

Revisiting the Concept of Imamate of Sayyid Muhammad Based on the Typology of Traditions in Al-Kafi

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Abstract

The chapter titled "al-ishārati wa l-naṣṣi 'alā Abī Muḥammad" (Indications and Explicit Designations Regarding Abū Muḥammad) in the book al-Kāfi—due to its inclusion of problematic narrations concerning the passing of Sayyid Muḥammad, the esteemed son of Imam al-Hādī (as)—has paved the way for an interpretation involving the concept of *badā'* (divine alteration of a prior decree) regarding the Imamate of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (as). This underscores, more than ever, the necessity for further research in this area. A critical re-examination of these traditions through typological analysis indicates that, in view of the repressive conditions of that period, Imam al-Hādī (as) had explicitly designated Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (as) as his successor to certain individuals during Sayyid Muḥammad's lifetime, but not to the Shi'a community at large. Sayyid Muḥammad served as the emissary and special representative, or *bāb*, of Imam al-Hādī (as). His esteemed position in the eyes of the Imam and the Shi'a, his responsibility for managing the affairs of the Imamate household, the fact that Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (as) remained unknown to the Imam's family and the Shi'a, and the absence of an explicit and public designation of the next Imam by Imam al-Hādī (as) led the Shi'a and the Imam's family to believe that Sayyid Muḥammad would succeed him. At the height of the climate of *taqiyya* (religious dissimulation), Imam al-Hādī's prudent strategy was intended to protect the life of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (as) from potential threats, particularly because the promised Imam was destined to be born from his blessed lineage. Following Sayyid Muḥammad's death, the divine will became manifest, revealing that the assumption held by the majority of the Shi'a and the Imam's family had been incorrect, as though a previously unknown truth had newly emerged. Accordingly, *badā'* in these narrations signifies the disclosure of the truth to the Shi'a community at large—a truth contrary to what they had previously believed.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The chapter titled "al-ishārati wa l-naṣṣi 'alā Abī Muḥammad" (The Indication and the Text Regarding Abu Muhammad) in the book *Al-Kafi* includes traditions that raise questions concerning the event of the passing of Sayyid Muhammad, the esteemed son of Imam Al-Hādī (as). This has paved the way for the emergence of the concept of "Badā'" (divine alteration) in the Imamate of Imam Hasan Al-Askari (as), highlighting the necessity of research in this area more than ever.

Materials and Methods

Given the diverse themes in the traditions of this chapter, it seems that the best approach to validate the traditions that imply "Badā'" alongside a descriptive-analytical method, is to revisit the concept of the Imamate of Sayyid Muhammad based on the typology of the traditions in this chapter from *Al-Kafi*. This is particularly significant as the texts of these traditions provide a precise context regarding their origins and the conditions under which they were transmitted.

Results and Findings

One significant interpretation of this tradition concerns the concept of badā' (divine alteration of a prior decree) within God's knowledge. This implies a change in the Imamate—shifting it from Sayyid Muhammad to Imam Hasan al-Askari—within God's knowledge; however, this conflicts with traditions that list Imam Hasan al-Askari alongside the other Imams. Nowhere in those traditions is Sayyid Muhammad mentioned.

It also conflicts with the traditions in which Imam Hādī (as)—during the lifetime of Sayyid Muhammad—affirmed the Imamate of Imam Hasan al-Askari. Furthermore, the Imam is, by definition, the most learned and most qualified (al-a'lam wa al-aṣlah) member of the Ummah following the preceding Imam (as); thus, the possibility of Sayyid Muhammad being the most qualified contradicts this established principle.

Furthermore, Seyyed Mohammad never claimed the Imamate; no evidence of such a claim on his part has been reported. In fact, Seyyed Mohammad himself was certain that he was not the Imam.

Among the various traditions, only two—attributed to Sheikh Ṭūsī—make brief reference to the selection of Sayyid Muhammad; these specific details are absent from the accounts provided by Al-Kulayni and Sheikh Mufid, rendering them "additional" to the latter versions. Naturally, this creates a conflict with the accounts of Al-Kulayni and Sheikh Mufid; therefore, in resolving this discrepancy, the version shared by Al-Kulayni and Sheikh Mufid represents the "certain

minimum" (common ground) and takes precedence—particularly given that their accounts predate that of Sheikh Ṭūsī.

In fact, the phrase "and he had pointed to him and indicated him" in the tradition of Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari reflects Abu Hashim's own understanding. It appears that Imam Hādī (as) recounted numerous traditions to Abu Hashim regarding Sayyid Muhammad's knowledge and piety, leading Abu Hashim to surmise that Sayyid Muhammad was the next Imam. Thus, the narrator has included their own assumptions and conjectures; consequently, this added section holds no value.

The phrase "I heard traditions from Imam Hasan al-Askari (as) indicating [the status of] Sayyid Muhammad" appears in the second tradition reported by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī—transmitted from Sa'd, who heard it from Shahawayh. The portion added here, compared to al-Kulayni's version, represents nothing more than Shahawayh's own understanding, impression, and conjecture.

Like Abu Hashim Ja'fari, he too had heard traditions from Imam Hādī (as) regarding the virtues of Sayyid Muhammad—yet, it seems, he had heard no traditions concerning Imam Hasan al-Askari. Consequently, he became all but certain that those traditions pointed to the Imamate of Sayyid Muhammad—a conclusion he later realized was mistaken.

Conclusion

A critical revisitation of these traditions through the lens of typology reveals that, given the oppressive atmosphere of that time, Imam Al-Hādī (as) had specified to certain individuals regarding the Imamate of Imam Hasan Al-Askari (as) during Sayyid Muhammad's lifetime, rather than to the general Shia community. Sayyid Muhammad served as the ambassador and special representative of Imam Al-Hādī (as), holding a high status among the Imam and the Shia, managing the affairs of the Imamate household, and keeping Imam Hasan Al-Askari (as) unknown to both the family and the Shia community. Additionally, the lack of a public and explicit declaration by Imam Al-Hādī (as) about the next Imam led the Shia and the family to believe that Sayyid Muhammad was the intended successor. The wise strategy of Imam Al-Hādī (as) during a period of extreme concealment (taqiyyah) aimed to protect the life of Imam Hasan Al-Askari from potential dangers, particularly to safeguard the life of the awaited Imam who was to descend from him. However, with the passing of Sayyid Muhammad, divine will become evident, clarifying that the general belief among the Shia and the family was mistaken. Thus, it was as if a new reality emerged. Consequently, "Badā'" in the mentioned traditions signifies the unveiling of truth for the general Shia, contrasting with the misconceptions they had previously held.

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