

The imam's knowledge and the Quran according to al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrī (d. 260 A.H./874 A.D.)¹

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Imamism² is generally believed to have begun to emerge as a distinct Shiite sect in the early Abbasid period. It was distinguished from other forms of Shiism, such as the Zaydiyya and the Kaysāniyya, by its rejection of activism and messianism and by its emphasis on the role of the imam as the highest religious authority. That authority was said to have been based on designation (*nass*) by the previous imam (or by the Prophet in the case of 'Alī) and on exclusive possession of religious knowledge (*'ilm*). Imamism also presented itself and was seen by outsiders as a doctrinally moderate form of Shiism; its members were known to have waged an ideological war on the so-called *ghulāt*, Shiite messianists and Gnostics or esotericists, who were accused of holding exaggerated beliefs (*ghuluww*) about the nature and status of the imams, and many of whom were also accused of antinomianism.³

Despite its declared war on *ghuluww*, it is clear that some of the ideas of the *ghulāt* were (or came to be) accepted in Imamism. Ideas ascribed to *ghulāt* figures or groups in heresiographical sources often appear in similar form in Imami *ḥadīths*.⁴ This has led modern scholars (beginning mainly with Hodgson) to postulate that Imamism tended to be opposed only to the more extreme forms of *ghuluww*, and especially those which were understood to compromise the absolute unity of God or which could not be reconciled with the Muslim consensus on the question of cessation of prophecy or with the importance that Muslims attached to the authority of the law. As for the *ghuluww* elements which are found in the Imami tradition, usually in a modified or toned down form, their admission has been explained in terms of their value for enhancing the status of the imamate.⁵ According to Hodgson, the admission of such elements did not entail a recognition of the validity of esotericism or spiritualist concepts of salvation, in other words, it did not alter the basically legalistic character of the sect.⁶ Hodgson also stated that the stages of this process of interaction between Imamism and *ghuluww* are obscure, but believed nevertheless that it is traceable to the beginning of Imamism, which in his view is the time of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), the sixth imam by Imami reckoning.⁷ His

¹ This article has benefited from extensive and valuable remarks made by Patricia Crone on my Ph.D. thesis *The Imāmi Shī'ī conception of the knowledge of the imām and the sources of religious doctrine in the formative period: from Hishām b. al-Hakam to Kulīnī* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1996). The comments of Gerald Hawting on an earlier draft have also been helpful.

² This is the sect which later developed into Twelver Shiism and as a result of adopting the doctrine of the *ghayba* or occultation of its twelfth imam in 260/874; see note 3.

³ On the emergence of the Imamiyya, see M. G. S. Hodgson, 'How did the Early Shī'a become Sectarian?' *JAOS* 75, 1955, 1–13; H. Halm, *Shiism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), ch. ii; and M. Momen, *An introduction to Shi'i Islam. The history and doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), ch. iv. On the transition of Twelver Shiism, see E. Kohlberg, 'From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-'ashariyya', *BSOAS* 39/3, 1976, 521–34.

⁴ For examples of this phenomenon, see Hodgson, 'Early Shī'a'; M. G. S. Hodgson 'Ghulāt', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (hereafter *EI*), 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954–).

⁵ Hodgson, 'Early Shī'a'; H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis. Die extreme Schia und die Alawiten* (Zurich and Munich: Artemis, 1982), 29f.; Halm, *Shiism*, chs ii and iii.

⁶ Hodgson, 'Early Shī'a', 8.

⁷ *ibid.*, esp. 13; Hodgson, 'Dja'far al-Ṣādiq' in *EI* (2nd ed.).

interpretation has been largely accepted by other scholars of the formative period of Imami Shiism.

As regards the question of the imam's knowledge, the predominant view among specialists is that the idea of the imam as a recipient of various forms of divine inspiration (*ilhām, taḥdīth*),⁸ which is familiar from the classical sources, was also a characteristic feature of early Imamism.⁹ And although the exact relevance of the idea of inspiration to Imami law and legal theory has rarely been discussed,¹⁰ the common assumption would seem to be that it served to support the authority of an imamate whose concerns were mainly in the traditional religious sciences and whose knowledge was based partly on transmission from predecessors. As for beliefs about other types of imams' knowledge, which are also based on divine inspiration but have nothing to do with Imami law or dogma and include things such as knowledge of 'the past and the future' or of 'the secrets of heaven and earth', these, like other beliefs about the supernatural qualities of the imams, are thought to have originated among the *ghulāt* or simply as elaborations on the claim that the imams were the supreme religious guides of the community.¹¹

A very different picture of early Imamism has been proposed by Amir-Moezzi. He has argued that the nature and scope of the knowledge ascribed to the imams in *ḥadīth* sources support his contention that pre-*ghayba* Imamism was an esoteric doctrine. The role of the imam, according to Amir-Moezzi, certainly involved teaching the traditional religious sciences, but also and especially the unveiling of and initiation to the esoteric part of these sciences and other secret sciences. There was accordingly no real doctrinal distinction between 'moderates' and *ghulāt* among the disciples of the imams, and to speak of the influence of the *ghulāt* on Imamism would be meaningless.¹²

These two pictures of the nature of early Imamism and its relationship with *ghuluww* are not only based almost entirely on late sources. In formulating

⁸ In the classical Imami tradition the terms *ilhām* and *taḥdīth* are used to describe the divine messages received by the imams and to distinguish them from *wahy*, which is the prerogative of prophets and messengers; see, e.g., Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulīnī, *al-Kāfi*, ed. 'Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Beirut: Dār Ṣa'b, Dār al-Ta'arūf, 1401/1980), 4th ed., 8 vols., 1, 176f, 264. Although the two terms are often used synonymously, there are indications that originally *ilhām* was used in juridical contexts (as we shall see here), whereas the concept of *taḥdīth/muhaddath* may have had messianic connotations (its origins were ascribed to the messianic sect the Kaysāniyya, on which see n14 below, and it was used by the Kaysānī poet al-Sayyid al-Himyārī (d. 173/789) to describe his occulted imam Muḥammad b. al-Hanafīyya; al-Hasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Fīraq al-Shī'a*, ed. H. Ritter (Bibliotheca Islamica, 4, Istanbul: Maṭba'at al-Dawla, 1931), 27, lines 4 and 6.

⁹ Some of the most relevant studies, i.e. those which have dealt with the question of the imam's knowledge or a particular aspect of it, are: M. Ayoub, 'The speaking Qur'ān and the silent Qur'ān: a study of the principles and development of Imāmī Shī'ī *tafsīr*', in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 177–98; Hodgson, 'Early Shī'a'; W. Madelung, 'Imāma' and 'Hishām b. al-Hakam' in *EI* (2nd ed.); W. Madelung, 'Authority in Twelver Shiism in the absence of the imām', in *La notion d'autorité au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident. Colloques internationaux de la Napoule 1978* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982), 163–73; E. Kohlberg, 'The term *muhaddath* in Twelver Shī'ism', in *Studia Orientalia memoriae D. H. Baneth dedicata* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), 39–47; E. Kohlberg, 'Imām and community in the pre-*ghayba* period', in S. A. Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and political culture in Shī'ism* (Near Eastern Studies Series, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988), 25–53; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (hereafter *Theologie*), 6 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991–95), 1, 278–85.

¹⁰ cf. Ayoub, 'Speaking Qur'ān', at 186f.

¹¹ Thus, e.g., van Ess, *Theologie*, 1, 279, 284f; Hodgson, 'Early Shī'a', 4, n27, 11, n66; Kohlberg, 'Muhaddath', 39.

¹² M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The divine guide in early Shi'ism: the sources of esotericism in Islam*, tr. from French by D. Streight (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994); M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Aspects de l'imāmologie duodécimaine I: remarques sur la divinité de l'imām', *Studia Iranica* 26, 1996, 193–216, esp. 206.

them scholars have tended to ignore, misinterpret, or regard as unrepresentative of the dominant trend in pre-*ghayba* Imamism, statements, traditions and reports which do not conform to the view of the imam as a leader who is in communication with God.¹³

More significantly, early sources and material which provide first-hand evidence of the doctrines of a main (if not *the* main) school within pre-*ghayba* Imamism have not been used or treated systematically. These show that leading figures in pre-*ghayba* Imamism upheld and defended the idea that the imam's knowledge was based entirely on transmission from the Prophet. That knowledge was said to have consisted of, and been restricted to, the Quran and its interpretation, with the Quran being envisaged as a complete and perfect source. The notion that the imam had access to knowledge emanating from divine sources was associated with the *ghulāt* and other (non-Imami) Shiite groups and was vehemently refuted by Imamis.¹⁴ There is also evidence to suggest that outsiders regarded the doctrine of transmitted '*ilm*' as one of the features which distinguished Imamism from other forms of Shiism.¹⁵

This article will examine the views of the Imami scholar al-Faḍl b. Shādhān, which are preserved in an extant polemical work of his known as *al-Īdāh*,¹⁶ and in his biographical profile in Kashshī's *Rijāl* where he is reported to have been involved in a dispute over the question of the imam's knowledge with a group of *ghulāt*.¹⁷

Al-Faḍl in the Imami tradition

The Imami tradition remembers al-Faḍl as part of a chain of scholars, consisting of Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, Yūnus b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān, and Muḥammad b. Khalīl Sakkāk, who were engaged in defending Imami beliefs and refuting opponents.¹⁸ There is, however, a certain amount of ambiguity about his relations with the Imami line of imams. Ṣadūq preserves a report which indicates that he was a disciple of the eighth imam 'Alī al-Riḍā (d. 202/818).¹⁹

¹³ e.g. Madelung, 'Imāma' in *EI* (2nd ed.); Kohlberg, 'Imām and community' (esp. 26f) and 'Muḥaddath', who seems to believe that there was a tendency to play down the extent of the imam's knowledge by not denying that he had access to divine inspiration; van Ess, *Theologie*, I, 283, 285, 390. Van Ess interprets the statement, ascribed to the Imami scholar Yūnus b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān (d. 208/823), that the imam is authorized to use analogical reasoning as evidence of Yūnus's belief that divine inspiration does not suffice. The report, however, is clear in identifying Yūnus as a member of a group which refuted the possibility of inspiration and held that the imam acquired all his religious knowledge from written sources bequeathed to him by his predecessors. For this report, see Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt wa'l-firaq*, ed. M. J. Mashkour (Tehran: al-Maṭba'a al-Haydariyya, 1963), 97f, para. 190.

¹⁴ In addition to al-Faḍl's *Kitāb al-Īdāh* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li'l-Maṭbū'āt, 1402/1982) which will be examined in this article, we have an early heresiographical work by Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795), which is preserved in Nawbakhtī's *Firaq al-Shī'a*, on which see W. Madelung, 'Bemerkungen zur imamitischen Firaq-Literatur', *Der Islam* 43, 1967. Hishām's views on the subject of the imam's '*ilm*' can be inferred from his work, as I have tried to show in chapters i and ii of my thesis. According to my analysis, Hishām regarded the doctrines of *tahdīth* and *ilhām* as heterodox. He ascribes them, respectively, to the Kaysāniyya and the Zaydī sect the Jārūdiyya, which seems to be a true representation of the beliefs held by those sects in his time; cf. Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī'a*, 21, 48–50. He also ascribes to his own sect, the Imamiyya, the belief that the knowledge of their imams is based entirely on transmission from the Prophet; *ibid.*, 16f, esp. lines 6–12.

¹⁵ The statements and descriptions of two contemporary Mu'tazilite scholars, pseudo-Nāshī' and Khayyāt, will be discussed below.

¹⁶ Beirut edition; see n14 above. F. Sezgin gives the title of the Mashhad manuscript as *al-īdāh fi'l-radd 'ala sā'ir al-firaq*; *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967–84), I, 537f, no. 27.

¹⁷ Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshī, *Ikhtiyār Ma'rifat al-Rijāl*, ed. H. Mostafavi (Mashhad: Dānishgāh-i Mashhad, 1960), 537–45.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 539.

¹⁹ Ṣadūq (Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī), *Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. M. M. al-Khurasān (Najaf: al-Maṭba'a al-Haydariyya, 1970), II, 119. According to this report, al-Faḍl maintained that he had heard from al-Riḍā the contents of '*ilal al-sharī'a*', a treatise on the reasons for *sharī'a*

Najāshī and Tūsī, on the other hand, do not seem to have considered al-Faḍl to be a contemporary of al-Riḍā. They report that al-Faḍl's father had been a companion of the Imami scholar Yūnus b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān and related traditions from al-Riḍā and Abū Ja'far al-Thānī (i.e. al-Riḍā's son and successor, Muḥammad al-Jawād).²⁰ Tūsī refers to al-Faḍl as a disciple of the tenth imam al-Hādī.²¹ And Kashshī preserves the text of a signed statement (*tawqīf*) ascribed to the eleventh imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, which suggests that al-Faḍl and some of his Nishapuri compatriots were at some stage thought to have refused to recognize that imam.²²

In addition to this uncertainty about al-Faḍl's association with al-Riḍā and his successors, there are virtually no records of him having transmitted traditions from them.²³ This may well be due to the fact that he never actually met any of the imams. There is no good reason to suspect that he lacked commitment to Imami doctrine or to the Imami line of imams. From his biographical profile in Kashshī, as we shall see, one can detect the existence of a hostile attitude towards him, which seems to have been due to differences over doctrinal matters and his defence of Imamism against the incursions of what he and other Imamis regarded as *ghuluww*. In view of this, it is not unlikely that opponents eager to discredit his doctrines would have attempted to undermine his status by suggesting that he had refused to recognize the imam.

In any case, al-Faḍl's works and the doctrines that he propounded must have been considered sufficiently Imami for him to have gained the approval of the *Rijāl* authors and for his opinions and arguments to have been quoted in later works. Moreover, his Imamism is amply attested in his *al-Īdāh* where he defends doctrines such as *raj'a*, *mut'a* and *taqiyya*, which in his time had already become distinctive features of Imamism.²⁴

Al-Īdāh

The first part of this work deals mainly with the divergent theological views of the Jahmiyya, the Mu'tazila, the Murji'a, the Jabriyya, the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* and the Kharijites, all of which are classified, rather curiously, as subsets of the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a*.²⁵ The latter are perceived as constituting one of two main parties in Islam, the other being the 'Shia'.²⁶ This classification may have been inspired by the attitude of opponents who regarded the Rāfiḍī

ordinances which is preserved in two of Ṣadūq's works, *Ḥal al-sharā'i*, ed. M. Ṣ. Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Najaf: 1963), 251–75, and *Uyūn*, II, 97–119.

²⁰ Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Najāshī, *al-Rijāl*, ed. J. D. al-Ghurawī al-Āmulī (Tehran: Markaz Nashr Kitāb, Chāpkhāna Mustafavī, n.d.), 235; Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Tūsī, *al-Fihrist*, ed. M. Rāmyār (reproduced from A. Sprenger's 1853–55 Calcutta edition, Mashhad: Dānishgāh-i Mashhad, 1351 A.H.), 254f.

²¹ Tūsī, *Fihrist*, 254.

²² Kashshī, 541. For an analysis of this report, see below.

²³ L. N. Takim, *The rijāl of the Shī'ī imāms as depicted in Imāmī biographical literature* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, Ph.D. thesis, 1990), 85f.

²⁴ *Īdāh*, 189ff, 197ff, 207. In his discussion of *raj'a* and *mut'a* al-Faḍl refutes the accusation that these doctrines were Shiite innovations by citing traditions which show that they had been held by some of the early Sunni authorities. Cf. J. Schacht, *The origins of Muhammadan jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), ch. ix.

²⁵ *Īdāh*, pp. 5–47 of the Beirut edition. On the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a* in the third/ninth century, see Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1965), 'Exkurse', 223–8; *EI* (2nd ed.), s.v. 'sunna'.

²⁶ *Īdāh*, 5. Throughout the work al-Faḍl uses the term 'shī'a' where he clearly means the Imamiyya. Occasionally, when referring to allegations made against them by opponents, the term Rāfiḍa is used (e.g. page 208). There is no mention at all of other Shiite sects even where one expects it, which, as we shall see, probably reflects reluctance to acknowledge the existence of differences within Shiism.

Shiites as being outside the *ijmā'* of the community on a number of issues.²⁷ Al-Faḍl, however, chose to justify it on the basis that only the Shiites adhere to the view that the Prophet had been sent with a complete and perfect religion; all the other non-Shiite sects admit the *sunna* of the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābi'ūn* (the Prophet's companions and successors), resort to *ra'y*, and perpetrate *ikhtilāf* and tolerate it of one another—practices which in his view amount to admitting that the law revealed to the Prophet was incomplete or deficient.²⁸

In the remaining part the main addressees are referred to as the Murji'a.²⁹ But it is clear from the contents, as well as from the occasional use of the term,³⁰ that al-Faḍl's polemics were aimed at a wider section of the community, namely, the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a*.³¹ The Murji'a/the *ahl al-sunna* are criticized for their willingness to recognize 'the remaining sects', but not the Shia, as belonging to the *jamā'a*. And their concept of *jamā'a* is challenged by highlighting the disagreement and contradiction in their legal doctrines and traditions and in many of the views which they hold in opposition to the Shiites.

The importance of *al-Idāh* in the present context lies in the evidence it provides of the existence in pre-*ghayba* Imamism of a system of ideas on the question of religious authority and its sources, which is at variance with the classical Imami system. It also sheds a different light on the Imami belief concerning the incompleteness and alteration of the official text of the Quran and the related belief in the completeness and perfection of the 'Alid codex. The adoption by some Imamis of this doctrine of *tahrīf*, as it is referred to in Imami sources and in the secondary literature, has conventionally been interpreted as an expression of political protest against the Sunni caliphate or as due to the influence of the *ghulāt*.³² In *al-Idāh*, however, one can see that the primary function of this idea was to support the claim that Imami doctrine was based entirely on the Quran.

Al-Faḍl's views on the imam's knowledge and the sources of Imami doctrine are well summarized in three passages which occur towards the end of this work. Addressing the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a* he states:

And you allege that the Shia maintain that Āl Muḥammad are inspired with 'ilm without learning (*yulhamūna al-'ilma ilhāman bi-ghayri ta'līm*). But then it is you who are of this opinion (*tarawna* instead of text's *tarwūna*) since you have related that Ibn 'Umar said: 'They (Āl Muḥammad) are *mufahhamūn*', and that 'Alī said: 'I do not have anything except *al-waḥy*

²⁷ That al-Faḍl was reacting to the Rāfiḍa being regarded as 'outsiders' is suggested by statements such as 'They (the *ahl al-sunna*) are agreed in opposing the other sort, the *shī'a*, for they do not accept their *shahādas*, pay them *zakāt*, pray behind them or accept *hadīths* from them (5). The idea that the Rāfiḍa were outside the *ijmā'* of the community on a number of issues is familiar from Abū 'l-Husayn al-Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-Intisār wa' l-radd 'alā Ibn al-Rāwandī al-mulhid*, ed. H. Nyberg (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyya, 1925), 159, 163f. See also 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb ḥujaj al-nubuwwa* in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. H. Sandūbī (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Rahmaniyya, 1933), 122f, where he describes the Rāfiḍa as outside the *ijmā'* on the basis of their attitude to the Quran and its 'alteration', their position on certain laws and rituals, and the fact that they have their own *fuqahā'* and their own imam.

²⁸ *Idāh*, 5f.

²⁹ *ibid.*, e.g. 47, 53, 54, 60.

³⁰ *ibid.*, e.g. 110, 136, 186.

³¹ The *Idāh* may thus be the same work as that referred to by Najāshī as the *kitāb al-radd 'alā al-murji'a*; Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 236. It was apparently not uncommon for Shiites to refer to all Sunnis as Murji'a; see, e.g. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffarī (Qumm: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1405/1985), 97, where Ibn Qiba al-Rāzī speaks of '*ulamā' al-'itra*' (viz. the imams of the *ahl al-bayt*) and '*ulamā' al-murji'a*'.

³² See, e.g., E. Kohlberg, 'Some notes on the Imāmite attitude to the Qur'ān' in S. M. Stern *et al.* (ed.), *Islamic philosophy and the classical tradition: essays presented to R. Walzer* (Oxford: Cassirer, 1972), 209–24, at 211, 219; H. Modarressi, 'Early debates on the integrity of the Qur'ān: a brief survey', *Studia Islamica* 77, 1993, 5–39, esp. 31ff.

(the Quran) unless God grants understanding (*fahm*)'. Is *fahm* anything but *ilhām* which God inspires man with (*yulhīmahu*)? And you claim that *ra'y* is permissible to you if you come across something that you do not find in the Book or the Sunna. Is *ra'y* anything but *ilhām* which God casts in man's heart so he speaks with it (*yaqūlu bihi*)? And likewise *ilhām*, God inspires man with it so he speaks with it.

The Shia though do not maintain that and do not believe in what you maintain concerning *ra'y* and *ilhām*. And the proof for this is the statement of 'Alī b. Abī Tālib: 'We do not have anything except that which is in the Book of God or (*aw*) in the *ṣaḥīfa*'. And 'Alī spoke the truth; he did not have anything except that which is in the Book of God; for the Book of God contains all the '*ilm* that people need for their religion, and everything in the *ṣaḥīfa* is interpretation (*tafsīr*) of that which is in the Book of God.

And you are averse to the claim that 'Alī Muḥammad have a *ṣaḥīfa* in which there is knowledge of the *ḥalāl* and the *ḥarām*, in 'Alī's handwriting and dictated by the Apostle of God. If what is reported from them ('Alī Muḥammad) concerning that (the *ṣaḥīfa*) is true, then it is not grave or reprehensible that 'Alī should have written down what he had heard from the Apostle of God, and so confirmed it (*athbatahu*) and bequeathed the '*ilm* to his descendants. As for you, the *faqīh* among you bequeathes to his descendants a hundred, or more or less, pages of what he heard and wrote down, but you do not disapprove that of each other.³³

Before refuting the allegation that the Shia believe in the imam's *ilhām* and making his position on the question of sources (*uṣūl*) of Imami doctrine absolutely clear, al-Faḍl first proceeds to accuse the *ahl al-sunna* of two errors: crediting 'Alī Muḥammad with knowledge acquired by means other than transmission, and admitting the use of *ra'y* in cases where the Quran and the Sunna do not appear to provide answers. Here, his polemical strategy is based on the idea that *ilhām* is not a quality which is peculiar to the imam but a source of knowledge which is open to all mankind, instilled by God, and comparable to *fahm* and *ra'y*. He is thus able to argue that the objections of the *ahl al-sunna* against 'Alī Muḥammad being credited with *ilhām* contradict their own beliefs and practices; for how is it possible to credit 'Alī Muḥammad with *fahm* and to admit their legal opinion and the opinion of others as an additional source of doctrine, but then deny that they have access to knowledge not based on transmission? In other words, by adducing Sunni traditions about 'Alī and the *ahl al-bayt*, and by equating *ilhām* with *fahm* and *ra'y*, al-Faḍl is able to accuse the *ahl al-sunna* of spreading the idea that 'Alī Muḥammad have '*ilm* without learning'.

It is of course possible that al-Faḍl resorted to such arguments because he knew that other Shiites believed in *ilhām*; given that one of the main accusations that he levels repeatedly at the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a* is the fact of their *ikhtilāf*, he would have been reluctant to admit that other Shiites believed differently or that *ikhtilāf* was also common amongst them. Those 'other Shiites', however, would not necessarily have been Imamis. In fact, and as we shall see later, it is more likely that in al-Faḍl's time it was the Zaydi Jārūdiyya who admitted the possibility of *ilhām* and regarded it as an additional source.

Having highlighted the fact that the Sunni position admits the validity of post-Prophetic doctrine, al-Faḍl goes on to contrast it with the Shiite (viz. Imami) position that does not. He insists that the Shia do not recognize the imam's *ilhām* as an admissible source. This is because they regard the Quran

³³ *Īdāh*, 205f.

as a complete and perfect source and the imam's understanding of it as derived from a *ṣahīfa*³⁴ in his possession containing its interpretation. The statement attributed to 'Alī by the *ahl al-sunna*, which implies that his knowledge encompassed the revelation to the Prophet (*wahy*) and his own divinely instilled powers of comprehension (*fahm*),³⁵ is clearly not acceptable to al-Faḍl. According to the Imami version of the tradition and al-Faḍl's understanding of it, 'Alī's knowledge was based entirely on transmission from the Prophet. His statement 'We do not have anything except that which is in the Book of God or in the *ṣahīfa*³⁶ serves as a categorical rejection of the role of *ilhām* in defining Imami doctrine. Al-Faḍl also explains that since the *ṣahīfa* contains nothing other than *tafsīr* 'Alī was right to insist that the doctrines of the imams are rooted *completely* in the Quran.

The authority of the Quran is at the centre of al-Faḍl's polemics against the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a*. Their neglect of the Quran is the root cause of their *ikhtilāf*.³⁷ They follow the legal decisions of the *ṣahāba* and the *tābi'ūn* which they call *sunna* even though they are based on *ra'y* and contradict the Quran.³⁸ They have failed to interpret (*tafsīr*) the Quran correctly.³⁹ They neglect even the conclusive evidence (*nātiq*) of the Quran and relate *ḥadīths* about the Prophet which suggest that he acted in contradiction to what the Quran had brought down.⁴⁰ Their report that the Prophet authorized Mu'ādh, his emissary to Yemen, to judge in accordance with his *ra'y* (in cases concerning which the Quran and the Sunna provide no answers)⁴¹ is tantamount to charging the Prophet with contradicting God's commands⁴² and with permitting to Mu'ādh and others what God had forbidden even to his Prophet Dāwūd.⁴³ Al-Faḍl cites the Quranic verse 'We have neglected nothing in the Book' in support of his belief that 'all legal decisions (*aḥkām*) are in the Quran'.⁴⁴ In areas where Shii law is in conflict with Sunni law, he attempts to demonstrate that Shii law is based on the Quran and that the error of Sunni law is due to the neglect of the Quran.⁴⁵

Although al-Faḍl refers repeatedly to the *sunna* of the Prophet, he clearly does not recognize it as a source which is independent of the Quran. The *sunna* is what the Prophet elucidated concerning every *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*.⁴⁶ It is the legal decisions (*ḥukm*) and penalties (*ḥadd*) made and defined by the Prophet

³⁴ Also known as *al-ṣahīfa al-jāmi'a*; Kulīnī, *al-Kāfī*, I, 239.

³⁵ See lines 4–5 of the first passage. According to a fuller version of the Sunni tradition cited by al-Faḍl (*Idāh*, 205), 'Alī denies having any knowledge other than *al-wahy* 'unless God grants understanding of (*fahman fi*) his Book or of that which is in the *ṣahīfa*'. Here, 'Alī's *fahm* appears to be regarded as a means of interpreting the revelation and not as an additional source of doctrine. But there is no indication that al-Faḍl recognized the validity of these subtle distinctions.

³⁶ It is not immediately clear what the use of the conjunctive *aw* in 'Alī's statement about the source(s) of the imam's knowledge is meant to indicate. (The description of the sources as '*kitāb* or *ṣahīfa*' occurs twice in *al-Idāh*, 205 and 206). Judging by the explanatory passage that follows (page 206), it would seem that the intention is to equate the imam's perfect knowledge of the Quran with his knowledge of its right interpretation, and hence to avoid undermining the idea of its perfection as a source.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 176.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 5, 63, 65.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 108.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 54f.

⁴² *ibid.*, 60f. Reference is here made to three Quranic verses which charge with *kufr* those who do not judge in accordance with God's revelation (*bimā anzala allāh*).

⁴³ *ibid.*, 61. The reference is to verse Q 38:25 in which Dāwūd is addressed: 'judge between men justly and follow not caprice (*fā'ḥkum bayna al-nāsi bi'l-ḥaqq wa-lā tattabi' al-hawā'*). *Al-ḥaqq* is here understood as 'what God revealed' and *al-hawā'* as *ra'y*.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 65; Q 6:38—'*mā farraṭnā fī' l-kitābi min shay'*'.

⁴⁵ See, for example, his arguments concerning *ṭalāq* (divorce), *qunūt* (a form of supplication), inheritance laws, and *mut'a* (temporary marriage); *ibid.*, 129ff, 161f, 169f, 197.

⁴⁶ '*abānahā rasūlu'llāhi fī kullī ḥalālin wa-ḥarām'*; *ibid.*, 57.

in accordance with, and based on, what God revealed in his Book.⁴⁷ It is embodied in the interpretation of the Quran of which the imam has a superior knowledge.⁴⁸

Thus, when al-Faḍl speaks of the perfection of Muḥammad's religion it is with reference to the Quran as a perfect source. His quarrel with the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a* is over their resort to *ra'y* and their reliance on the *sunna* of the *ṣaḥāba* which, as he says, was also based on *ra'y*. He interprets this reliance on *ra'y* as a claim by them that God did not send Muḥammad with a perfect religion or with all that mankind needs,⁴⁹ and that its perfection was achieved at the hands of the *ṣaḥāba*, the *tābi'ūn*, and those who came after them.⁵⁰ The *ahl al-sunna* claim that their authorities had knowledge of rulings and precepts of which the Prophet had no knowledge,⁵¹ or of which he knew but failed to elucidate to his people.⁵² In justifying their resort to *ra'y* their *fuqahā'* say that they have received only four thousand *ḥadīth*s from the Prophet concerning *tafsīr* and *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*.⁵³ Their ignorance of the Prophetic heritage is contrasted with the imams' perfect knowledge of it. It is because they have access to such knowledge that the Shii imams, unlike the '*ulamā'* and *fuqahā'* of the *ahl al-sunna*, never base their legal statements on *istiḥsān* (discretionary opinion).⁵⁴ In clear distinction to the (probably later) Imami point of view which perceived the doctrine of 'the perfection of religion' as incorporating the legislative authority of the imam,⁵⁵ al-Faḍl states that religion was perfected 'with the Prophet and with what God revealed to him'.⁵⁶

Al-Faḍl's use of terms such as *istinbāt/istikhrāj bi'l-ra'y*, *qiyās bi'l-ra'y*, or *istinbāt furū' al-dīn*⁵⁷ to describe the practices of the *ahl al-sunna* may indicate that he was aware of an argument by jurists that their practices involved the 'derivation' of law from revealed sources rather than the 'issuance' of law based on the free use of *ra'y*. However, his criticism of those practices suggests that he did not recognize the validity of any distinction between derived law and law based on *ra'y*, and regarded all law formulated by the *ṣaḥāba* and the *fuqahā'* as inadmissible extra-Prophetic law.

The fact that al-Faḍl did not recognize a distinction between reason as a source and reason as an interpretive method, and denied that it has any place in Islamic law, is also reflected in his view of the role of the imam. At no point does he suggest that the imam has an interpretive role, either for the elaboration

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 158f, 132.

⁴⁸ Al-Faḍl cites a report related by the '*amma* according to which the caliph 'Umar did not know the punishment for drinking wine and 'Alī knew that it was 80 lashes. 'Alī is said to have justified his view with reference to Quran 24:4 (which imposes this penalty on those who slander the *muḥṣanāt*, chaste or married women) and the argument that a drinker is a potential slanderer (*muftarī*). This report elicits a comment from al-Faḍl that, whereas the authorities of the '*amma* failed to know the *sunna*, 'Alī always knew its elucidation (*bayānaha*); *ibid.*, 101f. It must be emphasized here that although al-Faḍl does not refute the report's suggestion that 'Alī's ruling was based on analogical reasoning, this does not mean that the idea was acceptable to him. He cites the report mainly because it amounts to an admission by the *ahl al-sunna* that 'Alī's knowledge was superior to that of other Companions. The idea that 'Alī had resorted to *ijtihād* was refuted by al-Mufīd as a Sunni allegation; M. J. McDermott, *The theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd* (Recherches, Nouvelle Série A: Langue arabe et Pensée islamique, 10; Persian Studies Series, 9, Beirut: Dar al-Machreq Éditeurs, 1978), 288.

⁴⁹ *Idāh*, 3, 5, 47, 68.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 47, 185.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 68.

⁵² *ibid.*, 54.

⁵³ *ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁵ This point of view is expressed in statements such as *amr al-imāma min tamām al-dīn, kamāl al-dīn bi-wilāyat 'Alī* (Kulīnī, *al-Kāfi*, 1, 199, 290), *bihā (bi'l-imāma) kamula al-dīn wa-tammat al-ni'ma* (Ṣadūq, *Kamāl*, 658).

⁵⁶ *Idāh*, 185.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 5, 55, 132.

of dogma or for the derivation of new rules from the revelation. His insistence that the imam's knowledge is derived from a written source and based on the Prophet's teaching of *tafsīr* to 'Alī, and his refutation of *ilhām*, express a view of the imam as no more than the perfect transmitter of the Prophetic revelation. Any other view of the role of the imam would, according to al-Faḍl's arguments, undermine the notion of the perfection of the Quran. It is the *ahl al-sunna* who, in order to justify their illicit practices, maintain that the Quran does not contain comprehensive law. When confronted with Quranic evidence that the Prophet had brought a complete religion, the *ahl al-sunna* say that the rest of the law could have been lost when parts of the Quran went missing (*la'alla baqiyyat al-aḥkām fi'l-qur'ān alladhī dhahab*).⁵⁸

Al-Faḍl deals with the question of incompleteness of the text of the existing Quran in two places. In one section entitled 'What has been lost of the Quran'⁵⁹ he cites a number of (often contradictory) traditions related by the *ahl al-sunna* on its collection. He says that these traditions, if true, would indicate that most of the Book of God which was revealed to Muḥammad has gone missing.⁶⁰ He also refers to two Sunni traditions which relate that the Prophet had assigned to 'Alī the task of 'composing (*ta'līf*)' the Quran and that 'Alī was delayed in paying allegiance to Abū Bakr because he was occupied with that task. He then asks: 'Where did that which 'Alī had composed go so that you proceeded to collect it from the hearts of men and from sheets you claimed had been in the possession of Ḥaḥṣa?'⁶¹

In this section al-Faḍl's position on the question of the 'Uthmānic codex is not made absolutely clear and he makes no mention of any Shiite traditions on the 'Alid codex or its completeness. The only time he comes close to suggesting the existence of a 'Alid codex which is more complete than the official recension is when he asks that rhetorical question about the fate of 'what 'Alī had composed'.

Another relevant passage in *al-Īdāh* confirms that the background against which al-Faḍl engaged in such polemic was the allegation that the Shia believed that the text of the Quran had been tampered with. It also shows that his aim was *not* to deny that the official Quran is incomplete but to vindicate the Imami position and the idea of a more complete 'Alid Quran by adducing proof from what the Sunnis themselves admit to.⁶²

Commenting on the argument (which he ascribes to the *ahl al-sunna*) that the rest of the law may be in the 'Quran that has been lost', al-Faḍl asks his opponents why they did not entrust their authorities with producing for them those lost parts of the Quran. To the reply that this would not have been possible (presumably because the Quran is 'from God') he retorts that they accept the use of *ra'y* in establishing *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*, and *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*,

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 54ff.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 112–24.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 119.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 119f.

⁶² To conclude from this material, as Modarressi has done, that al-Faḍl's aim was to attack the Sunni traditionists for spreading ideas which could discredit the scripture of Islam is quite unjustified; 'Early debates', 27. Modarressi's argument that the idea of the loss of parts of the Quran first arose in 'Sunni' circles (*ibid.*, 10–13) is not really in dispute; J. Burton had already demonstrated that the idea was relevant to juristic concerns and probably came into existence as a result of the pressure exerted by scripturalists in those circles; *The collection of the Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), esp. ch. v. The question is whether Imamis also held that view (or some other version of it), whether they continued to uphold it after it was rejected and/or suppressed in Sunnism, and what function it served. Modarressi is not convincing in his contention that the idea was rejected by the imams (!) and most Imami scholars, or in his attempt to explain away the evidence suggesting that Imamis (at least in the third century) did hold such a belief by arguing that it was only the Imami *mutakallimūn* who adopted it and used it as a polemical strategy in their defence of the rights of the 'Alids; 'Early debates', esp. 26ff.

like the Quran, is also supposed to be of divine origin.⁶³ The statements which follow leave little doubt as to al-Faḍl's views on the 'Alid Quran, the problem with the first statement (a) notwithstanding. As far as this statement is concerned, it is clear that it does not fit in with the rest of the passage which deals with the 'loss' of parts of the Quran at the hands of its Sunni collectors; it looks like the work of a redactor who tried to turn the polemic into one about the failure of Sunnis to 'interpret' the Quran correctly.⁶⁴ The other manuscripts used in the Beirut edition provide a more likely version of that statement (a1),⁶⁵ which supports the suggestion that the one in our text has been altered.

- (a) You could not but acknowledge the Quran that you and your ancient forebears have failed to interpret (*lam tajidū buddan min an tuqirru bi'l-qur'ān 'lladhī 'ajaztum 'an ta'wilihi antum wa-'ābā' ukum al-aqdamūn*).
- (a1) Because of the matter coming to light, you could not but admit to what your forebears have failed to collect and what they have lost of the Quran (*lam tajidū buddan li-zuhūr al-amr bi-an tuqirru bi-mā 'ajaza 'anhu awwalūkum min jam'i al-qur'ān wa-dayya'ūhu*).
- (b) And this Quran, in its completeness and perfection, and with all its *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*, without disagreement or contention, is with the imams. But then you have been denied knowledge of it because you have disacknowledged the imam and gone astray... (*wa-hadhā al-qur'ān bi-kamālihi wa-tamāmihi wa-ḥarāmihi wa-halālihi bi-lā ikhtilāf wa-lā tanāzu' 'inda al-a'imma. fa-ḥurimtum ma'rifatahu bi-juhūdikum al-imām wa-tadyī'ikum al-ḥaqq...*).
- (c) And likewise the *sunna* which you are ignorant of and which the Apostle of God elucidated concerning every *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*... For is it conceivable that you lose most of the Quran but not most of the *sunna*? ... (*wakadhalika al-sunna allatī jahaltumūha wa-qad abanahā rasūl allāh fi kullī ḥalālin wa-ḥarāmin... fa-kayfa jāza lakum an tuḍayyi'ū akthar al-qur'ān wa-lā yajūz an tuḍayyi'ū akthar al-sunna?...*).

When al-Faḍl speaks of the complete and perfect Quran that is 'with the imāms' it is not clear whether he has in mind the 'Alid codex (*mushaf*) or whether the reference is to knowledge preserved orally by the imams.⁶⁶ There is no doubt, however, that what he is claiming here is that the imams had access to Quranic revelations which are not found in the official text (the Sunni authorities having failed to collect and preserve 'the whole Quran') and which are not known to the rest of the community (those who did not acknowledge the imam having been denied knowledge of them).⁶⁷ This is quite different from the more moderate Imami formulations of the doctrine of *tahrīf*,

⁶³ *Idāh*, 56f.

⁶⁴ In the classical Imami sources there are often signs that traditions indicating that the imams had access to additional Quranic passages have been reinterpreted or modified. Thus, according to one tradition, al-Bāqir asserted that only the imams can claim to have the totality of the Quran, 'its exoteric and its esoteric', this last phrase being almost certainly a gloss ('*mā yastatī' aḥad an yadda't anna 'indahu jamī' al-qur'ān kullahu zāhirahu wa-bāṭinahu ghayra al-awṣiyā'*); Kulīnī, *al-Kāfī*, 1, 228, no. 2.

⁶⁵ See *Idāh*, 56, editor's n4.

⁶⁶ If he was thinking in terms of a 'Alid codex he would not have envisaged it, the way some of the reports do, as containing in its margins explanatory notes by 'Alī. As seen earlier, al-Faḍl spoke of the Book of God and the *ṣahīfa* which contains its interpretation as two separate entities. Moreover, the concept of the 'Alid codex as one which contains explanatory notes was probably intended to express the view that, as far as the actual text of the Quran was concerned, the 'Alid codex does not differ from the 'Uthmānic (cf. J. Eliash, "'The Šīte Qur'ān': a reconsideration of Goldziher's interpretation", *Arabica* 16, 1969, 15–24, at 23), which is not compatible with what al-Faḍl contends here.

⁶⁷ The idea, implied in this assertion, that those who recognize the Imami imams have access to knowledge of the lost parts of the Quran, is noteworthy; see passage b above.

according to which the ‘omissions’ and ‘substitutions’ usually fell within the acceptable range of ‘variant readings’ and were often the same as those which the Sunni tradition recognized as having been found in other Companion codices or simply missing from the official text.⁶⁸

Now, from the context in which al-Faḍl makes that claim about the whole Quran being with the imams it is evident that the claim was of direct relevance to Imami legal theory; it comes in the course of attacking the juristic practices and theories of his opponents and contrasting them with the imams’ adherence to the Quran. It may thus be said that the idea of a ‘Alid codex which is more complete than the ‘Uthmānic text served to sustain the argument that all the imams’ teachings were based on the Quran: if no link could be established between those teachings and the Quran which was known to everyone, this would be because they were based on the additional revelations known only to the imams.

The foregoing shows that al-Faḍl defended vigorously the belief that the imam was no more than an infallible transmitter of the Prophet’s legacy. The belief is consistent with a legalist (as opposed to a gnostic or esoteric) conception of the role of the imam and represents a distinctive theory of sources. Although al-Faḍl presents his views, quite incorrectly, as characteristic of a general ‘Shiite’ position, this is most probably due to his reluctance to admit the existence of *ikhtilāf* among the Shia; it does not follow that he is also misrepresenting the views of his own sect, the Imamiyya, or that he is advocating ‘unusual’ ideas about the imam’s knowledge merely in order to undermine the juristic theories of the *ahl al-sunna*. The likelihood that his views represented the ‘orthodox’ Imami position in his time would seem to find support from external sources, as we shall see a little later, and from a report in Kashshī. According to that report, al-Faḍl defended the doctrine of transmitted *ilm* against beliefs which were then regarded as *ghuluww*, but which are commonplace in classical Imamism and assumed by modern scholars to have been acceptable to and common among pre-*ghayba* Imams as well. In what follows the report will be analysed and its historical value assessed.

Kashshī’s account of a dispute between al-Faḍl and other followers of the eleventh imam

The report in Kashshī purports to be based on a written message (*ruq’a*) sent to the eleventh imam by a certain ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥamdawayh al-Bayhaqī concerning a doctrinal controversy among the people of Nishapur. The document is also said to have contained the imam’s signed reply (*tawqīf*). Kashshī’s source, Abū’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Qutayba al-Nīsābūrī, claims to have seen and copied the document and relates its contents:

- 1.1 The people of Nīsābūr have differed (*ikhtalafū*) in their religion and have contradicted (*khālafā*) one another, and have accused one another of unbelief.
- 1.2 There are there people who maintain that the Prophet knew all the languages of mankind and birds ... that similarly there must be in every age someone who knows that, and knows what man holds secret ... and if

⁶⁸ See Eliash, ‘Sī’ite Qur’ān’, esp. 20ff; B. Todd Lawson, ‘Note for the study of a “Shī’ī Qur’an”’, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 36/2, 1991, 279–95, esp. 283–8, and n36; Modarressi, ‘Early debates’, 25ff, 31; Kohlberg, ‘Some notes’. The more moderate formulations are found in sources which mostly date from the fourth century onwards. The view of some modern scholars that those formulations were already in circulation in early Imamism or much earlier than our earliest Shii sources is not based on any solid evidence; cf. Kohlberg, ‘Some notes’, 210, 219, 223f, n99; van Ess, *Theologie*, I, 282.

he met two children he would know which of the two is a believer and which is a hypocrite ... They claim that revelation (*wahy*) does not cease, and that the Prophet did not have perfect knowledge (*kamāl al-'ilm*), nor did anyone else after him, and that if something (*shay'*) occurred in any age, of which the master of the age has no knowledge, then God would reveal (*awhā*) to him and to them(?).

1.3 He (the imam) said: They have lied and have fabricated a grave offence (*iftarū ithman 'azīman*).

[Return to Ibn Ḥamdawayh's words:]

1.4 And there is a *shaykh* called al-Faḍl b. Shādhān who contradicts them (*yukhālifuhum*) in these matters and disputes with them (*yunkiru 'alayhim*) concerning most of them (these matters).

1.5 And his doctrine is (*wa-qawluhu*): the testimony that there is no God but God and that Muḥammad is the messenger of God; that God is in the seventh heaven on the throne as He has described Himself, that He is a body (*jism*), that His attributes (*wasfuhu*) are different from (*bi-khilāf*) [those of] created beings in all respects, nothing resembles Him, and He is all hearing and all seeing.

1.6 And part of his doctrine (*wa-min qawlihi*) is that the Prophet had brought forth a perfect religion (*kamāl al-dīn*) ... that he appointed (*aqāma*) a man to occupy his position after him and taught him the knowledge which God had revealed to him ... the lawful and the unlawful (*al-ḥalāl wa'l-ḥarām*), the interpretation of the Book (*ta'wīl al-kitāb*), and unmistakable judgement (*faṣl al-khiṭāb*). Likewise in every age there must be someone who knows that. It is an inheritance from the Apostle of God which they inherit by transmission (*yatawāraṭhūnahu*). None of them knows anything of the matter of religion except from the knowledge which they inherited from the Prophet. He (al-Faḍl) refutes *wahy* after the Apostle of God.

1.7 He (the imām) said: He (al-Faḍl) has spoken the truth concerning some things and has lied concerning other things.

1.8 And at the end of the paper (*al-waraqā*) [the imām wrote]: ... God refuses to grant any of you right guidance ... whilst you are transgressors (*mukhālifūn*) and deny that God has attributes (*mu'aṭṭilūn*). You who do not recognize an imām ... whenever God received you into His mercy and permitted us to summon you to the truth and we wrote to you concerning that and sent you a messenger you did not believe him...

1.9 And al-Faḍl ibn Shādhān, what have we got to do with him (*mā lanā wa-lahu*). He alienates our followers (*yufsidu 'alaynā mawālīnā*) and leads them to think that vain things are good (*yuzayyinu lahum al-abāṭil*), and every time we write them a letter he opposes us concerning that ... I order him to desist or else by God I shall ask God to afflict him with an illness from which his hurt will never heal...⁶⁹

According to this report (or at least the first part of it), the dispute between al-Faḍl and the group from Nishapur concerned three questions for which the opinion of the imam was sought: the *shahāda*,⁷⁰ the doctrine of God and His attributes, and the sources and scope of the imam's *'ilm*. The emphasis is clearly on the question of the imam's knowledge, and the aim, it would seem, is to show that the imam disapproved of the doctrine of inspired/revealed *'ilm* (he condemns its advocates, al-Faḍl's opponents) and approved of al-Faḍl's

⁶⁹ Kashshī, 539ff, no.1026.

⁷⁰ On the Shiite three-tenet *shahāda*, see J. Eliash, 'On the genesis and development of the Twelver-Shi'i three-tenet *shahāda*', *Der Islam* 47, 1971, 265–72.

doctrine of transmitted *'ilm*. The problem, however, is that the imam's response to al-Faḍl's doctrine is ambiguous. He first says that it is partly sound and partly false but does not specify of which part of it he disapproves (1.7). And then, rather unexpectedly, he goes on to denounce both the Nishapuris and al-Faḍl very severely and for reasons which seem to have little or nothing to do with the doctrinal matters mentioned in the main part of the report (1.8, 1.9).

A closer examination of this and other reports about al-Faḍl and the other two men who figure in it, reveals that what we have here are essentially two separate reports/documents which reflect conflicting attitudes to al-Faḍl. The two reports (or rather parts of them) have been combined by a redactor and an attempt made to harmonize them, which resulted in the sort of ambiguities and inconsistencies referred to above.

The first report is incorporated in paragraphs 1.1–1.6, which form a more or less complete account and deal mainly with the question of the imam's knowledge. Its aim is to provide proof that in disputes over this question the imam came out on the side of al-Faḍl and his doctrine of transmitted *'ilm*. The statements concerning al-Faḍl's doctrines of *tajsīm* (corporealism) and two-tenet *shahāda*⁷¹ (1.5) are most probably later additions by the redactor: although these doctrines are presented as ones which al-Faḍl held in opposition to the group of Nishapuris whose beliefs are described in 1.2, their counterparts, the three-tenet *shahāda* and *ta'tīl*,⁷² are not mentioned in 1.2 as part of the beliefs of that group.⁷³

Of the second report/document used by our redactor we have only the imam's statement (paras 1.8, 1.9), his response to an inquiry from Ibn Ḥamdawayh but not the inquiry itself. The statement consists of an attack on the Nishapuri Shiites, and especially al-Faḍl, for their refusal to recognize the imam and to accept the claims made on his behalf by his agents: '...you who do not recognize an imam ... whenever God permitted us to summon you to the truth and we wrote to you concerning that and sent you a messenger you did not believe him...' (1.8). Al-Faḍl is accused of urging the Shiites not to recognize that imam: '... he alienates our followers' and 'every time we write them a letter he contradicts us concerning that' (1.9). This passage then is taken from a report whose contents, function and provenance are very different from what we have in the first report (1.1–1.7).⁷⁴ The only possible contextual

⁷¹ cf. Kashshī, 539, where al-Faḍl is associated with the belief that Islam is based on 'two *shahādas* and that which follows' (*wa-mā yattūhumā!*).

⁷² *Ta'tīl* (also *butlān* or *nafy*) is a theological concept denying that God has attributes and held to be the opposite of *tashbīh* (anthropomorphization of God) and *tajsīm* (corporealism). Many early Imamis were known to have held anthropomorphist doctrines. However, most came to hold an intermediate position which rejected both *tashbīh/tajsīm* and the Mutazili doctrine referred to polemically as *ta'tīl*; cf. Kulīnī, *al-Kāfī*, i, 100, no.1, and 104ff; Madelung, 'The Shiite and Khārijite contribution to pre-Ash'arite *kalām*', in P. Morewedge (ed.), *Islamic philosophical theology* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1979), 120–39, at 122; Madelung, 'Imāmism and Mu'tazilite theology', in T. Fahd (ed.), *Le Shī'ism imāmite. Colloque de Strasbourg 1968* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), 18 and n2; and P. Sander, *Zwischen Charisma und Ratio: Entwicklungen in der frühen imāmischen Theologie* (Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, 183, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1994), ch. iii.

⁷³ The reference to the Nishapuris as *mu'aṭṭilūn* in 1.8 is probably intrusive and an attempt to link the two reports; see below.

⁷⁴ The question of the *wikāla*, the Imami financial organization, in Rayy and Khurāsān during the imamate of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, the 11th imam, is an important theme in Kashshī. We have the texts of a number of letters (*kitāb*) and signed statements (*tawqī'*) which the eleventh imam is alleged to have sent to community leaders (one of whom was Ibn Ḥamdawayh) in Nishapur and Bayhaq, all of which deal with the *wikāla*. These suggest that some of the leading Shiites of Nishapur had contested claims made by financial agents (*wakīl*) that they had been appointed by the 11th imam, and the imam's letters serve to confirm those claims; *Rijāl*, 580f, 509f, 575–80, 542f. Also present is the idea that the imam's letters were replies to inquiries from Nishapur concerning those agents; *ibid.*, 575, line 3, 577, line 10, 543, lines 3 and 4, and 580. Three of these reports (including one about the *tawqī'* received by Ibn Ḥamdawayh) are not at all aware that al-Faḍl was in any way involved.

link between the first report (which deals with doctrinal matters) and this passage is the imam's reference to the Nishapuris critically as *mu'atṭilūn* (1.8). This reference serves to remind us of the idea (which is only implicit in 1.1 and 1.5) that the dispute between al-Faḍl and his opponents included the question of attributes; and it might be taken as an insinuation that the imam's view on this question amounted to *lā taj̄sīm/tashbīh wa-lā ta'fīl*, which is consistent with the classical Imami position. It is clear, however, that the imam's reference to the Nishapuris as *mu'atṭilūn* is not an integral part of this passage: here the recalcitrant Nishapuris are not al-Faḍl's doctrinal rivals but those who were persuaded by him not to respond to the imam's summons. It is the redactor who assumes (or chooses to create the impression) that they are al-Faḍl's opponents and that they and al-Faḍl are being reproached by the imam because of their doctrines and not because they refused to recognize the imam. He thus sees fit to ascribe to the Nishapuris the doctrine of *ta'fīl* (which is opposed to al-Faḍl's alleged corporealism) and thereby provides a link between the two reports.

The redactor then can be said to have introduced the question of attributes as another issue of contention between al-Faḍl and his Nishapuri opponents and to have transformed the Nishapuris of para. 1.8 (which he derived from another report) into al-Faḍl's opponents, this being part of his attempt to harmonize conflicting reports about al-Faḍl and to find another explanation for the imam's censure of him, an explanation which would be less damaging to his Imami standing than the one provided by the second report.

On this basis, the imam's verdict in 1.7 that al-Faḍl's doctrine is partly true and partly false would also be an addition by our redactor, and part of his attempt to reconcile conflicting reports about the imam's attitude to al-Faḍl. It is less clear, however, why he does not specify which part of al-Faḍl's doctrine the imam found unacceptable. Perhaps we are meant to infer that al-Faḍl's doctrine of the imam's *'ilm* was approved by the imam and that his only sin was that of *taj̄sīm*, a minor one considering that many other trusted disciples of the imams were known to have held similar views.⁷⁵ On the other hand, it is also possible to interpret the imam's verdict as referring to the partial soundness of both of al-Faḍl's doctrines, his theological doctrine *and* his doctrine of the imam's knowledge. From the point of view of classical Imamism, the other statements ascribed to him that 'nothing resembles God' and that 'His attribution is different from that of created beings' would have been perfectly acceptable.⁷⁶ And not all Imamis who denied the possibility of *'wahy* after the Apostle' would have agreed that the imam's *'ilm* was based completely on transmission; most would have advocated the possibility of divine inspiration (*ilhām*). In other words, the ambiguousness of the imam's verdict may well have been deliberate and reflects the reluctance of the redactor to endorse or condemn al-Faḍl's insistence that the imam's *'ilm* was based entirely on transmission.

As for the identity of our redactor, this is likely to have been Kashshī himself, and not Abū-'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad whom Kashshī cites as his direct source and the transmitter of the contents of Ibn Ḥamdawayh's document. Abū-'l-Ḥasan is described by Najāshī and Ṭūsī as the companion (*ṣāhib*) and student (*ṭilmīdh*) of al-Faḍl and the narrator of his books (*rāwiyat kutubihī*).⁷⁷ Ṭūsī lists him as the direct transmitter of al-Faḍl's traditions.⁷⁸ Many

⁷⁵ Madelung, 'Shiite and Kharijite contribution', 122 and the references therein.

⁷⁶ See, e.g., McDermott, *Theology*, 133, and Kulīnī, *al-Kāfi*, 1, 86.

⁷⁷ Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 197.

⁷⁸ Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 254f.

reports in Kashshī from (or about) al-Faḍl are transmitted by Abū'l-Ḥasan⁷⁹ and are probably based on a work or works by the latter.⁸⁰ This linking by the Imami tradition of Abū'l-Ḥasan with al-Faḍl indicates that they represented the same school of thought. As analysis of the reported arguments on the subject of the imam's 'ilm will confirm, the first part of Kashshī's report (1.1–1.6) expresses the point of view of someone who was entirely favourable to the doctrine of transmitted 'ilm and would have had no reason to be equivocal in endorsing it. Abū'l-Ḥasan, therefore, is a probable transmitter (if not the actual author) of that part only; it is unlikely that he would have included passages such as 1.7, which could be interpreted as casting some doubt on Faḍl's doctrine of the imam's 'ilm, or 1.8–1.9 which originate from a source hostile to Faḍl and his Nishapuri compatriots.⁸¹

As for Kashshī, it is clear from a number of other reports that he had before him conflicting attitudes to al-Faḍl and his doctrines,⁸² which he tried to reconcile or resolve. In the case of the report on the controversy in Nishapur, his redactional activity is indirectly confirmed by another report on that controversy. A certain Aḥmad b. Ya'qūb Abū 'Alī al-Bayhaqī, apparently addressing Kashshī, states:

2.1 As for what you have asked concerning the mention of the signed statement (*tawqī'*) which was issued regarding al-Faḍl b. Shādhān, that our master had cursed him because of his corporeal doctrine (*qawlihi bi'l-jism*), I tell you that this is false. Rather, our master had dispatched from Iraq to Nīsābūr an agent, whose name was Ayyūb b. al-Nāb, to collect his dues. He (the agent) stayed in Nīsābūr with Shiite people who held exaggerated doctrine (*madhhab al-irtifā' wa'l-ghuluww*)... I am loath to name them. That agent wrote accusing al-Faḍl of claiming that he was not genuine (*laysa min al-aṣl*) and preventing people from paying his dues, and those people too wrote to the imam complaining about al-Faḍl. They did not mention corporealism nor anything else.

2.2 That signed statement [written] in the letter (*kitāb*) of Ibn Ḥamdawayh al-Bayhaqī was issued through (*kharaja min yad*) the one who is known in Baghdad as al-Dihqān. I read it (saw it written) in our master's handwriting. And this signed statement (*wa'l-tawqī'*) [read thus]: al-Faḍl b. Shādhān, what has he got to do with my followers (*mawāliyya*, viz. agents) troubling them and accusing them of lying... If he does not desist, I will afflict him

⁷⁹ See Kashshī, 'Index', 198f.

⁸⁰ Abū'l-Ḥasan is unlikely to have been a direct oral transmitter to Kashshī (d. 368/979) of the traditions of al-Faḍl (d. 260/874). And since Kashshī does not mention any other transmitter for our report, we may assume that he had direct access to a work by Abū'l-Ḥasan from which he derived this report. Najāshī (*Rijāl*, 197) reports that Kashshī used Abū'l-Ḥasan as an authority (*i'tamada 'alayhi*) in his *Kitāb al-Rijāl* and that Abū'l-Ḥasan has a book which contains an account of al-Faḍl's sessions (*majālis*) with opponents (*ahl al-khulāf*) and of the problems or questions of the people of the provinces (*masā'il ahl al-buldān*).

⁸¹ It stands to reason that Abū'l-Ḥasan's report (1.1–1.6 which, according to our analysis, would have been unambiguously favourable to al-Faḍl) was earlier in origin than the other report which claims that al-Faḍl had been cursed in Ibn Ḥamdawayh's document (1.7–1.8). It is hard to imagine that a disciple of al-Faḍl and defender of his doctrines would have cited such a document if it had already been associated with the imam's cursing of him. It is possible that the idea was first put forward by Abū'l-Ḥasan's opponents reacting to his claim that the imam had condoned al-Faḍl's doctrine of transmitted 'ilm in his letter to Ibn Ḥamdawayh; their version of that document casts doubt on al-Faḍl's loyalty to the Imami cause and thereby undermines the validity of his views.

⁸² Thus, for example, he includes two reports according to which the imam saw, and approved the contents of, a book composed by al-Faḍl and invoked blessings on his soul; Kashshī, 537f (no.1023) and 542 (no.1027). Opposition to al-Faḍl and his doctrines was still being voiced in the time of Tūsī (d. 460/1068), as is suggested by the remark he makes at the end of Kashshī's profile of al-Faḍl (544f).

with an illness from which his hurt will never heal, neither in this life nor in the hereafter.⁸³

Although Ibn Ya'qūb describes the question posed to him by Kashshī as 'whether our master had cursed him (al-Faḍl) because of his belief in *jism*', two points in his comments indicate that he was responding to Kashshī's question as to whether al-Faḍl's cursing could also have been on account of some aspect of his *'ilm* doctrine (which amounts to denying the possibility of divine inspiration). Firstly, Ibn Ya'qūb, who denies that doctrinal matters were involved and says that the dispute was about agents and the collection of Imami taxes, insists that 'neither corporealism nor anything else (*'ilm?*)' was mentioned by al-Faḍl's opponents when they wrote to the imam (2.1). Secondly, it is only with the doctrine of the imam's *'ilm* in mind that Ibn Ya'qūb would have referred to al-Faḍl's opponents as *ghulāt*. The notion of *ghuluww* would not have applied to *ta'īl*, the other doctrine that Kashshī alleges was held by them.

This report, then, would seem to support the suggestion that the redactor of the report/document examined above is more likely to have been Kashshī than Abū 'l-Ḥasan. As mentioned above, Abū 'l-Ḥasan had close associations with al-Faḍl and hence is unlikely to have included that hostile passage (1.9) or to have been equivocal about al-Faḍl's doctrines (1.7). In the case of Kashshī, the question that he posed to Ibn Ya'qūb indicates that he was disinclined to be categorical in endorsing al-Faḍl's doctrine of the imam's *'ilm*. Thus, although his overall aim was to defend al-Faḍl's standing and credibility, he would have had reason to incorporate passages which could be interpreted as expressing the imam's dissatisfaction with some of al-Faḍl's views; in his time al-Faḍl's views would have appeared to be contrary to the dominant tendency to regard the imam as being endowed with various forms of divinely inspired knowledge.⁸⁴

As for Abū 'l-Ḥasan's claim that Ibn Ḥamdawayh was the author of a letter to the imam which describes the dispute and contains the imam's reply, and that he himself had seen that letter, there is good reason to doubt its truth.⁸⁵ But it does not necessarily follow that there is no truth in the idea that al-Faḍl had refuted the views of the *ghulāt* on the subject, or that Abū 'l-Ḥasan has misrepresented al-Faḍl's arguments.⁸⁶ And judging by the importance that Abū 'l-Ḥasan attaches to written proof of the imam's verdict, we may assume that the subject of the imam's knowledge was still being disputed in his own time.

Al-Faḍl's opponents are said to have held a number of beliefs concerning the scope, nature and sources of the imam's knowledge (1.2), for which the imam condemned them as grave sinners (1.3). With the exception of their use of the term *wahy* to describe the divine source of the imam's knowledge (and their belief that *wahy* did not cease after the Prophet), their listed beliefs would

⁸³ Kashshī, 542f, after no.1028.

⁸⁴ From the point of view of Kashshī, or any other classical collector of such reports about pre-*ghayba* figures, the report would still have been worth transmitting even though its aim and tenor may not have been compatible with classical Imami perceptions. This is because it showed that leading disciples were engaged in refuting *ghuluww* and the idea of 'continuous *wahy*'.

⁸⁵ The whole claim is clearly tendentious, the idea that the document contained an account of the dispute is denied by another Imami who also claims to have seen it (Ibn Ya'qūb's report, 2.1, 2.2), and other reports about Ibn Ḥamdawayh's correspondence with the imam mention only the issue of agents (see n74 above for references).

⁸⁶ For evidence that Abū 'l-Ḥasan's report was probably a close reflection of the arguments used by al-Faḍl in his attacks on *ghuluww*, see below and notes 91 and 92.

have been mostly acceptable to classical Imamism.⁸⁷ The dispute, though, was not about whether or not revelations received by the imam may be described as *wahy* rather than as *ilhām*. It concerned different conceptions of the role of the imam and the nature of his authority, of which the issue of transmitted versus inspired/revealed *'ilm* was an integral part.

Al-Faḍl is thought to have held a purely legalistic view of the role of the imam: he believed that the imam's knowledge was restricted to doctrinal matters. This is implied in his identification of the knowledge revealed to the Prophet and transmitted to the imams as *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* etc. (1.6). His opponents, on the other hand, are said to have regarded the imam's (and the Prophet's) knowledge as of an essentially esoteric nature (men's thoughts and beliefs, and other aspects of the unseen, 1.2); their lack of interest in the imam as a source of legal and dogmatic knowledge is implicit.

There is one aspect of this report which might suggest that the disagreement between al-Faḍl and his opponents was also about the sources (*uṣūl*) of Imami law (or perhaps, that Abū'l-Ḥasan thought so). This is the reference to the notion of 'perfection of religion (*kamāl al-dīn*)' which, as we have seen above, was also used by al-Faḍl when attacking Sunni legal theory and refuting the charge that the 'Shia' believed in *ilhām*. In this report al-Faḍl is said to have insisted that the religion (or the law, *al-dīn*) brought by the Prophet and transmitted to the imams is perfect (1.6), whereas his Shiite opponents are effectively accused of claiming that the Islamic revelation was not perfect. They are said to have maintained that neither the Prophet nor any of the imams had perfect religious knowledge (*kamāl al-'ilm*), and that whenever something (*shay'*, an event or a legal case?) which they had no previous knowledge of occurred God would send them revelations (1.2).

However, the following points make it unlikely that the dispute between al-Faḍl and his *ghulāt* opponents was also about the sources of Imami law. To begin with, the *ghulāt*'s reported conception of the substance of the imam's (and the Prophet's) knowledge, which is that it is of an essentially esoteric nature, would seem to preclude the notion that they had an interest in the law, let alone legal theory. It is in fact typical of the Imami tradition to portray the *ghulāt*/esotericists, including those of them who followed Imami imams, as antinomianists.⁸⁸ Secondly, and following from the first point, there is nothing to indicate that by '*shay'*' a legal case, and not an occurrence or an event, is meant; the reference is probably to the *ghulāt*'s belief that the imam has access to knowledge of the *ghayb* or the unseen. Thirdly, the use of the concept *kamāl al-dīn* does not necessarily imply an *uṣūl* dispute. The concept, as the report indicates, was also useful for undermining the *ghulāt*'s conception of 'religion': their belief that the law is not sufficient or necessary for salvation and that a perpetual source of esoteric knowledge was necessary is interpreted by the legalist author as an assertion that the Prophetic revelation was not perfect. In short, Abū'l-Ḥasan does not seem to have perceived those *ghulāt*, or intended to portray them, as a group that combined esotericism with regard for the law and had its own views on legal theory too.⁸⁹ Moreover, there is

⁸⁷ These include the belief that the imam knew all languages, the thoughts of men, the unseen, etc.

⁸⁸ e.g. Nawbakhtī, 25, 29, 30, 31, 32, 38 (in connection with Ḥamza b. 'Umāra, the Ḥārithiyya, the Rāwandīyya, the Khaṭṭābiyya, etc.).

⁸⁹ In principle, the existence of such a group (or groups) of Shiites or Imamīs cannot be precluded. The problem is that there is no evidence whatsoever of their existence, which may be due to the hostility of the Imami tradition and a prevalent fear of the antinomian potential of all esoteric doctrines. But the lack of evidence may also be due to the non-existence of such groups. In an attempt to account for the infiltration of *ghuluww* elements into mainstream Imamism, Modarressi has identified the Mufawwiḍa as such a group and suggested that, because they were

nothing in this report to indicate that al-Faḍl himself may have been involved in an inner-Imami *uṣūl* dispute.⁹⁰ That he had been involved in refuting the *ghulāt* is, on the other hand, confirmed by the titles of two (or three) of his works.⁹¹ Abū'l-Ḥasan may well have relied on such works when composing his 'document' and describing al-Faḍl's arguments against the *ghulāt*.⁹²

Other evidence of early Imami views

The existence within pre-*ghayba* Imamism of divergent positions on the related questions of *uṣūl* and the imam's '*ilm*' is reported by the Imami heresiographers Nawbakhtī and Sa'd al-Qummī. According to their (rather implausible) account, it was the status of Muḥammad al-Jawād, the ninth imam who was a minor when his father died in 202/818, which triggered debates about the sources of the imam's knowledge. They also imply that one of the debated issues was whether the imam's teachings were based on divinely inspired knowledge or on knowledge transmitted in a chain going back to the Prophet, and whether or not some of those teachings represented an additional source of law.⁹³

There is no supporting evidence either from the Imami tradition or from external sources to confirm that disputes about the sources of the law and the admissibility of *ilhām* took place within Imamism around the beginning of the third/ninth century. In fact, the few pieces of first-hand and datable evidence (viz. evidence which is not *ḥadīth*-based) that we have from before the early *ghayba* period indicate that Imamism was distinguished from other forms of Shiism and from the *ghulāt* by its 'transmitted '*ilm*' doctrine. Thus, the contemporary Mu'tazilite heresiographer pseudo-Nāshī' (d. 236/851) was

law-observing and less extreme than other *ghulāt* in their conception of the imams, they were able to spread their doctrines among the more moderate Imamis; *Crisis and consolidation in the formative period of Shī'ite Islam: Abū Ja'far ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and his contribution to Imāmīte Shī'ite thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1993), ch. ii, esp. 35f, n101. However, such a view of the Mufawwiḍa appears to be largely speculative and is not consistent with Imami descriptions of their doctrines. According to Sa'd al-Qummī (*Maqālāt*, 60f), some of the Mufawwiḍa were blatantly antinomianist and believed that the law was binding only on those who did not recognize Muḥammad (and the imams) as incarnations of the demiurge or the creator of the world (para. 120; cf. Modarressi who wrongly adduces this passage as evidence of the beliefs not of the Mufawwiḍa but of the 'sectarian *ghulāt*' whom he regards as distinct from the former). Others of the Mufawwiḍa, according to Sa'd, regarded prayer and other religious duties as punishments which they imposed on themselves 'in the open' and as a cover that conceals them (their true identity?) from opponents (para. 119).

⁹⁰ There is a possibility that al-Faḍl's refutation of the *ghulāt*'s conception of the imam's knowledge, which shows that the doctrine of transmitted '*ilm*' was the 'orthodox' one, was adduced by Abū'l-Ḥasan because it was relevant to a current dispute within Imamism about the sources of the law; see below, in connection with the *uṣūl* disputes reported by Nawbakhtī. But it is equally possible that Abū'l-Ḥasan composed his report against a background of an ongoing dispute between moderates and *ghulāt* about the nature and role of the imamate.

⁹¹ *Kitāb al-radd 'alā al-ghāliya al-muhammadiyya* and *kitāb al-radd 'alā al-qarāmiṭa*; Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 236. Tūsī also has two titles, *kitāb al-radd 'alā al-ghulāt* and *kitāb al-radd 'alā al-bāṭiniyya wa'l-qarāmiṭa* (*Fihrist*, 254), the first of which may be the same work as Najāshī's first title.

⁹² The first title (previous note) is in fact a likely source. The name *al-ghāliya al-muhammadiyya* probably signified those esotericists who were distinguished from others by the belief that the Prophet (and not only 'Alī, or 'Alī and the imams) occupied a position in the esoteric scheme of things; see, e.g., Sa'd al-Qummī's description of the Mukhammisa and the Mufawwiḍa (*Maqālāt*, 56–61), and cf. the section beginning with para. 93 (page 44f), where the *ghuluww* of other groups is said to have been directed at their 'imams' and no *ghuluww* beliefs concerning the Prophet himself are listed. According to Abū'l-Ḥasan's report, as we have seen earlier, the Prophet figured as much as the imams in the beliefs of al-Faḍl's opponents who regarded him (and the imams) as a source of esoteric knowledge.

⁹³ Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī'a*, 74–6, and Sa'd al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, 95–9. My observations about the issues reported by Nawbakhtī and Sa'd al-Qummī are based on a detailed analysis carried out in my Ph.D. thesis cited above.

aware of the existence of divergent views among the followers of al-Jawād and/or his successor 'Alī al-Hādī concerning the imamate of a minor and his knowledge.⁹⁴ But there is reason to believe that those divergent views (like the ones in Nishapur) reflected the different conceptions of the role of the imam held by the 'moderates/legalists' and the 'esotericists',⁹⁵ and that the question of *uṣūl* was not involved.⁹⁶ This would seem to be confirmed by the fact that pseudo-Nāshī' is not aware of the existence of more than one *uṣūl* position among Imamīs: he ascribes to the *ashāb al-imāma* the belief that the knowledge of their imams is based entirely on transmission from the Prophet and consists of all necessary legal matters.⁹⁷ He also associates the idea of the imam's *ilhām* as an additional source of law with the Zaydī sect, the Jārūdiyya, and with the Abbasid Shia.⁹⁸

The Mu'tazilite polemicist al-Khayyāt, writing after 269/883, also confirms that Imamīs were known to have rejected the idea that the imam had access to divinely inspired knowledge.⁹⁹ With the slightly later al-Ash'arī, on the other hand, we begin to hear (as we do from Nawbakhtī) of the existence of

⁹⁴ *Kitāb Uṣūl al-nihāl*, published by J. van Ess in *Frühe mu'tazilitische Häresiographie. Zwei Werke des Nāshī' al-akbar* (gest. 295 H.) (Beiruter Texte und Studien Series, 11, Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1971). For a revised authorship and date of this work see Madelung, 'Frühe mu'tazilitische Häresiographie: das *Kitāb al-Uṣūl* des Ga'far b. Ḥarb?' *Der Islam* 57, 1980. Pseudo-Nāshī' confirms indirectly that some of the disciples of al-Jawād and/or his successor 'Alī al-Hādī, who was also young when his father died, believed that they were already fully-fledged imams in their childhood years. The dispute about the imamate of a minor is ascribed (falsely and perhaps in order to avoid naming the current imam) to the followers of the fourth imam 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, on which see van Ess, *Häresiographie*, 29ff, and the text, *Uṣūl al-nihāl*, 25.

⁹⁵ That those who advocated the validity of the imamate of a minor were at that time regarded as *ghulāt*/esotericists, for whom the imam was first and foremost a source of spiritual salvation and endowed with supernatural qualities, is indicated by their use of the term *hujja* to describe the imams (pseudo-Nāshī', *Uṣūl al-nihāl*, 25; Sa'd al-Qummī, *Maqālat*, 95). The term, as is well known, is used in classical Imamism, but the fact that in the heresiographical tradition it signifies a 'messenger from the divine realm to the people of the earth' and its use is associated with Abū al-Khattāb, a paragon of *ghuluww*, is perhaps indicative of its origins; see, e.g., Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī'a*, 38; 'Alī b. Ismā'il al-Ash'arī, *Maqālat al-Islāmiyyin*, ed. H. Ritter (Bibliotheca Islamica, 1, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1963, 2nd ed.), 10; Sa'd al-Qummī, *Maqālat*, 51. The position of the other group in the dispute about child-imams is not made very clear by pseudo-Nāshī'. Its members are said to have insisted that 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn had been mature when his father died, which could imply that they were not willing to recognize al-Jawād (or to recognize him before he reached maturity; see the next note) and used the argument that there was no precedent for recognizing a child.

⁹⁶ That is not to deny of course that successors to the imamate who were children when their fathers died would have posed a number of theoretical problems to the legalists. Such problems, however, could have been (and probably were) resolved without abandoning the transmitted *'ilm* position and by adopting the idea of written (as opposed to oral) transmission. The concept of the *ṣahīfa* which contains the interpretation of the Quran may well have been devised as a solution to the problem of the transmission of *'ilm* being interrupted by the accession of minors. Thus, according to Nawbakhtī, one group of Imamīs accepted the possibility of a temporary suspension of the imamate and said that the imam assumes his role when he reaches maturity and that he acquires the requisite knowledge from 'written sources' inherited from his predecessors; Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī'a*, 75, line 8, 76, line 7 (with a gap at the beginning of the passage), and Sa'd's parallel passage which is more complete, 97f paras. 190, 191. According to the arguments presented here, these ideas are likely to have represented the position of the Imami legalists in the pre-*ghayba* period.

⁹⁷ *Uṣūl al-Nihāl*, 23f para. 36, and 44 lines 2–5 where the *'ilm* doctrine of the Batriyya is distinguished from that of the *ashāb al-imāma* (viz. the Imamiyya) and from that of the Jārūdiyya.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 43, 36.

⁹⁹ Khayyāt, *Intisār*, 152f. Khayyāt cites Ibn al-Rāwandī's objections to a remark made by Jāhiz about the Shia. Jāhiz is quoted as saying that the Shia believe the descendants of the prophet acquire their knowledge of the religious sciences by *ilhām*. Ibn al-Rāwandī protests that not all the Shia attribute *ilhām* to the Prophet's descendants and those of them who do maintain that it is an ability to attain (transmitted) knowledge, which is open to all men and is not restricted to the Prophet's descendants. Khayyāt retorts that Jāhiz had meant the Jārūdiyya. On Ibn al-Rāwandī, see Nyberg's 'Introduction', 22–46.

divergent views among the Rāfida on the subject of the imam's *'ilm* and the possibility of post-Prophetic inspiration.¹⁰⁰

This sort of evidence would lend support to the thesis that the *'ilm/uṣūl* position represented by the views and arguments of al-Faḍl was the 'orthodox' or non-*ghuluww* one in early Imamism and its defining feature, and that the transition to classical patterns took place sometime after the *ghayba*.¹⁰¹ It would also suggest that Nawbakhtī's account of an *uṣūl* controversy is more likely to have been a reflection of the situation in Imamism in his own time, that is, in the latter part of the third/ninth century, than at the time of the succession of al-Jawād.¹⁰²

It is not the aim here to discuss all the possible factors that brought about those changes in the Imami conception of the imam's knowledge. One factor, however, is worth considering briefly as it is relevant to the question of Imamism and the Quran. As observed above in connection with the views of al-Faḍl, it would appear that in early Imamism the idea that the imams had access to a 'more complete' Quran had served to support the claim that the imams' teachings were based entirely on it. Thus, a change of attitude to the official Quran (viz. accepting that it is complete and rejecting the idea that the imams had access to a more complete text) would have made the Imami scripturalist position much more difficult to defend and would have necessitated a reformulation of its *uṣūl* doctrine. One solution would have been to admit the possibility of divine inspiration for the imams and effectively to recognize that their teachings, or rather those of them which have no basis in the Quran, constitute a valid extra-scriptural source.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Ash'arī, *Maqālat*, 50f. This work was written not long after 291 A.H. (on which see Ritter's 'Introduction', page *yā-tā'*), that is, at about the same time as Nawbakhtī's *Firaq al-Shī'a* (on which see Madelung, 'Bemerkungen', 38).

¹⁰¹ That is not to deny of course that some of the roots of this change go back to the pre-*ghayba* period when the *ghulāt* were known to have attached themselves to Imamism and Imami imams. What is being suggested here is that before the *ghayba* the Imami leadership regarded them and their views as alien to Imamism, whereas later some of their views became acceptable.

¹⁰² The question arises as to why Nawbakhtī would have chosen to trace the *uṣūl* and *'ilm* disputes to the time of al-Jawād and to relate them to the question of the imamate of a minor. One reason may be that by portraying those disputes as having originated during the lifetime of the imams, he would have been legitimating the differences that existed in his own time. Or, it may be that he simply found the question of the imamate of a minor a convenient peg for discussion of all *'ilm*-related issues.

¹⁰³ A comparison between the evidence provided by Khayyāt and the reports of Ash'arī would seem to support this posited link between Imami attitudes to the Quran and views on the question of the imam's inspiration. Khayyāt accuses all the Rāfida (i.e. Imamiyya) of his time of claiming that the Quran has been altered, added to, and deleted from, and says that they have thereby placed themselves outside the *ijmā'* of the Muslim community; *Intiṣār*, 6, 41, 106f, 151, 158f. And as noted earlier, he accepts that the belief in *ilhām* was not a characteristic of Imamism. With the later Ash'arī, on the other hand, we hear for the first time of the existence of differences among the Rāfida on the question of the Quran and whether it has been altered (a question on which Nawbakhtī is understandably silent). We also hear from him of the existence of divergent *'ilm/uṣūl* positions; *Maqālat*, 47 and 50f. Given this and other evidence concerning the imam's knowledge examined in this article one could draw the conclusion that acceptance of the doctrine of *ilhām* and of the completeness of the official Quran began to take place in Imamism at about the same time, and that those changes in Imami thought were related.