

Ja'far al-Sadiq (700-765 C.E.)

An erudite jurist of Medina, Ja'far al-Sadiq was associated with a wide range of scholars. Abu Hanifa, and Malik b. Anas, among other prominent figures, are alleged to have heard traditions from him. Al-Sadiq is also credited with the construction of a legal system called Ja'fari school of law which Shi'is follow. In Sufi circles he is also revered and regarded as an eminent ascetic. Many mystical ideas are narrated from him.

Highly respected in the Sunni sources, al-Sadiq is considered by the Shi'is as the sixth imam. He was reportedly the author of thousands of traditions that were recorded by his disciples and documented in later Shi'i literature like those of al-Kulini, Ibn Babuya and Tusi. These sources also indicate that al-Sadiq was responsible for the formulation and crystallization of the Shi'i doctrine of the imamate. This stipulated that the leader of the community (imam) had to be designated by God through the Prophet or another imam. The imam was also believed to be infallible hence empowered to provide authoritative interpretation of Islamic revelation. Designation and infallibility were complemented by the imam's possession of special knowledge that was either transmitted from the Prophet or derived from inherited scrolls. The imams reportedly had access to esoteric knowledge and were able to foretell future events.

Al-Sadiq taught co-existence with rather than rebellion against tyrannical rulers. This political stance became the cornerstone of Shi'i political theory. He also preached the doctrine of dissimulation which meant that the imam did not have to publicly proclaim his leadership.

Al-Sadiq attracted an intellectual following and was responsible for training thousands of disciples in diverse fields like theology, jurisprudence, and Arabic grammar. Speculative Shi'i theologians and jurists like Hisham b. al-Hakam, Zurara b. 'A'yun, Muhammad b. Muslim al-Thaqafi, Mufaddal b. 'Umar and even extremists like Abu al-Khattab were associated with him. According to some Shi'i sources, some of his prominent disciples are reported to have differed with him on major points of law and theology, for which they were either condemned or excommunicated. Al-Sadiq claimed that they had misrepresented his teachings.

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