

The Words of the Imams, Al-Shaykh Al-Ṣadūq and the Development of Twelver Shī'ī Ḥadīth Literature

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Ḥadīth compilations are a fundamental part of the sources available to Muslims: not only as part of their legal framework, but also in matters of theology and ethics. The compilations offer an abundance of guidelines, instructions, and advice to inform the lives of Muslims, assisting them in living a life they believe to be consistent with God's expectations of them. Readers of ḥadīth from both the laity and scholars, academic or seminarian, primarily engage with ḥadīth as tools to enable them to derive rulings and pass normative judgements, looking past the author of the ḥadīth collections. Considering Shaykh al-Ṣadūq plays a pivotal role in Shī'ī ḥadīth, both in terms of the ḥadīth collections he left behind and that he was an important Shī'ī scholar in the 4th century AH, Warner seeks to lay out an intellectual portrait of Shaykh al-Ṣadūq by engaging with his ḥadīth works not from the perspective of them as compilations, but as authored works written with intent and purpose. Through readings of selected ḥadīth works of al-Ṣadūq, he attempts to demonstrate the issues that occupied al-Ṣadūq's context and how he responded to those issues.

It is important to note that Warner does not attempt to engage with all of al-Ṣadūq's works, meaning his study is not exhaustive or representative of the entirety of al-Ṣadūq's ideas, beliefs, and methodologies; rather, he intends to engage in a relatively new approach to engaging with ḥadīth collections: compilation criticism. In this manner of investigation, an individual deals with multiple works of a selected author – analysing the structure of the compilations, the content and style of narrations, and other elements – to present an intellectual biography of said author. This can be an effective tool to bring the author to life. In what follows,

there is a brief overview of Warner's book, with emphasis on certain sections to further understand what Warner is attempting to do from an outsider's perspective to ḥadīth studies.

This book is composed of two parts, the first consisting of three chapters, and the second consisting of two chapters. In part one, Warner is "Placing al-Ṣadūq" in the context of "Living without an Imam" (Chapter 1), exploring his approach to legal theory (Chapter 2), and how al-Ṣadūq contributed to wider ḥadīth literature, beyond the theological and legal (Chapter 3). In part two, a more detailed reading of two theological ḥadīth collections, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* (Chapter 4) and *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'mah* (Chapter 5), is undertaken to explore al-Ṣadūq as an author, and not simply a compiler of ḥadīth.

In "Placing al-Ṣadūq", Warner clearly highlights the context in which al-Ṣadūq lived and wrote to be one where an Imam is no longer accessible for the Shī'a to ask any questions pertaining to religion, which puts the Shī'a in a similar position to the non-Shī'a in lacking a direct source of guidance. This is an important factor in understanding the shift from a reliance on the words of an Imam to developing tools to verify the authenticity of narrations and formulating rational arguments for some tenets and foundations of faith. Given that al-Ṣadūq lives in this period of transition, highlighting his role and impact on legal theory, ḥadīth literature, theology, as well as his function as a scholar, is of great importance, something which Warner examines both within a socio-political and scholarly context.

When dealing with al-Ṣadūq as a *faqīh* (jurist), Warner wisely explores *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh* in the context of the development of legal theory in the absence of the Imam. This is prudent firstly as this book is one of the four canonical books for Ja'farī jurisprudence, but also because it is situated in a time when, as previously discussed, a transition is taking place from access to the Imams for legal matters, to losing that access. Warner highlights the style of the book being predominantly tradition based, much like the other books of al-Ṣadūq, with some rulings expressed in his own words. This allows a limited

reading into the narrators al-Ṣadūq considers reliable enough to narrate from, but does not expound on his “deeper standards” for evaluating the *asnād* (chains of transmission).

While Warner correctly places this section within the context of the development of legal theory in the absence of the Imam, it comes across as unstructured and perhaps out of place, namely because later in part two he deals with two theological texts independently in a more structured manner, laying out the macro structure of the respective books and elucidating on al-Ṣadūq as an author through relatable examples from the selected texts. He does not give the same regard for *Man lā yahḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, which is arguably a more well-known text of al-Ṣadūq. Furthermore, given al-Ṣadūq is most well known as a *faqīh*, it can be argued that there would be added value in dealing with his jurisprudential texts, *Man lā yahḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, *al-Muqniʿ*, and *ʿIlal al-sharāʿi* in part two of this book with considerably more structure, exploring al-Ṣadūq’s jurisprudential attitudes and methodology. Perhaps this was considered out of the scope of the book by the author, but it would have added a further dimension nonetheless.

In part two, Warner surveys two theological texts – *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* and *Kamāl al-dīn* – in greater detail, both being apologetic works to respond to the challenges of his environment, rather than aimed at being representative of al-Ṣadūq’s own theological positions. In *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, al-Ṣadūq highlights two beliefs that the Shīʿa are falsely accused of holding, *tashbīh* and *jabr*, and so one of the tasks of the author is to nullify the perception that the Shīʿa subscribe to these ideologies. Warner chooses these two chapters in *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* to illustrate al-Ṣadūq’s skill as an author and his scholarly capabilities. In Warner’s reading of the chapter on *tashbīh*, he is able to demonstrate al-Ṣadūq’s ability to understand that dealing with this accusation has various dimensions: a broader one in which the style is more apologetic, and a more nuanced one where specific details need to be established regarding the nature of God, His attributes, and the relationship between the two. What can be further deduced is that, given the context al-Ṣadūq lived in and the

challenges that arose following the greater occultation, his approach in using ḥadīth to respond to accusations can be interpreted as an attempt to convey the theology of the Imams from whom the Shī'a take their understanding of God and subsequently establishing the Imams as the authoritative source for the Shī'a in creedal matters.

The nature and purpose of *Kamāl al-dīn* on the other hand, is a book entirely different in its function and audience, one where the existence of an Imam is presumed and built upon to establish the legitimacy of the Twelfth Imam, his occultation, and to finally assert his reappearance as fact. An interesting element noted by Warner is that al-Ṣadūq does not attempt to use rational argumentation to make his case. Rather, he utilises the words of previous prophets and Imams who mentioned the existence of the Twelfth Imam, his occultation, and reappearance. This, according to Warner, is a clear display of al-Ṣadūq's understanding of the propensities of his audience at the time, who considered the words of the Imams and prophets as more authoritative than rational argumentation.

Both theological books chosen by Warner offer a great deal of engagement for Warner to explore his primary aim, i.e. shifting the view of a compiler of ḥadīth towards an author who has collected ḥadīth, and consciously structured the texts with the intent to address challenges of the time, using ḥadīth in a particular order to construct a coherent argument for his chosen position on a matter. Further, this method of compilation criticism is able to give further insight into the methodologies of al-Ṣadūq as a scholar, understanding the challenges and preoccupations of the people of his time, and not just an expert in compiling ḥadīth.

In conclusion, this book offers a great deal to a new genre of ḥadīth studies – compilation criticism – in which the compiler of ḥadīth is engaged with as an author with intent, not just as someone gathering traditions. In reading this book, al-Ṣadūq is brought to life as an individual who played a pivotal role in impacting the scholarly world of his time, as well as gaining an appreciation of al-Ṣadūq's methods

and how he dealt with the challenges of his environment. Furthermore, there is a framework laid out for engaging with other pillars in the Shīʿī ḥadīth world as intellectuals and scholars, not just compilers of narrations. While this book offers insight in these aspects, it is not likely to appeal to individuals who do not take interest in intellectual portraits of scholars, nor to those who have a limited background in ḥadīth studies.