A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE EFFECTS OF THE 8TH SHIITE IMAM'S PRESENCE IN PERSIA

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Abstract- Although more than a millennium has passed since the historic journey of Ali ibn Al-Mousa Reza, the eighth Imam of the Shiites from Medina to Merv(current day Khorasan) through Persia , extensive dispute regarding the exact course travelled and the social and political implications that his journey brought about in Persia exists among Islamic scholars and historians. After taking up the reins of government , the Abassid Caliph Mamun moved the capital of the Abassid empire from Baghdad to Merv; however the predisposition of the Persiaians towards the offspring of Ali ibnAbiTalib (known as Alaviyon) and the need for an intellectual and religious personage whose piety and lineage were accepted among the general population, resulted into Mamun's invitation for the eighth Imam to join him in Merv, and the subsequent introducing of the eighth Imam as regent apparent. The political ramifications were the decreasing of the Shiite influence in Medina and Mecca and the mollifying of the large Shiite population in Iraq and Persia. Although Mamun had explicitly ordered that the eighth Imam be brought to Merv through lesser travelled routes ; the political and social impacts of his journey through Persia were so vast and encompassing that Mamun had the Imam poisoned within half a decade in order to suppress his influence.

Index Terms- Ali ibn Al-MousaReza,Khuzistan, Merv,Persia

I. INTRODUCTION

Ali ibn Al-Mousa , known as Reza was born in Medina in 148 (Lunar Calendar) . His father MousaibnJaffar was the religious and intellectual leader of the Shiite order whom was imprisoned by the Abassid Caliph Harun Al -Rashid and subsequently murdered in prison. After his father's death, Ali ibn Al-Mousa took his place as the religious leader of the Shiite sect at the age of 35.

Ali ibn Al-Mousa was a shrewd and diplomatic leader; strengthening the Shiite movement and side stepping the pitfalls and intrigues of the Abassid court. The period of his leadership can be divided roughly into three periods. The first listening a decade during the rule of Harun Al- Rashid. The second one lasting half a decade during the reign of Harun's elder son Amin and the final half decade under the Caliph Mamun.

During the reign of Harun Al- Rashid, Mamun was the governor of Merv (current day Khorasan in Persia), but after his father's death and the succession of this brother Amin to the caliphate, Mamun sought to usurp the throne and was able to become caliph five years later by murdering his brother.

In order to safe guard himself from any potential threat, Mamun ordered the capital of the caliphate to be relocated to Merv. Being aware of the potential threat that Ali ibn Al-Mousa and the Shiite sect had for the Abassid caliphate Mamun sought to devise a way to draw him to Merv. The political ramifications of such an action he believed would be a decrease in the influence of the Shiite sect in Saudi Arabia ; the development of an intellectual and religious center in Merv ,and the attracting of the Alaviyoun political fraction to the Abassid court.

II. ALI IBN AL-MOUSA 'S ACCEPTANCE OF MAMUN'S INVITATION AND SUBSEQUENT JOURNEY TO MERV

Ali ibn Al-Mousa did not initially accept Mamun's offer to come to Merv , but after weighing the pros and cons of accepting the title of regent apparent and the effect it would have upon the Shiite sect, Ali ibn Al-Mousarecapulated and after a short journey and sojourn in Mecca he set off towards Basra. The caravan from Mecca to Basra was well out fitted and rather elaborate. Ali ibn Al-Mousa travelled alone, taking none of his household members with him to Merv. Along the route from Mecca to Basra, at any town or urban center that the caravan halted at ,Aliibn Al-Mousa would meet with the scholars, elders and common people and strive to resolve tregentproblems.This would be a common pattern as Ali ibn Al-Mousa travelled through Persia and later in Merv.

From Basra, Ali ibn Al-Mousa travelled to Khoramshar and from there to the city of Ahvaz, both in the Khuzistan plain. The route then travesed the zagroos mountains and passed through the provinces of Fars ,Arak , Ray and then Naishabur . It has been recorded in the annals of the Abassid caliphate that Ali ibn Al-Mousa's caravan reached Merv on the 10thSheval, 201Hijri lunar year.

Raja ibnAbiZohak whom was responsible for bringing Ali ibn Al-Mousa to Merv says that Ali ibn Al-Mousa would not remain in any city or village unless the people came foreword to ask him of matters related to religion and Islamic jurisprudence. During such talks Ali ibn Al-Mousawould quote from his father and from his forefathers the Prophet Mohammad(PBU) and Ali ibnAbi Taleb.[1] Such transference of quotes in the form of Haddiths quoted

from the Shiite Imams whom were of the house of Ali IbnAbiTaleb , whom was with and beside the Prophet in the early years of Islam proved to be the perfect means of restructuring the Shiite faith in Persia and to strengthen its foundation.
This especially manifest in the city of Nayshabur where Ali ibn Al-Mousa's teachings and haddiths were recorded for posterity.

The fact that Ali ibn Al-Mousa's statements would begin with the sentence that " I have heard from my father, and he from his father……continuing down his lineage to Hussainibn Ali ibnAbiTaleb and then Ali IbnAbiTaleb whom heard it from the Prophet (PBU) himself" had a threefold effect. First it established his lineage and origins. Second it negated the three ; five and seven Imam Shiite sects; especially the Esmaillite sect .Finally it restated the claim made by the Shiite sect that Ali IbnAbiTaleb is the rightful successor to the Prophet (PBU) .

III. POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ACCEPTING MAMUN'S OFFER

The social and political position of the Shiite sect was at its lowest point when Ali ibn Al-Mousa was nominated as Mamun's regent. Ali ibn Al-Mousa's reason for accepting such an offer has been attributed to several factors ; chief among them the attaining of a high ranking position by a Shiite of noble lineage, in order to pave the way for the influence of other Shiites in the Abassid court. Moreover, by setting the conditions of non-interference of the Caliph in areas such as the promoting and demoting of officials in provinces and the judgment of officials, in addition to the not changing of any tradition or ceremony by the Caliph; Ali ibn Al-Mousa adroitly foiled Mamun's plan to use Ali ibn Al-Mousa's validity and reputation to validate his own rule and subsequent social and political reforms. Another point was that Ali ibn Al-Mousa's political position allowed him to have a far greater accessibility to the Shiite sects in Persia and Iraq than he would have been able to in Medina.

Mamun ordered a coin to be stamped called the Ali ibn Al-Mousa coin and that after the noon and evening prayers a sermon to be recited in the Imam's name throughout all the mosques in the empire.

In addition he gave his daughter in marriage to Ali ibn Al-Mousa and another daughter was betrothed to Ali ibn Al-Mousa's son, Mohammad Taghiaslo known as Javad. These were crucial elements in the spreading of information among the masses that a person from the lineage of Ali ibnAbiTaleb nephew of the Prophet (PBU) whom had been mostly branded by the Umayiids as renegades and rebels in their propaganda among the masses, and the developing of a new perspective about the Shiite sect and its validity among the populations in Persia and Iraq.

IV. SOCIAL IMPACTS OF ALI IBN AL-MOUSA'S PRESENCE IN THE ABASSID COURT

Prior to the presence of Ali ibn Al-Mousa at Mamun's court, the Shiite sect was in discord. Several sectarian movements had developed in which its followers believed that Hussein ibn Ali was the last Imam and others believed EsmaeilibnSadegh, son of the seventh Shiite Imam to be the last Imam; while others believed that Imam MousaKazem was not dead but would arise. Ali ibn Al-Mousa's presence in court and the gradual acknowledgement of all sectarian Shiite sects of his knowledge and deep piety resulted into a bonding among the different fractons and the unifying of the Shiite faith in both Persia and Iraq in as such that after Aliibn Al-Mousa's death , his son and successor as the Imam of the Shiites Javadibn Ali Mousa, and the further Imams had little problem with a Shiite schism in faith.
With the presence of Ali ibn Al-Mousa at the Abassid court in Merv and the disposition of the court towards rationalistic learning and Islamic teaching, similar to what had existed in the court in Baghdad during the reign of Harun Al Rashid , Merv and Nayshabur became Shiite centers of learning. This was in itself an effective means of reintroducing and strengthening the roots of the Shiite faith in Persia; since theAbassid court in Baghdad focused primarily on Islamic jurisprudence and by laws to strengthen the court's rule and influence rather than on matters of faith and Islamic tradition. The publication of tracts and dissertations on Islamic law and tradition, the existence of a learned and outstanding scholar at court who could clarify and inform the debate among Shiite and Sunni scholars and the growth in public literacy in the region are among the social impacts that Ali ibn Al-Mousa's in Merv brought about in Persia.
Many Islamic schools ; hospitals and clinics began to grow and develop around Merv and the surrounding countryside . A vast number of the Alaviyouns migrated to Merv and people began to travel to the region to seek audience with Ali ibn Al-Mousa at court for grievances or justice. Although this is what Mamun had planned for when inviting Ali ibn Al-Mousa to become regent apparent , the pressure brought upon him by the Abassid nobles and high ranking scholars in Baghdad and the rebellion by the Shiite Mohammad ibnGhasem convinced him to find a means of removing Ali ibn Al-Mousa from power without being suspected.

V. RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED UPON ALI IBN AL-MOUSA BY MAMUN

The growing number of adherents and disciples of Ali ibn Al-Mousa , especially the number of Shiite scholars whom participated in the debates and discussions on rationalistic Islamic thought; rhetoric and law in court and at Ali ibn Al-Mousa's residence

or public mosque and the extensive correspondence of Ali ibn Al-Mousa to other scholars regarding the validity of the Shiite faith and Quranic interpretations caused Mamun to issue an edict to Mohammad ibnAmroTousi ordering him to ban anyone from gathering for debate and discussion Ali ibn Al-Mousa's residence. [2]

Ali ibn Al-Mousa's popularity among the people and his erudite speech and vast knowledge of Islamic teaching was cause of much concern of the Abassid court in Baghdad in as such they began to plot against him and his being regent apparent to Mamun. In order to do so the set up a series of debates in Mamun's court, inviting religious scholars from different faiths to debate and discuss their religions with Aliibn Al-Mousa. The main objective was to discredit Ali ibn Al-Mousa and show the general populace and the court that he is not as learned as it is generally believed to be. The debate was dully held and Ali ibn Al-Mousa's knowledge of other faiths and Islam was professed to by the other scholars. This further added to the growing popularity of Ali ibn Al-Mousa and underscored the necessity of learning among the masses; especially those of the Shiite faith.

In 203 Lunar year, Ali ibn Al-Mousa convinced Mamun to return the Abbasid court back to Baghdad. This political move would ultimately benefit Ali ibn Al-Mousa since Baghdad was the cultural and scientific center of the Islamic world and his presence there would benefit the Islamic world. This was severely opposed by the Abbasid nobles whom requested the immediate removal of Ali ibn Al-Mousa. In 203 Lunar year Mamun ; FazlibnSaahl ; Ali ibn Al-Mousa and other members of the court left Merv , but along the way in present day SarakhsFazlibnSaahl was assassinated in the bath house of Sarakhs and on the last day of the month of Safar, Ali ibn Al-Mousa was poisoned with toxic grapes and thus passed away. [3]

VI. HISTORICAL OPPOSITION TO ALI IBN AL-MOUSABY THE ABBASID NOBLES IN THE COURT OF BAGHDAD

The Abbasid court had been opposed to the house of Ali ibnAbiTaleb since the opposition of Hassan ibn Ali and Hussein ibn Ali, the sons of Ali ibnAbiTaleb and the religious leaders of the Alaviyouns to the early Umayid Caliphs especially Moaviyeh ; thus the fact that Mamun had decided to elect a member of Ali ibnAbiTaleb's lineage to power was intolerable; whatsmore the rapid influence of Ali ibn Al-Mousa on both Mamun's court and the general populace in Merv and the subsequent effects it began to have in Baghdad and other major cities in the empire added to their concern.

Upon Mamun announcing that Ali Ibn Al-Mousa would be the regent apparent an attempt was made to prevent Ali ibn Al-Mousa from reaching Merv. The governor of Fars sought to prevent the caravan in which Ali ibn Al-Mousa was with from entering the region by sending an armed military party against it. The leaders of the caravan ,Ahmad ibn Al-Mousa (known in Persia as Shah Cherageh) and Mohammad ibn Al-Mousa , brothers to Ali ibn Al-Mousa rallied the caravan against the armed force and were able to defeat it, but to prevent further attacks , the caravan party split up and sent off incognito in small parties.[4]

The governor of Fars sent out execution parties to track down and kill Ali ibn Al-Mousa , but to no avail , yet the number of shrines attributed to the lineage of Ali ibnAbiTaleb and Ali ibn Al-Mousa are thought to be the members of the caravan whom were caught and subsequently murdered.[5]

VII. SOCIAL EFFECTS OF ALI IBN AL-MOUSA DEATH ON PERSIA AND IRAQ

Mamun ordered public mourning for the death of Ali ibn Al-Mousa and put of a public display of sorrow for the death of the regent apparent. Ali ibn Al-Mousa's body was taken to the village of Sanabad (present day Mashad) and laid to rest next to the grave of Harun Al – Rashid.[6]

According to Sheikh Tousi at the time of the death of Ali ibn Al-Mousa, there were more than 317 disciples of the Imam whom were actively teaching in Islamic schools in Merv; and most were still in existence until 408 Lunar year after which most scholars went to Baghdad.[7] This indicates that the deeply rooted foundations for the rationalistic teaching of Islam provided for by Ali ibn Al-Mousa forethought and training continued to effect learning in Persia for decades.

The burial place of Ali ibn Al-Mousa became a center of pilgrimage for members of the Shiite faith and a center for the development of schools and centers of learning over the centuries ; in as such that subsequent rulers of Iran sought to develop and retain the sanctity of the shrine and surrounding area. During the SafavidAfsharid and Qujarperio ds exquisite masonry works and art work were carried out in the building housing Ali ibn Al-Mousa corpse; thus making it a center for art and later literature in subsequent centuries.

Among the works attributed to Ali ibn Al-Mousa is the " Sahifiyeh Al Reza" or " Mosnaad Al Emam Reza" which also contains accounts recited by others about his life and sayings. A tract on medicine called " AlRessaleh Al Zahabiyah" was written by Ali ibn Al-Mousa at the request of Mamun in gold leaf. [8]

ShaykhSadougeh in his work called " AyunAkhbar Al Reza" and AlamehMajlesi in the forty ninth book of " Bohar Al Anvar" and Aziz OllahAttarodi in " Mosnad Al Imam Reza" Vol. II have collected the debates and discussions held by Ali ibn Al-Mousa with the scholars of other faiths. The works and debates provided subsequent scholars with guidelines on rationalism and its applications in matter of religion and faith.

CONCLUSION

The eighth Imam of the Shiite faith, Ali ibn Al-Mousa, known as Ali ibn Al-Mousa Reza in both Persia and Iraq played a crucial role in the bringing together of the different dissident groups of the Shiite sect at the time by imposing a rational form of thought to matters of faith and providing logical arguments in matters of law, Islamic jurisprudence and prayer. Ali ibn Al-Mousa's learning and knowledge; his piety and attempt to provide justice to those whom sought grievances at court in addition to his position in the Abbasid court helped reinvigorate the Shiite faith among the general masses in both Persia and Iraq. By making Merv a center of intellectual learning; he decentralized Baghdad, gathering Shiite scholars in one region and thus being able to develop and form the schools and centers of learning with little or no interference from competing centers in Baghdad.

As in life, after death his place of burial became a sacred site where Shiites from both Persia and Iraq visit in the form of a pilgrimage at least once in a lifetime . His shrine and the mausoleum are unique in terms of architecture and art works of different periods in Persian history; showing the reverence attributed to Aliibn Al-Mousa by various rulers. Present day Mashad is among the centers of Islamic learning and art in Iran; thus fulfilling the objectives of Ali ibn Al-Mousa upon accepting Mamun's invitation to the Abbasid court.

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