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Alternative Shi'i communities

The main focus of this book has been on the history, doctrines and development of the Twelver sect of Shi'i Islam; this chapter is a brief review of the other Shi'i groupings. In the early history of Islam, many Shi'i sects arose. As each of the Imams died or was killed, his following divided into sects: some would say that the recently deceased Imam was the last Imam, who had not died but was in occultation and they were awaiting his return; some would gather around one or other of his sons as the next Imam; and some would go off to another member of the Hashimite family and follow him as Imam.

Thus a large number of Shi'i sects are described in the Islamic literature and indeed, whole books written describing them. Most of these sects, if they existed at all, had only a brief existence and then disappeared. Some, such as the Kaysaniyyah and the Khattabiyyah, died out but influenced other groupings that have survived to the present day (see pp. 56 and 60). Some Shi'i groupings, usually ones gathered around charismatic figures, advanced ideas that were considered to put the group outside the pale of Islam. These groupings, as explained in the Introduction, are referred to as the Gnostic Shi'is and their movement as Gnostic Shi'i Islam. In Shi'i history, they have been called by the pejorative title *ghulat* (extremists), although of course these groups did not consider themselves extremists. Indeed, it is likely

that their ideas were widely discussed among the Shi'ah, especially in Kufah, where many of these sects arose. Only in retrospect, with the coalescence of ideas about what is acceptable Islamic belief and what is not, were they labelled as extremists for holding ideas that no longer fitted within the Islamic framework. Their concepts have been described elsewhere (see pp. 57-8) and these concepts undoubtedly had widespread support and influence. Although there was a separation between the Twelver Shi'is and the Gnostic Shi'i groups during the time of the Lesser Occultation (see pp. 64-5), groups holding Gnostic views and revering the Twelve Imams persisted across the Middle East and emerged in later periods, among Iranians as the Hurufis, among the Arabs of south Iraq and south-east Iran as the Musha'sha' movement and among Turkish peoples as the Safavid and other orders. Some of these Gnostic Shi'i groups have continued to the present day.

In a small book such as this, there is not space to describe all of these Shi'i sects. This chapter is a brief review of those Shi'i groupings that have survived to the present day. These groups may be divided into two sets: the first includes those who do not accept the Twelve Imams of the Twelver line – the Zaydis, Isma'ilis and Druze; the second comprises those who accept the Twelve Imams but are outside orthodox Twelver Shi'i Islam because of the influence of Gnostic beliefs – the 'Alawis, Alevi, Ahl-e Haqq, and Bektashis. These latter four, although described as four separate groups, have many doctrines and practices in common and there are many variations within each group. Their history and the evolution of their beliefs and practices have yet to be fully researched and explained. They may perhaps be better thought of as a spectrum of religious doctrines and practice, some elements of which may have had their origins in the early Gnostic Shi'i Islam of Kufa but subsequently evolved along different pathways due to geographical separation and linguistic differences.

The history of schism in Shi'i Islam is often conceptualized as branches coming off mainstream Twelver Shi'i Islam. This is, however, a retrospective imposition of today's reality – the predominance of Twelver Shi'i Islam over the other Shi'i groups – on the history of Shi'i Islam. In fact, it is very likely that when the division between Zaydi Islam and the Twelvers occurred in the early eighth century or when Isma'ili Shi'i Islam emerged in the late ninth century, it was the Zaydis and the Isma'ilis that were then the mainstream of Shi'i Islam and were the majority, while the Twelvers were a minority. Even earlier, in eighth-century Kufa, it may be that Gnostic Shi'i Islam was the mainstream and the proto-Twelvers were a minority. Even within the history of Twelver Shi'i Islam, the positioning of the Usuli School as the mainstream is more of a reflection of today's realities and not those of the seventeenth century, when the Akhbari School was the mainstream and the Usulis were a minority.

Zaydi

The Zaydis were probably the largest group of the Shi'ah in the early period of Islamic history until the rise of the Isma'ili caliphate in the tenth century. They are named for Zayd, a son of the fourth of the Twelver Shi'i Imams, 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin. Zayd claimed to be the legitimate Imam, instead of his half-brother Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, on the basis that he would rise (like Imam Husayn) and fight for the leadership of the Islamic world. Thus a sect came into existence that considered that legitimacy belonged to any member of the family of the Prophet who would rise to seize power. Indeed, many who could be considered Zaydis seem to have deemed anyone from the extended Hashimite family (everyone descended from the Prophet's great-grandfather Hashim)

to be potentially legitimate leaders. One of those who arose as a Zaydi Imam in this early period, for example, was 'Abdullah ibn Mu'awiyah, a descendant of 'Ali's brother. In terms of their political activity, they were more radical than the Imams of the Twelver line, who were politically quietist after Imam Husayn. Doctrinally however, they accommodated the emerging Sunni tradition more than the Twelver line of Imams, in that they did not consider the first three caliphs as illegitimate. However, the Zaydiyyah were never a unified movement and different elements had varying beliefs. Later, for example, in some groups, legitimacy for leadership was narrowed to the descendants of 'Ali and Fatimah and the legitimacy of the first three caliphs was denied. In terms of theology, the Zaydiyyah also adopted various positions at different times.

There were a number of Zaydi revolts in the name of Zay Imams, especially in Iraq, between 740, when Zayd launched his revolt, and 864. The Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphates managed to fend off these uprisings. After this, Zaydism shifted to the periphery of the Islamic world. Along the south Caspian littoral (present-day Mazandaran and Gilan) during the ninth to tenth century, a number of small Zaydi states were established. The first Zaydi missionary was Yahya ibn 'Abdullah, who arrived in Daylam (modern Gilan) at the end of the eighth century; eventually al-Hasan al-'Utrush al-Nasir li'l-Haqq (a descendant of Imam Husayn) established a Zaydi state in this area at the beginning of the tenth century and gave rise to the Nasiriyyah branch of Zaydism. Meanwhile, al-Qasim ibn Ibrahim (a descendant of Imam Hasan) began to teach in Tabaristan (modern Mazandaran) in the middle of the ninth century and gave rise to the Qasimiyyah branch of Zaydism; eventually al-Hasan ibn Zayd (a descendant of Imam Hasan) established the first Zaydi state in Tabaristan, with its capital in Amul, in 864. The Zaydis in this part of the world were

divided both politically and doctrinally between the Nasiriyyah, predominantly in Daylam, and the Qasimiyyah, predominantly in Tabaristan. Among the Qasimiyyah, Mu'tazili doctrines came to predominate in the eleventh century, while at about that time, the Nasiriyyah came under pressure from Isma'ili expansion from the west. Eventually, the last Zaydi Imam surrendered to the Safavids in 1526 and the Zaydis of Gilan and Mazandaran converted to Twelver Shi'i Islam.

There was also a Zaydi Imamate in Morocco from the eighth to the tenth century, under the Idrisid line of Imams. Idris I (died 791), a great-grandson of Imam Hasan, fled the Abbasid domains after an unsuccessful Zaydi rebellion in 786 and, with the help of Berber tribes, succeeded in setting up a Zaydi state in the western Maghrib (now called Morocco). He founded the city of Fes, which his son Idris II made his capital. The dynasty was opposed at first by some Berber tribes that had adopted the Khariji creed and later by the Fatimids. In 927, they were evicted from Fes and the last of the dynasty was executed in 985. However, their influence continued. They are often regarded as the founders of the modern state of Morocco and various dynasties claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad have ruled the country (including the present rulers, who gained power in 1666), although they were no longer Zaydi Shi'is.

One of the Qasimiyyah of Tabaristan, al-Hadi ila'l-Haqq, moved to Sa'dah in Yemen in 897 and began teaching there, converting the populace to Zaydi Shi'i Islam. The Zaydis of Yemen also adopted Mu'tazili theology but a number of sectarian splits occurred in the eleventh century. Under the Imamate of Ahmad al-Mutawakkil 'ala'llah (died 1170), some degree of unity was restored. Zaydi scholars were brought from the Caspian but there was not full unity or disappearance of the divisions until the Imamate of Imam 'Abdullah al-Mansur bi'llah (died 1217). During the fourteenth century, there was a *rapprochement* with Sunnism, through the acknowledgement of the early caliphs

and companions of the Prophet, and also with Sufism. This was however reversed in the sixteenth century, particularly with the Imamate of Imam al-Qasim al-Mansur (died 1620), who was inimical to Sufism because of the strongly pro-Sunni and pro-Ottoman stance of the Sufi orders at this time. He likened the Sufis to the Isma'ilis who were the other main enemy of the Zaydis in Yemen. In parallel with this was a movement led by Muhammad al-Wazir (died 1436) that sought to bring Zaydism closer to Sunnism by accepting Sunni Traditions.

Al-Mansur succeeded in expelling the Ottomans from north Yemen and although the Ottomans regained control of the coastal area in 1849, they were not able to control all the highlands. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, Imam Yahya proclaimed an independent state of North Yemen. In 1962, however, his grandson Muhammad al-Badr was deposed by Egyptian-trained army officers. There followed a six-year civil war, which the forces of al-Badr were on the point of winning when Saudi Arabia, which had been backing al-Badr, withdrew its support. Consequently, al-Badr's campaign collapsed and he fled to London. In 1978, Ali Abdullah Saleh, a Zaydi (but not of Hashimite descent and therefore not eligible to rule as a Zaydi Imam), became president of North Yemen. The union of North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic) with South Yemen (People's Democratic Republic of Yemen) in 1990 left the Zaydis in a minority in the new state but Saleh was made president of the union. From 1992 onwards, however, there was fighting between the north and south until the defeat of the south in July 1994. In 2011, Saleh was overthrown and replaced by a new president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, a Sunni from the south. In 2004, a Zaydi insurrection began under the leadership of a cleric, Hussein Badreddin al-Huthi (al-Houthi). He was killed in fighting in 2004 and the present leader is his brother Abdul-Malik. Their supporters continue to control Sa'dah and its province in the north-west of the

country and parts of adjacent provinces. From there, they have pushed south and captured the capital Sana'ah. The Houthis say they are protecting their religious community, while the government (which includes Zaydi Shi'is) says that the Houthis want to impose Shi'i law on everyone and are supported by Iran. The actions of the Houthis have strengthened the hand of the Sunni forces, including Islamic State and al-Qa'idah, in the south and the most likely outcome now seems to be the partition of the country into a Zaydi-controlled north and a Sunni-controlled south. Zaydis are estimated to be about 11 million, 45% of the population in Yemen, and there are some 1.5 million Zaydis in Saudi Arabia.

Isma'ili

From the tenth century until the thirteenth century, the Isma'ilis were probably the largest group of Shi'is, and certainly the most powerful. The Isma'ilis believe that since Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq had appointed his eldest son Isma'il to be his successor as Imam and Isma'il died before Ja'far, the rightful successor to the Imamate was Isma'il's son Muhammad and his descendants (see p. 45). There was then a period of obscurity lasting for about a century until the 870s, when there began active Isma'ili propaganda, led by 'Abdullah ('Ubaydullah, died 934), who was based in Salamiyyah in Syria, and by Hamdan Qarmat in the Kufah area. At first the claim was that the Imamate stopped with Muhammad, the son of Isma'il, whose return as the Mahdi they awaited. The propaganda (*da'wah*) of this group was very successful and by 883 had spread to Iran, Iraq, Syria, al-Ahsa, Bahrain, Central Asia, Yemen and Sindh (where a small Isma'ili state was established during the last half of the tenth century). It is likely that many of the converts came from Twelver Shi'i Islam, whose

Imam had recently gone into occultation leaving them leaderless and in disarray.

In 899, however, 'Abdullah in Salamiyyah claimed that he was in fact a descendant of Isma'il (the son of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq), that there had been a succession of Imams in hiding from the time of Isma'il and his son Muhammad, and that he, 'Abdullah, was now the rightful Imam. He took the title al-Mahdi. This proclamation split the movement, with Hamdam Qarmat rejecting 'Abdullah's claim and taking with him the Isma'ilis of Iraq, western Iran, al-Ahsa and Bahrain, while those in eastern Iran split between the two factions, and the community in Sindh and most of those in Yemen and Syria backed 'Abdullah al-Mahdi. The group around Hamdan Qarmat propagated an egalitarian social teaching that appears to have been very attractive. By 899, they had established a state in al-Ahsa and Bahrain and became known as the Qarmatis (Qaramitah anglicized as Carmathians).

Fearing for his safety after the Qarmatis became active in Syria, 'Abdullah left for North Africa in 902 where a propagandist he had sent, Abu 'Abdillah, had had success among the Kutama Berbers. These Berbers formed a fighting force that in 910 established 'Abdullah's rule over the central part of North Africa (present-day Tunisia, western Libya and eastern Algeria) with his capital at first in Raqqada and later at Mahdia, both in present-day Tunisia. This established the Fatimid dynasty. 'Abdullah's descendants went on to conquer Egypt in 969, where they built a new capital, Cairo, and the al-Azhar university, which is now widely regarded as the foremost educational establishment of Sunni Islam. Syria, the rest of north Africa, and much of western Arabia, including Mecca and Medina, were also conquered.

Hamdan Qarmat mysteriously disappeared shortly after 'Abdullah's proclamation in 899 and the Qaramitah became divided into factions and gradually lost their hold on all but the

Isma'ilis of al-Ahsa and Bahrain. Here, however, their power was consolidated and they even campaigned against the Fatimids in the late tenth century. They earned the opprobrium of the Muslim world when they attacked Mecca and carried off the Black Stone of the Ka'bah in 930. The Qarmati state was finally overcome in 1077 and the Qarmati branch of the Isma'ilis disappeared from history, although it may have left some traces behind in the interest that certain Twelver Shi'i scholars from this region took in philosophy and mysticism.

Doctrinally, Isma'ili teaching concentrated on explanations of the mystical or inner (*batin*) meaning of the Qur'an by the Imam. History is cyclical and progresses through seven stages, each under the authority of a speaking (*natiq*) prophet, who brings a message and is accompanied by a silent (*samit*) interpreter of the inner meaning of the message, who is also called the *wasi* (inheritor), and a succession of seven Imams; the seventh Imam then becomes the *natiq* of the next cycle. The sixth *natiq* was Muhammad, his *samit* was 'Ali and the seventh Imam after 'Ali was Muhammad ibn Ismail, whom the Qaramitah believed will return as the Qa'im and Mahdi, while the Fatimid rulers claimed to be descendants of his, continuing the line of the Imamate. Until the coming of the Qa'im, the *batin* must be kept secret. Under the Fatimids, Isma'ili cosmology absorbed a great deal of Greek thought, such as the idea that God is unknowable and the first emanation from God is the Intellect (*'aql*) from which all other beings are derived.

The Fatimid caliphate began its decline in the middle of the eleventh century, with the loss in 1049 of much of its territory in the centre and west of north Africa, and the invasion of Syria and Palestine by Turkish forces and the Crusaders, although Isma'ili doctrine was at this time extending its influence in Yemen, India and central Asia. In 1094, a succession dispute split the Fatimid Isma'ilis into two factions, the Musta'li and Nizari.

The Musta'li supported the caliphs in Egypt. In 1130, this branch split again, with one group, the Hafizi, continuing to support the Fatimid caliphate but disappearing after the fall of that caliphate in 1171. The other branch, the Tayyibis, recognized as their Imam and caliph the infant Abul-Qasim Tayyib, who went into occultation in 1132; ever since, this branch has had no revealed Imam. Leadership of the Tayyibis was transferred to Yemen under a series of Da'i Mutlaqs (missionaries in charge of the movement, see pp. 170-1). After a period of residence in the Yemen, the Da'i Mutlaq moved to India in about 1567. They became known in India as Bohras. There was a further split in 1591 into the Sulaymani Bohras, who remained mostly in Yemen (their headquarters are at Najran in south Saudi Arabia on the border of Yemen and they are also found in the Haraz mountain area of Yemen) with a few followers in Baroda, Mumbai and Hyderabad in India (600,000 in all); and the Dawudi (Dawoodi) Bohras, who are mostly to be found in the India provinces of Gujarat and Maharashtra (their headquarters are in Mumbai), in south Arabia, the Persian Gulf, East Africa and Burma (one million in all). There have been a number of minor splits in Dawudi Isma'ilism, such as the Alavi Bohras (in 1625, headquartered in Vadodara, Gujarat). The Musta'li Tayyibis have been chief among the Isma'ilis in maintaining the interest that the Fatimid Isma'ilis had in cosmology and philosophy.

The other main division of the Isma'ilis, the Nizaris, rejected the Fatimid caliphs after 1094. They were led by Hasan al-Sabbah (died 1124), who claimed to be the *hujjah* (literally 'proof', the representative) of the rightful Imam, Nizar, who was imprisoned in Egypt. Al-Sabbah was based in the fortress of Alamut in the Qazvin area; most of the Isma'ilis in Iraq and Iran, and eventually Syria, followed him. In the face of repeated attacks from the Saljuq Empire, the Nizaris established themselves in a chain of fortresses across Iran, Iraq and Syria. The Nizaris focused on the doctrine of the Imamate, developing particularly

the idea of the special ability of the Imam to give authoritative, divinely-inspired, teaching (*ta'lim*). Hasan al-Sabah appointed Buzurg-Ummid to succeed him; he in turn was succeeded by his son Muhammad and grandson Hasan II, who came to have the title 'Ala Dhikrihi al-Salam. In 1164, Hasan II proclaimed that the Resurrection had occurred (albeit interpreted symbolically and spiritually), that the Islamic *shari'ah* was no longer in force and that the Hidden Imam had appointed him caliph. Over the next few years, it was explained that the term caliph meant that Hasan was God's representative on Earth, in other words the Imam, and indeed that he was the expected Qa'im, who comes at the end of a cycle and begins a new one; thus although he appeared to have been the son of Muhammad and grandson of Buzurg-Ummid, he was in fact the descendant of Nizar and the Fatimid caliphs. Hasan was assassinated less than two years later, in 1166. Nizari Imams subsequently reinstated the Islamic *shari'ah*. Hasan II's descendants ruled as Imams at Alamut until 1256 when that fortress was destroyed by the Mongols. A short time later, in 1273, the last of the Syrian Nizari fortresses was captured by Baybars, the Egyptian Mamluk ruler. Iranian and Syrian Isma'ilism was severely weakened, although a residual community survived and a number of local Nizari leaders came to power in Daylam (Gilan) and Mazandaran in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries.

From the thirteenth century to the eighteenth century, the Nizari Imams remained in concealment. The various Nizari communities looked to local leaders for guidance and wide divergences appeared. In many places Nizari Isma'ilism camouflaged itself as Sufism, with which it already had many commonalities. Nizari Isma'ilism flourished, in particular, in the Badakhshan area in north-east Afghanistan, reaching as far as Kashgar, and in Sindh, Maharashtra and Gujarat in India, where they are known as Khojas. The Khojas had many converts from Hinduism and blended features of Hinduism into its teaching, which was

largely done through hymns called *ginans*. There were however a number of splits in Nizari Isma'ilism. In the fourteenth century, the line of Nizari Imams was split into two rival lines, the Muhammad-Shahi and the Qasim-Shahi, but the former ceased in the eighteenth century. In addition, the Khoja community in India suffered a number of sectarian splits, the most important of which was the Imam-Shahi sect which began in the sixteenth century. In the fifteenth century, the Qasim-Shahi Imams based themselves in the village of Anjudan near Mahallat in Iran and were able to begin to establish contacts with the other Nizari communities and unite them. Then in the eighteenth century, the Imams moved to Kirman and were governors there. In 1841, the Nizari Imam Hasan 'Ali Shah, who was governor of Kirman and had been given the title of Agha Khan by Fath-'Ali Shah, rebelled against Muhammad Shah. He was defeated and fled, eventually reaching Mumbai (Bombay), which has remained the headquarters of the Nizari Imams ever since.

The successors of Hasan 'Ali Shah have kept the title Agha Khan and become international figures, due in no small part to the wealth made available to them by the Nizari faithful. Many Isma'ilis are successful businessmen and merchants and have a reputation for trustworthiness and philanthropy. The present Agha Khan, Shah Karim, has been very concerned with the social and economic development of poorer Isma'ili communities. The Nizaris are the largest and most widespread community of Isma'ilis. They are most numerous in India but there are also important communities in East Africa, Pakistan, Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, Central Asia and reaching into China. In modern times, there has been extensive migration to Europe, North America and other parts of the world.

It is very difficult to estimate the total world population of Isma'ilis. Figures published since 1990 range from two million to twenty-five million. The area with the largest proportion of Nizari Isma'ilis in the population is the Badakhshan region and

surrounding areas. This area spreads across south Tajikistan, north-east Afghanistan, including the Wakhan corridor, northern Pakistan and into western China. Although a large area, it is very sparsely populated. Maximum estimates of the Nizari population would be: most of the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan (700,000), one-third of the Pakistan province of Gilgit-Baltistan (700,000), the adjoining Khowar district (200,000), three-quarters of the Kuhistoni Badakhshon (Gorno-Badakhshan) province of Tajikistan (150,000) and adjoining areas in Xinjiang autonomous region of China (50,000). In the rest of Afghanistan and Pakistan, there may be as many as a million Isma'ilis (mainly in north-east Afghanistan and Sindh). In India, there are economically important but numerically small populations of Khojas, mainly in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujerat and Andhra Pradesh (Hyderabad), numbering two million at most. In the rest of the world, there are small pockets of Isma'ilis in Iran, Syria, Lebanon, East Africa, and in recent years, in Britain, Canada, United States, Australia and other countries in the West, which probably number no more than one million in all. Thus the total for Nizari Isma'ilis is no more than seven million. To this can be added some two million from the two branches of the Musta'ili 'isma'ilis. This gives a maximum total of nine million Isma'ilis.

Druze

There was one further major schism among the Isma'ilis: the Daraziyyah or Druze. In about 1017, during the reign of the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim, some of the Isma'ilis began to attribute divinity to him. Although the movement is named after Muhammad al-Darazi, it was in fact an Iranian named Hamzah, and his successor Baha al-Din al-Muqtana, who developed the doctrine and who, along with al-Hakim, are the main authors of the Druze scripture, the *Rasa'il al-Hikmah* (the epistles of

wisdom). Al-Hakim mysteriously disappeared in 1021 and is expected by the Druze to return and initiate a new era. Hamzah also disappeared and the movement was led by al-Muqtana, who withdrew from society in 1037 but continued to send out letters until 1043. At this time, all active missionary work ceased and the community fell into a mode of passively waiting for the return of al-Hakim and Hamzah that has continued to the present day. The movement disappeared in Egypt but became established among the Isma'ilis of western Syria. Although severely persecuted by the Fatimids and later by the various Sunni rulers of the area, it has survived until the present day.

There was much inter-family conflict among the Druze and a long-standing feud with the Christian Maronite community. In the seventeenth century, many Druze moved into the Hawran highlands south of Damascus, which became known as Jabal al-Daruz. A number of Druze shaykhs set up semi-autonomous fiefdoms and between 1921 and 1936, the French set up a Jabal al-Daruz state in Syria.

The Druze call themselves the Banu Ma'ruf (the sons of beneficence) or more commonly the Muwahhidun (the monotheists), because they worship the One God, of whom al-Hakim is the incarnation or manifestation (*tajalli*) and only through al-Hakim can human beings purify themselves. Islam and its *shari'ah* are regarded as abrogated (and so they do not carry out the Muslim daily obligatory prayer, fast, or make the pilgrimage to Mecca). Thus the Druze do not regard themselves as Muslims and are not so regarded by most Muslims. They believe in reincarnation or transmigration of souls and in the predetermination of all matters by God.

The social structure of the Druze community has gradually evolved. Its present form consists of an elite called the *'uqqal* (singular *'aqil*, sages, about 20% of all Druze), who have been initiated into the secret truths of the religion. From among this group, the most learned and pious are called *ajawid* (the

magnanimous) or shaykhs. Those not initiated are called *juhhal* (singular *jahil*, ignorant ones). The Druze have a strict moral code, emphasizing mutual help among the members of the community, sincerity and truthfulness, although dissimulation of their beliefs (*taqiyyah*) to others is permissible. The *'uqqal* keep to even stricter codes of behaviour. Women have a large measure of equality within marriage, which is monogamous, and they can become *'uqqal*. The Druze do not marry anyone outside the community and no one can convert into the community.

At present the Druze consist of a community of about a million, spread among south-west Syria (Hawran/Jabal al-Daruz region, 500,000), south Lebanon (the Chouf and Jabal al-Shaykh regions, 300,000), north Israel (120,000) and small communities in Jordan and the rest of the world.

Alawi (Nusayri, Alawite)

The *'Alawis* are a religious community that until 1920 was usually called the Nusayris, named after Muhammad ibn Nusayr al-Numayri (or Namiri, ninth century), a follower of the tenth Imam *'Ali al-Naqi* and eleventh Imam Hasan al-*'Askari*. He regarded the Imams as divine and was backed by the powerful Shi'i Banu al-Furat family. Successive leaders of the movement developed other aspects of the doctrine in Kufah until al-Khasibi (died about 969) took the movement to north Syria, ruled by the Shi'i Hamdanid dynasty from their capital at Aleppo. In Iraq and Syria, the Nusayris were in dispute with another Shi'i Gnostic group, the *Ihqaqis*, followers of Ahmad ibn *Ihqaq* (died 899). This conflict continued until at least the thirteenth century but after that, the *Ihqaqis* disappeared from history. Under the leadership of Maymun Tabarani (died 1034), the Nusayris relocated to the Lattakia area where the movement was adopted by a local dynasty and the religion spread among

the villages of the hills behind Lattakia, known as the Jabal al-Ansariyyah or Jabal al-Nusayriyyah. From there, the movement spread along the north Syrian coast. The region came under Crusader and Isma'ili rule until finally being conquered by Salah al-Din in 1188. Subsequently, the Nusayris were persecuted by the successive Sunni rulers of their lands. For a time in the nineteenth century, the Ottomans allowed them a certain degree of self-rule but then imposed central authority on them again.

After World War I, the French Mandate authorities proposed the setting up of an Alawite state centred on Lattakia as part of their plans for Syria. An 'Alawi region was given autonomy from 1920 but reincorporated into Syria in 1937 prior to independence in 1946. At this time a large number of 'Alawi fighters joined the Syrian army. In 1963, a group of army officers, including some 'Alawis, seized power and established the Ba'ath party. Further coups put Hafez al-Assad, the leading 'Alawi army officer, into power in 1970 and he was declared president of the country the following year. There has been Sunni resistance to the 'Alawi seizure of power ever since, with a major uprising in 1982 in Hama and another beginning in 2011. In addition, in 1938 the Sanjak (administrative district) of Alexandretta (Iskenderun) became an independent state and a republic. After nine months, in 1939, the French gave the northern part of the west Syria coast, centred on Iskenderun and the town of Antakya (Antioch), to Turkey. This area contained many 'Alawis. They have continued to speak Arabic (although the younger people now speak Turkish) and are known as Arap Alevileri (Arab Alevis) to distinguish them from the much larger number of Turkish Alevis in Turkey. In 1974, the 'Alawis obtained a legal decision that they are a legitimate Muslim people from Imam Musa al-Sadr, the Twelver religious leader in Lebanon. The 'Alawis have in recent decades come much closer to orthodox Twelver Shi'i Islam, mainly through the influence of the Islamic

Republic of Iran. 'Alawi students study at Qom and at Twelver institutions set up in Damascus.

The doctrines of the 'Alawis incorporate elements of Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Greek and Persian thought. They believe that from the time when the Souls of Light, the 'Alawis, fell from heaven after rebelling against God and took on human form until the time of 'Ali, there were seven manifestations of God, which called upon them to return to God. Each manifestation consists of a *ma'na* (meaning or essence) accompanied by two lesser figures: the Name (*ism*) or Veil (*hijab*) and the Gate (*bab*). In the Islamic dispensation these three figures were 'Ali, Muhammad and Salman the Persian respectively. After 'Ali, each of the Imams of the Twelver line was successively the *ma'na* and Ibn Nusayr was the *bab* of the eleventh Imam and of the Hidden Twelfth Imam. It was Ibn Nusayr who was given the true secret teaching of the Imam. Human beings are condemned to metempsychosis (*tanasukh*), being reborn as other human beings or, if they have opposed the leader of the Alawis, as animals, until they recognize the *ma'na* and then are liberated and can take their rightful place as Souls of Light, eventually attaining the Divine Presence. Occasionally these Souls of Light come to Earth as prophets or 'Alawi shaykhs. The 'Alawis call themselves the Muwahhidun (monotheists) and are divided into an inner circle (*al-khassah*), who are fully initiated into the doctrines of the group, and the rest of the believers (*al-'ammah*).

One of the main practices of the 'Alawis is that of *ziyarah*, visiting the tombs of prophets and saints to benefit from the blessings (*barakah*) of those places. Among the most important of these is the shrine of Khidr at Samandağ, near Antakya. Specific rituals and laws surround the *ziyarah*. The 'Alawis celebrate the Persian New Year (Nevruz, Naw-Ruz), Christian festivals such as Christmas, and Shi'i festivals such as 'Id al-Ghadir. The 'Alawis are found among the Arabs of north-west Syria (three million;

12% of the population of Syria), south Turkey (700,000–1,000,000 in and around Antakya) and north Lebanon (120,000 in and around Tripoli).

Alevi

It is quite common to find the designation 'Alevi' being applied indiscriminately to a number of very different communities in Turkey. Often included in this designation are Arabic-speaking 'Alawis from around Antakya (see above), Azeri orthodox Twelver Shi'is whose presence in Turkey is the result of migration from Azerbaijan, Kurdish groups who are closer to the Ahl-e Haqq (see below) and the largest group, which is mainly ethnically Turkish but not a uniform group; it probably arose from the coming together of a number of religious strands. It is with these last two groups that this section of the chapter is concerned.

Insofar as these can be distinguished, the following are among the strands that have gone into making up Alevism. For the influx of Turkish peoples into Anatolia in the thirteenth century (fleeing ahead of the Mongol hordes), Gnostic Shi'i Islam appears to have been an attractive religious doctrine. As early as the thirteenth century, one finds Gnostic features among the Babai movement that rose in revolt against the Seljuks under the leadership of Baba Resulullah Ishak in about 1240. Another strand in the Alevi movement was the Qizilbash followers of the Safavid order, which became the Safavid dynasty of Iran. The Safavids had many followers in eastern Anatolia in the fifteenth century, who were severely persecuted and even massacred when the Ottomans began a campaign against Safavid Iran in the sixteenth century. Another strand in the formation of present-day Alevism were members of the Bektashi Sufi order (see below). In addition, Kurdish Alevis are linked to the Ahl-e Haqq of Iran and Iraq and it is probable that Isma'ili and 'Alawi influences also had

a part in the development of Turkish Alevism. There is a strong influence from Sufism and almost certainly elements of native folk religion and central Asian shamanism as well. Accordingly, the beliefs of Alevis vary from one group to another. In general, Muhammad and 'Ali are regarded as a unity emanating the energy of God. The Twelver Imams are also venerated. The Alevis do not have mosques and, unless observing *taqiyyah*, do not practise the Islamic prayers or fast. Individual Alevis are expected to put themselves under the spiritual guidance of a *mürşhid*, *dede* or *rehber*. An Alevi is, however, not so much identified by beliefs as by participation in community rituals. The religion today focuses on communal religious worship, *âyin-i cem*, which includes Sufi features such as *dhikr* (repetitive chanting, literally remembrance [of God]) and *sama'* (dance, literally listening) and is held in a communal gathering place called a *cem evi*. The composition and recital of poetry in Turkish is also highly valued. In addition, there are various commemorations of Alevi saints and Shi'i Imams.

The Alevis and proto-Alevis have been persecuted in Anatolia from the time of the suppression of the Qizilbash and have practised *taqiyyah*. When Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923, his promise of secularization gave hope to the Alevis, but in the end this proved to be only a bureaucratization of Sunni control and the attempt by the state to impose religious homogeneity. When the one-party system ended in 1946, many Alevis were attracted to socialist parties because of their own low status in society. This coincided with the mass migration of people from the rural areas (where Alevis had lived) into the large cities. Following the 1980 military coup, which saw a reimposition of the Atatürk vision and the subsequent rise of politicized Sunnism, the Alevis attitude changed and, instead of *taqiyyah*, they now insisted on their own identity and political voice. This led to conflict, culminating in 1993, when radical Sunnis set fire to a hotel hosting an Alevi cultural

event in Sivas, killing thirty-three Alevis. The situation caused many Alevis to migrate to Germany. The coming to power of the Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002 signalled a change from the previously secular Turkish state. For the Alevis, the manner in which the AKP has imposed a conservative Sunni interpretation of Islam with the excuse of maintaining national unity means that little has changed from the Atatürk period. The general term 'Alevi' in Turkey often includes individuals who are orthodox Twelver Shi'is and the Arab 'Alawis. If these are excluded, the Alevis constitute some 10–20 million people in Turkey. They are mostly ethnic Turks (mainly in the eastern half of central Anatolia) but 20% are ethnic Kurds, mainly in the provinces of Tunceli and Elazığ. Most large cities in Turkey have an Alevi community. There is also a large Alevi community in Germany (500,000).

The Bektashi order

The Bektashis can be regarded as a Sufi order that has strong elements of Gnostic Shi'i Islam. Its development was closely linked to that of Alevism, in particular with regard to the influence of movements such as the thirteenth-century Babai order and the fourteenth-century Hurufis (see pp. 144–5), such that in Turkey, it cannot be regarded as separate from Alevism. This brief survey is mainly therefore about the Bektashis in the Balkans.

Among the beliefs of the Bektashi order are that 'Ali is elevated to a divine trinity of God, Muhammad and 'Ali and the Twelve Imams are venerated. The Bektashi order spread throughout the Ottoman domains, establishing itself particularly strongly in Bosnia and Albania (especially south Albania). It also became the main religious movement among the Janissaries, the crack regiment of the Ottoman army. With the abolition and suppression of the Janissary corps in 1826, the Bektashi order was also

persecuted. In Turkey, the suppression was renewed when Mustafa Atatürk banned all Sufi orders in 1925 and the order moved its headquarters to Tirana in Albania. In the Balkans, the order suffered a further period of suppression during the communist era. Since the end of communism, the order has been restored and some 20% of the population of Albania (approximately 600,000 people) have links with it. There are communities of Bektashis in Bulgaria, also called Alians, Kuzulbashis (Qizilbash) and Alevis. They live mainly in the north-east of the country, in the Razgrad, Sliven and Silistra provinces, and number some 50,000. In Macedonia, however, the order is not officially recognized and its main lodge or retreat (*tekke*) was taken over by the officially-recognized Sunni religious authorities in 2002. The Bektashis live mainly in the Kichevo and Tetovo areas in western Macedonia and number about 5,000. There is also a small Bektashi community in Kosovo, centred on Prizren and Gjakova (Đakovica) in south-west Kosovo. Because of the marked veneration of the Imam 'Ali and the Twelver Shi'i Imams in the order, the Iranian government has made a major effort to spread its version of Twelver Shi'i Islam among Albanians in recent years.

Ahl-e Haqq or Yarsan

The designation Ahl-e Haqq or Yarsan does not refer to a single religious group with a clearly defined set of doctrines and practices. It is more a label given to a grouping of loosely-knit movements. The history of this movement is hard to evaluate since it has largely been secretive, and so there are few external references to the group. Its internal accounts are largely mythic and of limited use for reconstructing a history. The traditional view is that the movement was founded by Sultan Sohak (Ishaq, Sahak), who claimed descent from the Twelver Imam Musa al-Kazim, was born in Iraqi Kurdistan in the late fourteenth century and

moved to the Avroman area in Iranian Kurdistan. But elements of the tradition possibly go back to a certain Baba Khushin and the poet Baba Tahir in eleventh-century Luristan. It may even be that the origins of the Ahl-e Haqq go back to the split between orthodox Twelver Shi'i Islam and Gnostic Shi'ism that occurred in the tenth century (see pp. 64-5). The spread of Ahl-e Haqq teachings among the Turkomans of Azerbaijan and northern Iraq dates to the fifteenth century and was part of the spread of the teaching of the early Safavid order and the poetry of Shah Ismail. Another important figure was Khan Atash, who lived in Azerbaijan in the eighteenth century.

While Imam 'Ali occupies a high station in the Ahl-e Haqq doctrines (and their detractors call them 'Aliyullahi, those who make 'Ali to be God), it is Sultan Sohak who is regarded as having revealed the *Haqiqat* (truth), the final stage of religious development. Now, the Ahl-e Haqq await the coming of the Lord of Time and the Final Judgement. Human beings go through cycles of reincarnation or metempsychosis until they are purified. The Ahl-e Haqq gather in ceremonies that resemble Sufi assemblies, with repetitive chanting (*dhikr*) leading to states of ecstasy. Again like Sufi orders, each person must have a spiritual guide (*pir*). The Ahl-e Haqq honour all the Imams of the Twelver line but they do not keep Islamic laws, such as prayer and fasting (their fast is for three days), do not consider the Qur'an a sacred book and consider 'Ali to be above Muhammad in their religious hierarchy. They consist of about a million people mainly among the Kurds of west Iran (especially in the area around Kirmanshah), but also among some Kurds and Arabs in north Iraq and in small pockets scattered throughout Iran, especially in a band of territory from Mazandaran and Tehran, through Qazvin, Zanjan and Azerbaijan, on into the Caucasus. The exact relationship between the Ahl-e Haqq and Kurdish Alevis in Turkey cannot be determined from current research.