Political - Religious Poetry of the Shi'ites During the Umayyad Period

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Abstract

With the establishment of the Umayyad caliphate, the opponent parties, such as the Kharjites and Shi'ites, accused the Umayyads as usurpers of the Muslim authority. The partisans of Ali, the Shi'ites, started composing many poems which had description of the Hashimites as the legitimate rulers of Muslims using the Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions in their poems, therefore, one could see terms as: Imam, Wasi, and Mahdi as indications of the Islamic meaning of the "Caliph".

The word Wasi, which means executor or mandator, was used as successor of the Prophet, therefore, the first wasi was Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Taib who is the legitimate ruler of the Muslim community, and Mahdi (Messiah) is the last Imam. Many shi'ite poets have employed these words in shi'ite poetry such poets included: Al-Kumayt ibn Zayd, Kuthayyir ibn Abd Al-Rahman, Abu Al-Aswad Al-Du'ali and Al-Sayyid Al-Himyari.

The Shi'ites have brought attention to the event of Ghadir Khumm, when the Prophet Muhammad announced the leadership of Ali on 18 Dhu al-Hijjah. This the shi'ite poets took as wasiyah (testament), therefore, they composed many poems about the event, some poets like Sufyan ibn Mus'ab al-'Abdi, al-Mughirah ibn Nawfal and others used this word in their poetry. However, the idea of Mahdi came as a result of the aggression of the Umayyads and reflected their own lives, and how they absorbed the idea of shi'ism. The shi'ite poets were inclined to favour the Hashimites, who were the Prophet's relatives.
The Hijrah or journey of Muhammad from Makkah, his hometown, to Madinah marked a turning point in the history of Arabic poetry as well as in the formation of the Islamic community, (ummah). Muhammad and his companions began to strengthen their own community by defending it and attacking their enemies. In response, the Quraysh composed a satire concerning Muhammad and the Muslim community. The Prophet ordered some Muslim poets to answer the Quraysh attacks and to satirize them for their paganism. During the Umayyad period, by reason of the conflict among Muslims, politico-religious poetry gained strength.¹

With the establishment of the ummah in Madinah, Muhammad stepped into the role of political and military leader as well as Prophet and Messenger of God. This unity of political and religious leadership extended to his successors, the caliphs, except that they did not assume the unique prophetic mission of Muhammad. When Abu Bakr and the following three caliphs were elected they succeeded Muhammad as heads of a religious community whose role demanded a military and a political leadership.²

With the increase of tension between Muslims, politico-religious poetry flourished on the basis of the developing ideas and differences of interpretation. These derived from the conflict during the Umayyad period concerning the legitimate right to rule the Muslims. Because the Umayyads succeeded to the caliphate by force of arms, they harnessed the great power of poetry to retain their hold on power. They also opened their doors to poetic talents, and even accepted some opponents. The other parties, however, challenged the Umayyads by encouraging their own poets to defend their ways and to attack the Umayyads. This conflict in poetry created a new horizon of meaning and attitude in poetry.³

As Mu'awiya wished to keep rival Arabs away from the centers of power, he inflamed the conflicts among the Arab tribes. This led to the revival of tribal chauvinism which Islam had tried to bury. Arabic poets became embroiled in the chauvinism or racism which existed among the Arabs themselves and also between Arabs and non-Arabs.⁴

This was a rather crafty effort by the Umayyads to keep the balance of power. It was, however, a sword that cut two ways, for it was also one of the factors that led to the downfall of Umayyad rule. Politico-religious poetry gained extraordinary splendor during these conflicts, and the tribal quarrels did not keep the poets of the contending parties from treating the main issue, which was the caliphate. Rather, the poets used the tribal conflict to protect their parties against outside forces. Thus al-Kumayt used racialism to protect the Hashimites.⁵ Politico-religious poetry centered on the caliphate or the leadership
of the Muslims. All political parties looked for the best leader according to their own particular doctrine. According to the Shi'ites, the leadership, or imamate, should come from Ahl al-Bayt, the household of Muhammad, and especially from the descendants of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib and Fatimah, a daughter of the Prophet. Further, the Shi‘ites believed that the Imam could not claim the leadership without the bay‘ah or the oath of allegiance. This is taken voluntarily from the Muslims. The shi‘ite Imams believe that, at Ghadir Khumm the Prophet bequeathed to ‘Ali the leadership of those who were to come after him, and that ‘Ali bequeathed it to his son Hasan, and from him to his brother Husayn, and so on, to the twelfth Imam, the Mahdi, or Messiah. In this way, the Imam designates his successor before he dies, and the authority of the successor is derived from that designation, nass. 

Key topics that occur commonly in shi‘ite political-religious poetry are the wasi (executor), imam (leader), imamah (leadership, imamate), and mahdi (the rightly guided one). Most shi‘ite poets composed many poems in which these words were predominant. However, the shi‘ite religious thinkers did not consider the imamate to constitute an inheritance, but rather a recommendation from the prior imam that they should take over the imamate by bequest. Further, each Muslim who rejected the bay‘ah to the imam was not considered to be non-Muslim; he is dealt with as a Muslim.

Following the assassination of ‘Ali and the martyrdom of Husayn, the themes of the wasi, the imam and the mahdi spread over more in the shi‘ite poetry. At that time, the idea that it was the right of Ahl al-Bayt to succeed the Prophet was strengthened, and the idea gained more supporters.

The Imam

During ‘Ali’s reign, Qays ibn Sa‘d ibn ‘Ubadah was among ‘Ali’s military leaders in Siffin. Qays composed a poem in which he mentioned ‘Ali’s imamate. He said:

وَعْلَمَيْنِ إِمَامًا وَإِمَامًا ِلَسْبُؤَانَا أَنْبَى إِلَى الْقَرْنِ
يَوْمَ قَالَ الْعَبْدُ مَنْ كَتَبَ مَوْلَا خَطَّبَ جَلِيلَ

And ‘Ali is our imam and an imam for others. Revelation brought this to pass.

The day the Prophet said: “To whomever I am master, this one (‘Ali) is his master.” It is a great matter.

Qays insisted that ‘Ali’s imamate was revealed to Muhammad on the day of Ghadir Khumm. If contemporary, this verse would indicate that ‘Ali’s imamate was recognized by some during Muhammad’s lifetime. Qays was a Companion
of the Prophet, and he was a witness to the Prophet's speech during the day of Ghadir Khumm. He did not merely recognize ‘Ali as Amir al-Mu'minin for himself and like-minded persons, but also for other Muslims, including those who did not give him the bay'ah.

During the reign of Mu'awiyah, among the shi'ite poets who recognized the imamate of ‘Ali was Muhammad ibn ‘Abdallah al-Himyari. A number of poets, including Tirimmah al-Ta'i, Hisham al-Muradi and Muhammad ibn ‘Abdallah al-Himyari, were gathered around Mu'awiyah when he said: "O group of poets, compose poems about ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, and say nothing except the truth. Then I will give him (the poet) this sum of money." Tirimmah recited his poem in which he cursed ‘Ali. Mu'awiyah said: "Sit down! Surely God knew your intention and knew your position." Then Hisham composed his poem and cursed ‘Ali. Mu'awiyah said the same to Hisham. Then Muhammad ibn ‘Abdallah composed the poem in which he said:

عليّ إمامًا يأبى وأميّ
إمام هذّي أناة الله علّما
....
أمّيّ المؤمّمين ببك اعيمادي
بالغفر الذي اغتاضمي
تناسبنا نضبة في يوم خُم

‘Ali is our Imam — by my father and mother!
Abu al-Hasan, the purified from unlawful things.
Leader on the right way whom God gave knowledge,
By his knowledge right was known from wrong.

Commander of the Faithful: upon you rests my confidence,
And on the noble and blessed (i.e., Ahl al-Bayt) I depend.
They ignored his installation in Khumm,
By God and by the best among the people (the Prophet).\textsuperscript{10}

Mu'awiyah gave the sum of money to Muhammad ibn ‘Abdallah. The poet is unknown among some shi'ite religious scholars, but his poem is recorded in other sources.\textsuperscript{11} This poem draws attention to the event of Ghadir Khumm, which was famous even among ‘Ali’s enemies. It also indicates that the position of ‘Ali among Muslims was well known.

Most shi'ite poets composed poems about Ghadir Khumm. Among these poets was al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi, who wrote several poems and
mentioned that event. In one of his poems he said:

علیٰ أمیر المؤمنین ومحقق
من الله مفروض علیٰ کل مسلم
وإن رسل الله أرضی بهقع
وأشرکة فی کل حق مقتسط
وأوجب يوما بالغدیر ولایة علی کل بی فصیح وأغلم

‘Ali, commander of the Faithful, and his right, obligated by God to rule over every Muslim.

Surely the Messenger of God recommended his right, and he (Muhammad) shared with him every right which could be shared.

Making it a duty one day in Ghadir Khumm to assume the leadership.

Over every pious person, those speaking clear Arabic and those broken in speech.12

Al-Kumayt focused on the day of Ghadir Khumm as a day on which the Prophet announced the leadership of ‘Ali, and the Shi‘ites celebrate this day as the ‘Eid al-ghadir, 18 Dhu‘l-Hijjah. The Sunnis, however, never recognized that day as it is celebrated by the Shi‘ites.13 The day of Ghadir was first celebrated sometime in the first century of Islam. During that time, Sufyan ibn Mus‘ab al-‘Abdi composed long poems. In one he included the lines:

وكان عندها لهم في حُمّ مـَرْدَجـٍ
وقائل والناس من ذاَه إِنـیه ومن
أبَلَـع الناـس والشَـیـبیس أُخْذُر بَـب
بَـغْدَر وَانْ غَلیا ِ خیر مَـنـتـصَب

They were driven away from it (the caliphate)
When the rightly guided Ahmad (Muhammad) climbed up on a pack saddle.
He said while people drew near him
And settled down, listened and watched.
O ‘Ali! Stand up! Surely I was ordered to
tell the people and telling them is dear to me.
Surely I have appointed ‘Ali, rightly guided banner,
And after me ‘Ali is surely the best for that post.14

This poem shows a clear intention of the poet to explain what happened in
Ghadir Khumm. Al-‘Abdi has put into his poem the state of the Muslims as they
listened to Muuammad’s announcement concerning the leadership that had
been bequeathed to ‘Ali. In his book Al-Ghadir, al-Amini discusses all versions, including those transmitted by sunni as well as shi’ite scholars, of the tradition of the Prophet regarding the day of Ghadir Khumm. That is, he collected every version of the Hadith.\footnote{\textsuperscript{15}}

Few scholars have written about religious-political or ideological poetry. Allowed a few pages to treat Umayyad poetry, Salma al-Jayyusi selected only al-Kumayt, the most prominent shi’ite poet. Even all the ideas of al-Kumayt could not be covered in a few pages.\footnote{\textsuperscript{16}} Al-Kumayt deals with all shi’ite ideas and argued with the Umayyads about them in logical terms. He was the one who opened the gate of the shi’ite argument in poetry.

Besides al-Kumayt, al-Sayyid al-Himyari composed many poems about ‘Ali, extolling his every virtue, manqabah. Al-Sayyid mentioned the event of Ghadir Khumm in twenty-three of his poems. In one of his poems, “Ghadiriyyah” he said:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{من دا الّذي أَخْمَدَ مِن بَتِّيهم} & \quad \text{يَوْمَ عَدِيرُ الْحَمُّمِ نَادِأٌ} \\
\text{أُقَامَةُ مِن بَنِّي أَضْخَابِهِ} & \quad \text{وَهُمْ خَوْالِي يُفْسَأَةُ} \\
\text{هَذَا عَلَيْي بَنِّي أَيْسِ طَالِبٌ} & \quad \text{مُؤَلَّا لَمَّا كَتَبَ مَلَأٌ} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Who was it that the most praiseworthy\footnote{\textsuperscript{17}} from among them? The day of Ghadir Khumm.

Stood him up from among his companions.

And those around him; then he named him:

“This is ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib,

A master to whomever I am master.”\footnote{\textsuperscript{18}}

His poem, “Ali-'Ayniyah,” is a biography of ‘Ali. There he mentioned all of ‘Ali’s wars fought during Muhammad’s lifetime. Al-Sayyid loved Ahl al-Bayt, especially ‘Ali. He said:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{إِنِّي لَأَكُرُرُ أَن أُطِيلٌ بِمَجْلِسٍ} & \quad \text{لاَ ذَكَرُ فِيهِ إِلَّا مَحْمُودٌ} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Surely I hate to stay a long time in a meeting
When there is no mention in it of the virtues of Muhammad’s family.\footnote{\textsuperscript{19}}

For this reason he devoted much of his poetry to Ahl al-Bayt. He also said:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{لَخُيْرُ الْعَشَّاءِ مِن سَام وَخَام} & \quad \text{أَلاَّ إِنَّ الْمُوْسَبَةَ ذَوْنَ شَكْ} \\
\text{وَقَالَ مُحَمَّدُ بِغَدِيرٍ خَمُّ} & \quad \text{عَن الرَّخْمَنِ يُنْبِطُ بِغَيْتَرَمُ} \\
\text{أَجَيَّ مَوْلَاةَ فَأَشْبَعْوا كَلَّا مِي} & \quad \text{أَلاَّ مَنْ كَتَبَ مَوْلَاةً فَهَذَا} \\
\end{align*}
\]

It was surely the commandment, no doubt,
To the best among the people descended from
Shem and Ham (sons of Noah).
And Muhammad spoke in Ghadir Khumm
Words on the authority of the Merciful,
“To whomever I am master, surely this
my brother, is his master. Listen, all of you, to my speech!”

Once again the original words of Muhammad at Ghadir Khumm came, in
poetic verse, to assure the audience that the leadership of ‘Ali after the Prophet
was proper. Al-Sayyid insisted that ‘Ali be appointed over not only Muslims, but
also over the whole world that is descended from Noah through his two sons
Shem and Ham. The Shi‘ites believed that the caliphate or imamate must be
held by virtue of nass, the designation by each incumbent imam of his
successor.

The Wasi

Did the tradition of nass prevail from the Prophet to ‘Ali? Shi‘ite scholars
regarded the day of Ghadir Khumm as a nass from the Prophet to ‘Ali, and they
supported this tradition with verses from the Qur’an and from other traditions
surrounding Muhammad. There were many Qur’anic verses that supported the
shi‘ite claims. One such verse is known as the wilayah verse:

إِنَّا وَلَيْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَلِيُّ الْبُلُوغِ وَلِيُّ الْأَمْرِ وَلِيُّ الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَلِيُّ الْأَمْرِ وَلِيُّ الْأَلْفَاحِ وَلِيُّ الطَّيِّبَاتِ

Your real friends are no less than God, His Apostle,
and the fellowship of believers, i.e. those who establish
regular prayers and regularly observe charity as they
bow in prayer.

It was said that this verse revealed to Muhammad the truth about ‘Ali when,
during a time of prayer, he donated his ring to a beggar. There were other
pertinent verses that supported the view held by the shi‘ite scholars. There
were also many traditions that supported the leadership of ‘Ali. Among them
were:

أَلَا أَتَّيْتُ فِي كُتَابِ الْبُقَارَةَ، كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَعَنْتِي أَهْلُ بَيْتِيً

Verily I am leaving among you the two objects of high estimation and of
care, the Book of God and my near kindred.

The shi‘ite scholars mentioned additional Hadith in support of their ideas
concerning ‘Ali’s inmate and his heirs. Because of their belief in ‘Ali’s calling to
follow Muhammad as the leader, the Shi‘ites called ‘Ali “Wasi of the Prophet,”
his executor.
The sunni scholars nevertheless rejected the shi'ite interpretation of such Qur'anic passages and the Hadith of the Shi'ites. They had their own explanation of those verses, and their own interpretations of the Hadith. Sunni opinion was divided into two groups. One group rejected all Hadith about the imamate of ‘Ali expressing suspicion with regard to the texts and the isnads (chains of transmitters). One of these persons was ibn Taymiyyah. The other group accepted the Hadith as sound, but they had their own explanations; which differed from the shi'ite interpretations. Among this latter group was ibn Hajar al-Asqalani.25

Shi'ite scholars were among the first to write books about the imamate and the political theory of Islam. Their theories naturally colored their arguments. The efforts of the shi'ite ulama reached an early peak in Islamic political theory. Because their work antedated that of sunni scholars, the latter are found adopting the shi'ite terms and the qualifications required of the imam (caliph), though their interpretations on legitimacy differed.

The first to write about the imamate was ‘Ali ibn Isma'il ibn Maytham al-Tammar. (His grandfather was a companion of ‘Ali). He wrote the Kitab al-Imamah. Following this, Hisham ibn al-Hakam, who was a friend of Ja'far al-Sadiq, wrote several books, including another Kitab al-Imamah, and The Difference between People Concerning the Imamate.26

In shi'ite political-religious poetry one can trace the use of such words as wasi (executor) and wasiyah (testament). The shi'ite poets used these words, as we have said, to indicate the imamate of ‘Ali and his successors among the Ahl al-Bayt. Terms of this kind were well-known even during ‘Ali’s reign. One of his contemporaries, the poet, Abu al-Aswad al-Du’aili, said:

أحبُّ مُختَنَدًا خبَّةَ عُمِيدًا وُبَابًا وُهْمَةَ وإِلَيْهَا

I love Muhammad with a great love.
And I love ‘Abbas, Hamzah, and the Executor (i.e. ‘Ali). 27

There is no mention of any protest by ‘Ali concerning any poet who used this word. It may be assumed, then, that ‘Ali was content to use it. Even al-Najashi, who was close to ‘Ali, used this word when he said:

وَصْبُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ مِنْ ذُو أَهْلِهِ وُصِيَّةُ نَغْدُ الغَمَوْمِ الأُكَابِرِ

The executor of the Messenger of God, rather than others of his family, And his heir after the senior uncles.28

The term wasi, as applied to ‘Ali, was well known even among the enemies of ‘Ali. It was said that a young man from the army of Basrah, during the Battle of the Camel, recited a rajaz poem in which he said:
We are sons of Dabbah, enemies of 'Ali. Who of old was known as the wasi.

Ibn Qays al-Ruqayyat, the Zubayrid poet, also mentioned the wasi in his poems. There is no evidence from 'Ali's lifetime to reject this assertion. It seems that this word was employed even by the Prophet in a tradition by Salman al-Farisi when he asked the Prophet: "Who is your executor (wasi)?" The Prophet replied: "My executor and inheritor is 'Ali ibn Abi Tali.'" There are, in addition, in the Manaqib, collected from many sources, a number of traditions with the same import.

Among 'Ali's contemporaries was also al-Mughirah ibn Nawfal ibn al-Harith. He mentioned the wasi during the Siffin War. He said:

"Фіکم وصیی رضوئ اللہ قابذکم وصیؤ وکتاب اللہ قد نبسا"

Among you was the wasi of the Messenger of God, your leader, And his son-in-law. And the Book of God had been circulated. Al-Mughirah was a cousin of 'Ali. Another of 'Ali's cousins was 'Abdallah ibn Abi Sufyan ibn al-Harith. He mentioned the wasi after 'Ali became caliph when he said:

"وصي النبي المستفاغ وابن عمہ وأول من یب目的地 ومن آن جابتة"

The wasi of the Chosen Prophet and his cousin, The first to worship and to adopt Islam.

There was therefore no doubt that the word wasi was well known during the time of Muhammad and 'Ali.

After 'Ali's assassination, the shi'ite poets continued using this word to confirm the wasiyah (testament) of the heirs who were descended from 'Ali. Among the poets using the term was al-Kumayt, who said:

"والفصیل الذي أمال التعود يبي به عرش أمة لانهدام"

And the wasi in whom al-Tajubi overturned The throne of a nation, to demolish it.

The wasi, 'Ali, was murdered by 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muljam, of the Tajub tribe, of Yemen.

Some scholars have written of al-Kumayt, describing his Hashimiyyat as artistically feeble. However, other scholars have praised the Hashimiyyat as the best among al-Kumayt's poems, and his fellow poet al-Farazdaq is reported to have said to him: "You are the most poetic among both the poets who have passed away and the poets who are still alive." Note, too, that Ma'adh al-Harra', a Kufan philologist, said: "Al-Kumayt is the most poetic among the ancient and modern." Al-Isfahani said that al-Kumayt was an 'alim in the Arabic language.
and an expert in history. The accusation that his poetry was "feeble" is, it seems, not supportable. Moreover, a modern scholar who wrote about al-Kumayt said that he was a great and eloquent poet, a scholar in Arabic history and language who used gharib (obscurities) in his poems. The Shi'ite poets who used the term wasi most frequently in several poems was al-Sayyid al-Himyari, who composed a poem as if at the tongue of the Prophet in which he said:

هذا وصي فيكم وخليفة
لا تجهلون فترجعوا كفارة

This is my executor among you, and my successor.
Do not ignore him lest you return to unbelief.
Al-Sayyid wrote another poem in which he expressed the same sentiments:

هذا أخي وصي في الأمور ومن يقوم فيكم مقامي عند بذكاري

This is my brother and my executor in affairs
Who stands among you in my place when you remember me.
Al-Sayyid also addressed a poem to Imam 'Ali in which he employed the term wasi:

أنت وصي المضطفى وابن عمه فإنا نعادي مبغضك ونثرك

You are the executor of the Chosen Prophet, and
his cousin.
Surely we are hostile to those who hate you and leave them.
After al-Sayyid converted to the Imamite sect he used the term "son of the wasi" for other imams such as Ja'far:

ونست الوصي المضطفى وشبيه أحمد في كماله

And son of the executor with whom God is pleased
And like Ahmad in his perfection.
Later poets sometimes employed wasi in reference to other imams in order to give them a religious authority after the Umayyads had driven them from worldly power they possessed as caliphs.

The Mahdi

Muslims believe in "mahdism" or messianism. The Sunni and Shi'ite 'ulama recited many prophetic traditions about the Mahdi, which means "the rightly-guided one." In the books of Hadith are to be found a number of traditions on the subject. The Prophet said: "Al-Mahdi, a man descended from me." He further said: "God will send a man before the end of the earthly world.
This man will fill the earth with justice as it once had been filled with oppression.”

Among the Shi'ites, mahdism is very common. However, each shi'ite branch has its own Mahdi. He is 'Ali ibn Abi Talib or his son Muhammad (Ibn al-Hanafiyah), as is the case of the Kaysaniyah, or he is the sixth imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, or his son Isma'il as in Isma'ili thought, or he is the twelfth imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, as the Imamiyah Ithna ‘Ashariyah believe. Whatever their differences, the Shi'ites all believe that, as the Prophet was a charismatic spiritual leader who also ruled as a statesman over Islamic society, the community needs a new charismatic leader to create and perfect an ideal Islamic society. That leader is the Mahdi who inherits the Prophet’s authority and who actually becomes a rightful successor of the Prophet.

During the Umayyad period, some Arab poets characterized some Umayyad caliphs as mahdi. The poet Jarir described Sulayman ibn 'Abd al-Malik using this word. He also was described by Farazdaq thus. Both Jarir the poet and al-Hasan al-Basri gave to ‘Umar II the title mahdi. Jarir also described Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Malik as mahdi, while al-Farazdaq gave this title to Yazid II and his son al-Walid II. Thus the Arab poets frequently used this title in their poems.

Because the Umayyad rulers subjected the shi'ite people to great oppression, the Shi'ites were deeply attached to the concept of the Mahdi, and to their ideas regarding justice, and to the notion that it was necessary to be divinely guided. This is reflected in their political poetry. Among these poets of the Shi'ites was Abu al-Tufayl ‘Amir ibn Wathilah, who said:

إِنَّكَ زُعِيمُ أَنْقَدْنَا لَمْ تَرْبُدْنَا أَنَّكَ رَبُّنَا
وَأَنَّكَ تَناَلْنَا شَرْفًا وَتَسْهَدْنَا وَوَازَرْنَا المَهْيِدَ كَيْثَمْ تَهَدْنَا

Our brothers, the Shi'ites, are not guilty of aggression.
Surely I say to you that you do what is right.
And that you gain honor and happiness.
And support the mahdi as you are led aright.

It was said that Abu al-Tufayl was a Kaysani, a supporter of Ibn al-Hanafiyah, but it seems that Abu al-Tufayl described Ibn al-Hanafiyah as mahdi, in the sense of “rightly guided” but not as a messiah, as some other poets had.

The Kaysaniyah believed that Muhammad ibn ‘Ali (Ibn al-Hanafiyah) did not die and that he is alive in a mountain called Radwa’. A Kaysani poet, Kuthayyir ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman, therefore said in a rajaz poem:
You did not die, O Mahdi! Son of the rightly guided!
You are the one with whom we are satisfied, for whom we hope.47
Kuthayyir believed that Ibn al-Hanafiyah was alive and that he would return
to earth leading an army. The poet said:

وسبطَ لَا يذُوقُ الموتِ خَتَى يَقُولُ الخَيلُ يَقِيمُهَا الدُّوَّارُ
And a grandson, who will not taste death,
Until he leads the horses, with flags going before him.48

The poet Kuthayyir does not merely describe Ibn al-Hanafiyah as a mahdi
but also asserts that Ka‘b al-Ahbar49 informed him about the mahdi or messiah
who was also expected among the ancient nations. Kuthayyir composed:

هو المهدى خيرًا جبًا أخُ الآخرين في الخلق الحوالي
He is the Mahdi of whom ka‘b informed us
Brother of the rabbis in the old times.50

The Kyasaniyah died out because of their extremist notions and their
followers converted to other sects characterized by more pragmatic thought.
Among those who changed allegiance was al-Sayyid al-Himyari, who was
converted by Ja‘far or one of his students. However, before this, al-Sayyid
composed poems about Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyah as Mahdi, where he said:

سبيصي نبيًا لَم يبق منهم تغيب غيبة من غير موت ولَا فصل وصار به القضاء
He is the namesake of the Prophet, there was no one remaining
Except him, and for him anticipation exists.
He disappeared without dying
Or being killed and the decree of God took him.51

Al-Sayyid had believed that no true Imam was left except Muhammad ibn
al-Hanafiyah, who went into occultation, at least according to their belief. He
was clearly convinced of this doctrine, for he is said to have composed these
lines:

لَهُ غِيْبَةً لَا بَدَّ مِنَ أن يُغِيبِهَا فَبِمَكْتُ بِجَيْبَةٌ نَمْ يَظْهَرُ جَيْبَة
He disappeared without dying
Or being killed and the decree of God took him.
He has an occultation that he must fulfill.
May God bless the one who has disappeared, for he will stay some time, then he will reappear in his time.
Then he will fill the world with justice from East to West.\textsuperscript{52}
It was said that these lines were composed for Ja'far al-Sadiq.\textsuperscript{53} Al-Sayyid described al-Mahdi as any Muslim theologian would, that is, that he disappeared and that he will come back to restore justice over the whole world. Al-Sayyid recited these lines concerning the long period of occultation of the mahdi:

\begin{equation*}
\text{بَلَّاءُ الْوُجُودِ رَبّي سَمِيُّ مَحْمَدَ}
\text{وَكَنْيَةُ نَفْسِي غَلِبَكَ تَذَوَّبُ}
\text{فَلَوْ عَابَ غَنِيَّ غَمَّرَ نَحْرَ لَأَنْقُلَت}
\text{مَنْ أَنْفُسُهُ بَلَاءُهُ سَيِّئَتُ}
\end{equation*}

O son of the executor! Namesake of Muhammad!
And bearer of his nickname. My soul dissolves for you.
If he were absent for a time as long as the life of Noah,
Our souls would be sure that he will return.\textsuperscript{54}

Al-Sayyid suggested the lifespan of Noah, 950 years according to the Qur'an, as an example of a long disappearance, confident that one day he would nevertheless reappear.

It was apparently after composing these verses that he met Ja'far al-Sadiq who convinced him to convert to the Imami sect, the Ja'far al-Sadiq who convinced him to convert to the Imami sect, the Ja'fariyah, who expected a Mahdi in the future in accordance with some traditions from the Prophet. This Mahdi also would bear the name Muhammad.\textsuperscript{55} The traditions in the Hadith concerning the Mahdi were popular in the Umayyad period. Each party claimed that he would be among them. The Imam Shi'ites expected him to come from the Ahl al-Bayt, and they recited many Hadiths about him. The shi'ite poet, al-Kumayt ibn Zayd, composed a poem expressing a hope to see him, in which he said:

\begin{equation*}
\text{إِنِّي لِلْرَجُو لَهُ رَوْىَةُ فَأَذَرْكَهُ}
\text{خَتَى أُكْوَنَ لَهُ مِن خَيْرٍ أَنْبَعُ}
\text{بِذَلِكَ أَنْبَأْنَا الرَّأَوْنَ عِنْ نَفْرٍ}
\text{مِنْهُمْ دُوَّرَ خَشْيَةَ لَهُ طَوَاعٍ}
\end{equation*}

Surely I wish for a vision of him, and to reach him,
That I might become one of the best of his followers.
About that the transmitter informed us, on the authority of several
Who feared God and were obedient.\textsuperscript{56}
These lines were composed during the life of Ja'far al-Sadiq, the sixth Imam of the shi'ite Imamiyah.
As a result of the Umayyad oppression and the threats they expressed to the people to drive them away from the Hashimites, al-Kumayt stated in his poem:

فَقُلْ لِبيتي أميَّةَ حيَّةٌ خلَّوا 
إِنَّ خَفَتُ المَهْيَتَ والقُطِيعَا

أُجَاعُ اللَّهُ مَن أُشْغَفُصَّمَوْهُ 
وَأَشْغَفُ مَن بِجُوْرُكَ كَأَجِيُّا

Say to the sons of Umayyah, wherever they stay,  
Even though I am afraid of the sword and the lash,  
May God make hungry whomever you satisfied,  
And may God satisfy all who by your tyranny were made hungry.57

Al-Kumayt spoke of the situation in which the Umayyads dealt unjustly with his people. They made many go hungry while others had more than enough to eat, and much money. In contradiction to Umayyad policy, the Shi’ites hoped to see a just man rule in the Islamic Empire and spread his justice over all people. Many traditions supporting this feeling grew up around the idea of the Mahdi. To express this desire, al-Kumayt composed some lines about him, in which he said:

يُقَيِّمُهمُ السيِّدَةَ باشمي  
وَأَلَيْنَا في المَسَاهِدَ خَيرَ نُكْسُ  
وَيُوْرِزُهَا وَيُذَبْ عَنْهَا  
بُكْونَ حَيَا لِأَمِيَّةَ زَيْعَا

In a Hashimite with pleasing policy,  
He would be alive, a spring for his people.  
He would be like a lion in the wars, not a coward,  
Able to reform the society of men,  
Arranging matters properly, and defending order,  
Changing forever drought to rich pastures.58

These lines reflect the dream of the Shi’ites, who wait for a religious-political leader who is able to rule in justice and defend the Ummah. In this ideal state, each person takes only what is right, and performs his duty without fear or threat. That ruler is al-Mahdi, the one who will restore God’s order in the world.

Characteristics of Politico-Religious Poetry
After the caliphate had become a monarchy and the Umayyads used force to strengthen their rule, and after the leadership over the Muslims had turned
into tyranny, the Shi'ites fomented revolts against the Umayyads in order to remove them from power. A just and legitimate caliphate became the cornerstone of Muslim demands. This drive contributed ultimately, of course, to the success of the 'Abbasid Revolution.

The politico-religious poetry of the Shi'ites is concerned with the question of the leadership of the Muslims. Therefore the poets emphasize the **imam**, (leader, caliph), **imamah**, (leadership), the **wasiyah**, (the Prophet's mandate or testament to his successor), the **wasi**, (executor of the Prophet), and the **mahdi**, (the rightly-guided one). All these categories are connected to one another in dispute, and the dispute is over the leadership to be exercised over the Muslims. The Shi'ites believed that the leadership was to go to Ahl al-Bayt and the most qualified among them, spiritually, was the Imam 'Ali, and after him his heirs. According to the shi'ite belief, they were the only legitimate rulers of the Muslim community.

The shi'ite poets used the term **imamah** instead of **khilafah**, to distinguish the legitimate leadership from those who ruled in the name of the caliphate even though they were guilty of a tribal fanaticism in which they oppressed people. For this reason, the **imamah** is a political-religious term, and it is employed to give religious reinforcement to the concept of the leadership of the Muslims.

The poets of the Shi'ites take this concept of the legitimacy of the Muslim leadership from several traditions of the Prophet on this subject. Among these Hadiths are those regarding a crucial event at Ghadir Khumm. Moreover, most of the people of Madinah selected 'Ali as caliph after the death of 'Uthman. From the legitimacy of the caliphate of 'Aii, his heirs also gained legitimacy.

The Imam 'Ali ruled in a just manner and divided the wealth among Muslims equally. He never distinguished one group from another; all free men received equal shares. For this reason the shi'ite poets described him as imam huda (a rightly-guided leader) to distinguish him from the Umayyad rulers.

Shi'ite poets used the term **wasi**, executor, to establish that the Imam Ali was the legal heir of the Prophet according to the Hadith of Ghadir and other related Hadiths. Therefore, the **wisayah**, testament, was the legitimate establishment of the succession to Muhammad's leadership. From this theory of legitimate succession the Umayyads were excluded. The Shi'ites considered them to be merely usurpers of authority which rightly belonged to the Hashimits.

Such Sunni scholars as Ahmad ibn Hanbal, al-Haki, and al-Nasa'i recognized these Hadiths in their books. The Shi'ites used these sources to strengthen their theories concerning Ahl al-Bayt, and the shi'ite poets employed this evidence in their poems to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Hashimits.
Besides the tradition of the Prophet, there were many Qur’anic verses that supported the Shi’ite theory, such as those cited above. Shi’ite poets enriched their poems with these verses, which demonstrated that ‘Ali’s obligation was from God and that all Muslims were to follow it. As al-Kumayt said: “Haqqahu min Allah mafrud ‘ala kull Muslim.” (His right is an obligation from God upon all Muslims.)

The earth is seen as full of sin and oppression. Many people have seen their rights lost or abused. All therefore look forward to a man to save the people and lead them to a land in which there is security and justice for all. The Shi’ites look forward to that man, whom they call “al-Mahdi,” to restore God’s order of justice. The Shi’ites look to the future with hope and love.

Shi’ite poets picked up the idea of the Mahdi or messiah and composed their poems using this word in order to express their hopes and wishes concerning justice. They described the Mahdi as a man descended from the Prophet. His name, and his manner too, are the same as the Prophet’s. This establishes the connection between him and the Prophet.

Because justice is a universal demand, Shi’ite theologians identify it as a root of Islamic principles (usu). Therefore the Mahdi must have ‘adalah (justice) in order to be a man who has committed no offense against any other person and who will bring justice to the earth.

The Shi’ite poets expected the policy of the Mahdi to be even-handed and to satisfy the people, bringing prosperity to all. The Mahdi will turn drought-parched land into fertile fields and nurture the people. Before these things could occur, the poets expected the occultation of al-Mahdi, his disappearance for a long period of time, possibly as long as the age of Noah, which was approximately one thousand years. The Shi’ites expect al-Mahdi to reestablish Islam and to bring salvation to the world, and that hope is reflected in their poetry.

NOTES

5. When al-Kumayt composed his poems, al-Hashimiyyah, ‘Abdulla ibn Mu’awiyah ibn ‘Abdallah ibn Jafar collected some money for al-Kumayt, but al-Kumayt refused it saying: "I praised you, the Hashimites, for the sake of God." Then ‘Abdallah asked "why don’t you compose a poem that could cause fitnah, rebellion, and might cause things to change afterwards?" So al-Kumayt composed "Al-Mudhahhabah" in which he praised sons of Nizar, using chauvinism,
and attacked the Yemeni tribes. For that reason some of the governor of Kufah's guards killed al-Kumayt. Al-Amin, al-Ghadir, 2:188.

(10) Al-Amin, Al-Ghadir 2:177. On this meaning of gh-r-r which I vocalize ghurr see Ibn Manzur, Lisan al-‘Arab 10:43, s.v. gh-r-r. On mayamin see the same work, 13:457, s.v. y-m-n.
(12) Al-Amin, Al-Ghadir 2:195. Fasih wa’l-jami’ doubtless means “Arabic and non-Arab.” Dawud Sallum who collected the poems of al-Kumayt claimed that these lines were attributed to the wrong poet, and therefore it was not genuine. Dawud Sallum, Shi‘i al-Kumayt Ibn Zayd al-Assadi (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Andalus, 1969), 3 (second part): 44.
(14) Al-Amin, Al-Ghadir, 2: 290-294.
(17) “The most praiseworthy,” i.e. “Ahmad,” Muhammad the Prophet.
(19) Diwan al-Sayyid al-Himyari 177.
(20) Diwan al-Sayyid al-Himyari 396-397.
(22) Qur’an surah 5(al-Ma‘idah): 55.
(28) Qusayy Shaykh Askar, Al-Najashi (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-‘Iraqat, 1988), 27.
(31) Ibn Shahh Ashub, Manaqib Abu Talib, 3; 46-49. Cf. also Sulayman al-Qanduzi al-Hanafi, Yanabi’l-Mawaddah 1: 76-81. In these two books of tradition are many hadiths from al-Tabari, ‘Ibn Hanbal and other canonical books.
(33) Ibn Ma‘sum, Al-Darajat al-Ra‘ifah 189.
(38) Diwan al-Sayyid, 328.
(39) Diwan al-Sayyid 232.
(40) Diwan al-Sayyid 297.
(41) Diwan al-Sayyid 353.
(43) Abd al-Hasib Taha, Adab al-Shi‘ah 97-106.
(48) Diwan Kuthayyir 521.
(49) Kabb ibn Mali‘ al-Himyari was a rabbi. He converted to Islam during Abu Bakr’s reign. Then he went to Madinah during Umar’s reign then to Syria where he died in A.H. 32/A.D. 652. Al-Zinkii, Al-‘Alam 6:85.
(50) Diwan Kuthayyir 232.
(51) Diwan al-Sayyid al-Himyari 49.
(52) Diwan al-Sayyid al-Himyari 117.
(54) Diwan al-Sayyid, 69.
(57) Al-Kumayt ibn Zayd, Al-Hashimiyyat 80.
(58) Al-Kumayt ibn Zayd, Al-Hashimiyyat 80.