

In Praise of the Few

Studies in Shi'i Thought and History

By

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CHAPTER 15

Taqiyya in Shi'i Theology and Religion

1 Introduction

Students of Imāmī Shi'ism have long noticed the central place which *taqiyya* in its various forms occupies in the life and thought of Shi'is. Some scholars have explained this phenomenon by referring to the position of the Shi'is as a minority within the surrounding Sunni world,¹ while others have related it to the esoteric nature of early Imāmī Shi'ism (or Shi'ism, for short).² Looked at from the point of view of motive, there appear in fact to be two main types of *taqiyya*: one which is based on fear of external enemies and another which is based on the need to conceal secret doctrines from the uninitiated. I will call the first type "prudential *taqiyya*" and the second, "non-prudential *taqiyya*". In what follows I attempt, first, to classify the different kinds of prudential *taqiyya*; second, to set out the evidence for the existence of non-prudential *taqiyya*; and finally, in the conclusion, to establish a connection between the two.

The word *taqiyya* means "fear" or "caution"; as a technical term it has been variously rendered as "precautionary (variants: pious, religious, expedient) dissimulation (of one's beliefs)", as "self-protection through dissimulation" and as "safeguarding of secrets". In Shi'i sources *taqiyya* denotes various methods of maintaining secrecy, notably *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi*, and it is

1 The literature includes I. Goldziher, "Das Prinzip der *taqiyya* im Islam", *ZDMG* 60 (1906), pp. 213–226, repr. in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. J. Desomogyi (Hildesheim, 1967–70), v, pp. 59–72; EI¹, art. "Taqiyya" (R. Strothmann); Kohlberg, "Taqiyya"; E. Meyer, "Anlass und Anwendungsbereich der taqiyya", *Der Islam* 57 (1980), pp. 246–280; H. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin, 1982), pp. 175–181; H. G. Kippenberg, *Die vorderasiatischen Erlösungsreligionen in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der antiken Stadtherrschaft* (Suhkamp, 1991), index, s.v. *ketmān*, *taqiyya*; van Ess, *Theologie*, 1, pp. 312–315; [EI², art. "Taqiyya" (R. Strothmann–[Moktar Djebli]); M. Ebstein, "Secrecy in Ismā'īlī Tradition and in the Mystical Thought of Ibn al-ʿArabī", *Journal Asiatique* 298 (2010), pp. 303–343; D. de Smet, "La pratique de *taqiyya* et *ketmān* en islam chiite: compromis ou hypocrisie?" *Actualité du Compromis* (Paris, 2011), pp. 148–161; idem, "La *taqiyya* et le jeûne du Ramadan: quelques réflexions ismaéliennes sur le sens ésotérique de la charia", *al-Qanṭara* 34 (2013), pp. 357–386; M. A. Amir–Moezzi, "Dissimulation tactique (*taqiyya*) et scellement de la prophétie (*khatm al-nubuwwa*)", *Journal Asiatique* 302 (2014), pp. 411–438].

2 See in particular H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien* (Paris, 1971–2), index, s.v. *ketmān*, *taqiyyeh*; Amir–Moezzi, index, s.v. *taqiyya*.

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