

## Disputations on “the Necessity of Imamate” in the Mu'tazilite Political Theory

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### ABSTRACT

Within the Mu'tazila, due to their different approaches to the imamate and politics, there emerged two main streams, the schools of Baghdad and Basra or, in another word, those holding the vision of the most excellence (*afdāliyya*) and those holding the vision of the less excellence (*mafdūliyya*). Such factors as Ali's preference, the attitude taken against the then political structure, history and the agreement with society played an important part in this divergence. While the school of Basra in general adopted the chronological order after the prophet Muhammad, i.e. Abū Bakr-'Umar- 'Uthmān and 'Alī, the school of Baghdad took an attitude giving precedence to Ali, but at the same time regarding the other caliphs as lawful. Thus, in respect of imam's being the most excellent of his time, the Mu'tazilite tradition took two different attitudes. As for he who would be designated to the imamate after the four caliphs, they asserted that he had to be a person whom Muslim community determined and pledged allegiance to. These all have been dealt with by the members of school in the frame of necessity of imamate.

Although the Mu'tazila have generally argued for the necessity of imamate, within the school there also existed those upholding that the imamate was not necessary such as Abū Bakr al-Asam and Hishām b. 'Amr al-Fuwatī, while the former held that in peacetime the imamate was not needed, the latter held that in chaos it was unnecessary. This article has been attempted to deal with the arguments and views of either persons, who questioned the necessity of imamate.

**Key Words:** Mu'tazila, Islamic political theory, caliphate, *afdāliyya*, *mafdūliyya*, Rāfidī, Abū Bakr al-Asam, Hishām b. 'Amr al-Fuwatī, Umayyad rulers, 'Abbaside rule.

### 1. Introduction

In the history of Islamic thought, the Mu'tazila School is characterized by its particular method in understanding and interpreting Islamic precepts. First of all, Mu'tazila theologians laid down their principles as 'al-usūl al-khamsah (five roots or fundamentals); Unity (Tawhid), Justice (Adl), the promise and the threat (el-Va'd-ve'l-void), intermediate state of the grave sinner (el-Menziletü beyne'l-menziletyn) and commanding good and forbidding evil (el-Emru bi'l Ma'ruf ve'n-Nehyi ani'l-Münker) and focused on theological and philosophical issues. The Mu'tazila thinkers are most often described as rationalist, individualist, liberal and eccentric figures. Among the

Mu'tazila famous thinkers are Wasil b. 'Ata, 'Amr b. 'Ubayd, Abu al-Huzayl al-'Allaf, Bishr al-Mu'tamir, Nazzam, Cahiz, Djubbai and his followers.

Mutazilite School has emphasized of the Unity and the purity of Divine Existence and the Justice. In the context of the idea of Unity, it has discussed Allah-cosmos relation, atom, motion, rest and Divine attributes. In the context of the concept of Justice, the Mu'tazila School has underlined that the responsibility of the deeds, such as good-bad, belief-unbelief, submission-disobedience, in this world or in the hereafter, belongs to human himself. In other words, this school has connected the human responsibility to mind, freewill and the potential power. The Mu'tazila thinkers also carved out an original political attitude; in defining their *imāma* doctrine, they founded their *imāma* doctrine on the Koran, the practices of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs and, historical experiences.<sup>1</sup>

The political incidents that took place on the heels of the Prophet's death and then the establishment of Abū Bakr as caliph in the courtyard of Benī Sa'īda led to the conflict over the headship of state. As consequence of the persistence of this conflict into the subsequent generations, the matter of *imāma* (headship) came to be one of the most important problems of the Muslims.<sup>2</sup> Later on, this issue set the Muslims along two political lines: The Sunnite discourse claimed that the head of state should be chosen by Muslim community while the Shiite school contended that the head was established by the Prophet's clear designation (*nasās* and *ta'yīn*).<sup>3</sup>

The *Khārijīs* described the years of Abū Bakr and 'Umar's caliphate as the most ideal caliphatic epochs. They, however, claimed that 'Uthmān and 'Alī became infidel after the former's first six years of caliphate and the latter's acceptance of *tahkīm* (setting up arbitrator). Opposing the notion of Quraysh's superiority in leadership, the *Khārijīs* held that the *imāma* is not restricted to the Arabs and hence can be assumed by those other than the members of the Quraysh tribe.<sup>4</sup>

The Shiite political theory is based on the belief that 'Alī was appointed as caliph with *nasās* and *ta'yīn* (divine designation) after the death of the Prophet and the leadership exclusively pertained to the lineage of 'Alī and Fātima, daughter of

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<sup>1</sup> For further information about the Mu'tazila political theory, see Osman Aydinli, "The Mu'tazilite Political Theory: The Afdāliyya and Mafdūliyya Doctrine", *Islamic Quarterly*, London 2005, vol. 48/4, pp. 5-30.

<sup>2</sup> Abū al-Hasan 'Alī bin Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936), *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Musūllīn*, ed. by Helmut Ritter, Wiesbaden 1980/1400, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Nihāl*, ed. by Muḥammad Fahmī Muḥammad, Beirut 1990/1410, vol. I, p. 18; Qādī 'Abduljabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, ed. by 'Abdulkarīm 'Uthmān, Cairo 1988/1408, p. 762.

<sup>4</sup> al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 125.

the Prophet. Besides, the *imāma* is recognized as a fundamental of the Islamic *Credo* (*usūl al-dīn*).<sup>5</sup> Since the Shiite school believed that the *imāma* is not a purely practical matter (*ijtihādī*) relied on *masālahā* (public interest or good), rather it is indispensable part and parcel of the Islamic tenets. So it cannot be decided by Muslim community.<sup>6</sup> In the frame of the Shiite *imāma* theory, there were discussed such subjects as the doctrine of *ghayba* (disappearance), the relationship between *imāma* and *nubuwwa* (prophethood), the obedience to the *imām* and, the qualities which the *imām* should possess.<sup>7</sup>

As for Ahl al-Sunna, the Sunnite thinkers endorsed the factual and historical order of the first four caliphs and argued that the precondition of leader's being excellent was ideally fulfilled in the historical succession. Moreover, the Sunnite theologians regarded the practices of the time as necessity of the then political circumstances and insisted on excluding the issue of *imāma* from the *Credos*. They dealt with the political issues within the context of caliphate and worked out the notion that the *imām* should come from the Quraysh tribe.<sup>8</sup> The Sunnite tradition preferred the maintaining of security over the theoretical or doctrinal legitimacy of government.

The Islamic schools of thought held various views about the necessity of imamate. Those who held that the imamate was necessary and that to fulfill it was obligatory were the Khârijites, except for Najadât, al-Murjia, majority of al-Mu'tazila and Ahl al-Sunna. And, while asserting the necessity of imamate, the Shia made a comparison between imamate and prophethood and argued that just as God designated the prophet, so He had to designate the imam."<sup>9</sup> The divergence among them stemmed from the way they interpreted the religious references and evaluated the historical process.

The Mu'tazila, principally recognizes the necessity of the existence of an imam but confines the choice of the head of state to notables of Muslim community. For the school, it is of primary importance that the nominee must be just, righteous, well-versed in the *Qur'ân* and *Sunna* of the Prophet, and must judge according to these

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<sup>5</sup>Qādī 'Abduljabbār, *Sharh al-Usūl al-Khamsa*, 762; Shahrīstānī, *al-Milal*, vol. I, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup>Shahrīstānī, *al-Milal*, vol. I, p. 163.

<sup>7</sup>For further information about the Shiite political theory, see Hasan Onat, "Şîî İmâmet Nazariyesi", AÜİFD, XXXII(1992), pp. 89-110.

<sup>8</sup>al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna 'an Usūl al-Diyāna*, ed. by Bashīr Muhāmmad Ayūn, Riyad 1993, p. 50 and on; Baghdādī, *Kitabu Usūl al-Dīn*, Beirut, 1981/1401, p. 271.

<sup>9</sup> Qādī 'Abduljabbār, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawhīd*, ed. by 'Abdulhālīm Mahmūd-Sulaymān Dunyā, Dār al-Misriyya, no date, vol. XX/I, p. 298.

two fundamental sources. According to the Mutazilite view, the imâm is custodian or administrator (*walî*) over Muslim community; and he exercises authority in the name of society; therefore, Muslim community would inevitably be in need of an *imâm*. Nevertheless, the imam was needed so that the verdicts of courts be fulfilled, the state be guarded and the troops be commanded.<sup>10</sup> In this context, the Mu'tazila contended that the imamate was a human judgement (*ijtihâdî*) to be solved by Muslim community in accordance with the conditions of time.

Since the Mutazilite school saw the institution of prophethood in favour of mankind, to fulfil it, they asserted, was incumbent on God. The point, here, at issue was the manifestation of God's favour (*lutf*). Therefore, to send a propethood (*bi'tha*) was incumbent on God. God observes the goodness of humankind. It was incumbent on God to create the best and the most beneficial. So, the propethood (*nubuwwa*) was incumbent on God.<sup>11</sup> The issue of propethood according to Mu'tazila is related with the necessity of God's creating the most beneficial and perfect. Otherwise, it would mean to describe God as an oppressor (*Zâlim*) which cannot be.

The proofs that the schools of thought which held the necessity of imamate relied on, may be put in order as follows:

The most important reason which was discussed by those arguing the necessity of imamate was to forestall the chaotic situation. Humankind is a social being and this necessitates the social life to be arranged through some rules. For some reasons, e.g. the arrangements of these rules and to meet some human needs, the necessity of imamate was suggested. A society without ruler may be prevailed by chaos, disorder and disagreement. It is necessary, according to religious law, for that society to forestall the damages to be resulted from this chaotic situation. It is clear that this damage can not be forestall without appointing an imam.<sup>12</sup>

Another proof for the necessity of imamate is the obligation to fulfil the religious aims and religious duties. And this rests on the presence of imam. The protection and defence of religion, forestalling the events of apostasy, to give a warning to the neglectful in performing religious orders and to discipline those undermining the religion depend on the authority of imam. "The presence of an imam, who will fulfil the judgements and punishments, protect his subjects, defend

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<sup>10</sup> Qādî 'Abduljabbār, *Sharh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, p. 750.

<sup>11</sup> Shahrīstānī, *Nihāyat al-Iqdām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*, ed. by Alfred Guillaume, no place no date, p. 417.

<sup>12</sup> Qādî 'Abduljabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. XX/1, pp. 17 ff., 31 ff., 41 ff.

their homes, command his troops, distribute the booties and alms among them, do justice to the oppressed and impose sanctions on the oppressor, appoint the governors and judges of every province and officers of every rank and send the teachers and preachers to everywhere, is necessary."<sup>13</sup> One another evidence on the necessity of imamate was the administration of justice. since the imamate was, in a sense, the continuation of prophethood<sup>14</sup> whose fulfilment was necessary and obligatory, its function is to protect the fundamentals of beliefs and views they call for and defend.

On the claim that the imamate was necessary, there were two arguments this claim based on: The imamate was either necessary in accordance with reason and human social experience, or religion. The meaning of its being necessary in terms of religion was the existence of explicit designation (*nass*) commanding the imamate. Whereas the *nass* was neither implying it, nor was explicitly and directly making the imamate necessary. Thereby, it is not possible to suggest that the imamate was religiously binding and that the necessity in question was of a kind, when omitted, leading to sin.

Among the Mu'tazila there also existed those arguing that under certain conditions the imamate was not necessary and, so, it could not be characterized as a binding institution.<sup>15</sup> They adopted such a view, not because they underestimate the imamate, rather they believed that there was not an explicit expression (*nass*) emphasizing the necessity of imamate. Here the point they laid stress upon was the fact that there was no accountability, if not fulfilled.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Disputations on the Necessity of Imamate

Abû Bakr al-Asam and Hishâm al-Fuwatî argued that in some cases the imamate and imam might not be needed. Although one of them adopted the *afdâliyya* (the desirability of the excellent leader) and the other the *mafdûliyya* (the legitimacy of the less excellent's leader), they diverged from their group on account of their aforesaid views. Besides, because of his similar views, Abbâd b. Sulaiman may be considered in this group. This group also followed a different way stating that all the individuals of society should have participated in determining the head of the

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<sup>13</sup> Shahrastânî, *Nihāyat al-Iqdām fî 'Ilm al-Kalām*, p. 480.

<sup>14</sup> Qādî 'Abduljabbār, *al-Mughnî fî Abwāb al-Tawhîd*, ed. by Amin al-Hulî, Dār al-Misriyya 1960, vol. XV, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Nashî al-Akbar, *Masāil al-Imāma*, ed. by Josef Van Ess, Beirut 1971, p. 49 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Ziyauddin Rayyis, *İslamda Siyasi Düşünce Tarihi*, tr. İbrahim Sarmış, İstanbul 1995, p. 124 ff.

state. Whereas, according to other Mutazilites the imam must have been appointed by the representatives of *the umma* (Muslim community) acting on behalf of *the umma* and distinguishing with some features such as devoutness, learnedness, vision and wisdom.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.1. Abû Bakr al-Asam and the Imamate in Peacetime

Abû Bakr al-Asam<sup>18</sup> is a very distinctive person of whose life and political relations much information are not at our disposal, apart from some accounts implying that he had not any relations with statesmen and did not demand any official duty though be in need. As has been reported by Thumâmah b. Ashras, a keyman who introduced many Mutazilites to the caliph, after the caliph Mamun left Marw for Baghdad in 201/817, he wanted Thumâmah to bring al-Asam to his presence (*majlis*). But he had passed away short before he informed him of this invitation.<sup>19</sup> Thus, caliph's wish to meet with him and give him place in his session of knowledge could not be achieved. Nevertheless, he was reported to have served as a judge under the caliphate of Mu'tasim.<sup>20</sup> This person most probably was Abû Bakr Muhammad b. Abî Layth al-Asam, the judge of Egypt, who was involved in *mihna* (*trial*),<sup>21</sup> Because the time he lived in and the focusing of discussions on the earlier periods,<sup>22</sup> the doubts raise about these accounts, and the date given above by Ibn Nadim seems to be more reliable. Al-Asam who was considered one of the foremost preachers of his time was the one, though belonging to the school of Basra, who had a different position within the tradition with his views in *fiqh* and *kalâm*. In this respect, he reminds of Dirar b. 'Amr with whom he held the same views and probably

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<sup>17</sup> Qādī 'Abduljabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. XX/I, p. 251 ff.

<sup>18</sup> The accounts on the Abû Bakr Abd al-Rahmân b. Kaysân al-Asam's life related that under Mamar Abû al-Ash'as he studied together with Muammâr b. Abbad, Hafs al-Fard and Abu Shimr al-Hanafî. Although it has been related that he was died in 235/850, the dates given by Ibn Nadim seems to be more appropriate. His foremost student was Ibn Ulayya who disputed with Imam al-Shâfi'î. It is narrated that he disputed with Hishâm b. al-Hakam and Hisham wrote a refutation against him. Besides, Nazzam praised his *tafsir* to Jâhîz. Among his works are *Kitab iftiraq al-umma wa ihtilâf al-ṣiya'*, *Kitab al-jami alâ al-Rafida*, *al-Imâma*, *ar-Rad alâ al-Mujbira*, *ar-Rad alâ al-Dahriyya wa Kitâb alâ ahl al-Fatwa*. For more information see Ibn Nadîm, *Fihrist*, ed. by Ridâ Tajaddud Ibn 'Alî bin Zayn al-Âbidîn al-Hâirî al-Mazindirî, Beirut 1988, p. 214; Qādī 'Abduljabbār, *Fadl al-'tizâl wa Tabaqât al-Mu'tazila*, ed. by Fuâd Sayyid, Tunis 1406/1986, p. 267.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Nadîm, *Fihrist*, p. 214.

<sup>20</sup> Khatîb Baghdâdî, Abu Bakr Ahmad b. Ali b. Thabit (463/1070), *Ta' rihu Baghdâd*, Cairo 1931, vol. VI, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, "Ebu Bekir Esam", *DîA*, vol. 11(1995), İstanbul, p. 353.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Nadîm, *Fihrist*, p. 214

intellectually made use of,<sup>23</sup> and who was the leader of session (*majlis*) of Basra during his lifetime.

One of the most interesting Mutazilite attitudes of imamate was that introduced by Abu Bakr al-Asam (202/818). He suggested that under certain circumstances the imamate was not necessary. In his opinion, neither revelation nor reason make the imamate necessary. He speaks of this subject as follows:

"Imamate is not necessary, provided that Muslim community perform the pilgrimage and wage holy war, do justice amongst them, give the booties and taxes to their owners and fulfil the legal punishments."<sup>24</sup>

In fact, it is not strange that A'sam, the one and only Mutazilite who did not hold the principle of commanding the right and forbidding the wrong,<sup>25</sup> asserted that the imamate was not necessary, since this principle at his time was viewed as a politico-moral responsibility and the imamate was considered *a sine qua non* of this principle.

In the prevailing opinion of Islamic political thought, choice of someone to the imamate is a fairly important and essential duty. If this duty is fulfilled by someone, the other(s) gets rid of the responsibility. The view that the imam is not necessary was also voiced prior to that of Abû Bakr al-Asam by a Kharijite sect al-Najadât. Al-Najadât argued that the choice of imam was not incumbent on the community, but they had to act justly amongst them.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, this view introduced by A'sam in a systematic and justified way. The obligatory point of imamate is to adjudge in accordance with the Book (Quran). To this approach, the imamate is not a necessary (*fard*) thing which the Muslim community do not fulfil entails a punishment and castigation. The imamate is a fact concerning the people's activities and affairs. Neither the imam nor the imamate will be needed, if a fairly relation among the individuals of Islamic community, a cooperation on the basis of benevolence and avoidance, and every individual's fulfilling his own responsibility are maintained.<sup>27</sup>

As we shall discuss in the next subtitle, while Hisham al-Fuwati held that the imam was not needed in cases of troubles (*fitna*), al-Asam, contrary to him, viewed that the presence of imam was not necessary in peacetime, not in emergency, that is,

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<sup>23</sup> Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, "Ebu Bekir Esam", *DİA*, vol. 11, p. 353.

<sup>24</sup> Juwaynî, *al-Aqîda al-Nizamiyya fi arkan al-Islâmiyya*, ed. by Ahmad Hijazî, Cairo no date, p. 127.

<sup>25</sup> Abû al-Hasan 'Alî bin Ismâ'îl al-Ash'arî (d. 324/936), *Maqâlât al-Islâmiyyîn wa Ikhtilâf al-Musallîn*, ed. by Helmut Ritter, Wiesbaden 1980/1400, p. 278.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Hazm, *al-Fasîl fi Milal wa al-Ahwâ' wa al-Nihâli*, ed. by Muhammad Ibrâhîm Nasir-'Abdurrahmân 'Umayra, Beirut, vol. V, p. 53.

<sup>27</sup> Shahristânî, *Nihâyat al-Iqdâm fi 'Ilm al-Kalâm*, p. 481.

in a time al-Fuwati attached much attention to the imam.<sup>28</sup> In Abu Bakr al-Asam's opinion, if Muslims keep themselves from wrong, not do wrong to each other, they would not need an imam.<sup>29</sup> If the imam does not exist, a sufficient number of Muslims may exercise the legal (*shar'ī*) principles.<sup>30</sup>

Al-Asam and those of the same opinion with him, presumably due to the non-existence of a religious text requiring or forbidding a certain rule, claimed that the imam and institution of imamate were not needed. Because when every individual, in religious respect, does his duty, a ruler will not be needed. Accordingly, it seems that he gave the society a significant role.

Generally, al-Asam was stated to have been known with his views that the existence of an imam was not necessary. Nashī al-Akbar, nevertheless, does not mention him among those denying the necessity of an imam's existence, but among those adopting the view of *imamat al-mafdūl* (the less competent leadership). He states that he held that in the politically unsuitable phases an imam could not work, in such cases, simultaneously several imams could exist. Thus, it appears that he did not insist on the unnecessary of imamate, but such view was deduced merely from some expressions stated by him. In that case, we may conclude that though this view of al-Asam was his general opinion, under some particular circumstances, to him, such practices were possible.

Nashī al-Akbar refers al-Asam's legitimating the leadership of the less competent as follows:

"The person who was brought to the imamate by the ummah, may be the most excellent of the ummah in the course of allegiance (*bi'a*). But, later on, among Muslim community a man more excellent than him may appear. People succeed each other in order of excellence. The less excellent today may become the best excellent tomorrow; the unlearned (*jāhil*) today may become the learned (*ālim*) tomorrow. In that case, the people are not entitled to depose their imam, since a man more excellent than the determined one may arise within the society. If, in such cases, he who is determined as the imam is deposed, it would be necessary to change the imams everyday. This cannot be approved by religion, then, the imamate of the less excellent is lawful."<sup>31</sup>

Although Abū Bakr al-Asam is regarded among those arguing the imamate of the less excellent, he does not give precedence to Ali over Abū Bakr. In al-Asam's view,

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<sup>28</sup> Ziyaeddin Rayyis, *İslâmda Siyasi Düşünce Tarihi*, p. 138; Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Ortaçağ'da İslâm Siyaset Düşüncesi*, tr. by Ali Çaksu, İstanbul 1996, p. 40.

<sup>29</sup> al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, 460; Baghdādī, *Kitabu Usūl al-Dīn*, p. 271.

<sup>30</sup> Baghdādī, *Usūl al-Dīn*, p. 271.

<sup>31</sup> Nashī al-Akbar, *Masāil al-Imāma*, p. 59.



the excellence of person who will succeed the imamate, from time to time, may increase and decrease or lessen his excellence. Al-Asam argued that just as the excellence of the chosen imam may decrease, so, the excellence of other candidates may augment, and the imam no longer becomes the most excellent, but the less excellent, and in that case it will not be true to depose the imam, and therefore, the less excellent must be left as imam.<sup>32</sup>

Al-Asam's view that if the people treat each other fairly, the oppression did not exist and the circumstances entailing to carry out the legal punishments (*hudûd*) disappeared, the imam would not be needed was severely criticized in Mu'tazilite tradition. It has been said that such a view would not match with the reality and the points attributed to the men could not happen as claimed. The reality requires to set up an imam; the main reason for this matter was the fact that God enjoin the Friday prayer to be performed in the presence of imam or of whom he appointed.<sup>33</sup>

Abû Bakr al-Asam was of the opinion that the imamate would set up only with the participation/consensus of all members of the community. His view that an imam's coming to power will be lawful, if only he wins the approval of each member of community seems to be quite a perfectionist view.<sup>34</sup> The general opinion of Mu'tazila is that this matter should be accomplished by the representatives of community who exercise authority on behalf of the ummah. These representatives entrusted with the act of choosing must be the notables of the community, who are endowed with trust, devoutness, knowledge, vision and wisdom.<sup>35</sup> As for Abû Bakr al-Asam, he contended that the imamate would not be established with the choice of some people and their consultation (*shûrâ*), but only with the consensus (*ijmâ*) reached on a person to whom the allegiance was pledged. The point to which he gave a special importance in the acceptability of imamate was to determine whether a consensus was reached by the ummah. As a corollary of this understanding, while he accepted the imamate of Abû Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmân, he repudiated the imamate of 'Ali for the reason that there was no consensus and satisfaction upon him.<sup>36</sup> According to al-Baghdâdî, he was of the opinion that both the imamate of 'Uthmân and 'Ali were questionable for on the imamate of 'Uthmân, some of the

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<sup>32</sup> Nashî al-Akbar, *Masâil al-Imâma*, p. 59 ff; al-Ash'arî, *Maqâlât*, p. 456.

<sup>33</sup> Qādî 'Abduljabbâr, *al-Mughnî*, vol. XX/1, p. 48.

<sup>34</sup> Baghdâdî, *Usûl al-Dîn*, p. 271; Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Ortaçağ'da İslâm Siyaset Düşüncesi*, p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> Qādî 'Abduljabbâr, *al-Mughnî*, vol. XX/I, p. 251 ff.

<sup>36</sup> al-Ash'arî, *Maqâlât*, p. 456; Qādî 'Abduljabbâr, *al-Mughnî*, vol. XX/II, p. 65.

members (not all of them) who were present at the *shûrâ* proclaimed allegiance to him. Nevertheless, apart from this, there is no other account relating that he regarded the imamate of 'Uthmân as questionable. In our opinion, it would be better to give credence to the accounts quoted by al-Ash'arî and Qâdî Abd al-Jabbâr, historically the nearest authors to him. He is mostly known with his views concerning the imamate of 'Ali. To him, the imamate of 'Ali became questionable for the opposition of Ahl al-Shâm until his death.<sup>37</sup> In his view, owing to the battles and turbulances of his time, his imamate was under doubt, although Ali's suitability for imamate was not confirmed by others.<sup>38</sup>

Al-Asam adopted the imamate of Mu'âwiya for the consensus reached on it, which was criticized by a large number of ulema and described as the transformation of caliphate into kingdom.<sup>39</sup> According to him, the imamate is established with the consensus of umma relying on the consent. However, these conditions do not exist in the caliphate of 'Ali. Mu'âwiya is utterly right in his struggle against Ali, since on his imamate a consensus was reached.<sup>40</sup> As has been seen, he further made an effort to justify Mu'âwiya in his all disagreements with 'Ali. Corollary to this, al-Asam asserts that Abû Mûsâ al-Ash'arî was right in his deposing 'Ali in the incident of *tahkîm* (arbitration) so that the umma reached an agreement on one caliph.<sup>41</sup>

Whether Ali, Talha and Mu'âwiya were right should be taken into consideration in respect of their intentions, i.e. as to whether they worked for the well-being of Muslims or for their own interests. When speaking of Ali's position in the battle of al-Jamal, al-Asam states that Ali was wrong, if he worked for his own interest, but if he acted for public interest, he was right. On the other hand he keeps on saying that Ali, Talha and al-Zubair were wrong in fighting him. Those who stepped aside, according to him, were right.<sup>42</sup> There is the same logic in his consideration of Mu'âwiya. For him, Mu'âwiya, if he fought against 'Ali to undertake this duty for his own interest, was wrong and a tyrant. Otherwise, if he fought aiming at the consensus on one imam and, so, ensuring the peace amongst people, he

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<sup>37</sup> Baghdādî, *Usûl al-Dîn*, p. 287.

<sup>38</sup> Qâdî 'Abduljabbâr, *al-Mughnî*, vol. XX/2, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> Baghdādî, *Usûl al-Dîn*, p. 287; W. Montgomery Watt, "The Political Attitudes of the Mu'tazilah", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (JRAS)*, 1963, p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> Nashî al-Akbar, *Masâil al-Imâma*, p. 60.

<sup>41</sup> Baghdādî, *Usûl al-Dîn*, pp. 291-293.

<sup>42</sup> Nawbakhtî, Abû Muhammad Hasan b. Mûsâ (310/922), *Firaq al-Shîa'*, ed. by Helmut Ritter, İstanbul 1931, p. 15.

was right.<sup>43</sup> In order that the people would not be tried for their intentions, or the intentions are not open to inquisition, it must be kept away from making a decision on these matters. The purpose of the doctrine was to justify the Abbasid caliphate basing it upon the consensus of Muslims. Nevertheless, for he did not give an active role to the politicians, he angered them.<sup>44</sup>

Al-Asam is one of the prominent Mutazilites taking the most opposite attitude against al-Shî'a. He contended that Ali at no time became imam.<sup>45</sup> In his opinion, the first three caliphs, when came to the office, were the most excellents of their times. But, when 'Umar died, the most excellent was 'Abd al-Rahmân b. 'Awf. Despite this, 'Uthmân, in order of excellence, became caliph, for 'Abd al-Rahmân withdrew himself from the caliphate.<sup>46</sup> We realize, through this approach, that he regarded the caliphate of 'Uthmân as the imamate of the less excellent.

It is hard to say that al-Asam did not attach weight to the imamate. However, the reason why he took such an attitude was that he had an idealist approach and that he intended to achieve some ideals. The super social order he imagined in accordance with his own view could be realized only through a perfect and equitable method. It seems to him more attractive, instead of talking about the necessity of imamate, to emphasize the necessity of obedience to God's orders. It appears that al-Asam wished a legislative and judicial power based upon mutual understanding of people. Therefore, it is possible to say that he aimed at a common collective government in which everyone in the society would participate.

What al-Asam spoke of the unnecessary of imamate was characterized to have been identical with the Sunnite view or the Sunnite threat.<sup>47</sup> It seems probable that al-Asam was thought to have a sunnite attitude probably because of his view on the position of the grave sinner that he would not depart from the faith even if insisting on his sin.<sup>48</sup> Besides, it has been asserted that the source for the view that the caliphate was not necessary at all was a work entitled *Peri Basileias* written in the name of Aristotle and that this work, in al-Asam's time, was translated into Arabic

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<sup>43</sup> al-Ash'arî, *Maqālāt*, pp. 453, 457.

<sup>44</sup> Watt, "The Political Attitudes of the Mu'tazilah", *JRAS*, p. 50 ff.

<sup>45</sup> Nashî al-Akbar, *Masâil al-Imāma*, p. 52 ff.

<sup>46</sup> Nashî al-Akbar, *Masâil al-Imāma*, p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Ortaçağ'da İslâm Siyaset Düşüncesi*, p. 40.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Hāzīm, *al-Fasāh*, vol. IV, p. 80; Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, "Ebu Bekir Esam", *DİA*, vol. 11, p. 354.

by Yahia b. Bitrîq.<sup>49</sup> There are no documents at our disposal showing that al-Asam was cognizant of that work. But, there are a lot of works relating that this view was held in an earlier time by al-Najadât.<sup>50</sup> When considered that al-Asam lived in the intellectual and religious milieu of al-Basra, it can be easily said that this view was produced by Muslims.

Al-Asam may have come to the conclusion that the imamate was possible for he found that the necessity of the imamate is contrary to the principle of equality and considered that the each of those formulating individual judgement (*ijtihâd*) on a par with other and thus seeing the necessity of obedience of one to the other meaningless. The imamate is a position contrary to the freedom and rights. To have a control over man in every matter is disadvantageous to the obedient. The imamate leads to disagreements, thus the differences of opinion arise and this gives rise to chaos. Consequently, this causes people to suffer damage.<sup>51</sup> The community will be damaged, unless the wrongdoer or unbeliever imam is deposed. If he is deposed, this instigates trouble, since the fight may be necessary to depose him. The advantage should be gained from the imam, whereas it is not possible for every one to reach him. For this reason, it is no use to determine a comprehensive imam.<sup>52</sup> Among the dangers arisen from the non-existence of imamate were anarchy, clash, despotism, bloodshed, loss of rights and the abolishment of Islamic rules, loss of independence, enslavement and extinction of Islam.

It is obvious that Abû Bakr al-Asam's views of the necessity of imamate do not accord with the socio-political reality. It is known that justice and peace do not realize in a society spontaneously and accidentally, for the terms "justice" and "peace" are not the spiritual values that have only a religious and internal nature. On the contrary, they are protected through the practical relations which are at the political and social levels concretely represented in social life. Accordingly, it is not a sound approach to put the terms "justice and "peace" and "order" in a distant place from imamate, the most concrete and powerful institution of society.

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<sup>49</sup> Goldziher, "Hellenistischer Einfluß auf mu'tazilitische Chalifats-Theorien.", *The teachings of the Mu'tazila: texts and studies*, ed. by F.Sezgin, Mazen Amawi, Carl Ehrig-Eggert, Eckhart Neubauer, Frankfurt 2000, vol. I, p. 220 ff.; Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Ortaçağ'da İslâm Siyaset Düşüncesi*, p. 40.

<sup>50</sup> al-Ash'arî, *Maqâlât*, p. 189 ff.

<sup>51</sup> Shahrîstânî, *Nihâyat al-Iqdâm*, pp. 482-484.

<sup>52</sup> Ziyauddin Rayyis, *İslamda Siyasi Düşünce Tarihi*, p. 142 ff.

## 2.2. Hisham b. 'Amr al-Fuwatî and the Imamate in Chaos

Hisham b. 'Amr al-Fuwatî<sup>53</sup> took a different attitude asserting that in the environments where the negative circumstances were dominant the imam and imamate were not necessary, although essentially he adopted the imamate of the less competent.<sup>54</sup> For him, if the state is ruled with justice, and the people live in peace, the imam is needful. But this necessary should not be regarded as a religious matter.<sup>55</sup> He argued that in case of disagreement on the imamate, the allegiance could not be proclaimed.<sup>56</sup> According to Hisham b. 'Amr al-Fuwatî (218/833), it is possible, in some cases, to live without an imam. He viewed that when the social order was collapsed, and the anarchy, despotism and chaos became dominant, neither the imam could be appointed, nor the allegiance be pledged to him. In this manner, he criticized the way Ali came to power in a time of chaos and trouble.<sup>57</sup>

Hisham al-Fuwatî speaks of imamate as follows: " The imam is necessary, in case Muslim community come to an agreement over the truth. But if the the imam is murdered as a consequence of uprisings and anarchy, it is no longer necessary for the people to designate a person favouring truth for the imamate." If the community revolt and kill the imam, the duty of imamate can not be handed over to somebody else. Al-Baghdādî has regarded this as an attack against the imamate of Ali, saying that this would mean to reject his imamate, since he who was elected to the caliphate in a milieu of anarchy and after the murder of the former imam.<sup>58</sup> So, Hisham, only in one case, considers the existence of the imam is necessary. And that is the case when the community live in safe and unity. In short, the election of the imam is necessary on condition that the community agree on the imamate, but in case of disagreement it is not necessary.

Asserting that the imam is not necessary in case of chaos and anarchy, Hisham b. 'Amr al-Fuwatî differs from al-Asam in this matter. So, it may be said that

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<sup>53</sup> In the sources, we have not much information on Hisham b. Amr al-Fuwatî al-Shaibanî. It has been related that he lived in Baghdad at the time of Mamun and died in this city. It has been said that he was the disciple of Abu Huzayl, Nazzam or Muammār b. Abbad'īn. He went to Baghdad and was treated by Ma'mun with respect in the court. He probably died before 218/833. Abu Duad has been recorded to perform his funeral. Some of his works are *Kitāb al-rad alā al-Asam fī nafy al-haraka*, *Kitāb khalq al-Qur'an*, *Kitāb ilā ahl al-Basra*. For more information see Ibn Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 214; Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, Berlin 1991, vol. IV, pp. 1-15.

<sup>54</sup> Nashī al-Akbar, *Masā'il al-Imāma*, p. 55.

<sup>55</sup> Shahrīstānī, *Nihāyat al-Iqdām*, p. 481.

<sup>56</sup> Abdurrahman b. Ahmad al-Ījī, *al-Mawaqif fī ilm al-Kalam*, Beirut no date, p. 417.

<sup>57</sup> Baghdādī, *Usūl al-Dīn*, p. 271 ff.; Zuhdi Jarullah, *Mu'tazila*, Beirut 1990, p. 145.

<sup>58</sup> Baghdādī, *Usūl al-Dīn*, p. 272.

the views of al-ʿAsam and Hisham al-Fuwatī on the necessity of imamate are at variance with each other. Arguing that the choice of imam was necessary only in peace and suggesting that the imam was necessary in anarchy, were the views that were asserted by him on the basis of quite different points. The issue that lay at the heart of Hishām's view that the imamate was not necessary at the time of anarchy because of concerns that the imamate in the time of anarchy would not work properly. Since the people would come under all kinds of pressure, at the time of turbulences a sound election would not be possible. It is almost unlikely that the people under such circumstances go to choice wishfully and provide a clear majority. Sharing the same views with Abū Bakr al-ʿAsam, Hishām b. 'Amr al-Fuwatī argued that the imamate could be set up only with the full consensus of the community.<sup>59</sup> This view of his seemed contrary to the general opinion of other ulema. Because at that time the Muslim community, for the opposition of Damascenes and their disobedience to Ali, could not reach a consensus on Ali. Nevertheless, they acknowledged him as caliph. Hishām b. 'Amr al-Fuwatī, deemed the imamate of Mu'āwiya suitable and acceptable, since the community reached a consensus on him after the murder of Ali.<sup>60</sup>

Hisham b. 'Amr al-Fuwatī was quoted to have argued that 'Uthmān was not besieged, thus that he should not be regarded as murdered.<sup>61</sup> Being criticized by some, he was said to have seemed to let those who disagreed with him to kill him. In effect, he asserted that 'Uthmān was not besieged by Muslims in his house, but killed by several Egyptian rioters.<sup>62</sup> Hisham b. 'Amr al-Fuwatī's aim was to exonerate the companions and to express that a number of impertinents were responsible for the intrigue. But this approach of his was misjudged and interpreted as if he rejected that 'Uthmān's house was besieged and murdered by violence and despotically. According to al-Baghdādī, he asserted that 'Uthmān was trapped and killed, without a siege by a small group. Despite the many accounts reported on this matter, he argued that the incident of siege was fictitious. Al-Baghdādī criticized his approach

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<sup>59</sup> Shahrīstānī, *al-Milal wa al-Nihā al*, vol. I, p. 63.

<sup>60</sup> Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, ed. by Muḥammad Muḥyiddīn 'Abduḥamīd, Beirut, no date, p. 163.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Ijī, *al-Mawaqif fī 'ilm al-Kalām*, p. 417.

<sup>62</sup> Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-Intisār wa al-Radd 'ala Rāwandiyya al-Mulḥid*, ed. by Nasr Nādir, Beyrut 1957, p. 120 ff.

saying "he who denied this is on par with he who denied the battles of Badr and Uhud and the miracles about which many accounts were reported." <sup>63</sup>

When defending Hishâm b. 'Amr's views about the martyrdom of 'Uthmân and about the incident of al-Jamal, Khayyât said that he did not dissociate himself from any of the companions who participated in these events.<sup>64</sup> In al-Fuwatî's view, Ali, Talha, al-Zubair are not responsible for the incident of al-Jamal. They had come together in Basra in order to make a general assessment about the situation, to discuss and negotiate the disagreements and the murder of 'Uthmân.<sup>65</sup> But despite they did not wish to fight, the conditions gave rise to the war. Without their knowledge, the groups coming from Egypt started the war. They also disliked and worried about this situation. The proof supporting this view was what al-Zubair said when he saw war: "God be praised! I did not think at all of the war, when I came here."<sup>66</sup>

Abbad b. Sulaiman al-Saimarî, who was Hishâm b. 'Amr al-Fuwatî's disciple and subjected to the fierce opposition for he objected to the general tendencies of the school, argued that the imam was not needed, though he was a Basrian Mutazilite.<sup>67</sup> But, disputing the practices of imamate after the four caliphs, he posed a somewhat different approach. Although the majority adopted the succession to imamate after Ali, 'Abbâd b. Sulaimân criticized this attitude and opinion. In his view, a conflict arose as to whether the imamate after Ali would be succeeded or not. Thereby, such a matter on which the Muslims did not reach a consensus had to be discussed.<sup>68</sup> This discussion led 'Abbâd to declare that there was not an imam after Ali. According to him, the Muslim community can do all what the imam can. Such matters as to go to war, to deliver the judgements and to carry out the punishments are among the affairs that Muslims can do.<sup>69</sup> According to the Mutazilite tradition, 'Abbâd argues that the most erudite and the most excellent of his time should be imam. Only several

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<sup>63</sup> Baghdādî, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, p. 163.

<sup>64</sup> Khayyât, *al-Intisā'ār*, pp. 50 ff; 120 ff.

<sup>65</sup> Nashî al-Akbar, *Masā'il al-Imāma*, p. 55; Khayyât, *al-Intisā'ār*, p. 120 ff.

<sup>66</sup> Khayyât, *al-Intisā'ār*, p. 120 ff.; Zühdi Jarullah, *Mu'tazila*, p. 146.

<sup>67</sup> Abû Sahl 'Abbâd b. Sulaimân (250/864) is one of disciples of Hishâm b. Amr al-Fuwatî. There have been some accounts about his discussions with Ibn Kullâb. Saimarî of whom the accounts did not give much information met with opposition from within the school, since he asserted the contrary views to the general opinion of Mu'tazila of Basra. Al-'Asharî for the most part refers to his view about the unity of God (*tawhîd*). For more information see al-Ash'arî, *Maqālāt*, pp. 165 ff, 188 ff, 497 ff; Ibn Nadîm, *Fihrist*, pp. 215, 230; Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, Berlin 1991, vol. IV, pp. 16-44.

<sup>68</sup> al-Ash'arî, *Maqālāt*, p. 459.

<sup>69</sup> al-Ash'arî, *Maqālāt*, p. 467.

persons are suitable for imamate. If he who is suitable for imamate does not undertake this duty, in that case, he who is not suitable for imamate is permitted to assume it.<sup>70</sup> As has been seen, Abbād b. Sulaimān also asserted, like al-ʿAsam and al-Fuwatī, that the imamate under certain circumstances might not be needed. As for the role of companions in the war and Ali's attitude in the arbitration (*tahkīm*), 'Abbād took a confirmative and justificative stance.<sup>71</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

The Mu'tazila which adopted a distinctive stand on imamate and politics, while setting forth its view on this matter, were based on the Qur'ān, Sunna, Four Caliphs and historical experiences. While, with a justice based understanding, an idealist stand was taken by exalting the institution of imamate and its features into the rank of the caliphs who were regarded as virtuous ones and into the prophet, it was unavoidable, in the course of time and occurrence events, to adopt a realistic approach.

Although the Mutazilite paradigm in general suggested that the imamate was a necessary institution, there existed within the school, those arguing that under certain circumstances the imamate was not needed and that the imamate could not be described as a necessary institution. The representatives of this view, Abū Bakr al-ʿAsam and Hishām b. 'Amr al-Fuwatī, claimed that the imamate, because of lack of peace and chaos, was not necessary. At the same time, both Mutazilite figures took a different attitude from the view which was accepted by both, their own school and the Sunnites, that Ali was the fourth caliph and the most excellent of his time, since they claimed that the imamate had to be set up by consensus of all community. In their view on the caliphate of Ali, a full consensus, contrary to the other three caliphs, was not reached.

Considering the views of Hishām b. 'Amr al-Fuwatī, we may easily realize that they have no equivalents in practice. All of those holding the probability of imamate have been obliged, in practice, to choose an imam for themselves. While the Kharijites who were distinguished with this view, for example, designated Abd Allah b. Abī Wahb al-Rāsibī as imam, al-Najadāt, a sub-Kharijite group, appointed Najdat b. Atiyya to the imamate. It seems that al-ʿAsam and Hishām b. 'Amr al-Fuwatī, while

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<sup>70</sup> Qādī 'Abduljabbār, *al-Mughnī*, vol. XX/1, p. 210.

<sup>71</sup> al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 454, 458.



voicing such opinions, were idealistic. They came to the conclusion that the super social order they imagined could be realized only through a perfect and equitable rule. It is wrong, therefore, to say that they underrated the institution of imamate. In this manner, they might have longed a legislative and judicial power based on the mutual understanding. They attempted to introduce a sense of rule in which everybody would participate and share the responsibilities.