

## Introduction

This book attempts to define the nature and main characteristics of the legal thought of Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, a preeminent religious scholar and jurist of Medina in the first half of the second century of the Muslim calendar (mid-eighth century CE).

During the reign of the Umayyad caliphate, which ruled the Muslim world from 41 to 132 AH (662–750 CE), various trends in legal interpretation and reasoning emerged, mainly in the Ḥijāz and Iraq. A generation of jurists with circles of devoted students and the subsequent debates and disputes between supporters of rival positions gradually turned these trends into brands and, over a few further decades, into local schools of legal interpretation. Some of these local schools managed to attract followers beyond their lands of origin and spread to other parts of the Muslim world. Each of these schools is usually identified by the name of the prominent jurist in early Islam who started or led the trend that the school represents. The schools made invaluable contributions to the legal thinking of the young Muslim community. A few survived the test of time, formed vast communities of followers, and continued to inform the Muslim legal mind down to our time.

The school that is the focus of the present study emerged in the late Umayyad period. Its eponym was Imam Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ja‘far b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, a highly respected jurist of Medina who was also a revered member of the House of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*), as was known to his contemporaries. Ever since his lifetime, the school has been known as the Ja‘farī school, and its adherents are known as the Ja‘farīs.<sup>1</sup> Like all other schools of Islamic law, it developed over time into a well-established school with a specific legal theory and distinctive methods of analysis. The school embodies a living tradition that endured for thirteen centuries and presently has more than two hundred million followers worldwide, and its legacy is

---

1 For some of the earliest references to the name from the time of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq to later in the second century, see the reports in Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 2:77, 636 (also 2:233, 5:467); Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 162, 255, 306; Qāḍī Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā‘im al-Islām*, 1:73 (also 1:71, 82 [in which the word *Ja‘fariyya* is obscured as *fulāniyya*]; Qāḍī Nu‘mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, 3:504); Ibn Bābawayh, *Faḳīh*, 1:251. See also Ḥimyarī, *Qurb al-isnād*, 357. For some early non-Shī‘ī references, see, for instance, Abū Tammām, *Diwān*, 3:242; Ibn Qutayba, *Ma‘ārif*, 215; Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Tamhīd*, 2:66.

preserved in thousands of books conveying the ideas of a long list of original legal thinkers. In the two areas of legal interpretation and contract in particular, this tradition has expanded to a degree unmatched by any of its counterparts in the Muslim legal tradition.

Numerous works in different languages, including a 1984 English monograph by the present author,<sup>2</sup> have appeared in the past half century to introduce this school of Islamic law, its history, legal theory, and contents. All of this literature, however, has focused on later stages of the school in its developed and expanded form. The goal of the present study as an essay in intellectual history is to show how the school began and to sketch the background and past that it represented.



There are other aspects of the character of Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq that this study will not touch upon. The most important is his leadership of the Shī‘a Muslim community of his time and its recognition of him, to the present day, as the sixth Imam from the House of the Prophet. This matter is too well known to require deep explanation. The following paragraph provides a brief summary for readers who may require it:

For the first twenty years after the death of the Prophet in the year 11, the community remained united under rulers commonly known as caliphs. A protest by some members of Muslim society against certain administrative policies of the third caliph, ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (r. 24–35), got out of hand and ended with his killing, but the hostility between his supporters and opponents continued and culminated in a civil war during the caliphate of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (r. 35–40), which broke the unity of the Muslim community. The civil war subsided after ‘Alī’s assassination and the accession to the caliphate of his rival and opponent, Mu‘āwiya (r. 41–60), who assumed rule over the entire Muslim community and established the Umayyad dynasty, which subsequently governed the lands of Islam for close to a century. However, support for ‘Alī and his descendants and hopes that they would one day come to lead the community again did not die away. The supporters of the ‘Alids’ cause<sup>3</sup> were involved in a number of unsuccessful uprisings against the Umayyads. The latter, for their part, chased and prosecuted the supporters of the ‘Alids in a ruthless manner, as is well known to students of the history of Islam.<sup>4</sup>

2 Modarressi, *Introduction to Shī‘i Law*.

3 “Those who have affection for us” (*ahl mawaddatinā*), as they were called by Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq in a report in ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr*, 1:67.

4 The first civil war as an historical event thus ended with the establishment of the Umayyad dynasty. However, the pro-‘Uthmān versus pro-‘Alī conflict had an enduring effect on Muslim society. In a statement quoted from Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq in Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 8:159, he advised his

As the most learned and esteemed member of the House of the Prophet in his time,<sup>5</sup> Ja'far al-Ṣādiq was the focus of both public reverence and governmental jealousy and suspicion for most of his life. His supporters were not limited to proponents of the 'Alids' cause, who were by then known as

followers not to mention the name of 'Alī in public in order to protect themselves from harm, given the general pro-'Uthmān sentiment of the time:

إياكم وذكر علي وفاطمة فإنّ الناس ليس شيء أبغض إليهم من ذكر علي وفاطمة.

Beware of mentioning 'Alī and Fāṭima, for people detest nothing more than mention of 'Alī and Fāṭima.

See further Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, 11:44–45 (quoting the historian Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Madā'inī [d. 225] in his *Kitāb al-Aḥdāth*).

5 See, for instance, the letter that his contemporary caliph, Manṣūr, wrote to another member of the House with a claim to the caliphate, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Nafs al-Zakiyya:

وما وُلد منكم بعد وفاة رسول الله أفضل من علي بن الحسين. وما كان فيكم بعده مثل ابنه محمد بن علي. ولا مثل ابنه جعفر.

No one born among you after the death of the Messenger of God was more virtuous than 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn. After him, no one among you was like his son Muḥammad b. 'Alī, nor like his son Ja'far (Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, 5:82–83; Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, 4:119; Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh* 7:569–70).

The letter was written before 145 and thus during the lifetime of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who passed away in 148. See also how the caliph received Ja'far when he was brought to the caliph's presence by his order, as reported by one of the caliph's close associates:

رُزِمَ مولى خالد بن عبد الله القسري قال: وجهني [المنصور] في حمل جعفر بن محمد بن علي بن الحسين بن علي بن أبي طالب فحملته. فلما صرنا على باب المنصور وقيل: «جعفر بن محمد!» فما هو إلا أن سمع به أمر بالأبواب ففتحت، والستور فرفعت، وخرج المنصور يستقبله إلى صحن الدار، فعانقه وأخذ بيده يمشى معه إلى صدر فراشه وقد جعل يده على صدره وحنا عليه، فأجلسه معه على فراشه.

[Ruzām, client of Khālīd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qasrī:] Manṣūr sent me to bring Ja'far b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib to him, so I did. When we arrived at Manṣūr's doorstep and [the name of] "Ja'far b. Muḥammad" was announced, he [Manṣūr] upon hearing the name immediately ordered the doors to be opened and the curtains to be raised and came out to the front yard to welcome him, [where he] embraced him, took him by the hand, then led him to the upper part of his sitting place, and had him sit with him on his seat while [Manṣūr] had his hand upon his chest and inclined towards him (Raqqām al-Baṣrī, *al-'Afw wa'l-i'tidhār*, 2:568–69).

And the caliph's comments when he received news of Ja'far's death:

إنّ جعفرًا كان ممن قال الله فيه: ﴿مَنْ أَوْزُنْتَ الْكِتَابَ الدِّينِ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا﴾ وكان ممن اصطفى الله وكان من السابقين بالخيرات.

Ja'far was among those about whom God said, "Then We allowed the Book to be inherited by those of Our servants whom We chose." He was among those whom God chose and of "those who took the lead in good deeds" (Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, 2:383. The quotation is from Qur'an 35:32).

See also the following comments about him:

لكنّ الله قد قدّم لك فضلًا ليس لأحد من قومك.

God granted you an excellence that no one among your family shares with you (Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:358–59 quoting 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan, father of the abovementioned Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Nafs al-Zakiyya).

the Shī'a—shorthand for an earlier name, Shī'at 'Alī—and who held specific theological doctrines and historical views about the past. Others<sup>6</sup> also believed that Ja'far had a better claim to the caliphate than his contemporary caliphs did. Even though he never claimed the position for himself, the Shī'a considered him to be the legitimate ruler of the Muslim community as heir and successor to the Prophet, not only as the bearer of true knowledge of religion but also as the rightful leader of the community. The absolute majority of the Shī'a thus venerate him as the sixth Imam of their doctrine, following 'Alī, his two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, Ḥusayn's son 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn, and the latter's son Muḥammad al-Bāqir.

Certain supporters of the House of the Prophet had esoteric inclinations<sup>7</sup> and attributed supernatural qualities to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and other Imams, including unlimited knowledge and knowledge of the unseen. He consistently condemned these claims in the strongest possible terms. Such supporters wrote, but ascribed to him, numerous books and reports on the

عمر بن أبي المقدم قال: كنت إذا نظرت إلى جعفر بن محمد علمت أنه من سلالة النبيين.

[ʿAmr b. Abī al-Miqdām:] Whenever I looked at Ja'far b. Muḥammad, I knew that he was a descendant of the prophets (Ibn 'Adī, *Kāmil*, 2:556; thence, Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, 5:78; Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, 6:257).

كان أفضل الناس وأعلمهم بدين الله.

He was the best of people and the most knowledgeable about God's religion (Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, 2:381).

سمعت أبي يقول: جعفر بن محمد ثقة، لا يُسأل عن مثله.

I heard my father say "Ja'far b. Muḥammad is reliable. One does not ask about the likes of him" (Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ wa'l-ta'dīl*, 2:487).

كان من سادات أهل البيت فقهاً وعلماً وفضلاً.

He was one of the masters of the House of the Prophet in religious law, knowledge, and excellence (Ibn Ḥibbān, *Thiqāt*, 6:131).

كان سيّد بني هاشم في زمانه.

He was master of the Banū Hāshim in his time (Dhahabī, *Ibar*, 1:209).

أحد الأئمة الأعلام، برّ صادق كبير الشأن، سيّد بني هاشم.

One of the leading luminaries, pure, virtuous, great in stature, and master of the Banū Hāshim (Dhahabī, *Mizān al-i'tidāl*, 1:414, 192).

6 For later periods, see for instance Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, 13:120 where he says:

جعفر الصادق كبير الشأن، من أئمة العلم، كان أولى بالخلافة من أبي جعفر المنصور.

Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, great in stature, one of the leaders in knowledge. He had a greater right to the caliphate than [the caliph of his time] Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr.

And Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām*, 3:833, where he says of Ja'far:

كان يصلح للخلافة لشؤده وفضله وعلمه وشرفه.

He was qualified for the caliphate because of his sublime status, merits, knowledge, and family honor.

7 See Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 21–32.

natural sciences, alchemy, geomancy, dream interpretation, and augury, as well as Sufism and other esoteric genres. It is obvious, however, that all of this literature is misattributed. This topic has also attracted a good number of treatments in different languages.

For the mainstream of the Shī'a, the Imam was and remained the source of correct religious knowledge and the bearer of the legacy of the House of the Prophet. The oldest definition of Shī'ism, by a prominent scholar of Kūfa in the early second century, Abān b. Taghlib (d. 141),<sup>8</sup> neatly explains this point: "The Shī'a are those who follow the opinion of 'Alī when reports from the Prophet are contradictory, and the opinion of Ja'far b. Muḥammad [al-Ṣādiq] when reports from 'Alī are contradictory."<sup>9</sup>



As noted above, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq was a highly esteemed jurist in his time, and his mastery of Islamic religious law was a matter of unanimous agreement in the Muslim society of his time. This mastery is well-documented in Islamic sources, some of which will be quoted in the first chapter of the present work. The following story, describing an alleged meeting between Abū Ḥanīfa, the eponym of the Ḥanafī school of Islamic law, and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in the presence of the Abbasid caliph Maṣṣūr (r. 136–58) as quoted by some early Ḥanafī sources on the authority of Abū Ḥanīfa's student, Ḥasan b. Ziyād al-Lu'lu'i, shows how the Muslim community remembered Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in its early centuries:<sup>10</sup>

8 On him and his works see Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 1:107–16.

9 Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 12.

10 For the first time in more than twelve centuries, the authority of this report has come under doubt by the editor of the 2003 Beirut edition of Dhahabī's *Ta'rikh al-Islām* (3:830) on three grounds: (1) Abū Ḥanīfa was not on good terms with the Abbasid caliphate, to the extent that he died in Maṣṣūr's prison, and he was thus an unlikely candidate to be chosen by the caliph for this task. (2) The caliph respected Ja'far al-Ṣādiq to the point that he wept when he received the news of Ja'far's death (Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, 2:383). (3) The ultimate source of the report, Ibn 'Uqda, Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Sa'īd al-Kūfī (d. 332), a major source of *ḥadīth* (*ḥāfiẓ*) in Kūfa in the late third to early fourth century, was commonly known as a Shī'i during his lifetime and after, and hence it is possible that sectarian bias might have played a role in the making of the report as a whole or in part. For the present purpose, however, it suffices that the report was in circulation in the early fourth century, as attested by the fact that it is quoted in Ibn 'Adī (d. 365), *Kāmil* (2:556), and cited in early Ḥanafī works on Abū Ḥanīfa. Furthermore, the arguments made by the editor of Dhahabī's *Ta'rikh al-Islām* fail to take note of important facts: (1) The nature of politics is that people are favored and fall out of favor in response to changing circumstances, especially if one keeps in mind that Abū Ḥanīfa allegedly fell out with the caliph late in his life during Nafs al-Zakiyya's rebellion in 145, some ten years after the beginning of Maṣṣūr's caliphate. This was the same time that the government began to prosecute the 'Alids, including Ja'far, whom the caliph would no longer treat with the high degree of respect depicted in this story. The episode must have therefore occurred during the years when Abū Ḥanīfa was still favored by the

سمعت أبا حنيفة وسئل من أفاقه من رأيت؟ قال: ما رأيت أحدًا أفاقه من جعفر بن محمد. لما أقدمه المنصور الحيرة بعث إليّ فقال: يا أبا حنيفة! إنّ الناس قد فُتِنوا بجعفر بن محمد فهَيَّءْ له من مسائلك الصعاب. فهَيَّأتُ له أربعين مسألة ثم أتيت أبا جعفر [المنصور] وجعفرٌ جالسٌ عن يمينه. فلما بصرتُ بهما دخلني لجعفر من الهيبة ما لم يدخلني لأبي جعفر. فسَلَّمْتُ وأُذِنَ لي فجلست. ثمّ التفتُ إليّ جعفر فقال: يا أبا عبد الله! تعرف هذا؟ قال: نعم! هذا أبو حنيفة – ثمّ أتبعها: قد أتانا. ثمّ قال: يا أبا حنيفة! هات من مسائلك تسأل أبا عبد الله. فابتدأتُ أسأله، فكان يقول في المسألة: أنتم تقولون فيها كذا وكذا، وأهل المدينة يقولون كذا وكذا، ونحن

government. (2) There are reports in major historical and biographical sources (among the earliest being Zubayr b. Bakkār, *Muwaffaqiyyāt*, 149; Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḥ*, 7:603; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, 3:224–25), some of which were edited by the same editor in the past (Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, 5:95–97; Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, 6:266–97) in which the caliph openly threatens, at times swearing by the name of God, to kill Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. The reported reaction of the caliph to Ja'far's death thus sounds like government propaganda to preempt any suspicion of a possible role of the government in his death. As noted in Chapter 1 below, the community was aware that the caliph was not on good terms with Ja'far and that he looked forward to the latter's death as a means of relieving the caliph of some anxiety. (3) The fact that although Ibn 'Uqda was indeed a Shī'ī (see the entry on him in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* II, 12 [suppl.]: 400–401 [Wilferd Madelung]), he was known as a Zaydī Shī'ī (see Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 94; Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 28: both mentioning among his works *Kitāb man rawā 'an Zayd b. 'Alī*, and Ṭūsī also mentioning a *Kitāb Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn b. Zayd wa-akhbārih*) like his father (Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'riḥ Baghdad*, 6:150), and as such should have had no special sentiment for Ja'far al-Ṣādiq or Imāmi Shī'ism. Needless to say, an Imāmi would not consider knowledge of the diversity of opinions to be a great merit for an Imam. As is well known to students of the history of Islam, Zaydīs supported the cause of the Ḥasanī branch of the 'Alids and were not on good terms with Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (see for instance, Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 5:19; Abū Maṣnūr al-Ṭabarsī, *Ihtijāj*, 2:292–93; 'Alī al-Ṭabrisī, *Mishkāṭ al-anwār*, 2:75) nor his followers (see for instance, Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 221; Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb*, 4:53). In a report in Mufīd, *Amālī*, 33, a contemporary to the Zaydīs' revolts in the lifetime of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq expresses a general concern among Ja'far's followers at the time:

إن ظفر زيدٌ وأصحابه فليس أحدٌ أسوأ حالاً عندهم منّا، وإن ظفر بنو أمية فنحن عندهم بتلك المنزلة.  
If Zayd and his companions are victorious, nobody will be in a worse situation than us with them. If the Umayyads are victorious, we will have the same status with them too.

A younger contemporary of Ibn 'Uqda, Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381), tells us in his *Kamāl al-dīn* (a book that he wrote only a few decades after Ibn 'Uqda) that “the Zaydīs are the harshest of the people against us [that is, the Imāmīs]” (Ibn Bābawayh, 126). A few decades later, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī refers in his *al-Imtā' wa'l-mu'ānasa* to the then-existing hostility between these two branches of Shī'ism as an example of deep animosity between two religious groups (Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, 2:188).

Abū Ḥanīfa was certainly not less favored by the Zaydīs than was Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. Ibn 'Uqda, in particular, wrote a book titled *Kitāb Akhbār Abī Ḥanīfa wa-musnadih* (Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 94; Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 28). He thus seems to have quoted this story, as he did with thousands of other reports that he cited in his works or recited to his students, with no specific sectarian bias.



نقول كذا وكذا. فربما تابعنا، وربما تابع أهل المدينة، وربما خالفنا جميعاً، حتى أتيت  
على أربعين مسألة، ما أخرج منها مسألة. ثم قال أبوحنيفة: أليس قد روينا أن أعلم  
الناس أعلمهم باختلاف الناس؟<sup>11</sup>

I heard Abū Ḥanīfa [when he was] asked who was the person most knowledgeable in religious law he had ever seen. He replied that he had never seen anyone more knowledgeable in religious law than Ja‘far b. Muḥammad [al-Ṣādiq]. When Manṣūr brought him to Ḥīra [near Kūfa, the seat of the Abbasid government in its early years], he sent for me and said, “O Abū Ḥanīfa! The people are enchanted by Ja‘far b. Muḥammad, so prepare for him some of your hardest questions.” I prepared [a list of] forty questions and went before Abū Ja‘far [al-Manṣūr] while Ja‘far was sitting on his right. When I saw the two, the awe that I felt for Ja‘far was well above that which I felt for Abū Ja‘far [al-Manṣūr]. I offered my greetings and was given permission to sit down. Then Abū Ja‘far [al-Manṣūr] turned to Ja‘far and said, “O Abū ‘Abd Allāh! Do you know this man?” Ja‘far said, “Yes, this is Abū Ḥanīfa,” and added, “He has been to see us before.” Then [Manṣūr] said, “O Abū Ḥanīfa! Present your questions so that we may ask Abū ‘Abd Allāh.” So I started asking him questions and he would say in his answer to every question, “You [in the school of Iraq] say such-and-such [about this question], and the people of Medina [that is, the jurists of the school of the Ḥijāz] say such-and-such, and we [in the tradition of the House of the Prophet] say such-and-such.” His opinions agreed at times with ours, at times with those of the people of Medina,<sup>12</sup> and at times with none, until I finished all forty of

11 Ibn ‘Adī, *Kāmil*, 2:556; Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad al-Makkī, *Manāqib Abī Ḥanīfa*, 1:137 (possibly from *Kashf al-āthār al-sharīfa fī manāqib Abī Ḥanīfa* by Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Ḥārithī [d. 340], a major source of reports in Muwaffaq al-Makkī’s book); Abū al-Mu‘ayyad al-Khwārazmī, *Jāmi‘ masānid Abī Ḥanīfa*, 1:251; Mizzi, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, 5:79–80; Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, 6:257–58; Dhahabī, *Ta’rikh al-Islām*, 3:830. See also Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, 4:255, who quotes the story from a *Musnad Abī Ḥanīfa*; Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 1:157, where the key sentence from the report is quoted.

12 This point is well attested, especially in the opinions quoted from him in Sunnī works of law. Compare for instance Ibn Qudāma, *Mughni*, 5:148—in which Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq is reported to have supported the opinion of his maternal grandfather, Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. Abi Bakr, one of the Seven Jurists of Medina, on the unlawfulness of a special kind of fragrant food for a pilgrim to Mecca who is in the state of pilgrim sanctity (*iḥrām*)—with Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, 1:84 (under *ḥadīth* no. 34), where Ja‘far is said to have agreed with the opinion of the jurists of Iraq on the number of times that a Muslim was supposed to wipe his head in ritual ablution (*wuḍū‘*). In Ibn Qudāma (13:290) Ja‘far’s opinion on naming God when slaughtering an animal sides with that of the jurists of Mecca, but he agrees primarily with the Iraqis, both Kūfans and Baṣrans, on the lawfulness of a person who had not yet performed his own *ḥajj* obligation substituting for someone else in the same ritual (Ibn Qudāma, 5:42).

my questions. He did not leave a single question unanswered. Commenting on the story, Abū Ḥanīfa then said, “Are we not told that the most knowledgeable of the people is the one who knows best the differences of opinion among the people?”<sup>13</sup>



Mālik b. Anas, the eponym of the Mālikī school of Islamic law, was a student of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq and transmitted *ḥadīth* from him. The following report conveys how Mālik remembered his time with Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq:

سمعت مالك بن أنس فقيه المدينة يقول: كنت أدخل على الصادق جعفر بن محمد فيقدم لي مخدة ويعرف لي قدرًا ويقول: يا مالك! إني أحبك. فكنت أسر بذلك وأحمد الله تعالى عليه. قال: وكان لا يخلو من إحدى ثلاث خصال: إما صائمًا، وإما قائمًا، وإما ذاكراً. وكان من عظماء العبّاد وأكابر الزهّاد الذين يخشون الله، وكان كثير الحديث طيب المجالسة كثير الفوائد. فاذا قال: «قال رسول الله» إخضر مرة واصفر أخرى حتى يُنكره من كان يعرفه. ولقد حججت معه سنة فلما استوت به راحلته عند الإحرام كان كلما همّ بالتلبية انقطع الصوت في حلقه وكاد أن يخر من راحلته. فقلت: قل يا بن رسول الله! فلا بد لك من أن تقول. فقال: يا بن أبي عامر! كيف أجسر أن أقول: «لبّيك اللهم لبّيك»، وأخشى أن يقول لي: «لا لبّيك ولا سعديك!»<sup>14</sup>

I heard Mālik b. Anas, the jurist of Medina, say: I used to visit al-Ṣādiq Ja‘far b. Muḥammad. He would offer me a cushion and honor me and say, “O Mālik! I like you!” That would make me happy, and I would praise God the Exalted for that. He was always engaged in one of three practices: fasting, prayer, or remembrance of God. He was among the greatest of worshippers and self-deniers who feared God. He was also

13 Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s extensive knowledge of the differences of opinion among the jurists of different regions is well attested in his answers to questions, as will be further documented in Chapter 2. When someone who was not a follower of his asked him a legal question, he would quote the diversity of opinions of the jurists of different regions (Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 253; see, for example, Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 4:236, where he refers to the opinion of the jurists of Mecca with whom he disagreed). At times, he also noted their points of consensus, as in, for instance, Ibn Bābawayh, *‘Ilal al-sharā’i*, 1:18, where he says, “The jurists of the Ḥijāz have not disagreed with the jurists of Iraq on this point.”

14 Quoted from Muṣ‘ab b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Zubayrī (d. 236) in Abū al-Qāsim al-Jawharī (d. 381), *Musnad al-Muwatta‘a*, 286–87 (whence Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Tamhīd*, 2:67; Ibn Khalfūn, *Asmā’ shuyūkh Mālik*, 135; Qāḍī ‘Iyād, *Shifā*, 2:142; Ibn Farḥūn, *Irshād al-sālik*, 1:201); Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, 7:306; and through a Shī‘ī chain of transmission in Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī*, 432 (see also his *‘Ilal al-sharā’i*, 1:224, and *Khiṣāl*, 167).



full of pleasant speech, and his company was plentiful in benefits. When he said, “The Messenger of God said,” he would turn sometimes green, sometimes yellow, such that even those who knew him could not recognize him.<sup>15</sup> One year, I performed *hajj* with him. When his mount stopped in order for him to enter the state of pilgrim sanctity, every time he would resolve to say the *talbiya*, his voice would choke up, and he would almost fall off his mount. I said, “Say it, O son of the Messenger of God! You must say it.” He said, “O son of Abū ‘Āmir!<sup>16</sup> How can I dare to say, ‘Here I am, My Lord, here I am,’ when I fear that He may say to me, ‘You are not welcome!’”



A brief remark about the sources for this study seems merited. As expected, there is an enormous number of quotations from, as well as reports and information about, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq in the collections of religious reports and compendia of law, as well as in works on biography and literature, by adherents of various doctrinal and sectarian tendencies in the general Islamic tradition.<sup>17</sup> Some of that material is spurious or pure fabrication. In Sunnī *ḥadīth*, attempts can frequently be observed by late Umayyad and early Abbasid transmitters to rebuff rivals by putting statements in the mouths of leaders of the opposing group, which was a well-attested tactic in the sectarian milieu of the early Muslim centuries. In Shī‘ī *ḥadīth*, the hand of various esoteric groups and individuals who pretended to have affection

15 A report in Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 6:39 further attests to the utmost respect that members of the House had for the memory of the Prophet (see also 5:114):

عن أبي هارون مولى آل جعدة قال: كنت جليسا لأبي عبد الله بالمدينة، ففقدني أياما، ثم إنني جئت إليه فقال: لم أرك منذ أيام يا أبا هارون! فقلت: ولد لي غلام. فقال: بارك الله لك! فما سميتَه؟ قلت: سميتَه محمداً. فأقبل بخده نحو الأرض وهو يقول: محمد محمد محمد، حتى كاد يلمس خده بالأرض. ثم قال: نفسي ووُلدي وأهلي وأبوي وأهل الأرض كلهم جميعاً فداءً لرسول الله. لا تسبه ولا تضربه ولا تُسئ إليه.

[Abū Hārūn, client of Āl Ja‘da:] I used to sit in the company of Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq] in Medina. He missed me for a few days. The next time I went to him, he said, “I have not seen you for some days, O Abū Hārūn!” I said, “A child was born to me.” He said, “May God bless you! What did you name him?” I said, “I named him Muḥammad.” He bent with his face toward the floor, saying “Muḥammad, Muḥammad, Muḥammad,” until his face almost touched the floor. Then he said, “Myself, my children, my family, my parents, and all the people of the earth altogether be ransomed for the Messenger of God. Do not insult him [your child], beat him, or mistreat him.”

16 Mālik was the son of Anas b. Mālik b. Abi ‘Āmir al-Aṣḥabī.

17 A work by Muḥammad Kāzīm al-Qazwīnī, *Mawsū‘at al-Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq*, attempts to collect the reports from or about the Imam, mostly those recorded in Imāmī Shī‘ī sources. It is organized thematically and thus serves as an easy starting point for research on any aspect of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s life, thought, and teachings.

for and affiliation with the House of the Prophet,<sup>18</sup> although many of them may not have even believed in God or Islam,<sup>19</sup> can clearly be seen behind many texts that do not match the language and conventions of the Imams.<sup>20</sup> Some of that material was nevertheless received favorably among the uneducated or unsophisticated masses.<sup>21</sup> There were also *ḥadīth* fabricators in both camps who boldly improvised lies on behalf of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq with no specific doctrinal agenda, simply because of the popularity of his name as a leading authority on religious teachings.<sup>22</sup> There is, however, a large

18 The esoterics usually had no education or social and family distinction. Their esotericism and exaggeration were only stratagems to acquire distinction in the community and set themselves up as devoted supporters and advocates of the Shī‘ī cause (see Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 138, 148, and passim). They were ready and happy to create tension, hatred, and animosity between people only to assert themselves as notables in the community. Much of the material that they forged and ascribed to the Imams could have potentially put the life of the Imams and those of their disciples and transmitters in danger, or the community of the supporters and well-wishers of the House of the Prophet in deep shame and disgrace, if the Imams had actually said this or the alleged transmitters reported it at the time. This is a clear indication that such material, with its claimed authority and chains of transmission, was blatant fabrication.

19 See Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 35–36.

20 Such were many of the fabrications told about Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq by the esoterics, which could easily be distinguished by their tone and content as neither in line with his widely-transmitted statements nor comparable to his style of speech, personal character, or family and class culture. As attested in numerous examples, the close disciples of the Imam who were familiar with his language would immediately recognize the true from the false as soon as they received a statement ascribed to him (see Chapter 1 below).

21 A very common practice by the esoterics was to *edit* narratives and paraphrase words, putting the new versions into the mouths of the Imam or his prominent disciples and then into vast circulation in the Shī‘ī community of the time. With a small edit, a straightforward statement could take on a very different meaning by the time it reached Kūfa. Many of the Shī‘a of Kūfa had recollections of some phonetically similar statements from the Imams (see, for instance, Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 1:90), a fact that helped the forgers succeed in their edits. Human inclination toward wonders, make-believe, imagination, and exaggeration about their spiritual leaders always led uneducated masses to fall victim to the traps set by the esoterics, to believe in their claims and ascriptions, and to act as a type of free-of-charge mass media to spread each new fabrication.

22 These three categories of lies and liars will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1. See also the intelligent observation of a prominent scholar of *ḥadīth*, Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Rāzī (d. 277), in Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ wa’l-ta’dīl*, 9:25. It shows that the government and its supporters were happy with, and presumably encouraged, fabrications and misattributions to Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, as these would taint the image of the Imam and the House of the Prophet in the eyes of the religious masses, and especially of the scholars of *ḥadīth*, by casting them as “weak transmitters” of false material:

كتب الفضل بن الربيع إلى أبي فقال: لا تُحدِّث عن جعفر بن محمد. فقلت لأبي: هذا أبو البخترى ببغداد  
يحدِّث عن جعفر بن محمد بالأعاجيب ولا يُنهي. قال: يا بُني! أما من يكذب على جعفر بن محمد فلا  
يُبالون به، وأما من يصدق على جعفر فلا يُعجبهم!

Al-Faql b. al-Rabī‘ wrote to my father, saying, “Do not transmit *ḥadīths* from Ja‘far b. Muḥammad.” I said to my father, “Here is Abū al-Bakhtarī in Baghdad transmitting fantastical *ḥadīths* from Ja‘far b. Muḥammad but not getting forbidden.” He said,

body of material that sounds authentic or can reasonably be assumed to be. As for the provenance of the material, there is naturally much more in Shīʿī sources, especially those of the Jaʿfarī school.

The present study uses all material that corresponds to the language and character of Jaʿfar al-Šādiq, as known through both historical and biographical accounts, and as such can reasonably be deemed reliable. The same is true with those reports that are supported by internal or external<sup>23</sup> evidence, including the language and style of legal discourse in his time.<sup>24</sup> Sectarian tendencies and doctrinal affiliations play no role in

“O my son! They do not care about one who attributes lies to Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad, but they do not like the one who transmits truthfully from Jaʿfar!”

Al-Faḍl b. al-Rabiʿ and his father served the Abbasid caliphate as top officials for many decades, al-Faḍl as *ḥājib* (the doorkeeper or chamberlain) for Maṣṣūr and his successors, and as vizier for Hārūn al-Rashīd (after the fall of the Barmakids) and his son, Amin. Al-Faḍl died in 208. For Abū al-Bakhtarī, see below, Chapter 1.

- 23 External evidence includes corroboration of the dates given for historical events through records in early chronological works. In a report in Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 2:346–47, for instance, a follower of Jaʿfar al-Šādiq tells him that after his previous meeting with the Imam a number of years earlier, his entire family was wiped out in the plague outbreak of the year 31 (that is, 131 AH). He was clearly referring to a well-documented plague that started in the month of Rajab in 131 AH and ended in Shawwāl of the same year. It is said that during the plague, one thousand people died every day in Baṣra alone. See Conrad, “Plague in the Early Medieval Near East”; Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 1:104.
- 24 A well-known example is the use of the formulas “I said . . . he said . . .” and *araʿayta* (“imagine/consider/what do you think about?”), which are frequently attested in the surviving material from the earliest periods of Islamic legal discourse. The second formula is clearly a linguistic convention from pre-Islamic Arabic and is repeatedly used in the Qurʾān (including the variations *araʿaytaka*, *araʿaytakum*, and *araʿaytum*), in the Sunna of the Prophet (with numerous examples that should be easy to find with a simple online/digital search in *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* databases such as *al-Shāmila* and *al-Waqfiyya* for Sunnī sources, and *Noor Digital Library* for Shīʿī works), and in legal and theological writings of the time (abundantly in legal works, such as those by Mālik, Shaybānī, and Shāfiʿī [see also Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence*, 9, 10, 45–47, 52–53], but also in early theological treatises; for one example, see ʿAbd Allāh b. Yazīd al-Fazārī [late second century AH], *Tawḥīd*, 203, 205, 207, 208, 210, 211, 212, 213, 218, 219). Contrary to the assumption of some Western scholars of Islamic law, this second formula had nothing to do with the concept of *raʿy*—the use of personal preference or arbitrary decision-making (but cf. Dārimī, *Sunan*, 1:281, 285; Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:58). The formula is very common in early Shīʿī material. Examples should be easy to find with an online/digital search. Here are just a few examples in reports from Jaʿfar al-Šādiq in the collection of material that I have selected for the present study from Kulaynī alone: 1:53, 54, 58; 2:81, 173, 213, 219, 264, 266, 280, 281, 450, 475, 488; 3:197, 209, 355, 435, 459, 517, 520, 525, 528; 4:27, 109, 137, 146, 248, 311, 333, 337, 362, 523, 539; 5:13, 23–26, 38, 44, 77, 100, 130, 185, 197, 200, 209, 220, 235, 258, 259, 264, 286, 290, 391, 407, 448, 464, 468, 473, 481, 482, 525; 6:4, 116, 146, 148, 162, 163, 184; 7:34, 35, 38, 45, 57, 130, 131, 147, 150, 160, 161, 162, 176, 178, 208, 214, 219, 221, 227, 248, 252, 258, 266, 267, 357, 361, 362, 387, 397, 418, 431, 433, 473, 697; 8:99, 146. Many more can be found in Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb*, e.g., 1:364; 2:7, 365; 3:288, 290; 4:33, 155, 161; 6:135, 345; 7:28, 41, 57, 128, 176, 180, 205, 227, 235, 244, 248, 261, 264, 269, 426; 8:87, 228, 315; 9:133, 154; 10:16, 80, 233, and other early Shīʿī *ḥadīth* collections.

my acceptance or rejection of any individual item, whether a historical or a religious report.<sup>25</sup>

There are three further points to note:

First, the word “Shī‘ī” is used in this work as an adjective in respect for the publisher’s preference. This is a break from my thirty-year-long practice of using the word “Shī‘ite.”

Second, unless otherwise specified, all dates in this book are according to the Islamic *hijrī* calendar, except for publication dates, which refer to the Common Era.

Third, the editions used of the sources cited in the work are those specified in the bibliography at the end of the book. The reader will notice that at times I use a different edition, as specified in each citation. This is a reminder of a time during which libraries were closed because of a pandemic, resulting in the author having no access to the specific editions used throughout a work, and requiring him to be content with whatever he could find online.

And finally, it is a pleasant duty to thank Michael Cook and Intisar Rabb who read an earlier draft of this work and offered invaluable suggestions for its improvement. My thanks are also due to the anonymous peer reviewers for their very helpful comments and corrections, to Rami Koujah for helping in various ways as my research assistant, and to Hanna Siurua and Stuart Brown for their careful and thorough copy editing of this volume.

---

25 No particular attention will be paid to the chains of transmission (*isnāds*) that could easily be forged and put into circulation together with any text of the forger’s choice. See Chapter 3 below, n. 58 on p. 255 to n. 60 on p. 256, and the accompanying text.