

Al-Qalam Journal of Advanced Islamic Research

Issue 3



AL-QALAM JOURNAL
OF ADVANCED ISLAMIC RESEARCH

International Centre *for* Advanced
Islamic Research (ICAIR)



AL-QALAM JOURNAL
OF ADVANCED ISLAMIC RESEARCH

Al-Qalam Journal

ISSN 2755-3698

ISBN PAPERBACK: 978-1-78991-193-0 • ISBN HARDBACK: 978-1-78991-192-3

ISBN DIGITAL COPY: 978-1-78991-194-7

VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 3

International Centre *for* Advanced Islamic Research (ICAIR)

www.icair.ac • journal@icair.ac

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Transliteration

Arabic has been transliterated according to the following key:

ء	’	ض	ḍ
ا	a	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	‘
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dh	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	ه	h
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ي	y
ص	ṣ	ة	a; at in <i>idāfah</i>

Vowels and Diphthongs

آ	ā	أَوْ	aw
أُو	ū	أَيَّ	ay
إِ	ī		
أَ	a		
أُ	u		
إِ	i		

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Al-Qalam Journal



ARTICLES

From Ithnā-‘Ashariyya to Western Academia: Twelver Reactions to Historical Studies of the Formation of Twelver Doctrine

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ABSTRACT

Etan Kohlberg’s paper—“From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya”—was seen by the Twelver tradition to pose a challenge to the belief that the chain of Imams would end with the twelfth Imam. Building upon Kohlberg’s observations, Hossein Modarressi’s *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shī‘ite Islam* emphasised that hitherto overlooked Sunnī traditions supporting the doctrine of twelve Imams came to a timely rescue of a community in crisis, and since its publication (and subsequent translation in Persian), critiques still appear in print in Persian and Arabic. The critiques in the present paper concentrate on the responses offered in defense of the belief in Imams being twelve in number, and make three central arguments. First: the *aḥādīth* affirming the number of Imams as twelve were in circulation much before the occultation. Second: the doctrine was not considered important for the generation of Shī‘as living prior to the occultation. Third: the socio-political conditions necessitated the practicing of *taqiyya* which led to a cautious dissemination of this doctrine. This

paper also discusses the efforts made to publish works offering alternative historical models of Shī‘ī intellectual history. These efforts—coupled with the novel questions brought to the fore during debates surrounding *Crisis and Consolidation*—shaped the emergence of a rich discourse in Iranian scholarly circles. The paper’s final section outlines the emerging discourse on the relationship between history and theology, demonstrating how modern intellectual history intersects with the development of a religious intellectual tradition.

KEYWORDS: Twelve Imams, Twelver Doctrine, Occultation, Hossein Modarressi, theology, intellectual history.

Introduction

Modern historiography is infamous for its propensity to challenge historical narratives that religious communities hold with regards to their own origins and what they believe to be sacred. One of the earliest instances of this conflict can be traced back to the historical criticism of the Bible initiated by Baruch Spinoza in the 17th century. Another set of studies, later translated and titled as *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*¹, resulted in a destabilisation of faith in the Church’s depiction of Jesus. Islam was not exempt from this scrutiny: the revisionist school questioned the traditional beliefs about the origins of Islam. A most radical instance, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*², attributed the origins of Islam to Jewish messianic sects. Recent historical studies on the formation of Twelver Shī‘ism primarily undertaken in Western academia, challenged the traditional Twelver historical narrative of

¹ Albert Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, trans. William Montgomery, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (A. and C. Black: 1910).

² Patricia Cook and Michael Crone, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge University Press: 1977).

some of its tenets concerning the doctrine of Imamate.³

The Twelver Shī'ī community is characterised by a unique belief in a divine scheme of guidance that transcends the era of the Prophet (s) and continues through a lineage of Imams. These Imams, who are explicitly appointed by divine command, undertake leadership roles predicated on their exceptional attributes. These attributes include infallibility (*'isma*), divinely decreed boundless knowledge, the capacity to manipulate natural phenomena, and the ability to intercede on a believer's behalf. The lineage begins with 'Alī (a) and culminates in the twelfth Imam, the Mahdī (a), who entered a state of occultation at the tender age of five and is prophesied to re-emerge to usher in an era of global justice at the end of times.

Historical studies conducted within Western academia dedicated

³ This is not to undermine the Islamic tradition's engagement with its own history, or the fervent debates sparked by historical studies within the tradition. Intellectual history, as a modern discipline, finds its closest counterpart in Islamic civilisation within the heresiographical or *fīraq* literature. Books belonging to this genre can be traced back to the earliest centuries of Islamic intellectual production. The Shī'īs have also participated in historical debates, frequently invoking history to substantiate that 'Alī (a) was indeed appointed by the Prophet (s) and that 'Alī (a) himself believed it was his right to rule. The discourse and subsequent conflict following the publication of Shahīd Jāwīd in the latter half of the 20th century in Iran underscores the significance of the history of Karbala for Shī'ism and its propensity to provoke a theological debate and popular controversy. See Evan Siegel, "The Politics of Shahīd-e Jāwīd," in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende (eds.), *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture and Political History* (Brill: 2001), 150–177.

What distinguishes the current challenge is the application of secular academic intellectual history and philology to construct comprehensive models of early Shī'ī development. These models are perceived to question the originality of presently held religious beliefs. The studies in question are authored by researchers who claim neutrality and aloofness from siding with any of the theological positions under examination. Furthermore, the methodologies and concepts, often initially articulated in a foreign language, are believed to be influenced by Orientalism, thereby adding to the sensitivity of the issue. See Mohammad Taqī Sobhani et. al, *Naqd wa barrāsī-yi naẓariyī-yi taṭawwur-i tārikhī-yi tashayyū'* (Majma' 'ālī ḥikmat: 1388 Sh./2009), 7–8.

to writing an intellectual history of Shī‘ism have scrutinised the conception of the Imams held by Twelver orthodoxy. Dr. Hossein Modarressi, an alumnus of the Islamic seminary and a professor at Princeton University, delved into this issue, arguing that the political frustrations and theological challenges gradually led to an increasingly superhuman image of the Imams. The *mufawwiḍa* faction, rather than moderate Imāmīs, emphasised the Imams’ impeccable nature and extraordinary qualities, including knowledge of the unknown and divine-like attributes. Fabricated *aḥādīth* allowed the *mufawwiḍa* to infiltrate the Imāmī mainstream during the period of the later Imams, contrasting with the earlier cautious approach that considered such views as *ghuluww* (exaggeration). The moderate companions of Imam al-Šādiq (a), represented by ‘Abdullāh b. Abī Ya‘fūr simply regarded the Imams as pious learned men (*‘ulamā’ abrār atqiyā*).⁴

The Twelver sect also distinguishes itself from other Shī‘ī factions by adhering to the belief in a predetermined count of twelve Imams, with the twelfth Imam leading an extraordinarily prolonged existence in a state of occultation. In contrast, different branches of Ismailis and Zaydis historically maintained a continuous chain of living Imams even if the chain was believed to be concealed at some point in history. Historical research in Western academic settings suggests that the initial adherents of what eventually evolved into Twelver Shī‘ism were originally followers of Imāmī doctrine. These early Imāmīs upheld a lineage of Imams, the number of which was not predetermined, extending until the Day of Judgment. A critical juncture in this belief system occurred when it became necessary to justify the prolonged concealment, or *‘ghayba*, of the twelfth Imam. William Montgomery Watt was among the first scholars within Western academia to hint at this doctrinal shift.⁵ Kohlberg further illuminates the transition between

⁴ Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shī‘ite Islam: Abū Ja‘far ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and his Contribution to Imāmīte Shī‘ite Thought* (Darwin Press: 1993), 30, 47–51.

⁵ William Montgomery Watt, “Sidelights on Early Imamite Doctrine,” *Studia*

distinct doctrines and their resulting social identities,⁶ contending that prophetic traditions, initially used to justify the twelve Imams, were borrowed from Sunnī sources after the *ghayba*, aligning with the emerging Twelver doctrine.⁷ Modarressi notes how previously ignored Sunnī traditions were collected post-*ghayba* by Twelver traditionists, providing essential support during a time of existential crisis for the community.⁸

Historical research on the development of fundamental religious doctrines has elicited a range of reactions among believers and religious intellectuals. The Twelver Shī'ī reactions to these studies have been equally diverse. In relation to the characteristics of the Imams, Kadivar posits that a prevalent interpretation of Imamate among Shī'īs until the 5th Islamic century depicted the Imams as pious learned individuals. Kadivar asserts that the Imams themselves dismissed an alternative interpretation. Kadivar cites Hossein Modarressi's *Crisis and Consolidation* as supporting his views of normatively authentic Shī'ism.⁹ There have also been attempts to employ the findings of the book for political activism.¹⁰

Islamica 31 (1970): 287–298.

⁶ Etan Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-'Ashariyya," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39, no. 3 (1976): 521–534; Etan Kohlberg, "Early Attestations of the Term 'Ithnā' 'Ashariyya,'" *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 24 (2000), 343–357.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 99–102.

⁹ Mohsen Kadivar, "Qirā'at-i farāmūsh shudi az dīn," *Madrisi* no.3 (2006): 92–102.

¹⁰ In an article titled, "*Barsākhtihā-yi tārikhi*", Akbar Ganji, an Iranian dissident activist opposing the Islamic government of Iran and currently residing in the United States, endeavored to challenge, amongst other doctrines, the existence of the twelfth Imam, suggesting it was a later fabrication. He posited that Hossein Modarressi has historically demonstrated that the figure of the twelfth Imam was constructed due to a dispute over the legacy of the eleventh Imam. This stance potentially aids him in scrutinising the legitimacy of the

Nevertheless, Hossein Modarressi has consistently distanced himself from such assertions in multiple rebuttals to his detractors. He underscores that the book was written within a Western context,¹¹ and that his work is fundamentally an intellectual history of early Shī‘ism, written in line with the prevalent standards of Islamic Studies in Western academia. Thus, he highlights that his approach to scrutinising historical and religious reports diverges from the conventional norms

Guardianship of the Jurist, who governs as a representative of the twelfth Imam. Akbar Ganji, “*Barsākhtehā-yi tārikhi*”, *Rādiyo Zamaaneh*, https://zamaaneh.com/idea/2008/08/post_365.html.

¹¹This implies multiple considerations for the author. Primarily, it underscores the fact that the Shī‘is represent a “minority within a minority”. Consequently, the emphasis is on preserving unity with other Islamic sects, necessitating the presentation of a minimalist Shī‘ī doctrinal position. In addition, terminologies that carry negative connotations in western context should be avoided. Therefore, the author believes that the concept of infallibility (‘isma) of the Imams, which draws parallels with widely criticised doctrine of papal infallibility should be dropped in favor of the concept of purity (ṭahāra) supported by the wording of the Qur’an 33:33. This verse is traditionally invoked to prove the infallibility of the Ahl al-bayt. Otherwise, he does not see a fundamental difference between himself and one of the clerics propounding “maximalist” positions in Qom. See the email Modarressi wrote to his confidant Rasūl Ja‘farīyān in response to Ayatollah Milani’s foreword on Maktab dar Imtidād-i Hidāyat, made available by Jafarian on his Telegram channel at <https://t.me/jafarian1964/12880>. These may be seen as invalid excuses by religious scholars in Iran who believe the work in fact puts Shī‘ism in a negative light by positing that contemporary doctrinal understanding is inauthentic. For more details, see Ghulām Ḥasan Muḥarramī’s interview, which mentions the aforementioned letter. The interview is accessible at Muḥammad Jawād Ḥussaynẓādi, “Iddi‘āyi āghā-yi Modarressi Tabataba‘i dāstān ast,” *Mobahethāt*, <https://mobahesat.ir/24062>.

Ayatollah Milani also questions whether the Western context of the text justified an uncritical verbatim translation into Persian, devoid of any “corrections”. Ghulām Ḥasan Muḥarramī and Sayyid ‘Alī Ḥusaynī Milani, *Maktab dar Imtidād-e Hidāyat* (al-Ḥaqāyiq: 1401 Sh. /2022): 15. This discourse illustrates how present day concerns may affect intellectual historiography of Shī‘ism.

within the Islamic tradition.^{12 13}

However, several Shi'i scholars, including those affiliated with traditional seminaries and those possessing pertinent university education in Iran and Iraq, and even one within Western academia, have expressed potent criticisms of the findings presented by Watt, Kohlberg, and Modarressi. These critiques, disseminated through academic journals, scholarly books, and academic conferences, have unfolded in stages, upholding a stringent level of academic rigor whilst generally eschewing personal attacks or the questioning of motives. Some of these critics have adopted a forthright approach, penning books with titles that unambiguously articulate their critique of specific works. Conversely, others have endeavored to critically evaluate only a singular claim or piece of evidence presented in the aforementioned

¹² Modarressi, "Jawābiyyi-yi Hossein Mudarresi Tabataba'i bi naqd-i Hasan Tarumi," *Kitāb-i Māh-i Dīn* 142 (1388 Sh. /2009): 20–29. Despite his own objections to the book, this point has found sympathy with Hassan Ansari. Ansari, "Kitāb maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul wa tadhakkur-i du nukti," *Kātebān*. Accessed 25th May 2024, <https://ansari.kateban.com/post/2918>, and "Naqdhā-yi Hassan Ansari bar kitāb-i maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul ta'lif-i Hossein Modarressi," *Kātebān*, Accessed 25th May 2024, <https://ansari.kateban.com/post/3993>.

¹³ Intriguingly, in a correspondence to his confidant, the historian Rasul Jafarian, the author concedes his personal disagreement with the portrayal presented in the book. There was even a moment when he considered the publication of a counterargument under an assumed name. Rasul Jafarian, *Mukātibāt-i dūstāni-ye ustād duktur Hossein Modarresi Tabataba'i va Rasul Jafarian* (Muwarrikh: 1394 Sh./2015): 169. The subsequent disapproval of the scholarly work, presuming sincerity, exemplifies the tension which a believer encounters within the academic sphere. It underscores the formidable endeavor of authoring for an academic milieu that possesses its own historical trajectory of distinct secular research methodology and that has exhibited a persistent skepticism towards early Islamic sources. The academic milieu of the time, with the Revisionist School of Islamic Studies still influential when the book was published in 1993, should also be factored in. One of its leading proponents, Michael Cook is based at Princeton University since 1986. Hossein Modarressi has been a faculty member at the same university.

works.

The critiques, spanning approximately 70 books, articles and dissertations,¹⁴ employ a variety of strategies and follow several lines of argumentation.¹⁵ To mention a few, some scholars demonstrate that the Twelver doctrine, as understood today—including the number of Imams and their attributes—has historical antecedents during the era of the Imams, even if not universally comprehended by the entire Shī‘ī community. A number of critiques affirm the authenticity of the Shī‘ī *ḥādīth* corpus, asserting that the *ghulāt* could not have tampered with the *aḥādīth*, given the rigorous culture of *ḥādīth* transmission and authentication employed by the Imams and their companions when the *ḥādīth* books were being written.¹⁶ Some scholars have also endeavored

¹⁴ Listed in the appendix.

¹⁵ In addition to the strategies outlined in the text, Alviri has categorised the shortcomings identified in the critiques of *Crisis and Consolidation*. Each specific critique discusses some or either of these:

1. Confusion between intellectual history and theological critique based on intellectual history.
2. Epistemic fallacy.
3. Neglect of *taqīyya*.
4. Not accounting for a lack of societal preparedness for a minority ideology.
5. Ambiguous language usage.
6. Incorrect referencing.
7. Cherry-picking.
8. Incomplete quotation of reports.
9. Omission of references supporting important claims.
10. Lack of engagement with counter evidence.

Mohsen Alviri, “Gūneshenāsi-yi intiqādi-yi didgāhhā darbāri-yi tārikh wa chigūnigī-yi piydayish-i tashayyu,” *Tārikhi farhang wa tamaddun-i Islāmī* 3, no. 8 (1391 Sh./2012): 33–34. These titles also generally hold true for criticisms levelled at Kohlberg.

¹⁶ Sayyed Alireza Hosseini Shirazi and Ṭāhir ‘Azīz Wakīlī, “Bāzkhānī Guzārish Dass wa Tahṛīf-i Ghāliyyān dar Partow-i Kār kard-i Farhangī-yi Nahād-i Imāmat, *Imāmat Puzhūhī* 15 (1393 Sh./2014): 31–70; Muḥammad Mahdi Kassamali, A critical analysis of the views of Sayyed Hossein Modarressi Tabataba‘i regarding

to demonstrate that elements of belief attributed to the so-called *ghulāt* (exaggerators) were also shared by the members of the group identified as moderate Shī'īs, thus undermining the dichotomy.¹⁷

Critics have, however, unanimously recognised the gap left by tradition in its own intellectual history and the necessity to independently revisit its past using an academic methodology akin to that used by scholars in Western academia. This methodology should not be theological or rational, but rather one that examines intellectual ideas historically. Some critics have thus attempted to propose alternative interpretations and models of early Shī'ī intellectual history while generally acknowledging a historical progression of ideas amongst the members of the early Shī'ī community. Works written on these models are considered less challenging to faith and more faithful to historical data.¹⁸

The discussions pertaining to Western studies on the formation of Shī'ī doctrine and the ensuing critiques have led to the emergence of more profound questions. A discourse is gradually taking shape around these questions within Iranian academic circles. What is the precise definition of intellectual history, and how should an academic intellectual history of Shī'ism be composed? To what degree are history

the influence of the *ghulāt* on Imāmī theology, Masters Thesis, Department of Islamic History *Sīrah* and Civilization, Al-Mustafa International University, Qom, 2023.

¹⁷ For instance, Mohammad Baqer Malekian and Zoheyr Bolandghamatpoor, "Mi'yār-i ghuluww dar andishī-yi Shaykh-i Šadūq," *Ma'rifat-i kalāmī* 1 (1391 Sh./2012): 47–62.

¹⁸ See Hadi Gerami, *Nukhustīn munāsibāt-i fikrī-yi tashayyū': Bāzkhānī-yi mafhūm-i ghuluww dar jaryānhā-yi mutaqaddim-i Imāmī* (Dāneshgāh-i Imam Šadiq: 1391 Sh./2012); Muḥarramī, *Barrasī-yi tārikhī-yi tafakkur-i Shī'ī-yi Ithnā 'Ashariyya* (Pazhūhishgāh-i farhang wa andishī-yi Islāmī: 1393 Sh./2014); Mahdi Farmanian, Mustafa Sadeqi Kashani, *Nigāhī bi tārikh-i tafakkur-i Imāmiyya: az āghāz tā zuhūr-i Šafawīyya* (Pazhūhishgāh-i 'ulūm wa farhang-i Islāmī: 1394 Sh./2015); Muatafa Motahhari, *Naqsh-i 'anāšir-i tārikhī dar tabyīn-i 'aqāyid-i Ahl-i Bayt* (Dār al-ḥadīth: 1394 Sh./2015).

and theology mutually dependent, and is it possible to authenticate or refute theological assertions through historical analysis, or vice versa? Does the gradual historical evolution of a doctrine necessarily invalidate its theological basis?

While Western academia continues its investigation into the genesis of nascent Shī‘ism, maintaining a critical perspective on its own assumptions about sources and methodologies,¹⁹ the reactions and criticisms from Shī‘ī scholars, particularly those expressed in non-European languages, often receive insufficient attention.

This study aims to elucidate the responses provided by Twelver Shī‘ī scholars to studies concerning the formation of Twelver doctrine. We particularly focus on responses from researchers who disseminate their ideas in Persian and Arabic languages. Amongst the number of topics addressed by the critics—as a case study—we only concentrate on the specific doctrine stipulating the count of Imams as twelve. We further aim to outline the emergence of a discourse developing among Shī‘ī intellectuals regarding Shī‘ī intellectual history and the interplay of history and theology as academic disciplines.

We have examined a comprehensive range of resources. These include published books and articles, transcripts of conferences, book reviews, online books, blog posts, and interviews by Shī‘ī intellectuals.

Our study period ranges from 1976, the year of publication of Kohlberg’s “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya” up to the preparation of this manuscript in 2024. An appendix at the end of this paper lists and provides the details of academic works in print, works available online, conferences and blog posts written by Shī‘ī scholars that critically engage with Modarressi in general.

¹⁹ Edmund Hayes, *Agents of the Hidden Imam: Forging Twelver Shī‘ism*, 850–950 CE (Cambridge University Press: 2022), 23; Sajjad Rizvi, “Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi: The Spirituality of Shī‘ī Islam,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies* 75, no. 2 (2012): 379–80; Robert Gleave, “Recent Research into the History of Early Shī‘ism,” *History Compass* 7 (2009), 1593–1605.

An exposition of the shift from Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya

In this section, we aim to accurately explicate the narrative presented by Kohlberg and Modarressi. Kohlberg’s article, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya”, was published in 1976 whilst Modarressi’s book, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi‘ite Islam*, was published in 1993. Whilst many of their arguments are identical, Modarressi’s work does contain some significant differences that shall be highlighted.

According to Kohlberg, the earliest evidence for the belief in a line of twelve Imams is to be found in heresiographical literature. Al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, in *Kitāb firaq al-Shi‘a*²⁰, and Sa‘d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Qummī, in *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-l-firaq*²¹, (both completed around 287/900) describe the state of the Shi‘ī community after the death of the eleventh Imam who was poisoned by the caliph al-Mu‘tamid in the year 260/874. The most important sect, the Imāmiyya, believed that Imam al-‘Askarī had died leaving an heir who had gone into hiding. There is no explicit mention of how long his occultation would last nor is there any mention of the possibility of two occultations. More significantly, there is no mention of the number of Imams having reached twelve or any significance of this number.²² Further evidence of the absence of a ‘specifically Twelver Shi‘ī doctrine’ is provided by the lack of mention of any narration that mentions the idea of twelve Imams in Imāmī sources contemporaneous to the death of the eleventh Imam (a) or the idea of a *ghayba* (occultation) of the final Imam. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/903) in *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*²³ has many narrations regarding the virtues of the Imams but does not mention any

²⁰ Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shi‘a* (Dār al-aḍwā’: 1983).

²¹ Sa‘d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Ash‘arī, *al-Maqālāt wa-l-Firaq*, ed. Muḥammad Jawād Mashkur (Markaz-i intishārāt-i ‘ilmī wa farhangī: 1981)

²² Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 521-522.

²³ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt fī faḍāilī āli Muḥammad* (Maktab Ayatollah al-Mara‘shī al-Najafi: 1983).

narration that implies that Imamate would be limited to twelve. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893) similarly does not mention any such narration in *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin*²⁴, even though the first section of his book, *Kitāb al-ashkāl wa-l-qarā’in*, is dedicated to traditions dealing with the significance of various numbers, from 3 to 10, clearly deeming it not necessary to proceed up to the number twelve.²⁵ Furthermore, al-Barqī cites a famous narration in which al-Khiḍr meets Imam ‘Alī (a) and reveals the names of the Imams. As compared to other later renderings of this narration that has the name of all twelve Imams, in the version reported by al-Barqī, al-Khiḍr only mentions the names of ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and the reporter adds ‘and he counted every last one of them’ without specifying the names or number of Imams after al-Ḥusayn.²⁶ According to Kohlberg, since both the abovementioned works, were compiled either before or shortly after the beginning of the minor occultation (*al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*), the belief in twelve Imams had thus not yet been formulated as part of the Imāmi creed until that time.²⁷

It is only towards the middle of the fourth/tenth century where the belief in twelve Imams can be seen in Shī‘ī works. In the *Tafsīr* of ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 307/919), the al-Khiḍr tradition referred to above appears with the names of all twelve Imams.²⁸ Similar narrations are found in Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941)’s *al-Kāfī*. More than 150 narrations alluding to the same can also be found in al-Khazzāz al-Rāzi al-Qummī (d. 381/991)’s magnum opus *Kifāyat al-athar fī l-nuṣūṣ ‘alā l-a‘immat al-ithnay ‘ashar*. Al-Nu‘mānī (d. 360/971) also gathered

²⁴ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥaddith (Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1992).

²⁵ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 521-522.

²⁶ Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, 332.

²⁷ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 523.

²⁸ ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, ed. Ṭayyib al-Mūsawī al-Jazā‘irī, (Najaf:1967), 2:44.

narrations that explicitly mention twelve Imams in his *Kitāb al-ghayba* (completed in 342/953) as did al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) in his *Kamāl al-dīn*.

Kohlberg further adds that belief in the occultation of the last Imam was elucidated as a direct corollary of the belief in twelve Imams. From the proposition that there are only twelve Imams, it follows that the last Imam must be alive (since mankind cannot remain without a guide), and in order to protect himself, must remain in occultation. The narrations that discuss this occultation are therefore directly related to our study of the formation of the Twelver creed. Apparently, there are some contradictions within these narrations. Al-Nu'mānī, who wrote his book *al-Ghayba* thirteen years after the beginning of the major occultation, quotes a narration from the sixth Imam (a) in which the Imam (a) implies that there will be two occultations, the first of which is the longer one. However, this contradicts other narrations as well as orthodox beliefs. Kohlberg comments:

The impression gained from the discrepancy between the description of the respective lengths of the first and second *ghaybas* is that initially it was not quite clear which of the two would last longer; only later was it established that the second concealment (also known as *al-ghayba al-tāmma* 'the complete concealment') would also be the longer one.²⁹

Having succinctly gone through the stages of growth in the Twelver doctrine, Kohlberg then turns his attention to the pivotal question: "to what extent can the traditions on which that doctrine is based be traced back to the period preceding the disappearance of the twelfth Imam?"³⁰ His answer is that both the number twelve and the idea of the occultation are very early motifs in Islamic history and traditions discussing twelve successors can be found circulating in Sunnī *ḥadīth* literature long before the beginning of the minor occultation.

²⁹ Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿAshariyya," 528.

³⁰ Ibid, 529.

As for the narrations discussing the *ghayba*, this was a belief commonly found amongst earlier Shī‘ī sects including the Wāqifis, the *ghulāt*, as well as the *qaṭ‘īyya* (who were the forerunners of the Twelvers). “Clearly, then, the sources on which Twelver Shī‘ism drew had been extant long before the ‘lesser’ *ghayba*. These sources merely had to be brought into line with the nascent Ithnā-‘asharī dogma. This was achieved mainly through a process of reinterpretation of existing material.”³¹

Kohlberg maintains that Twelver Shī‘ī theologians “could not be content with such a view of the origins of their faith; by projecting their doctrine backwards they sought to prove that specifically Ithnā-‘asharī beliefs had been held by the Imāmiyya prior to the ‘period of confusion (*ḥayra*)’ (which is the term used to describe the time following the disappearance of the twelfth Imam).”³² They therefore claimed that narrations discussing the twelve Imams can be found in the four hundred primary *uṣūl* that were written down by the companions of the sixth Imam (a). Al-Nu‘mānī went further and stated that such narrations can even be found in the book *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, which was supposedly written by a companion of Imam ‘Alī (a). According to Kohlberg, the problem with such an argument is that:

While such claims are nominally correct, it must be remembered that the names of the twelve Imāms do not appear in these sources. *Al-Uṣūl al-arba‘u mi’a* contain a tradition about eleven (!) unnamed Imāms, the last of whom would be the Qā‘im, and a saying by Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq to the effect that after the Prophet there will be seven Imāms, the last of whom will be the Qā‘im. As for the *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, serious doubts as to its authenticity persist among Shī‘īs and non-Shī‘īs alike. Furthermore, the possibility of later additions cannot

³¹ Ibid, 532.

³² Ibid, 532.

be entirely ruled out.³³

Based on the above depiction, it appears that the belief in twelve Imams as well as the occultation of the final Imam were doctrines adapted from other groups. The former was taken from the Sunnīs and the latter from earlier Shīʿī sects. In another article written by Kohlberg in 2000, “Early attestations of the term *‘ithnā ‘ashariyya’*,” Kohlberg concludes that there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that the term *Ithnā-‘ashariyya* was in use during the minor occultation. The earliest firmly datable attestation is in al-Mas‘ūdī’s *al-Tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf* written in 344-345/955-956.³⁴

Modarressi makes similar arguments in the third chapter of his book, *Crisis and Consolidation*. According to him, when the minor occultation began, no one, except for ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī and his close associates, expected the occultation to last for such a long period of time. A contemporaneous rumor suggested that the Imam (a) would remain in hiding for either six days, six months or a maximum of six years. In his footnote, Modarressi references this rumor in a narration quoted by al-Nu‘mānī who quotes a narration from al-Kulaynī. However, the latter’s rendition mentions “six days, six months or six years” whilst the former’s rendition changes this phrase to “a period of time.” The same report is mentioned by al-Ṭūsī in his *al-Ghayba* but he completely omits the part of the report that discusses the length of the occultation!³⁵

It did not take long for the Shīʿī community to realise that this was the occultation that was mentioned in their narrations that were circulating about a century ago. Like Kohlberg, Modarressi also claims that the narrations regarding the two occultations are conflicting regarding which of the two occultations would be the shorter one and which would be the longer one.³⁶ These narrations were previously used

³³ Ibid, 532-533.

³⁴ Kohlberg, “Early Attestations of the Term Ithna-‘Ashariyya,” 165.

³⁵ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 87.

³⁶ Ibid, 87.

by the Wāqifis in order to bolster their claim that Imam al-Kāzīm was the Qā'im. Like Kohlberg, Modarressi also concedes that the idea of occultation was one that was previously well-established in the Shī'ite mentality.³⁷

As the occultation prolonged, the Shī'ī faith began to weaken and a state of extreme doubt crept into the minds of the believers. However, it was due to the continuous efforts of the Imāmī transmitters of *ḥādīth* that the situation reversed at the turn of the third/ninth century. There was a well-known statement attributed to the Prophet by the Sunnī transmitters of *ḥādīth* according to which he predicted that there would be twelve caliphs after him, all from his tribe, the Quraysh. The different renditions of this narration were present in several Sunnī books much before the occultation and thus no one can claim that the statement was in any way authored by the Imāmīs in the post-occultation period. Modarressi further adds that

There is no evidence in any work written before the last decades of the third/ninth century that suggests that this statement had ever attracted the attention of the Shī'ite traditionists or that anyone in the Shī'ite community had ever thought it might concern them.³⁸

Referencing Kohlberg, Modarressi also repeats the claim that the likes of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār (d. 290/903) does not refer to such a statement in his *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* and neither do Sa'd b. 'Abdullāh al-Ash'arī or Ibn Qība, all from the latter part of the third/ninth century.³⁹ Interestingly, in the Persian translation of his book, Modarressi claims that there are two narrations in *Baṣā'ir* that explicitly mention the idea of twelve Imams but these seem to be later interpolations.⁴⁰ The

³⁷ Ibid, 87-88.

³⁸ Ibid, 100.

³⁹ Ibid, 100.

⁴⁰ Modarressi, *Maktab dar farāyandi takāmūl: Naẓarī bar taṭawwuri mabāniyi fikrīyi tashayyū' dar si qarni nakhustīn*, (Intishārātī kavīr: 1386 Sh./2007), 191-

narration in the book of Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays is also dismissed as being a later addition.

Two similar reports that quoted the Prophet as predicting twelve noble chiefs “from among his descendants,” the last of them being the *qā'im* who would fill the earth with equity and justice, appeared in a collection of *ḥadīths* ascribed to the Kūfan Zaydite transmitter of *ḥadīth*, ‘Abbād b. Ya‘qūb al-Rawājīnī (d. ca. 250/864) (al-Kulaynī, 1:534).⁴¹

According to Modarressi, the reason why the Imāmīs were never attracted to such a prophecy was because

The Imāmīte community in the first decades of the Occultation still expected that the order of the Imāms would continue its normal path in the descendants of Ḥasan al-‘Askarī until the end of time.⁴²

The idea of the Imams being restricted to twelve was an idea first put forward by Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī and ‘Alī b. Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 329/941), from amongst those authors whose works have survived. The former has a chapter in his *Kitāb al-Kāfī* where he gathered twenty such reports. However, according to Modarressi, the chapter seems to be a later supplement, possibly added by the author himself later in his life. But what evidence do we have to doubt the authenticity of the reports collected by al-Kulaynī?

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nu‘mānī was a pupil and close associate of al-Kulaynī and personally copied his above-mentioned work [referring to *al-Kāfī*] (see Maḥfūz: 19). In the chapter of his *Kitāb al-Ghayba* that deals with the question of the exact number of

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⁴¹ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 101.

⁴² Ibid, 101.

the Imāms (pp. 57-111), al-Nu‘mānī tried his best to collect all reports he could find on that matter. After the completion of the book he found yet two more reports and added them to the chapter (pp. 97-101) as attested by a note that the principal transmitter of the book, Abū l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Shujā‘ī (Najāshī: 383), added before those two reports (p. 97). The work, as noted, was compiled some ten years after the death of al-Kulaynī. al-Nu‘mānī, however, failed to quote sixteen of the total twenty reports included in that chapter of the *Kāfi*, though he quoted some of those reports from other Shī‘ite authorities of *ḥadīth*. This clearly indicates that in his copy of the *Kāfi* those sixteen reports, especially those that he quoted on other authorities, did not exist, particularly if one notes that al-Nu‘mānī’s special preference for what is reported by al-Kulaynī. This is well attested by the fact that in one case in which he received one of those reports recorded in the *Kāfi* through a different source too, he quoted that on the authority of al-Kulaynī and merely referred to some additional words in a different transmission of it that was narrated by “some others” (pp. 94-95). Apart from four reports that al-Nu‘mānī quoted from the above-mentioned chapter of the *Kāfi*, he quoted also a fifth report on the authority of al-Kulaynī that he quoted from ‘Alī in the chapter of the Occultation of the *Kāfi*, but major differences exist between al-Nu‘mānī’s quotation from al-Kulaynī and what is in the present version of the *Kāfi*. In the *Kāfi*, 1:338, the duration of the Occultation is, as noted before, given as “six days, six months or six years.” In al-Nu‘mānī:61 this phrase is

recorded as “a period of time.”⁴³

To summarise, both Kohlberg and Modarressi believe that the belief in twelve Imams was a later addition to the Imāmī creed. Kohlberg suggests that this belief was adopted towards the middle of the fourth/tenth century whilst Modarressi holds that this amendment took place during the end of the minor occultation (260/874 – 329/941) and the beginning of the major occultation. Some scholars have suggested that perhaps Modarressi worked in tandem with Kohlberg to reach such a conclusion⁴⁴ whilst others exclude such a possibility as Kohlberg’s article was published in 1976 at which time Modarressi was still in Iran.⁴⁵

Twelver responses

Kohlberg has been praised for his meticulous research and extolled for his efforts in citing original Shī‘ī sources, something that is less often seen in Western academia. Some scholars have even considered Kohlberg to be unique in terms of the vast number of Shī‘ī textual references that can be seen in his works.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, a plethora of responses have been given to his arguments, that are usually mentioned alongside a critique of Modarressi’s work. Due to the vast number of critiques levelled against the abovementioned narrative, in this section we shall divide the responses based on each assertion.

⁴³ Ibid, 102-103.

⁴⁴ Alireza Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāhi naqd: Silsiliyi nishasthāyi ‘ilmī-yi anjūmani tāriḥpazhūhān naqd-i kitāb wa naqd-i naẓariyyi* (Mu’assisi-yi intishārāt-i khākriẓ: 1388 Sh./2009), 160.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 202.

⁴⁶ Seyed Abdul-Rahim Hoseini et al., “Barrasī wa naqd-i ravish-i Etan Kohlberg dar bahrigīrī az manābi’ imāmī dar muṭālī’āt-i shī‘ī-yi imāmī”, *Faṣlnāmi-yi taḥqīqāt-i kalāmī*, 7(26), (1398 Sh./ 2020), 80.

Lack of mention of the idea of twelve Imams in pre-occultation sources

Before delving into specific sub-arguments, some general critiques that can be seen in the literature shall be presented.

The argument that the Shī‘ī community borrowed some aspect of their tenets from other groups or that the Twelver sect was a later formation not found in the early days of Islam is not a new claim at all. In fact, similar claims can be traced back to the first centuries of the Islamic civilisation.⁴⁷ Even amongst Orientalists, such a claim is not new and has been put forward by others before Kohlberg.⁴⁸

The belief in the number of Imams being limited to twelve was never a necessary credal tenet during the time of the Imams. At the time of each Imam, it was necessary for each believer to recognise the Imam of his age, know that he was divinely appointed (*manṣūb min Allāh*) and must be fully obeyed (*muftaraḍ al-ṭā‘a*).⁴⁹ In order to ascertain the

⁴⁷ Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni‘ma*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1975), 1:67; See also, Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāh-i naqd*, 169, 183; For a detailed study and critique of differing opinions about the origins of Shī‘ism, see Alviri, “Gūnishināsī-yi intiqādī-yi didgāhhā,” 7-52.

⁴⁸ For example, see Montgomery W. Watt, “Sidelights on Early Imāmite Doctrine”, *Studia Islamica* (1970): 287-298; Alviri, “Naqd-i naẓariyī-yi dar piydayish-i Shī‘i-yi ithnā ‘asharī”, *Faṣlnāmi-yi pazhūheshhā-yi dāneshgāh-i Imam Sadiq*, 2, (1374 Sh./1995), 53; Ahmad Akbari, “Examining Etan Kohlberg’s works and opinions on Mahdism” (Masters Diss., Al-Mustafa International University, 2021), 129-130.

⁴⁹ The famous report of the Prophet alludes to this, “Whoever dies and does not recognise the Imām of his age dies a death of ignorance” (Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar Ghaffārī, (Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1986), 2:21). This narration has mass transmission (*tawāṭur*) amongst both Sunnis and Shī‘īs (See Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-anwār al-jāmi‘at li durari l-akhbār al-a‘immat al-aṭhār*, ed. Muḥammad Bāqir Mahmudi (Dār ihyā’ al-turāth al-‘Arabī: 1983), 8:368). In another report of Imam al-Ṣādiq, the reward for those who visit the grave of Imam Ḥusayn is conditioned upon knowing that his imamate was by divine appointment and

divine appointment of the current Imam, it was necessary to know the previous Imams until the Prophet (as the Prophet made an explicit designation (*naṣṣ*) of the Imamate of Imam ‘Alī who in turn did the same for Imam Ḥasan and so forth). In such a setting, it was not necessary to know the next Imam nor was it fundamental to believe how many Imams were going to come in total. What supports this observation is that in several reports, companions would come to Imam al-Ṣādiq presenting their beliefs to him for verification. In many of these reports, the companions would list their belief in the Imams from Imam ‘Alī to Imam al-Ṣādiq, and the Imam would commend their belief without pointing out to them that a central tenet of their belief that they needed to attest to was that there would be twelve Imams in total, or who the next Imams were.⁵⁰ Of course, some Shī‘as were still eager to know who the next Imam would be and would thus attempt to ask the Imam about this matter at a time when it was possible for the Imam to reveal such information.⁵¹

It was only after the beginning of the Imamate of the twelfth Imam and the commencement of the minor occultation that it became necessary to know all twelve Imams.⁵² In the later parts of the occultation

the obligation of obeying him (see al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī* (Mu’assisat al-bi’tḥat: 1996), 684). Similarly, in the famous narration in which Imam al-Riḍa says, “*Lā ilāha illā l-Allāh* is the divine fortress,” the Imam concludes by stating that he himself is one of the conditions for entering the fortress; here, al-Ṣadūq notes that the meaning of this condition is attesting that Imam al-Riḍa is the divinely appointed Imam upon the people and his obedience is obligatory (al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Syed Hashim Husseinī (Jāmi‘i-yi mudarrisīn), 25).

⁵⁰ See al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:188; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥassan al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār ma’rifat al-rijāl*, ed. Mehdi Rajā’ī (Mu’assisat āl al-bayt: 1983), 2:717, 718; Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Nu’mān al-Mufīd, *al-Amālī*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Dār al-Mufīd: 1993), 32.

⁵¹ Hamed Montazeri Moghaddam, “Rahyāftī no bi tārikh-i piydayish-i tashayy‘-i ithnā ‘asharī: Shikl gīrī bi hingām”, *Tārikh-i Islām dar āyeni-ye pazhūhish*, 16 (2), 47 (1398 Sh./2020), 88-90.

⁵² Majid Khayrabadi, “Barrasī-yi mas’ali-yi “Ithnā ‘Ashariyya” dar neẓām-i

such a tenet became necessary to differentiate the mainstream Imāmī community from those who believed that there would be an infinite chain of Imams until the Day of Judgement.⁵³ This does not negate the fact that some of the early Imāmīs were aware of such narrations, just that it was not a fundamental tenet that stood out as a unique feature of Imāmī beliefs. It is important to differentiate between having the title or label of Ithnā ‘ashariyya, and the belief in twelve imams. The former is something that emerged later in order to differentiate the mainstream Imāmiyya from other fringe sects but the latter was a belief that always existed, even prior to the occultation.⁵⁴

Another significant point to bear in mind in this discussion is that the crux of both Kohlberg and Modarressi’s argument is that works written before the minor occultation do not mention the concept of twelve Imams, and it is only later scholars like al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941) who mention this. Aside from the fact that there are indeed reports of the twelve Imams in extant works written before the occultation, as will be shown, it is erroneous to establish whether a certain tenet existed in the Imāmī creed on the basis of whether that tenet existed in written works from a certain time period. The compilers of these *ḥadīth* collections were known for their reliability and character and would transcribe what they had orally heard from their teachers and other narrators, who were also known for their veracity and trustworthiness. As such, if someone like al-Kulaynī narrates from a chain of reliable narrators, that reaches the Imams or their direct companions, then it hardly seems accurate to suggest that the purport of the said narration first appeared during the time of al-Kulaynī. Due to the oral tradition,

imāmat-i Shī‘a wa naqd-i barkhī shubuhāt wāred bar ān” (Masters Diss., Dāneshkadi-yi ‘Ulūm-i Ḥadīth, 1390 Sh./2011), 247; Moghaddam, “Rahyāfti no”, 83-102.

⁵³ Moghaddam, “Bāzkhāni wa naqd-i dīdgāhhā-yi Kolberg wa Modarresi Ṭabataba’i darbāri-yi piydayish-i tashayy’-i dawāzdah Imāmī”, *Tārikh-i Islām dar āyini-ye pazhūhish* 17, no. 48 (1399 Sh./2021), 111

⁵⁴ Khayrabadi, “Barrasi-yi mas’ali-yi “Ithnā ‘Ashariyyah””, 227

an idea would have been in circulation much earlier than the period it was first recorded, not to mention the socio-political circumstances of the early centuries, in which there was a governmental ban on recording *ḥadīth*.⁵⁵ What is noteworthy is that in many of these narrations, there are explicit references to the year in which one narrator heard the narration from the other narrator.⁵⁶ Furthermore, people like Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī are explicitly mentioned as part of the chain of narrators in later works like *al-Kāfi*, and there is no evidence to indicate that these later works were fabricating narrations and anachronistically ascribing them to earlier scholars.⁵⁷

A further methodological flaw is that these studies fail to take into consideration that a vast number of the earliest Shīʿī writings are no longer extant. Those writings were consolidated into later compendiums, and thus, even if one were to accept the premise that the birth of an idea is directly linked to when it was first transcribed, because the earliest works are not available to us, we cannot exclude the possibility that those ideas existed previously.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Alviri, "Naqd-i naẓariyi," 58; Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāhe naqd*, 164, 175, 196.

⁵⁶ See for example Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, ed. 'Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Maktabat al-Ṣadūq: 1977), 57 and 67; For a more comprehensive list see Moghaddam, "Rahyāfti-ye nu," 91-92.

⁵⁷ Alviri, "Naqd-i naẓariyi," 58; Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāhe naqd*, 164. For example, al-Kulaynī narrates the famous al-Khiḍr narration (that shall be discussed later in depth) which contains the names of the twelve Imams and then adds, "And it was reported to me by Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā from Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār [the author of *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*] from Aḥmad b. Abī 'Abdillāh [i.e., Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd, the author of *al-Maḥāsin*] from Abī Hāshim, the same [al-Khiḍr narration]. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā says, 'I told Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan [al-Ṣaffār], 'O Abā Ja'far, I wish this narration had come from other than Aḥmad b. Abī 'Abdillāh.' He replied, 'He narrated this narration to me 10 years before the ḥayrah.'" (*al-Kāfi*, 1:526-527).

⁵⁸ Alviri, "Naqd-i naẓariyi," 62.

Furthermore, even if, hypothetically, one was to accept the argument of Kohlberg and Modarressi that the Imāmīs incorporated the belief in twelve Imams and the occultation of the Mahdī from Sunnī literature, how are we to explain the plethora of narrations that speak about the other qualities of the Mahdī such as the signs of his reappearance? For what purpose were these narrations fabricated, or assimilated from Sunnī books? Furthermore, given the profound differences in the narrations related to Mahdism between the Shī‘ī and Sunnī ḥadīth corpus, under what motive did the Shī‘as alter the wordings of their narrations? What explanation can be given for the *tawqī‘āt* (rescripts issued by the twelfth Imam to his representatives during the minor occultation)? Were they also adoptions from other sects? Or were they fabrications? And if so, for what purpose were they fabricated?⁵⁹

It seems that the socio-political context in which the early Imāmīs were living has not been considered in the above portrayal. It is a well-attested historical fact that the Shī‘a were under constant persecution and harassment which necessitated that both the Imams and their followers practice *taqiyya* (dissimulation). Is it reasonable to expect that in such conditions, narrations about sensitive topics such as the names of the Imams, designation of the next Imam, and perhaps even the number of the Imams, would be widespread and extensively relayed? The same can also be seen in the narrations that discuss the Mahdī, who was clearly perceived as a threat to the ruling authorities.⁶⁰

Consider the following examples that illustrate the sensitivities of that era. In a report in *al-Maḥāsin*, Mu‘adh b. Muslim brings his brother ‘Umar to Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). In response to the question of what constitutes the necessities of faith, which nothing other than shall be

⁵⁹ Ibid, 64.

⁶⁰ To the extent that even during the era of Imam al-Bāqir (a), the Imam refuses to divulge the name of the twelfth Imam, citing that even from the progeny of Fāṭima some would wish to kill him if they were to identify him. See al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 288-289; Alviri, “Naqd-i naẓariyi,” 65; Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāhi naqd*, 166.

accepted by God, the Imam mentions attestation to the oneness of God, the prophethood of Muḥammad and the Imamate of the true Imams from the progeny of Muḥammad. ‘Umar responds by asking for the names of these Imams to which the Imam responds by mentioning by name Imam ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn and Muḥammad b. ‘Alī and then says “and Allah gives goodness to whoever He wills.” ‘Umar, perplexed as to why the Imam did not mention his own name, questions the Imam as to whether he is from amongst the Imams? The Imam cryptically responds by saying, “this affair flows for the last of us just as it flows for the first of us and Muḥammad and ‘Alī have a virtue over both.” ‘Umar is not satisfied and proceeds to repeat his question three more times and each time he gets a similar cryptic response.⁶¹ In another report, Imam al-Kāẓim informs Yazīd b. Salīṭ of his martyrdom in that year and that the Imam after him would be his son ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, who would not be able to speak freely except four years after the demise of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.⁶²

Thus, in such a socio-political context, it is unreasonable to think that narrations detailing the names and identities of the twelve Imams would be in wide circulation. Rather, only the innermost circle of companions closest to the Imams were privy to such matters, which later on became widespread. In what seems contrary to the central idea of his book, Modarressi attests to this fact in a footnote where he says, “This is, of course, the chronological order of how the community came to know the fact. This certainly does not exclude that the fact was already revealed by God to the Prophet and via him to the Imams and that they had already informed their reliable associates, as verified by many Imamite and even non-Imamite reports.”⁶³ Taking a more definite stance in the Farsi translation of his work, Modarressi writes, “It is necessary to reiterate and emphasise here, as previously stated, that

⁶¹ Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, 288-289.

⁶² Al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. Mehdi Lājiwardī (Jahān), 1:24-26.

⁶³ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 89, footnote 195.

this book is a history of the sect and not a theological treatise. From the perspective of proof and theological reasoning, given the overwhelming multitude of relevant narrations, evidence, and countless indications, no reasonable and fair-minded person can doubt that the blessed names of the pure Imams were known to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him and his family), the pure Imams (peace be upon them), and those whom these eminent figures informed. The discussion revolves around how the Shi‘ī community, meaning ordinary individuals (including narrators and others, i.e., everyone except the custodians of the secrets of Imamate), became aware of these truths.”⁶⁴

1.1 Lack of mention of the idea of twelve Imams by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893) in *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin*

According to Kohlberg, the absence of the doctrine of twelve Imams, or the occultation of the last Imam, can be supported by a lack of mention of any narration indicating to the same in one of the earliest *ḥadīth* compilations, the *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin*.⁶⁵ Kohlberg adds that it is noteworthy that al-Barqī dedicated sections to narrations dealing with numerical issues, from three to ten, not bothering to allocate a chapter for the number twelve, as opposed to later scholars such as al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), who in his *al-Khiṣāl*, enumerates narrations dealing with numerical issues from one to over a thousand, and thus has a chapter on the number twelve where several narrations mentioning the twelve Imams are presented.⁶⁶

Several responses to this claim can be seen in the literature. Firstly, it is not possible to say with certainty what was omitted by al-Barqī in his *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin* as the aforementioned book has not reached us in

⁶⁴ Modarressi, *Maktab dar farāyande takāmūl*, 196, footnote 1.

⁶⁵ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 523.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

its totality. In fact, only one-third of the original book is extant today.⁶⁷ Secondly, the purpose of al-Ṣadūq in his *al-Khiṣāl* was to gather all such numerical narrations as opposed to al-Barqī who had no such intention. The latter only cited forty such narrations, most of them dealing with ethical matters, under the chapter *Kitāb al-ashkāl wa-l-qarā'in*. In fact, even the famous narration stating that 'Islam is founded upon five things' was not brought in the aforesaid chapter but was recorded under the chapter, '*Bāb al-Sharā'i*'.⁶⁸

Thirdly, whilst there may not be a direct reference to the idea of the twelve Imams in *al-Maḥāsin*, one of al-Barqī's other works that is extant today is *Rijāl al-Barqī* which chronologically mentions the names of those who narrated from the Prophet (s) and each of the Imams, until Imam al-ʿAskarī (a), which clearly alludes to the belief in twelve Imams.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Moghaddam, "Bāzkhānī wa naqd," 110; Akbari, "Examining Etan Kohlberg's works," 124. According to al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin* was made up of 98 chapters (see *al-Fihrist* ed. Jawād Qayyūmī (Mu'assisat nashr al-faqāhat: 2001), 44-45) and according to al-Najāshī, 90 chapters (see *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, ed. Mūsa Shubbayri Zanjānī (Mu'assisat al-nashr al-Islāmī: 1986), 76-77). By comparing the names of the chapters in both the above works and deducting repetitions, we reach a total of 120 chapters, a far cry from the extant version of *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin* that only contains 11 chapters! (Muḥammad Jawād Shubbayri Zanjānī, "Barqī, Abū Ja'far," *Dāneshnāmeḥ-e Jahān-e Eslām* 3, 158-160).

⁶⁸ Moghaddam, "Bāzkhānī wa naqd," 111; Alviri, "Naqd-i naẓarīyī," 59; Seyed Abdul-Rahim Hoseini et al., "Barrasī wa naqd-i rawish-i Etan Kohlberg," 86; Akbari, "Examining Etan Kohlberg's works," 125.

⁶⁹ Alviri, "Naqd-i naẓarīyī," 55; This argument is only effective to the extent that the authors of *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin* and *Rijāl al-Barqī* are considered one and the same; this is the popular opinion and amongst the earlier scholars was espoused by al-Najāshī (see *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 76) and al-Ṭūsī (al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī* ed. Jawād Qayyūmī (Mu'assisat al-nashr al-Islāmī: 1994), 373 and 383). However, in recent times this has been disputed and some scholars opine that the author of *Rijāl al-Barqī* was the grandson of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī (see Muḥammad Jawād Shubbayri Zanjānī, "Barqī, Abū Ja'far").

1.2 Alterations to the famous al-Khiḍr narration

According to Kohlberg, al-Barqī reports a famous tradition in which Prophet al-Khiḍr testifies to the names of the Imams but only mentions the names of ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and the reporter adds ‘and he counted every last one of them’ without specifying the names or number of Imams after al-Ḥusayn.⁷⁰ The same narration appears in *al-Kāfī* and *Tafsīr al-Qummī* with the names of all twelve Imams.⁷¹ Modarressi also reiterates the same point but doubts the authenticity of the report of al-Qummī as the latter’s *Tafsīr* was supposedly compiled by his pupil, Abū l-Faḍl ‘Abbās b. Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim b. Ḥamza, presumably sometime during the first decades of the fourth/tenth century, by which time the complete version of the al-Khiḍr tradition was already in full circulation.⁷² In order to properly understand the responses given, we will first present the two versions of the narration in their entirety as reported in *al-Maḥāsin* and in *al-Kāfī*.

Al-Khiḍr narration in *al-Maḥāsin*

Narrated from him [Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī], from his father, from Abī Hāshim al-Ja‘farī, he elevated the narration (*rafa‘ al-ḥadīth*), saying: Abū ‘Abd Allāh (a) [Imam al-Ṣādiq] said:

“Amīr al-Mu‘minīn (a) entered the mosque with al-Ḥasan (a), and a man entered and greeted him.

Al-Khiḍr narration in *al-Kāfī*

Narrated by several of our companions from Aḥmad b. Muḥammad [b. Khālīd] al-Barqī from Abī Hāshim Dāwūd b. al-Qāsim al-Ja‘farī from Abī Ja‘far al-Thānī (a) [Imam al-Jawād], who said:

“Amīr al-Mu‘minīn (a) approached, accompanied by al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī (a), while leaning on

⁷⁰ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 523.

⁷¹ Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, 332; ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:44; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:525-526.

⁷² Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 100.

He replied with a greeting similar to his. The man said, 'O Amīr al-Mu'minīn, I came to ask you.' He said, 'Ask.' The man said, 'Inform me about where a man's soul is when he sleeps, how a newborn resembles his father, and how memory and forgetfulness occur.' Amīr al-Mu'minīn (a) looked at al-Ḥasan (a) and said, "Answer him," Al-Ḥasan (a) replied, "When a man sleeps, his soul is attached to the wind (*al-rīḥ*), and the wind is attached to the air (*al-hawā*'). If Allah wishes to seize his soul, the air pulls the wind, and the wind pulls the soul. If Allah wishes to return it to its place, the soul pulls the wind, and the wind pulls the air, and it returns to its place.

As for the new-born who resembles his father, when a man engages with his wife with a calm heart and a non-agitated body, the sperm settles in the womb, and the child resembles his father. If he engages with a preoccupied heart and an agitated body, the sperm settles in the womb. If it attaches to a vein from the veins of his uncles, the child will resemble his uncles. If it attaches

the hand of Salmān. They entered Masjid al-Ḥaram and sat down. A well-dressed, handsome man approached and greeted Amīr al-Mu'minīn, who returned the greeting. The man then sat down and said, 'O Amīr al-Mu'minīn, I will ask you about three matters. If you answer them, I will know that the people have wrongfully taken your position and that they are not to be trusted in their worldly affairs and in their afterlife. But if your answer is otherwise, then I will know that you and they are equal in status.'

Amīr al-Mu'minīn (a) said to him, "Ask me whatever you wish."

The man said, "Tell me, where does the soul of a man go when he sleeps? How does a man remember and forget? And how does it happen that a man's child resembles his paternal uncles and maternal uncles?"

Amīr al-Mu'minīn (a) turned to al-Ḥasan (a) and said, "Answer him." He said, "al-Ḥasan (a) answered him, and the man then said, 'I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and I have always borne

to a vein from the veins of his maternal uncles, the child will resemble his maternal uncles.

As for memory and forgetfulness, the heart is in a container, and the container is covered. When Allāh wishes the heart to remember, the cover is lifted, and the heart remembers.” The man said, “I bear witness that there is no god but Allāh, alone with no partner, and I bear witness that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger. I bear witness that your father, Amīr al-Mu’minīn, is truly the successor of Muḥammad, and I have always said this. I bear witness that you are his successor, and I bear witness that al-Ḥusayn is your successor,” and he counted every last one of them. I asked Abū ‘Abd Allāh (a), “Who was the man?” He replied, “Al-Khidr (a).”

witness to this. I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah, and I have always borne witness to this. I bear witness that you are the rightful successor of the Messenger of Allah (a) and his family), and the executor of his proof,’ and he pointed to Amīr al-Mu’minīn (a). ‘I have always borne witness to this. I bear witness that you are his successor and the executor of his proof,’ and he pointed to al-Ḥasan (a). ‘I bear witness that al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī is the successor of his brother and the executor of his proof after him. I bear witness that ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn is the executor of al-Ḥusayn’s affairs after him. I bear witness that Muḥammad b. ‘Alī is the executor of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn’s affairs. I bear witness that Ja‘far b. Muḥammad is the executor of Muḥammad’s affairs. I bear witness that Mūsā is the executor of Ja‘far b. Muḥammad’s affairs. I bear witness that ‘Alī b. Mūsā is the executor of Mūsā b. Ja‘far’s affairs. I bear witness that Muḥammad b. ‘Alī is the executor of ‘Alī b. Mūsā’s affairs. I bear witness that ‘Alī b. Muḥammad is the executor of Muḥammad b.

‘Alī’s affairs. I bear witness that al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī is the executor of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad’s affairs. I bear witness to a man from the descendants of al-Ḥasan who is not to be referred to by his name or his teknonym until his matter becomes manifest and he fills the world with justice as it had been filled with oppression. Peace be upon you, O Amīr al-Mu’minīn, and the mercy and blessings of Allah.’ Then he stood up and left. Amīr al-Mu’minīn said, ‘O Abū Muḥammad, follow him and see where he goes.’ So al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī went out and said, ‘As soon as he stepped outside the mosque, I did not know where he went on the earth of Allah. I returned to Amīr al-Mu’minīn and informed him. He said, ‘O Abū Muḥammad, do you know who he is?’ I said, ‘Allah, His Messenger, and Amīr al-Mu’minīn know best.’ He said, ‘He is al-Khiḍr.’”

The allegation is that al-Kulaynī altered the narration which he took from *al-Maḥāsīn* by appending the names of all twelve Imams. Several responses to this claim can be seen in the literature. Firstly, the phrase ‘and he counted every last one of them’ is itself evidence that the Shi‘as did not believe that there was an infinite number of Imams until the

end of time,⁷³ as alleged by Modarressi.⁷⁴ Secondly, this narration was recorded by al-Barqī in the chapter called *al-‘Ilal* – translated as ‘the reasons’ – which mainly focuses on those sections of reports that deal with questions and answers of the infallibles, and does not record the reports in their totality.⁷⁵

It seems that the reason why Kohlberg and Modarressi have considered the version of *al-Kāfi* to be a later interpolation is because the chain of narrators in the report of *al-Kāfi* includes the name of al-Barqī and hence the assumption is that al-Kulaynī took this report directly from *al-Maḥāsīn* and then corrected it by adding the names of the rest of the Imams.⁷⁶ However, by comparing the report of *al-Kāfi* and *al-Maḥāsīn*, it can be seen that there are variations in the content (*matn*), the chain of narrators (*isnād*) and even the Imam to whom the narrator ascribes the narration. If al-Kulaynī sought to merely append the names of the twelve Imams to the end of the narration, what explanation can be given to this great degree of variation in all sections of the report?

Four possible reasons have been given regarding this variation.

(1) Al-Kulaynī was quoting this narration from another work of al-Barqī other than *al-Maḥāsīn*.⁷⁷

⁷³ Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 110.

⁷⁴ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 101.

⁷⁵ Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 110.

⁷⁶ This argument only stands for those who accept the Shī‘ī narrative of *ḥadīth* transmission. If one were to reject the standard narrative and only consider manuscripts, this argument would not hold because the oldest available manuscript of *al-Kāfi* (7th/13th century - 8th/14th century) predates the oldest available manuscript of *al-Maḥāsīn* (10th/16th - 11th/17th century). In addition, al-Kulaynī was more popular and his work was copied many more times (Mohammad Ghandehari, “Ḥadīth-i shahādat-i Khidr bar dawāzdah Imām: Barrasī-i aṣālat wa naḥwi-ye intiḳāl az uṣūl-i awwalīyyi bi jawāmi‘-i ḥadīthi,” *Imāmat Pazhūhī* 3, no. 12 (1392 Sh./2013), 224).

⁷⁷ According to al-Najāshī (*Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 72) and al-Ṭūsī (*al-Fihrist*, ed. Jawād Qayyūmī (Mu‘assisat nashr al-faqāhat: 2001), 62), al-Barqī authored other

(2) The original version of *al-Maḥāsin* did have the full narration as reported in *al-Kāfī*, whereas the extant version available to us is only one-third of the original as mentioned previously. This possibility is further strengthened by the observation that while al-Kulaynī in *al-Kāfī* narrates from al-Barqī about 1500 times, most of these narrations cannot be found in the what remains of *al-Maḥāsin*.⁷⁸

(3) The report was summarised by al-Barqī himself and thus the phrase, “and he counted every last one of them” is al-Barqī himself summarising the narration. What supports this possibility is that it is only the first part of the narration that was in line with the chapter of *al-ʿIlal* and thus there was no need for al-Barqī to report the full tradition. Interestingly, al-Kulaynī’s purpose of mentioning the narration lay in the second portion that mentioned the names of the Imams. Hence, in *al-Kāfī* the first part of this narration, that details the responses of Imam al-Ḥasan to the 3 questions of al-Khiḍr, has been condensed.⁷⁹ Some authors have even compared all of al-Barqī’s reports in this chapter with their renditions in other works, with the result being that most narrations in this chapter involve some degree of paraphrasing or excluding of certain segments.

There are 63 reports in this chapter that have been recorded by other authors but have been taken from a shared primary source. By comparing the rendition of al-Barqī with these other authors, whereby both were accessing the narrations from a common source, 40% of these 63 reports were shown to have been summarised or had certain segments excluded in *al-Maḥāsin*,⁸⁰ which clearly indicates that al-Barqī was only interested in bringing those sections of narrations that were in line with his chapter heading.

works apart from *al-Maḥāsin*. See also Muhammad Jawād Shubbayrī Zanjānī, “Barqī, Abū Jaʿfar,” 159.

⁷⁸ Ghandehari, “Ḥadīth-i shahādat-i Khiḍr,” 224.

⁷⁹ Khayrabadi, “Barrasī-yi masʿali-yi “Ithnā ‘Ashariyya,”” 223.

⁸⁰ Ghandehari, “Ḥadīth-i shahādat-i Khiḍr,” 239.

(4) One of the copyists of *al-Maḥāsin* summarised the narration, though this is unlikely and perhaps the weakest possibility.

Thus, in order to suggest tampering by al-Kulaynī, one would have to first disprove these four possibilities.⁸¹

Furthermore, by analysing the chains of narration of this al-Khiḍr report in *al-Maḥāsin*, *al-Kāfī*, *al-Ghayba* of al-Nu‘mānī, *Kamāl al-dīn*, ‘*Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, ‘*Ilal al-sharā’i*’, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* of al-Mufīd as recorded in Ibn Shahrāshūb’s *Manāqib*, *al-Ghayba* of al-Ṭūsī, and *Tafsīr ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī*, we realise that whilst the chains may differ between the authors, they all go back to al-Barqī who reports from Abū Hāshim Dāwūd b. Qāsim al-Ja‘farī (d. 261/875). The report in *Tafsīr ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī*, however, does not have al-Barqī in the chain and it is Ibrāhīm b. Hāshim who directly reports this narration from Dāwūd b. Qāsim. We can thus be certain that the primary narrator of this narration was Abū Hāshim Dāwūd b. Qāsim al-Ja‘farī, who was one of the great companions of Imams al-Riḍā, al-Jawād, al-Hādī and al-‘Askarī.⁸² We can also safely assume that Dāwūd b. Qāsim recorded this narration in his book, as it was deemed highly reprehensible for primary narrators to transmit narrations verbally without writing them down. In the words of Modarressi,

⁸¹ Khayrabadi, “Barrasī-yi mas‘ali-yi ‘Ithnā ‘Ashariyyah,’” 223. According to Andrew Newman, there was no reason for al-Barqī to mention the section of the narration with the names of all the Imams since he was one of the earlier companions and this was common knowledge at that time. “Al-Barqī was himself a companion of the ninth and the tenth Imams, and his father – from whom Aḥmad narrated the tradition – had been associated with the eighth and ninth Imams. Muḥammad narrated the tradition from Dāwūd b. al-Qāsim, Abū Hāshim al-Ja‘far, a Baghdadi prominent in the community and respected by the political authority, who had seen the eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh Imams, as well as the Hidden Imam. Given these associations, including the actual names of al-Ḥusayn’s successors would have been useful for later generations but perhaps less necessary at the time.” (Andrew Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī‘ism: Ḥadīth as Discourse between Qum and Baghdad* (Routledge: 2013), 63, footnote 53.

⁸² Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 124.

Authors sometimes noted if a report did not appear in the notebook of the ultimate authority for an oral transmission, [this was] a sign normally taken to indicate that the ascription was not reliable.⁸³

What further strengthens this assumption is that the primary narrator who transmitted the book of Dāwūd b. Qāsim was none other than al-Barqī himself.⁸⁴ The question then arises, if the main source of this narration was the book of Dāwūd b. Qāsim, from whom all the above authors were transmitting, then why does the version in *al-Maḥāsin* differ from the others? The answer lies in the fact that in the chapter of *al-ʿIlal*, 70% of reports (91 out of 130) were extracted by al-Barqī from the book of his father Muḥammad b. Khālīd, which was also called *al-ʿIlal* (compare the chain of narrators in the above table).⁸⁵ It is noteworthy that throughout the rest of *al-Maḥāsin*, al-Barqī seldom reports from his father (about 28% of reports are narrated on the authority of Muḥammad b. Khālīd). Therefore, the narration of al-Khiḍr in this chapter was taken from a completely different source (the *kitāb al-ʿIlal* of Muḥammad b. Khālīd) than the one relied upon by the likes of al-Kulaynī (the book of Dāwūd b. Qāsim al-Jaʿfarī).⁸⁶ Perhaps it can be postulated that the reason why al-Barqī did not directly transmit from the book of Dāwūd b. Qāsim in this chapter – even though he was the main narrator of the book – was because at the time of compiling this section of *al-Maḥāsin*, he had not yet been granted permission to transmit the book, and this

⁸³ Modarressi, *Tradition and survival: a Bibliographical Survey of Early Shīʿite Literature* (Oneworld Academic: 2003), xv.

⁸⁴ Ghandehari, “Ḥadīth-i shahādat-i Khiḍr,” 228.

⁸⁵ Thus, even where al-Barqī could directly narrate from his teachers, in this chapter specifically, he relied on his father’s renditions of the narrations. For example, throughout *al-Maḥāsin*, al-Barqī frequently reports directly from Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, but in the chapter in question, all the reports of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr are reported on the authority of his father Muḥammad b. Khālīd.

⁸⁶ Ghandehari, “Ḥadīth-i shahādat-i Khiḍr,” 233-234.

was something that was granted to him in his later years.⁸⁷

1.3 Lack of mention of the idea of twelve Imams by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/903) in *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*

Kohlberg claimed that there are no narrations in *Baṣā’ir* that mention the twelve Imams.⁸⁸ The response that has been given is that this is an erroneous statement, as there are no less than six narrations that clearly refer to the twelve Imams.⁸⁹ In addition, in another article written in the same year, Kohlberg actually discusses two of these narrations within a different context.⁹⁰

1.4 Lack of mention of the idea of twelve Imams in *Uṣūl al-arba‘a mi’a*

An *aṣl* refers to a compilation of narrations transcribed by a narrator upon directly hearing them from an infallible. The 400 *uṣūl* (*al-uṣūl al-arba‘a mi’a*) refers to the earliest compilations of Shī‘ī *ḥadīth*. The companions of the Imams would directly transcribe the words of the Imams in these booklets of theirs, with most of them being written down from the time of Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) and the latter Imams. The four major Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* books (*al-kutub al-‘arba‘a*) mainly relied on these 400 *uṣūl* and thus after the compilation of these major books, the 400 *uṣūl* began to be ignored and today, only sixteen of them are extant. Kohlberg argues that the idea of twelve Imams, or the occultation of

⁸⁷ Ibid, 235.

⁸⁸ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 523; Modarressi also states the same but adds that there are three such narrations that seem to be later interpolations (Modarressi, *Maktab dar farāyandi takāmul*, 191-192).

⁸⁹ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, 280 (*ḥadīth* 15), 320 (*ḥadīths* 4 and 5), 319 (*ḥadīth* 2), 372 (*ḥadīth* 16) 405 (*ḥadīth* 4).

⁹⁰ Etan Kohlberg, “The Term “Muḥaddath” in Twelver Shī‘ism,” in *In Praise of the Few. Studies in Shī‘ī Thought and History* (Brill: 2020), 242-249.

the last Imam, cannot be found in these earliest works, except for two narrations, one of which mentions that there will be eleven Imams (in the *aṣl Abī Saʿīd ʿAbbād al-ʿUṣfurī*), whilst the other says there will be seven Imams (in the *aṣl Muḥammad b. al-Muthannā al-Ḥaḍramī*).⁹¹ Modarressi also makes a similar claim, but clarifies that there are actually two such narrations in the *aṣl Abī Saʿīd ʿAbbād al-ʿUṣfurī* which indicate towards eleven Imams.⁹²

Several responses to this claim can be seen in the literature. Firstly, these are erroneous statements. There are several narrations in the aforementioned works that clearly refer to the twelve Imams. For example, in the very same *aṣl Abī Saʿīd ʿAbbād al-ʿUṣfurī*, there are other narrations that speak of twelve Imams. Imām al-Sajjād (a) is reported to have said, “Indeed, Allah created from the light of his greatness, Muḥammad, ʿAlī and eleven from his descendants...”⁹³

Another narration in the aforesaid *aṣl* quotes Imām al-Bāqir (a) quoting the Prophet (s) as saying, “Indeed, me and eleven of my descendants, and you O ʿAlī, are the pegs of the earth...so when the eleventh of my descendants departs, the earth and its inhabitants will be destroyed and they will not be given respite.”⁹⁴ In light of these narrations, it is clear that the narrations referenced by Kohlberg and Modarressi in which the Prophet only mentions eleven of his descendants as being the leaders are referring to the rest of the twelve Imams excluding Imam ʿAlī (a), because Imam ʿAlī (a) is not a descendant of the Prophet.⁹⁵

The author of the abovementioned *aṣl* is Abū Saʿīd al-ʿUṣfurī whose original name, is ʿAbbād b. Yaʿqūb (d. ca. 250/864).⁹⁶ Some, like

⁹¹ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿAshariyya,” 532

⁹² Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 101

⁹³ Ḍiyā al-dīn al-Maḥmūdī, Niʿmatullah al-Jalīlī and Mehdi Ghulām ʿAlī, *Al-Uṣūl al-sittat ʿashar min al-uṣūl al-awwalīyya* (Dār al-Ḥadīth: 2002), 15.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 16.

⁹⁵ Alviri, “Naqd-i nazāriyi,” 55.

⁹⁶ Najāshi quotes Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī who says that the companions would say

Modarressi, maintain that he was a Zaydī whilst others surmise that he was definitely an Imāmī Shī‘ī.⁹⁷ Interestingly, in *Tradition and Survival*, Modarressi claims that most of the narrations in this *aṣl*, including the abovementioned ones, were taken from the book of Ibn Abī al-Miqdām (d. 172/789).⁹⁸ This means that if one were to ascertain the reliability of ‘Abbād b. Ya‘qūb, and thus accept that he reported this from Ibn Abī l-Miqdām, we could thus say that these narrations were circulating in Shī‘ī circles before 170 AH, and were we to go one step further and ascertain the reliability of Ibn Abī l-Miqdām, we can conclude that these narrations were in circulation before 150 AH (as that is the year of the demise of Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī, from whom Ibn Abī l-Miqdām

this ‘Abbād al-‘Uṣfurī is ‘Abbād b. Ya‘qūb (see entry 793 in *Rijāl al-Najāshī*). This seems to be the reason why many, like Modarressi, have considered him to be one and the same with another narrator by the name ‘Abbād b. Ya‘qūb al-Rawājini. A minority have opined that ‘Abbād al-‘Uṣfurī is different to ‘Abbād al-Rawājini based on the following indicators:

1. Neither al-Ṭūsī nor al-Najāshī have mentioned the ascription of “Rawājini” for Abū Ṣāid al-‘Uṣfurī
2. Al-Ṭūsī has two separate entries. One for ‘Abbād al-‘Uṣfurī and one for ‘Abbād al-Rawājini.
3. The chain of al-Ṭūsī to ‘Abbād al-‘Uṣfurī differs with his chain to ‘Abbād al-Rawājini suggesting that these are two different individuals with similar names. (Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 119-120; See also Muḥammad Taqī Shūshtarī, *Qāmūs al-rijāl* (Mu’assisat al-nashr al-Islāmī: 1989), 5:658-664; Morteza Naderi, “Aṣālat wa i’tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat-i Imām-i dawāzdahum (taḥlīl-i intiqādi-yi naẓariyī-yi wābastegī-yi Imāmiyya bi wāqifa dar aḥādīth-i ghaybat)” (PhD diss., Dānishkadi-yi Ilāhiyyāt wa Ma‘ārif-i Islāmī, 1396 Sh./2017), 86). See Etan Kohlberg, “*al-Uṣūl al-Arba‘umī’a*,” in Harald Motzki (eds.) *Hadith Origins and Developments* (Routledge: 2016), 132-133, for an extensive discussion that describes how it was the inveterate liar Abū Sumayna who, using the method of *tadlīs al-shuyūkh*, corrupted the name of ‘Abbād al-‘Uṣfurī (and not his book!)

⁹⁷ See for example, Al-Khū‘ī, *Mu‘jam rijāl al-ḥadīth wa tafṣīl ṭabaqāt al-ruwāt* (1992), 10:237.

⁹⁸ Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 206.

reports from).⁹⁹

Modarressi also mentioned that the earliest written record of the Prophet foretelling the coming of twelve Imams was in the *Amālī* of the Egyptian Sunnī scholar Layth b. Sa'd (d. 175/792). However, the abovementioned evidence clearly suggests that these narrations were circulating within Shī'ī circles before this. Secondly, the book *Ithbāt al-raj'a* attributed to Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Naysābūrī (d. 260/873-4) contains four narrations alluding to the twelve Imams.¹⁰⁰

With regards to the narration of seven Imams, Kohlberg himself acknowledges this as being an Ismā'īlī tradition. Furthermore, Shaykh al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, when transcribing the extant sixteen *uṣūl*, explicitly states that two of the narrations in this compendium were clearly said in the state of *taqiyya* (dissimulation), including this one.¹⁰¹

It must also be added that whilst it is true that we only have access to sixteen *uṣūl* today, that does not exclude the possibility of being able to identify the contents of the lost *uṣūl*. Later authors like al-Kulaynī were extracting and sorting their narrations from these earlier written works. By analysing al-Kulaynī's chain of narrators, one can identify

⁹⁹ Reza Ghorbani Zarrin, "Barrasī-yi qidmat-i aḥādīth-i dawāzdah Imām dar al-Kāfi," *Imāmat Pazhūhī* 3, no. 12 (1392 Sh./2013), 161-162.

¹⁰⁰ See Ḥadīth numbers 1, 4, 5 and 6 in al-Faḍl b. Shādhān, *Ithbāt al-raj'a*, ed. Ghulam Hasan Muharrami (Dār al-mujtabā: 2013); Fatema Hussein Tehrani, "Mahdaviyyat az didgāh-i mutakallimīn-i Shī'a dar qarn-i 3 wa 4 bā ruykard-i naqd-i āthār-i mustashriqān (Masters diss., Dānishgāh-i Qur'an wa Ḥadīth, 1395 Sh./2016), 180-181. This response is only acceptable to those who accept the attribution of such a work to Faḍl. For a critique of this attribution, see Hassan Ansari, *Huwiyyat-i wāqī'i-yi kitāb-i Ithbāt al-raj'a mansūb bi Faḍl b. Shādhān*, *Barrasiha-yi Tahqiqi*, <http://ansari.kateban.com/post/1286> and translated into English on Iqra Online, <https://iqraonline.net/ithbat-al-raja-of-fadhl-bin-shadhan/>. For an example of a defense of this attribution, see Mehdi Farrokhi et al., "Mawjūdiyyat-i khārijī-yi kitāb Ithbāt al-raj'at-i Faḍl b. Shādhān Nīshābūrī bā tā'kid bar naql-i riwāyāt-i kitābash dar āthār-i mutā'akhkhir az ū," *Shī'ah Pazhūhī*, 7, 20, (1400), 229-253.

¹⁰¹ Diyā al-dīn al-Maḥmūdī, Ni'matullāh al-Jalīlī and Mehdi Ghulām 'Alī, *Al-Uṣūl al-sittat 'ashar*, 170; Alvīrī, "Naqd-i naẓariyī," 55.

the earlier sources that al-Kulaynī relied upon. For example, one study investigated the twenty reports that al-Kulaynī brings under *Bābu mā jā’a fi l-ithnay ‘ashara wa-l-naṣṣi ‘alayhim* (the Chapter of what has been reported about the Twelve and their explicit designation).

Another study collectively looked at the narrations regarding the twelve Imams in *al-Kāfī*, *al-Ghayba* of al-Ṭūsī and *al-Ghayba* of al-Nu‘mānī (a total of 64 narrations) to identify the earliest sources that were being used to gather these narrations. The result was that these narrations can be traced back to the earliest compilations of the companions such as *Kitāb ‘Abān b. ‘Uthmān al-Aḥmar* (d. 200/815), *Kitāb Ibn Abī ‘Umayr* (d. d. 217/832) and *Kitāb Muḥammad b. Sinān* (d. 220/835).¹⁰²

Thus, the conclusion that can be deduced is that from at least the second half of the second/eighth century, the narrations regarding twelve Imams were being circulated by the companions and were preserved in their books.¹⁰³

1.5 The description of the Twelvers according to *Kitāb firaq al-shi‘a* and *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-l-firaq*

Kohlberg stated that al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, in his *Kitāb firaq al-shi‘a*, and Sa’d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Qummī, in his *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-l-firaq* (both completed around 287/900) described the state of the Imāmiyya after the death of the eleventh Imam, but no mention is made that the number of Imams had reached twelve, the name of the twelfth Imam or that he would have two occultations.¹⁰⁴ Modarressi makes a similar claim whilst adding,

Other scholars, such as the two Nawbakhtīs, Sa’d b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ash‘arī and Ibn Qiba, all from the latter part

¹⁰² Muḥammad Reza Wahhabi, “Aḥādīth-i Ithnā ‘ashar dar manābi‘-i si qarn-i nakhust-i Shi‘a”, *‘Ulūm-i Ḥadīth* 16, no. 2 (1390 Sh./2011), 85-109.

¹⁰³ Zarrin, “Barrasi-yi qidmat-i aḥādīth.”

¹⁰⁴ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 522;

of the third/ninth century, also failed to refer to that statement in any of their surviving works.¹⁰⁵

This is an erroneous statement. Both the abovementioned books describe a sect after the death of the eleventh Imam (a) who believed that the successor of the eleventh Imam (a) was his son whose name was 'Muḥammad', was the 'Qā'im' and had gone into 'one of his two occultations'.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, it is not accurate to reject the attribution of such beliefs to scholars such as Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī and Ibn Qiba, as we do not have access to most of their writings.¹⁰⁷ For example, more than thirty works have been attributed to Abū Sahl,¹⁰⁸ out of which only a portion of the book *al-Tanbīh* and a few pages of *al-Anwār* are extant.

2. Narrations describing the idea of twelve Imams in post-occultation sources

2.1 *Kitāb al-Kāfī*

According to Modarressi, al-Kulaynī was one of the first authors to gather narrations predicting that there would be twelve Imams. Twenty such narrations are gathered in a chapter entitled *Bābu mā jā'a fi l-ithnay 'ashara wa-l-naṣṣi 'alayhim* (the Chapter of what has been reported about the Twelve and their Explicit Designation). However, aspersions are raised regarding the originality of this chapter in *al-Kāfī*. According to Modarressi, the whole chapter is not in its proper place and appears to be a later addition, and the fact that al-Nu'mānī only quotes of four out of the twenty narrations of this chapter is a further

¹⁰⁵ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 100.

¹⁰⁶ Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī'a* (Dār al-aḍwā': 1983), 102-103; Sa'd b. 'Abdullāh al-Ash'arī, *al-Maqālāt wa-l-Firaq*, 114; Moghaddam, "Bāzkhānī wa naqd," 111.

¹⁰⁷ Moghaddam, "Bāzkhānī wa naqd," 113.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 31-32; Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 12-13.

source of suspicion.¹⁰⁹

Several responses to this claim be seen in the literature. Apart from the abovementioned chapter, narrations about the Imams being twelve have been mentioned in two other chapters that seem to have been completely overlooked by Modarressi: *Bābu mā naṣṣa Allāh ‘azzawajal wa rasūluhū ‘ala l-a’imati ‘alayhimu l-salām wāḥidan fa wāḥidan* (the Chapter of Explicit Designation of each of the Imams by Allah the Almighty and His Prophet)¹¹⁰ and the whole chapter that discusses the birth and death of each of the Imams.¹¹¹ As for the aforesaid chapter being “not in its most proper place”, this is a mere claim made by Modarressi for which no evidence is presented.¹¹²

With regards to why al-Nu‘mānī only reported four (out of twenty) of these narrations, the assumption being made is that al-Nu‘mānī had complete access to *al-Kāfī*, presumably because he was one of the students of al-Kulaynī and one of the people who copied *al-Kāfī* (hence why he is also known as al-Kātib). However, there is evidence that indicates that at the time of compiling his *al-Ghayba*, al-Nu‘mānī did not have complete access to his copy of *al-Kāfī*, or at the very least, the section of *al-Kāfī* under discussion. In his introduction to *al-Ghayba*, he says:

I have gathered in this book, by the help of Allah, narrations that have been reported by our teachers from Imam ‘Alī (a) and the truthful Imams regarding the occultation (ghayba) and related topics, based on what was available to me. I did not report everything that has reached me in this regard due to it not being in my reach and neither did my memory have the capacity to remember all of it. What people report about these

¹⁰⁹ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 102.

¹¹⁰ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:286-329.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 439-525; Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 116.

¹¹² Ibid, 116.

topics is much more and much greater than what I have reported...¹¹³

By comparing the narrations reported from *al-Kāfi* in *al-Ghayba*, it is clear that most of the narrations that have been taken from *al-Kāfi* are found very close to each other in the chapters of *al-Kāfi*, implying that al-Nu'mānī had physical access to those sections of *al-Kāfi*. Unfortunately, the chapter that is under discussion - *Bābu mā jā'a fī l-ithnay 'ashara wa-l-naṣṣi 'alayhim* (the Chapter of what has been reported about the Twelve and their Explicit Designation) - is quite far from the other set of chapters to which al-Nu'mānī apparently had access. Perhaps one may then question how it is that al-Nu'mānī reported four (out of the twenty) narrations from *al-Kāfi* that speak of twelve Imams, if he did not have access to this section of *al-Kāfi*? By comparing the chain of narrators (*isnād*) and the content (*matn*) of these four narrations, what is apparent is that there are variations between what is in *al-Kāfi* and in *al-Ghayba* in three of these narrations, such that it seems highly likely that al-Nu'mānī did not obtain these narrations from *al-Kāfi* itself.¹¹⁴ There is only one narration that is exactly identical in both works. However, due to the fact that there are several narrations in *al-Ghayba* which have the name of al-Kulaynī in their chain of narration, yet are narrated in a different manner in *al-Kāfi*, the most realistic possibilities are either that (1) al-Nu'mānī was reporting these four narrations verbally from al-Kulaynī (and not from *al-Kāfi* directly), or (2) that he was reporting from another work of al-Kulaynī other than *al-Kāfi*, or perhaps (3) al-Nu'mānī was relying on his memory of what had been recorded in *al-Kāfi* and thus was only able to recall these four narrations.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, there is no solid evidence that al-Nu'mānī intended to gather all reports about twelve Imams for one to thus question as to why

¹¹³ Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 29.

¹¹⁴ Muḥammad Jawād Shubbayrī Zanjānī, *al-Kātib al-Nu'mānī wa Kitābuhū l-Ghayba*, 'Ulūm al-ḥadīth 3 (1419 AH), 228.

¹¹⁵ Zarrin, "Barrasī-yi qidmat-i aḥādīth," 155-157.

he did not report the sixteen other narrations that are found in *al-Kāfī*.¹¹⁶

2.2 The narration of ‘Six days, six months or six years’

According to Modarressi, there was a rumor that had spread during the minor occultation that the Imam would only be in hiding for six days, six months or six years.¹¹⁷ He bases this claim on the narration mentioned by al-Nu‘mānī whilst also pointing out how this report has been tampered with in other renditions such as the versions reported by al-Kulaynī and al-Ṭūsī.¹¹⁸ However, this narration has absolutely no indication that such a rumor was floating around at any time whatsoever. It is a prophecy narrated by Imam ‘Alī (a), and can in no way be used to decipher the state of the Shī‘ī community during the minor occultation.¹¹⁹

Modarressi also claimed that al-Ṭūsī completely omitted the part of the narration that spoke about the occultation being six days, six months or six years. However, al-Ṭūsī has recorded this narration twice in his *al-Ghayba*, once in full (including the aforesaid phrase)¹²⁰ and once in brief (without the aforesaid phrase) i.e., only that section of the narration was quoted that was relevant to the chapter.¹²¹

As for why al-Nu‘mānī’s version has the phrase “a period of time” instead of “six days, six months or six years”, more than one possibility has been suggested, which must be proven to be false before one can suggest intentional tampering. Al-Nu‘mānī may have heard this narration from al-Kulaynī verbally and thus was not quoting from the

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 158-159.

¹¹⁷ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 87.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 87 and 103.

¹¹⁹ Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 117; Hussein Tehrani, “Mahdawiyyat az dīdgāh-i mutakallimīn-i Shī‘a,” 203-204; Naderi, “Aṣālat wa i‘tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat,” 101.

¹²⁰ Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, ed. ‘Alī Ahmad Nasih and Abdallah Sarshar (Mu’assisat al-ma‘ārif al-Islāmiyya: 2004), 165, *ḥadīth* 127.

¹²¹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 336, *ḥadīth* 282; Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 118; Naderi, “Aṣālat wa i‘tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat,” 101.

book *al-Kāfi* directly, and because this was a verbal transmission, al-Kulaynī may have paraphrased the narration, as is commonly known amongst scholars of *ḥadīth*.¹²² An alternative possibility is that this phrase was changed by a later copyist of *al-Ghayba*. Al-Majlisī explicitly states in *Biḥār al-anwār* that the phrase ‘Six days, six months or six years’ has been reported by al-Nu‘mānī in his *al-Ghayba*.¹²³ This means that in Majlisī’s copy of *al-Ghayba*, this section of the narration had not been tampered with. Clearly, it was one of the later copyists who edited the phrase, and thus al-Nu‘mānī should not be accused of this.¹²⁴

2.3 Discrepancies in descriptions of the respective lengths of the first and second *ghayba*

According to both Modarressi and Kohlberg, there are conflicting reports about which of the two occultations would be the longer one and which would be the shorter one.¹²⁵ The impression gained from such a discrepancy is that initially it was not quite clear which of the two would last longer; only later was it established that the second occultation would be the longer one.

However, this is an erroneous statement. Both Modarressi and Kohlberg refer to the same narration “according to which the first *ghayba* will also be the longer one.”¹²⁶ However, upon referring to the reference given in their footnotes, it seems that the narration has clearly been misunderstood:

Iṣḥāq b. ‘Amār al-Ṣayrafī says, I heard Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) say, “For the Qā’im, there are two occultations. One of

¹²² Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 118; Refer to the previous section for evidence to support this claim.

¹²³ Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:118.

¹²⁴ Naderi, “Aṣālat wa i‘tebār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat,” 101.

¹²⁵ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 87; Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 528.

¹²⁶ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 528.

them is long and the other is short. As for the first one, a group from his Shī‘as would know of his whereabouts, whereas for the other one, no one would know of his whereabouts except his special compatriots who are on his religion (*khāṣat mawālīhī fī dīnihi*).¹²⁷

It is not clear how such a narration supports their claim. Perhaps the phrase “one of them is long and the other is short” was understood as referring to the occultations in chronological order, but this is clearly unwarranted.¹²⁸

3. Adopting beliefs from other Shī‘ī sects such as the Wāqifa

According to both Modarressi and Kohlberg, the idea of the occultation of the Imam is something that has its roots in the Wāqifi sect who claimed that the seventh Imam (a) was the Qā’im and had gone into occultation.¹²⁹ However, the sources referenced by both Modarressi and Kohlberg that attribute such a belief to the Wāqifis were written around the same time as works that describe the occultation of the Imam as part of the tenets of the Twelver creed, and as such, based on their working methodology, it is not accurate to use this as evidence that a certain group held these beliefs before the Twelvers.¹³⁰

According to Kohlberg himself, al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb al-Zarrād (d. 224/839) in his *Kitāb al-mashyakhā* reports a narration from Imam al-Bāqir (a) that mentions the two occultations of the Qā’im.¹³¹ This author is one of the greatest companions of the seventh, eighth and ninth

¹²⁷ Al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 170.

¹²⁸ Hussein Tehrani, “Mahdawīyyat az didgāh-i mutakallimīn-I Shī‘a,” 202-203; Naderi, “Aṣḥālat wa i‘tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat,” 103.

¹²⁹ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 87-88; Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 528.

¹³⁰ Alviri, “Naqd-i nazāriyī,” 60.

¹³¹ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 531.

Imam and was contemporaneous to al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-Baṭā’īnī, one of the alleged Wāqifis who wrote a book on the *ghayba*. As such, based on what evidence can it be alleged that the Twelvers borrowed this concept from the Wāqifis (if not the opposite)?¹³²

Furthermore, the narrations that discuss the occultations have been reported by both Wāqifis and non-Wāqifis. An extensive study that analyses the role of the Wāqifis in spreading the narrations concerning the occultation shows that the number of narrations reported by non-Wāqifis is actually much larger than those reported by the Wāqifis. There are a total of 130 narrations about the *ghayba* in *al-Kāfī*, *al-Ghayba* of al-Nu‘mānī, *Kamāl al-Dīn* of al-Ṣadūq and *al-Ghayba* of al-Ṭūsī. From these 130, only 23 (17.7%) are exclusively reported by Wāqifis.¹³³ Furthermore, even in the reports of the Wāqifis, they were not the primary narrators who heard these narrations from the Imam, but rather, secondary reporters who heard these narrations from other Imāmīs such as Muḥammad b. Muslim and Zurārah b. ‘Ayan.¹³⁴

Within the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus, narrations about the occultation are reported from the Holy Prophet (s) and all the Imams leading up to Imam al-Kāẓim i.e., before even the formation of the Wāqifī sect. These narrations can be traced back to early works which report the narration alongside chains of narrators that do not include Wāqifis. For example, in a famous narration that has been recorded in many works, Kumayl b. Ziyād al-Nakha‘ī (d. 82/701) reports from Imam ‘Alī (a) that the earth will never be devoid of an infallible, either manifest and well known or afraid and hidden. This narration has been narrated by both Shī‘ī and Sunnī narrators and can be found in the earliest works, with a complete chain of narrators, such as *al-Ghārāt* of Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Thaqafī al-Kūfī (d. 283/896-7). It has also been reported in a *mursal*¹³⁵

¹³² Alviri, “Naqd-i nazariyi,” 61.

¹³³ Naderi, “Aṣḥālāt wa i‘tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat,” 192.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 105.

¹³⁵ Referring to a report in which one or more of its transmitters are not

fashion in heresiographical works like *al-Maqālāt wa-l-firaq* of Sa’d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Ash‘arī al-Qummī (d. 301).

Interestingly, Modarressi himself quotes the same narration in one of the responses of Ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and describes it in the footnotes as “a well-transmitted statement of ‘Alī quoted in the sources.”¹³⁶ In the Persian translation of *Crisis and Consolidation*, Modarressi adds that Zaydī works also report this tradition but exclude the last phrase.¹³⁷ However, a recent discovery has been made in one of the oldest Zaydī libraries where a manuscript of a Zaydī work was found containing the full narration with the aforementioned phrase. What is more interesting is that in the commentary of the narration, the Zaydī scholar has mentioned the opinion of the Imāmīs as well about the occultation of the Imam.^{138,139}

Further, whether one considers the reason for the breaking away of the Wāqifīs from the mainstream Imāmī community to be greed and hankering after their personal desires, or simply a mistake in identifying the seventh Imam as the awaited Qā’im, the simple fact that they claimed that the Imam had gone into occultation is itself a proof that such a belief already existed within the Imāmī school of thought. In other words, just as sects before them like the *saba’iyya* and the *kaysāniyya* had claimed that the Imam had gone into occultation, the Wāqifīs did the same, because the Imāmī community already subscribed to the tenet that the awaited Qā’im would go into occultation.¹⁴⁰

mentioned, and thus lacks continuity in its chain of transmitters.

¹³⁶ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 227.

¹³⁷ Modarressi, *Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul*, 288.

¹³⁸ Muḥammad Kazim Rehmatī, “Yek irjā’-i kuhan bi Ibn Qiba wa maṭlabī darbāri-yi ū,” *Payām*, 3 (1388 Sh./2009), 673-675.

¹³⁹ For a detailed analysis of the sources and transmission of many such reports that are narrated prior to the formation of the Wāqifīs, see Naderi, “Aṣālat wa i’tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat,” 162-177.

¹⁴⁰ Alviri, “Naqd-i nazariyi,” 61.

4. Adopting the *ḥadīth* of twelve Imams from Sunnī sources

According to both Kohlberg¹⁴¹ and Modarressi,¹⁴² the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet foretelling the coming of twelve Imams was originally only found in Sunnī sources and it was only after the occultation of the twelfth Imam that the Shī'as incorporated these narrations in their own books. Before this point, such narrations "had never attracted the attention of Shī'ite traditionists."¹⁴³

There are three such narrations in the earliest Sunnī works, the primary narrators of which are four famous companions of the Prophet. The first narration is reported by ibn Mas'ūd, the second narration by Jābir b. Samura and Sa'd b. Abī Waqqās and the third narration by Abū Juḥayfa. A quantitative analysis of the transmission of these three narrations in Sunnī works shows that within the first three centuries, approximately 200 narrators reported these narrations, a majority of which are considered trustworthy according to Sunnī Rijāl standards, and around 25-30% of these narrators are classified as Imāmī Shī'ī. By assessing each of the narrators as well as the generation (*ṭabaqa*) they fall into, it is clear that during the time of every single Imam, these narrations were being spread by both Sunnī and Shī'ī narrators of *ḥadīth*.¹⁴⁴

According to Modarressi, these narrations were first recorded by Sunnī scholars such as Layth b. Sa'd (d. 175/792) and Abū Dāwūd al-

¹⁴¹ Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿAshariyya," 529.

¹⁴² Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 100.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 100.

¹⁴⁴ Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāh-i naqd*, 169-171; In fact, even amongst the *tābiʿīn*, there were certain companions like Masrūq b. Ajda' who transmitted this report. It seems likely that he was a Shī'ī based on the fact that it is reported that he would carry a clay tablet with him wherever he travelled in order to prostrate on it during his prayers (see *ibid*, 170).

Ṭayālīsī (d. 204/819-820).¹⁴⁵ However, there are certain Shī‘ī narrators within Sunnī works who are recorded to have reported these narrations even before these two Sunnī authors, such as Faṭr b. Khalīfa (d. 150/767) and Shu‘ba b. Ḥajjāj (d. 160/777). Thereafter, these narrations were recorded in other *ḥadīth* compendiums,¹⁴⁶ such as the *Musnad* of ‘Alī b. al-Ja‘d al-Jawharī (d. 230/845).¹⁴⁷

5. Imāmī belief in an endless chain of Imams until the end of times

According to Modarressi, the early Imāmī community upheld that there was no defined number of Imams and in fact, the chain of Imams would continue until the Day of Judgement. This idea then changed as the occultation was prolonged more than expected.¹⁴⁸ However, the evidence brought forth by Modarressi – in the footnote of both English and Farsi versions of his works – for such a claim has no relevance to the said claim:

“See Nawbakhtī: 116, 118; Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh: 102, 106...”¹⁴⁹

Since both references are for the most part identical, it will suffice to just look at one, and thus, analysis will focus on the reference referring to page 102 of the work of Sa‘d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Ash‘arī al-Qummī (d. 301), *al-Maqālāt wa-l-firaq*. Here, the author begins to describe the sects that existed after the passing away of Imam al-‘Askarī (a), the first of which is the Imāmiyya who are described as

Those who believe that after the demise of al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī (a), Allah has a proof on the earth and a vicegerent who is the son of al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī

¹⁴⁵ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 100.

¹⁴⁶ See above where the Aṣl of Abū Sa‘īd al-‘Uṣfūrī was discussed.

¹⁴⁷ Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāh-i naqd*, 174.

¹⁴⁸ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 86; See also, *Ibid*, 101.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 86; Modarressi, *Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul*, 168.

al-Riḍā.... He is a guide for the nation, rightly guided, following the original path and the past traditions of the preceding Imams. He continues in the same manner as those who have passed and will remain in this role among those who are to come until the Hour. The Imamate remains in the progeny, following the order of succession and the system of birth. It does not transfer or deviate from this line. The Imamate will not revert to two brothers after Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, nor is it permissible for it to do so. It will remain exclusively in the lineage of Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad until the end of creation and the cessation of God’s command and prohibition, and the lifting of obligation from His servants. ...

The author continues to reiterate that Imamate is not transferable between brothers, according to the Imāmiyya. Similarly on page 106, the author states,

As long as affairs are in the hands of Allah, Imamate will remain in the progeny of Imam al-‘Askarī (a) and will not go to a brother, uncle, cousin or grandchild.... The *ijmā‘* (unanimous opinion) of the Shi‘a is on this.

This repeated emphasis by the author that until the Day of Judgement, Imamate will never transfer between brothers is a means of rejecting the claims of Ja‘far, the brother of Imam al-‘Askarī (a) and other claimants. In addition, the next five pages clearly indicate that the author’s main focus is on rejecting the transfer of Imamate between familial relations other than father-son and the absolute prohibition of revealing any detail about the twelfth Imam such as his name or whereabouts. There are no indications whatsoever that the Imāmīs were under the impression that there would be a continuous chain of Imams after Imam al-‘Askarī until the Day of Judgement. It would seem impossible for Sa‘d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Ash‘arī to even posit such a view, since he is one

of the narrators (in at least 4 different chains of narrators), who have reported the famous *ḥadīth al-lawḥ*, which describes the roles of each of the twelve Imams and in which the twelfth Imam is explicitly described as the seal of vicegerents.¹⁵⁰ Thus, Modarressi’s claim that the Imāmīs believed in a continuous chain of Imams remains unsubstantiated, with the evidence provided in the footnotes of his work bearing no relevance to such a claim.

In the Farsi translation of Modarressi’s work, he further buttresses his claim by referencing *Kitāb al-Shajara* of the Ismā‘īlī Abū Tammām (d. c. 4th/10th century). This book is not only insignificant in terms of heresiographical data, but is replete with claims that are in opposition to what is unanimously accepted by major heresiographers. Furthermore, the aforesaid work also does not prove Modarressi’s point, assuming the work is authoritative, as “a group that believes in a non-specified number of Imams” has no relation with “the beliefs of the Imāmiyya at the time of the beginning of the minor occultation.”¹⁵¹ The latter group is even explicitly described as the majority of the Shī‘a, who believe in twelve Imams. This implies that, at most, only a minority sect, believed in an infinite chain of Imams, whilst Modarressi’s claim was that most of the Shī‘ī believed this.¹⁵²

Furthermore, there are strong counter indications to this claim in works predating Abū Tammām by other Ismā‘īlī authors. Consider the

¹⁵⁰ Al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 62-64; al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Jāmi‘at al-mudarrisīn: 1983), 477; Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 1:308, Ibn Bābawayh, ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra* (Madrasat Imām al-Mahdī: 1983), 103.

¹⁵¹ Javad Ala Almohadesin, “Ketābī ki bahāni dast-i Akbar Ganji shud,” *Tābnāk*. Accessed 14th May 2024, <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/89155/%DA%A9%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87%E2%80%8C%E2%80%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%A8%D8%B1-%DA%AF%D9%86%D8%AC%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%AF>

¹⁵² For a more detailed analysis of all of Modarressi’s references regarding this point, see *Ibid*.

report of Ja'far b. Aḥmad b. Haytham in the book *al-Munāẓarāt* in his debate and dialogue with Abū 'Abdullāh, the great Fatimid missionary in the Maghreb, on 3rd Rajab 296/908 in the city of Raqqada.¹⁵³ Speaking from the position of someone who had been an *Ithnā-‘asharī* Imāmī and familiar with the sect four years prior to the mentioned date, he stated that the Twelver Imāmīs are the majority of the Shī'a and emphasised that they have provided reasons to support the belief that there are twelve Imams. At the request of Abū 'Abdullāh, Ibn Haytham elaborated the arguments of the Twelver Shī'a and claimed that they refer to things such as the twelve celestial constellations, the twelve months of the year, the twelve hours of the day, and the twelve hours of the night. Undoubtedly, such arguments could not be considered the most important and scholarly evidence of the Twelvers. However, the essence of these references could indicate the consolidation of the doctrine of the twelve Imams. Unfortunately, during this discussion, Abū 'Abdullāh interrupted Ibn Haytham and did not give him the opportunity to further elaborate on the evidence of the Twelver Shī'a. It seems that Ibn Haytham himself was not particularly interested in this task and, in any case, was ready to accept the Ismā'īlī invitation.¹⁵⁴

A general weakness in relying on heresiographical works is that often, the authors of such works posit the existence of sects that do not actually exist in the real world. For example, if a handful of people hold onto a certain opinion, these works tend to classify them as a sect. Proper historical investigation needs to be done in order to assess the extent to which these works represent a society's stratification.¹⁵⁵

This concludes the section on Twelver responses to the assertions of Kohlberg and Modarressi and it is hoped that the reader was able to appreciate the depth of scholarship, precision and academic integrity

¹⁵³ Ibn al-Haytham, *The advent of the Fatimids: A contemporary Shī'ī Witness: An edition and English translation of Ibn al-Haytham's Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, ed. Wilfred Madelung and Paul Walker (I.B. Tauris: 2001), 92.

¹⁵⁴ Moghaddam, "Raḥyāftī no bi tārikh," 95.

¹⁵⁵ Ala Almohadesin, "Ketābī ki bahān-i dast-i Akbar Ganji shud."

that has been shown by those responding to these discussions from within the seminary and affiliated institutions. The next section will broadly discuss emerging discourses within the seminary that resulted from the above engagement.

The relationship between history and theology and an emerging discourse on Twelver intellectual historiography

Responses to Hossein Modarressi's *Crisis and Consolidation* following its official Persian translation has brought novel questions to the fore, which has shaped a rich discourse in Iranian scholarly circles. This section attempts to briefly sketch the background of the interlocutors and delineates some of the questions being asked in the aftermath of the said book. This will also assist us in showing how modern intellectual history intersects with the development of a religious intellectual tradition.¹⁵⁶

Being a work of intellectual history, dealing with doctrinal issues while employing the *ḥadīth* corpus, the publication of *Crisis and Consolidation* provided an opportunity for researchers from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds to join a discourse that amongst other debates, sharpened the contours of and the interplay of various fields: in particular, the fields of history, intellectual history and theology. The scholars critiquing this work have raised many of these questions in a multitude of conferences and discussions, and thus have set the terms of this discourse, alongside those interested in Western academic studies of Shī'ism in general.

¹⁵⁶ As discussed below, one of the debates that has emerged concerns the relationship between Theology and History, Ni'matullah Safari, member of faculty at the department of History at Al-Mustafa University, believes the debate has its roots in the reaction that arose following the publication of *Shahīd-i Jāwīd*. Thus, *Crisis and Consolidation* might merely be seen as a trigger that revealed underlying questions and tensions. Ni'matullah Safari and Muhammad Taqī Sobhani, "Rābiṭi-yi 'ilm-i kalām wa 'ilm-i tārikh", *Ni'matullah Safari Furūshāni*, <https://www.nsafari.ir/>

Parts of this discourse have also been touched upon in book reviews and introductions of books offering an alternative historical reading of Shī'ī thought, as well as surfacing in obituaries and sessions held in memory of deceased historians of early Islam.¹⁵⁷ There are now independent publications in Persian that focus specifically on intellectual history and the history of ideas in the context of Islamic and Shī'ī Studies.¹⁵⁸ Some of the interlocutors are historians employed at university departments of history in Qom and Tehran, others are known to be experts of *ḥadīth*, and yet others come from a theological background. This variety promises a diversity of concerns and opinions.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Sayyid Morteza 'Āmili was seen by some to be a theologian who tainted History with Theology. See the remarks of Dr Ḥasan Ḥaḍratī, assistant professor of history at the University of Tehran. at Ḥasan Ḥaḍratī, "Naqd wa barrasī-yi tārikh nigāri-yi marhūm ustād sayyed Morteza 'Āmili", *Dānishkadi-yi Adabiyyat-i 'Ulūm-i Insānī*. <https://literature.ut.ac.ir/-/%D9%86%D9%82%D8%AF-%D9%88-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AE-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%B6%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%DB%8C>.

Alternatively, Mahdi Pishva'i was thought by Abdol Hossein khosropanah to have struck a good balance between disciplines of theology and history. Obituary posted on the latter's Eitaa channel at @khosropanah_ir, posted on 15 August, 2021.

¹⁵⁸ This was preceded by oral lectures by some professors.

¹⁵⁹ For instance, despite his own reservations, Ni'matullah Safari places *Crisis and Consolidation* in high esteem and pronounces it as the best book written to date on the Intellectual history of Shi'ism, and best explains available historical data. Speaking immediately after him in the same conference, Sobhani believes it is only to be praised for its extensive referencing to multiple and diverse early sources, but not to be praised for a proper comprehension and analysis of the sources. Ni'matullah Safari, Muhammad Taqī Sobhani et al., "*Nishast-i naqd-i kitāb-i maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul: Jalasi-yi awwal*,"

Despite this diversity, however, critics have unanimously acknowledged the void left by the Shi‘ī tradition in the field of intellectual history and the need to do more. It may be suggested that this is the reason Orientalists took over the narrative.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, both the need to understand and critique, as well as the need to develop an independent, ‘local’ and ‘faith-compatible’ field of intellectual history, has provided the impetus for fresh debate.^{161 162}

For example, in their attempt to provide a fitting scholarly critique on a comparable level, critics have found themselves compelled to

Kitāb-i Māh-i Dīn 142 (1388 Sh./2009), 41–43.

In yet another conference held in honor of Sayyid Morteza ‘Āmilī on the fortieth day after his passing, Hazrati attacked the deceased for consciously allowing his theological beliefs to intervene in historical analysis. He compared his work to Hossein Modarressi, whom the speaker thought was faithful to history and didn’t commit the fallacy committed by the former. While acknowledging that theology and history have different topics to discuss as disciplines, he asserted that a theologian is dependent on history if he wishes to prove a number of key doctrines. Ḥasan Ḥadrati, “Naqd wa barrasī.”

¹⁶⁰ Whilst critics declared Hossein Modarressi to be borrowing methodology from the Orientalists, they didn’t consider him an Orientalist. In contrast, Kohlberg and Heinz Halm were categorised as “*mustashriq*” (lit. Orientalist). This is because in the Iranian context, *mustashriq* — although a literal translation of “Orientalist” — denotes any westerner who studies the east. Hailing from the west is also defined ethnically. Therefore, a Muslim Islamic researcher born in the west or migrating to a university in the United States would not be termed an orientalist, while his white Caucasian colleague in the same department would. This is in contrast to the way in which the term “Orientalist” is currently understood in academic circles in English-speaking countries.

¹⁶¹ Gerami explicitly states that his book on intellectual history was in part the result of his observations following the publication of *Crisis and Consolidation*. Hadi Gerami, *Muqaddami-yī bar tārikh negārī-yi ingārii-yī wa andīshi-yī* (Imam Sadiq University, 2017), 12.

¹⁶² Interestingly though, the discourse avoids two key terms that gained popularity in Iran after the revolution and still continue to receive mixed reactions; *Islāmī sāzi-yi ‘ulūm* (Islamisation of the Sciences) and *‘Ilm-i dīnī* (Religious Science).

question the nature of intellectual history, and how it might diverge from the manner in which Shī'ī doctrines and their evolution have been addressed by the tradition up to this point. Other researchers have asked how the field of intellectual history might be redefined and understood in a local context, and what existing and innovative methods should be employed to conduct a valid intellectual history of Shī'ism.¹⁶³

The participants of this discourse concur that the study of intellectual history is necessary and does not inherently pose a threat to faith, as well as agreeing that it reveals new perspectives and insights not offered by historical sources and studies produced by the tradition.¹⁶⁴ Thus, the shortcomings identified in the works of Modarressi and Kohlberg serve to reinforce the belief that the study of intellectual history should be conducted using appropriate methodology. In fact, there are several instances where interlocutors accuse Modarressi of being 'un-academic' (*ghayr 'ilmī*), or overstepping into the realm of theology, instead of adhering to the boundaries of his work stated as intellectual history.¹⁶⁵

These questions then invite a discussion pertaining to the relationship of history – in particular intellectual history – with existing disciplines such as theology. This intersection of disciplines, may, for example, pose a challenge when discussing the actions and sayings of the Imams (a) and the Prophets (s) as recorded in history, and whether they possess supernatural qualities.¹⁶⁶

There are a number of individuals who have attempted to address the questions mentioned above,¹⁶⁷ and yet others who have written on

¹⁶³ Ibid, 31.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 51–52; Mohammad Taqi Sobhani, "Az tārikh tā andīsheh," *Khīradnāmeḥ-ye Hamshahrī*, no. 28 (2008), 13–14.

¹⁶⁵ Mohammad Taqi Sobhani et. al, *Naqd wa barrasī-yi naẓarī-yi taṭawwur-i tārikhī-yi tashayyū'* (Majma' 'ālī ḥikmat: 1388 Sh./2009), 22–23.

¹⁶⁶ Safari and Sobhani, "Rābiṭi-yi 'ilm-i kalām wa 'ilm-i tārikh."

¹⁶⁷ For instance, Dr Hazrati and Sulaymānī Amīrī, a professor of History from a seminary in Qom, share a common interest in the subject matter but might have a difference of opinion. A lecture delivered by the former that touches

an aspect of Shī‘ī intellectual history. Two research teams in Iran can be identified that have seriously attempted to answer some of these questions and consistently produced works on Shī‘ī intellectual history.

A group of researchers is led by Dr. Mohammad Taqi Sobhani, a seminarian with a variety of interests who specialises in discussions related to Imamate. Known to be mildly skeptical of the dominant Sadrian philosophy,¹⁶⁸ he leads a network of institutes in Qom focusing on theological studies, specifically issues that relate to the doctrine of Imamate. Under his stewardship, the group has published several works on the history of Shī‘ī *kalām*, producing at least ten volumes that explore various theological issues, trends, and methodologies identifiable in Shī‘ī history, from the era of the Imams in Medina to the theological school of Hilla.¹⁶⁹

Sobhani asserts that the interrelation between history and theology, as well as intellectual history and theology as distinct disciplines, calls for individual scrutiny. When these fields are compared in terms of their definitions, methodologies, subject matter, and objectives, he acknowledges that theology, history, and intellectual history may intersect on numerous subjects related to a historical event involving a divine figure. He maintains that theological presuppositions not only influence but should also guide the interpretation of history by introducing hypothetical possibilities of immaterial dimensions and interventions. However, he clarifies that this does not necessarily imply

on this topic is available. Ḥasan Hazrati, “Nisbat-i ‘ilm-i kalām wa ‘ilm-i tārikh dar Ashūrā shināsī”, Pazhūhish-i ‘ulūm-i insānī wa muṭālī‘āt-i farhangī, <https://www.ihts.ac.ir/fa/news/15729/>. The latter has published a paper. Javād Sulaymānī Amīrī, “Manṭiq-i ta’sīr gudhārī-yi bāvarhā-yi kalāmī bar tārikh pazhūhī,” Ma’rifat-i kalāmī, no. 25 (2020), 157–176.

¹⁶⁸ See Mahdī ‘Abdullāhī’s criticism of his views on Islamic Philosophy. Mahdī ‘Abdullāhī, “Naqdī bar sukhānān-i Muhammad Taqi Sobhani dar hamāyish-i jāyigāh-i ‘aql dar kalām wa falsafī,” Mehr, Accessed 18th May 2024, <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4481078/>

¹⁶⁹ See for instance: Sayyid ‘Alī Ḥusaynzādeh Khidrābād, *Madrasi-yi kalāmī-yi Madini: az āghāz tā imāmat-i Imam Bāqir* (as) (Dār al-ḥadīth: 2023).

a theological dictation of historical analysis, and concludes that none of these disciplines are capable of independently resolving each other's issues or intervening in each other's respective domain.¹⁷⁰

Another research group, primarily based at the University of Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) in Tehran is led by Dr. Ahmad Pakatchi. This group leans more towards the study of Qur'ān and *hadith* and their historical transmission. One of Pakatchi's students, Hadi Gerami, has authored a work on intellectual history, with a foreword by Pakatchi. The author expresses gratitude towards his mentor for the significant contributions made to the discipline of intellectual history, and acknowledges the instrumental role that Modarressi's scholarly work has played in the formation of this discipline within the Iranian context. Gerami's primary focus lies in the expansion and evolution of intellectual history in Iran. A notable obstacle to this progression has been the perceived discord between this discipline and theological beliefs or faith. In a separate chapter, Gerami explores the interplay between theology and intellectual history. He concludes that any apparent conflict between these two fields is merely superficial, provided that the historian refrains from overstepping his boundaries by delving into doctrinal territory. He believes that Hossein Modarressi committed this fallacy.¹⁷¹

The team led by Sobhani maintains a clerical identity despite university degrees, whilst the team based at the Imam Sadiq University asserts a non-clerical identity, despite Dr. Pakatchi and his students having engaged in seminary studies at some point in their careers. The latter is more open to social sciences in Western academia, and often engages with Western academia on topics of interest, confidently using the terminology and concepts existing in these disciplines; Pakatchi himself is known to be an expert in semiotics. Meanwhile, the other team has formulated and developed its own categories, terminology,

¹⁷⁰ For more details, refer to his lecture series on the relationship between theology and History, available at <https://eitaa.com/mtsobhanii?q=م+الک+و+خ+ی+رات+ه+ط+ب+ار>, accessed on May 18, 2024.

¹⁷¹ Hadi Gerami, *Muqaddami*, 63–80.

and phases of Shī‘ī history, perhaps in an attempt to evade a Western framework as they proceed to elucidate the contours of Shī‘ī intellectual history.

Conclusion

This work has attempted to demonstrate a lively discourse that has ensued within the seminary and relevant university departments in Iran, after the publication of the Persian translation of Hossein Modarressi’s *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shī‘ite Islam*. There are several conclusions that can be gleaned from this exposition. Firstly, there is a critical need for dialogue and engagement between scholars in Western academia writing in English, and traditional seminarians or scholars who represent the sect, writing in non-European languages such as Arabic or Persian. To this date, there are almost no original works written in English that meticulously engage with and critique works produced by Western academia on Shī‘ī Studies from a traditional perspective. This paper has only given a glimpse of the vast amount of critical research ongoing within the seminary, affiliated institutions and relevant university departments in Iran. This comprehensive survey of one such topic should be considered as a first step in presenting such research to a wider audience. It is anticipated that this study will spark an interest in other researchers to carry out similar projects bringing to light the critical engagement of the tradition with the studies and ideas pertaining to the origin and development of Shī‘ite doctrine.

In addition, the discussions surrounding intellectual history and its parameters, sparked by critiques of *Crisis and Consolidation*, is currently one of the liveliest areas of discourse within the seminary. The results of this discussion would have significant consequences on other areas of study within the tradition and thus should be closely monitored. This also demonstrates how modern intellectual history intersects with the development of a religious intellectual tradition.

Appendix

List of works critiquing Hossein Modarressi

No.	Title	Authors/ Contributors	Entry Type	Year	No. of Pages
1	<i>Ta'ammulī dar ḥadīth va dark-i tārikhī-yi 'aqā'id</i>	Majīd Reza'ī	Article	1996	21
2	<i>Pīrāmūn-i kitāb Maktab dar farāyand-itakāmūl: nātāmāmī-yi dīdgāh-i Duktur Modarressi Tabataba'i darbāri-yi Ibn Qiba wa nawbakhtīyān</i>	Sayyid Mohammad Zowqī	Answer to a Question Published Online	2006	6
3	<i>Naqd-i naẓariyyi-i 'Ulamā-yi abrār bā tā'kīd bar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmūl</i>	Hamidreza Qorbani Mobin	Master's Thesis	2010	120
4	<i>Ta'ammulī dar maktab dar farāyand-i takāmūl</i>	Mohammad Šafar Jibrā'īlī	Article	2007	31
5	<i>Naqdi bar yik kitāb</i>	Ḥasan Yūsufiyān	Article	2007	18

No.	Title	Authors/ Contributors	Entry Type	Year	No. of Pages
6	<i>Four posts on the author's web-blog: Naqdhā-yi Hassan Ansari bar kitāb-i maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul, Tahqīq-i nimūni, Kitāb-i maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul va tazakkur-i du nukti, Bāz ham dar bāri-yi kitāb Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Hassan Ansari	Blog posts	2007-2016	8
7	<i>Maktab dar farāyand-i tahājumāt-i tārikhī</i>	Morteza Razawī	Book	2008	304
8	<i>Kudām takāmul? Molāhizātī intiqādī darbāri-yi yik kitāb janjālī</i>	‘Abdullāh Īmāgar	Article	2008	3
9	<i>Gozārish-i jalasāt-i naqd wa barrasi-yi Kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Hasan Ṭarumi	Article (transcription of a conference)	2008-2009	53

No.	Title	Authors/ Contributors	Entry Type	Year	No. of Pages
10	<i>Naqd-i bīṭaraḡī dar kitāb Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Mahdi Cheheltanī	Article	2009	8
11	<i>Pāsukh-i Hasan Tarumi bi javābīyi-yi Hossein Modarresi Tabataba'i</i>	Hasan Ṭarumi	Article	2009	8
12	<i>Guzarī bar shuklgīrī-yi i'tiqādāt-i Islāmī</i>	Ashkān Shīrāzī	Article	2009	4
13	<i>Nishast-i naqd-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul: Jalasi-yi awwal</i>	Sobhani, Safari, Wāsi'ī	Article (Transcription of a conference)	2009	24
14	<i>Nishast-i naqd-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul: Jalasi-yi duwwum</i>	Sobhani, Safari, Wase'i	Article (Transcription of a conference)	2009	26
15	<i>Naqdhā-yi Hasan Tarumi bar moqaddami-yi kitāb Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Ṭarumi, Fakhkhari	Article (Transcription of a session)	2009	8
16	<i>Ta'ammulī dar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Maḥmūd Hedāyat Afzā	Article	2009	11

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17	<i>Naqdī bar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Ḥusiyn Kahfī	Summary of the session made available online	2009	19
18	<i>Yik irjā‘-i kuhan bi Ibn Qiba wa maṭlabī darbāri-yi ū</i>	Moḥammad Kazem Rahmati	Article	2009	3
19	<i>Naqd-i bakhsh-i siwwum-i kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul dar majmū‘i-yi tārikh dar gudhargāh-i naqd</i>	Şobhani, Safari, Wase‘i	Article (transcription of a conference)	2009	46
20	<i>Naqd wa barrasī-yi naẓariyyi-yi taṭawwur-i tārikhī-yi tashayyu‘</i>	Sobhani, Abbazi, Kazem Tabataba‘i, Yusefi Gharavi	Book (transcription of a conference)	2009-2010	108
21	<i>Ketābī ki bahāni-yi dast-i Akbar Ganjī shud</i>	Javad Ala Almohadesin	Article Published online on a news agency’s website	2010	11
22	<i>Vizhigihā-yi asāsī-yi Imāmān dar andīshi-yi Ibn Qiba</i>	Aşghar Gholami	Article	2010	32

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23	<i>Andīshi-yi tafvīd wa ārā-yi mafawwizi: Wākāvī-yi yik khalt-i nā-muwwafaq</i>	Alireza Farajpoor	Article	2010	24
24	<i>Barrasī-yi nazariyyi-yi Imāmat dar maktab-i kalāmī-yi Shū'a wa farḍiyyi-yi 'ulamā-yi abrār (az manẓar-i falsafī)</i>	Thamineh Fooladgar	Master's Thesis	2010	120
25	<i>Iṣmat-i Imām dar tārikh-i tafakkur-i Imāmiyyi tā pāyān-i qarn-i panjum-i hijrī</i>	Muḥammad Ḥuseyn Fāriyāb	Book	2011	472
26	<i>Naqd wa barrasī-yi nazariyyi-yi 'ulamā-yi abrār az dīdgāh-i Qur'an wa aḥādīth</i>	Morteẓā Ḥāj Ḥusiynī, Thamineh Fooladgar	Article	2011	16
27	<i>Molāhizātī darbāri-yi goftimān-i tafvīd dar nukhustīn qurūn-i Islāmī</i>	Hadi Gerami	Article	2011	30

No.	Title	Authors/ Contributors	Entry Type	Year	No. of Pages
28	<i>Barrasī-yi chahār nukti darbāri-yi zindigī-yi Imām Şādiq az kitāb-i Duktur Hossein Modarressi</i>	Sayyed Moḥammad Reza Mousavi	Article	2012	22
29	<i>Naqdī bar farḍiyy- yi taṭawwur-i Imāmat-i Shī‘ī: Barrasī-yi istinādhā-yi kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul, bakhsh-i marbūṭ bi durān-i Imāmat-i Ḥaḍrat-i Imām Bāqir</i>	Javad Ala Almohadesin	Article	2012	28
30	<i>Mi‘yār-i ghuluww dar andīshi-yi Shiykh-i Şadūq</i>	Mohammad Baqer Malekian, Zoheyr Bolandghamatpoor	Article	2012	16
31	<i>Molāhiḏāti bar Khānish-i Modarressi Tabataba‘i az Ibn Qiba</i>	‘Abbās Mīrzā‘ī	Article	2012	19

No.	Title	Authors/ Contributors	Entry Type	Year	No. of Pages
32	<i>Barrasī-yi intiqādī- yi didgāh-i nu-andīshān-i mu'āsir darbāri-yi īshmat-i imām tā ta'kīd bar nazar-i aṣḥāb-i a'immi</i>	Ābqad Tashakkerī, Muḥammad 'Alī Vatan Dūst	Article	2012	31
33	<i>Muṭālī'āt-i mustashriqān dar bāb-i Mahdawiyyat wa didgāh-i Shī'ayān rāji' bi ān</i>	Batool Khan Alizadeh	Master's Thesis	2012	120
34	<i>Naqd-i ravishshināsī- yi nazarīyyi-yi ulamā-yi abrār bā tā'kīd bar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Qorbani Mobin, Hamidreza, Khosropanah	Article	2013	20
35	<i>Ṣifāt-i farābasha- ri Imāmān az niqāh-i aṣḥāb-i a'immi</i>	Sayyed Mohammad Hasan Alavi	Article	2013	40
36	<i>Barrasī-yi qidmat-i ahādīth-i dawāzdah Imām dar al-Kāfi</i>	Reza Qorbani Zarrin	Article	2013	32

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37	<i>Padidār-shināsi-yi Jāyghāh-i Imāmat wa maqāmāt-i Imāmān dar ‘aqā’id-i Abdullāh b. Abī Ya‘fūr</i>	Moḥammad Hossein Afrakhteh	Article	2013	44
38	<i>Tabyīn-i ma‘nāyī-i iṣṭilāh-i ‘ulāmā-yi abrār bā ta’kīd bar Jaryānāt-i fekrī-yi aṣḥāb-i a’immi</i>	Mohammad Ja’far Rezaei, Safari	Article	2013	16
39	<i>Barrasī-yi ārā-yi tārikhī-yi ghaybat-i sughrā dar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Aḥmad Kachāyī	Article	2014	18
40	<i>Naqsh-i ghālīyān dar intishār-i riwāyāt bā mazāmīn-i fawq-i basharī būdan-i a’immi</i>	Muḥammad ‘Alī Chelongar, Mehra Tabataba’i Poodeh	Article	2014	27
41	<i>Tabyīn-i naẓariyyi-yi ghaybat-i Imām dar andīshi-yi Ibn Qība Rāzi</i>	Abbas Mirzaei, Marziyeh Amri	Article	2014	18

No.	Title	Authors/ Contributors	Entry Type	Year	No. of Pages
42	<i>Bāzkhānī-yi guzārish-i dass wa tahrīf-i ghālīyān dar partu-yi kār kard-i farhangī-yi nahād-i Imāmat</i>	Sayyed Alireza Hosseini Shirazi, Taher Aziz Vakili	Article	2014	40
43	<i>Naqsh-i 'anāsir-i tārikhī dar tabyīn-i 'aqāyid-i ahl-i bayt</i>	Sayyed Mustafa Motahhari	Book	2015	212
44	<i>Barrasī-yi tārikhī-yi tafakkur-i Shī'i-yi ithnā-'ashariyyi</i>	Ghulām Ḥasan Muḥarrammī	Book	2015	244
45	<i>Nigāhī bi tārikh-i tafakkur-i Imāmiyyi: az āghāz tā zuhūr-i Safawiyyi</i>	Mahdi Farmanian, Mustafa Sadeqi Kashani	Book	2015	190
46	<i>Tahlīl-i intiqādī-yi didgāh-i Modarressi Tabataba'i dar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmūl dar murid-i aḥādīth-i Shī'i</i>	Muḥammad Mighdad Amiri, Abdulhadi Faghihzadeh	Article	2015	22
47	<i>Az ghuluww tā taqshir: ta'ammulī dar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmūl</i>	Sayyede Munā Mousavi	Article	2015	22

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48	<i>Naqd-i nazariyyi-yi ‘ulamā-yi abrār bar asās-i didgāh-i aṣḥāb-i ijma‘-i Imāmayn Šādiqayn</i>	Akbar Baqeri	PhD Thesis	2016	200
49	<i>Tabyīn-i ravish-shināsi-y tārīkh-i tafakkur dar ‘arṣi-yi Imāmat az didgāh-i Modarresi wa naqd-i ān</i>	Hamidreza Qorbani Mobin	PhD Thesis	2016	200
50	<i>Ibn Qiba Rāzī wa Imāmat-i ḥadd-i aqallī: ta‘ammulī dar didgāh-i Modarresi Tabataba‘i darbāri-yi Ibn Qiba</i>	‘Abbās Mīrzā, Ṭūlī Fārūq	Article	2017	16
51	<i>Aṣālat wa i‘tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat-i Imām-i dawāzdahum (taḥlīl-i intiqādī-yi nazariyyi-yi wābastigī-yi Imāmiyyi bi wāqifi dar aḥādīth-i ghaybat)</i>	Morteza Naderi	PhD Thesis	2017	200
52	<i>‘Ilm-i Imām dar bāwar-i Shī‘ayān-i nukhustīn</i>	Sayyed Abdulhamid Abtahi	Book	2018	263

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53	<i>Maqāmāt-i imāmān: Naqdi bar kitāb Maktab dar frāyand-i takāmul wa nazariyyi-yi ‘ulamā-yi abrār</i>	Mustafa Sulaymāniyān	Book	2019	364
54	<i>Barrasī-yi intiqādī-yi didgāh-i nu-andishān-i mu‘āshir dar bāri-yi gustari-yi ‘ilm-i Imām bā ta’kid bar nazar-i aṣḥāb-i ā’immi</i>	Ābqad Tashakkurī, Ghulamhossein Shānehchī	Article	2019	24
55	<i>Rahyāft-i nu bi tārīkh-i piydāyish-i tashayyu’-i ithnā ‘asharī: shiklgīrī-yi bihīngām</i>	Hāmid Montazarī Moqaddam	Article	2019	20
56	<i>bāzshināsī tārīkh-i āghāz-i pardākht wa daryāft-i Khums; barrasī-yi intiqādī-yi didgāh-i bāztāb yāfti dar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Javād Solaimānī Amīrī	Article	2019	27

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57	<i>Barrasi-yi intiqādī- yi naẓariyyi-yi ‘ulamā-yi abrār bā ta’kid bar ‘iṣmat wa karāmat-i imām</i>	Taqī Khalīlī	Master’s Thesis	2019	120
58	<i>Bāzkhānī wa naqd-i didgāhhā- yi Kohlberg wa Modarresi Tabataba’i darbāri-yi piydāyish-i tashayyū‘-i dawāzdah imāmī</i>	Hāmid Montazarī Moqaddam	Article	2020	21
59	<i>Naqd-i mabnā’ī-yi kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul bā ta’kid bar rüykar-d-i taḥawwul-i tārīkhī-yi ‘aqā’id-i Shī‘a</i>	Hādī Razāqī Harikandehī	Article	2020	21
60	<i>Barrasī wa naqd-i ‘ilm-i ghayb-i imāmān dar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul (mabānī, ravish wa muḥtawā’)</i>	Asadullāh Rahīmī	PhD Thesis	2020	200
61	<i>Rijāl al-Kashshī wa naẓariyat al-taṭawwur al- imāma</i>	Mohammad Baqer Malekian	Article	2020	44

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62	<i>Nazariyyi-yi imāmat-i Shīʿī wa lavāzim-i ān nazd-i aṣḥāb-i aʿimmi</i>	Muḥammad Naqī	PhD Thesis	2020	200
63	<i>Barrasī wa naqd-i mabānī-yi Qurʾānī, ḥadīthī va kalāmī-yi kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul darbāri-yi ʿilm-i ghayb-i imāmān</i>	Ḥusayn ʿAbdulmuḥammadi, Asadullāh Rahīmī	Article	2021	20
64	<i>Maktab dar imtidād-i hidāyat: dar naqd-i ketāb Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Ghulām ḥasan Muḥarramī, Sayyid ʿAlī Ḥusaynī Milānī (Introduction)	Book	2022	428

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The Role of Intellect in the Perspective of Imāmī Jurists

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ABSTRACT

In the eyes of Imāmī jurists, the Qur'an, Sunna, *ijmā'* (consensus), and 'aql (intellect) are the four sources used to derive religious rulings. Intellect is a religious tool that all Imāmī scholars, except the scholars of the Akhbārī school of thought, are at one over its validity for deriving religious rulings.

The issue of intellect, its realm, and the level of its validity has been one of the preoccupations of Shī'ī scholars throughout history. They examine intellect from four important angles:

1. What is the definition of the rule of intellect?

2. Does reason have the capacity to discover religious rulings?

In other words, when the intellect deduces a ruling in a definite form, can it be said that the *sharī'a* also has such a view?

3. If the answer is yes, can it compel a *mujtahid* to issue a *fatwā* accordingly?

4. What are the reasons for the Akhbārī opposition to the role of intellect in revealing religious rulings?

This article aims to address these four angles in detail.

KEYWORDS: *sharī'a*, induction (*istiqrā'*), analogy (*tamthīl*), logical deduction (*qiyās-i manṭiqī*), independent dictates of reason (*al-mustaḥilla al-'aqliyya*), non-independent dictates of reason (*ghayr al-mustaḥilla al-'aqliyya*) understanding of benefits and harms (*maṣāliḥ wa mafāsīd*).

Introduction

Intellect is one of God's blessings upon human beings, which can lead them to the position of the best of creations. Intellect has distinguished humans from other creatures of this world, meaning that their ultimate felicity and ruin in this world and the Hereafter, depends on the prosperity of their intellect. Throughout history, the role of the intellect has been one of the preoccupations of scholars. They have presented various and contradictory perspectives on the function of intellect to the extent that some of them have gone to "excess" (*ifrāt*) or "neglect" (*tafrīt*) due to their lack of proper cognition of the real position of intellect.

This article, in its own capacity, attempts to analyse the role of intellect in the perspective of Imāmī jurisprudents. First, it will look at the definition of intellect. Second, it will address the authority of the rule of intellect from two perspectives: a) the judgement of intellect as an example of certitude (*qaṭʿ*), and b) the validity of the rule of intellect as the discoverer of the law of *sharīʿa*. The second perspective falls into induction (*istiqrāʾ*), analogy (*tamthīl*), and logical deduction (*qīyās-i mantiqī*). Third, it will address the three types of logical deduction: a) independent dictates of reason (*al-mustaḥilla al-ʿaqliyya*); b) non-independent dictates of reason (*ghayr al-mustaḥilla al-ʿaqliyya*); c) understanding of benefits (*maṣāliḥ*) and harms (*maḥāsīd*). Finally, it will examine four arguments that the Akhbārī school presents against the role of intellect in jurisprudence.

The history of intellect amongst Muslim jurists

It is generally acknowledged that intellect is the fourth source of inference following the Qurʾan, Sunna, and consensus (*ijmāʿ*).¹ The views of Islamic jurists are not unanimous over the role of intellect in the realm of jurisprudence. In the schools of the Ahl al-Sunna, there

¹ Miqdād b. ʿAbdullāh Fāḍil Miqdād, *al-Tanqīḥ al-rāʾiʿ li mukhtaṣar al-sharāʾiʿ* (Maktabat al-Marʿashī al-Najafī: 1983), 1:5.

are two distinct approaches to deriving religious rules: followers of *ḥadīth* (*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*) and companions of opinion (*aṣḥāb al-ra'y*).² The exclusive basis of the first group in inference is the transmitted sciences, especially *ḥadīth*, *sīra* of the *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (the practice of the early pious predecessors), and the views of the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*). On contrast, the second group contends that there are very few authentic *ḥadīths* that are able to respond to all jurisprudential questions. Therefore, we must cling to other sources besides the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*.

The early Shī'ī jurists (*mutaqaddimūn*) have paid less attention to the role of intellect, and those who have addressed this issue have not clearly explained the place of intellect in jurisprudence. However, among the later jurists (*muta'akhkhirūn*), this issue has been discussed to a greater extent.³

The definition of intellect

Lexicographers have mentioned many meanings for intellect. The term 'aql in Arabic means refrain and clinging (*istimsāk*). Among the derivatives of this word, we can refer to the word 'iqāl. 'Iqāl denotes a rope tied to a camel's leg so that it does not move. It seems that since the power of wisdom prevents a person from doing abnormal things, this word is applied to it.⁴ However, conventionally, as Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī, commonly known as Mullā Ṣadrā (1572-1641) maintains, 'aql is a term shared by six meanings (*mushtarak lafẓī*). Among them, two terms are more prominent in the field of Islamic philosophy and theology:

²Abdullāh b. Muslim b. Qutayba, *Ta'wīl mukhtalaḥ al-ḥadīth* (Dār al-jayl: 1990), 51 and 73.

³Nāṣir Makārim, *Dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i fiqh-i muqāran* (Madrasat Imām 'Alī: 2006), 1:203-4.

⁴Ḥusayn al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt fī alfāẓ al-Qur'ān* (Dār al-Qalam/al-Shamitiyya: 1991), 577-8; Fakhr al-Dīn Ṭurayḥī, *Majma' al-Baḥrayn* (Murtaḍawī: 1997), 5:425.

- a. The first term considers intellect as a being that is intrinsic and in the realm of act (*fi'l*) immaterial. It independently exists without belonging to the soul and body. Based on this, there are many '*aqls*, in the world, and among them there is a causal (*sababī*) relation, which are mediators of God's grace.⁵
- b. In the second term, intellect is one of the tools of the human soul, which is united with it and is actually one of its powers. Intellect is ahead of tools such as imagination (*khīyāl*), illusion (*wahm*), and senses (*ḥiss*), which are capable of understanding the general concepts (*maḥāhīm-i kullī*). Intellect can deduce theoretical issues from self-evident premises.⁶ In theological parlance, it denotes "the faculty with which a man can distinguish truth from falsity."⁷ Given this definition, we can see that '*aql* is capable of preventing errors.

Intellect or rational apprehension (*al-idrāk al-ʿaqlī*) in the second term falls into two classifications, theoretical (*naẓarī*) and practical (*ʿamalī*).

Theoretical and practical

The former refers to the apprehensions which are valuable to know, such as the arguments for proving God's existence, His attributes, His acts, etc. They somehow are able to affect man's practical life. Nevertheless, they are not such that we should act upon them; they do not fall under the scope of action.

The latter is an awareness which is in the realm of action, and we should perform it. "God must be worshipped", "lying must be avoided",

⁵ Ḥasan b. Yūsuf ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, *Kashf al-murād fī sharḥ tajrīd al-iʿtiqād* (al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1992), 176-181; ʿAbd al-Razzāq Fayyāḍ Lāhījī, *Gawhar-i murād* (Sayih: 2004), 301-3, 293-4.

⁶ Al-Ḥillī, *Kashf al-murād*, 191-2; al-Ḥillī, *Nihāyat al-marām* (Muʿassasat Imām Ṣādiq: 1998), 225 and 229.

⁷ Muhammad Husayn al-Tabatabaʿi, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Raja: 1983), 1:405.

and “the devil must not be obeyed” are examples of practical ‘aql.⁸

Following a brief explanation of intellect, the following section addresses its realm and authority in jurisprudence.

The realm of intellect

The authority of the rule of intellect should be assessed from two standpoints. First, the authority of the judgement of intellect since it is one of the examples of certitude (*qaṭʿ*). Second, the validity of the rule of intellect is since it is the discoverer of the law of *sharīʿa*. These shall be discussed in turn.

First: the authority of intellect as an example of certainty

There is no doubt that when a *mujtahid* reaches certainty, he must act upon it since it, in of itself, leads him towards truth. In the eyes of Uṣūlīs, if he obtains certitude, he must act upon it since reason independently dictates so. It implies that he will be rewarded if his certitude is correct and excused if it is not.

For clarification, when a jurist reaches a degree of certainty about an issue, he logically cannot act contrary to his assurance. Certainty reveals the truth, and, at least in the eyes of the person who gains certainty, this certainty reflects the true reality; that is, what he has arrived at is the true reality. This, in turn, implies that opposing the certitude is like opposing the reality, which is unjustifiable.

Based on the above, certitude has three features:

1. Discovery (*kāshifiyya*): It reveals the truth, even if he is the only one who has reached certainty about it.
2. Accountability (*munajjiziyya*): When the certainty of a jurist is in accordance with the actual ruling, it makes the real ruling definitive. In this case, if he obeys the ruling, he will be entitled to a reward. Likewise, he is worthy of punishment for contravening the ruling.

⁸ Al-Ḥillī, *Nihāyat al-marām*, 224-5.

3. Exculpability (*mu'adhdhiriyya*): When the certainty of the jurist is not in accordance with the real ruling, in this case, if he realises after obeying that his certainty was wrong, he will be excused. It means that he will not be entitled to punishment for contravening the actual ruling.⁹

As mentioned above, the authority of the rule of intellect should be assessed from two standpoints. First, the authority of the judgement of 'aql since it is one of the examples of certitude (*qaṭ'*). Second, the validity of the rule of intellect due to the fact that it is the discoverer of the rule of *sharī'a*. Now we discuss the second angle, which is the main concern of this article.

Second: the validity of intellect as a discoverer of the rules of sharī'a

As stated before, intellect is generally regarded as the fourth source of inference after the Qur'an, the Sunna, and consensus (*ijmā'*). There are three types of rational arguments: induction (*istiqrā'*), analogy (*tamthīl*), and logical deduction (*qiyās*). To clarify whether Imāmī Uṣūlīs approve all three types or not, we will examine them in turn.

1. Analogy

The transition from one thing to another, owing to their similarity, is called analogy.¹⁰ Let me make it clear with two examples. Suppose you have read a book by a famous author which you found very interesting. Then you see a new book from the same author and, compared to the previous book, you may say: "This book will definitely be as interesting as the previous book." In this case, you deduce the attraction of the second book from the first book since it emanates from the same person.

Another example of analogy is that we know that wine is forbidden

⁹ Muḥammad Kāẓim al-Khurāsānī, *Kifāyat al-uṣūl* (Āl-al-bayt: 1988), 258-9.

¹⁰ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *al-Jawhar al-naḍīd* (Bīdār: 1984), 189. It is worth noting that the term analogy in the science of *uṣūl* is known as *qiyās*.

in Islam. We also know that wine is intoxicating. But let us assume that we are not aware of the verdict of beer. Here, due to the similarity between wine and beer (i.e. intoxication), we may say: "Beer will also be forbidden."

Therefore, in analogy, the criterion is the similarity between two partial things: 1. Similarity of something which we know its ruling by *naṣṣ* (wine, for instance), and 2. We do not know its ruling (since there is no *naṣṣ* for it, for instance, beer).

There are two types of analogy:

- a. *Manṣūṣ al-‘illa* (analogical inference premised on authentic proof): The *ḥadīth* clearly specifies the reason (‘illa) of impermissibility. For instance, the evidence says that wine is harm due to intoxication, in such if it turns to vinegar, it will no longer be impermissible.

Another example: a *ḥadīth* states:

ماء البئر واسع لا يفسده شيء الا يتغير ريحه او طعمه، فينزع حتى يذهب الريح او الطعم، لانه له ماله.

The water of the well is wide and nothing spoils it unless it changes its smell or taste. [If it becomes impure] it should be drained until the smell or taste is gone, because it has a source.¹¹

The *ḥadīth* clearly specifies the reason for the purification of water. It means that if the water of the well has a source, nothing can make it impure unless the colour or the taste of the water is changed by the impurity. We can take it as a reason and hold that if any water (like the river) has a source, the impurity cannot make it impure since it connects to a source.¹²

- b. *Mustanbiṭ al-‘illa* (analogical inference premised on conjectural causal factors): The proof does not mention the reason for

¹¹ Muḥammad al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-Shī’a* (Āl al-bayt: 1988), 1:141.

¹² See also Ja’far b. Ḥasan al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī, *Ma’ārij al-uṣūl* (Āl al-bayt: 1982), 185-6.

impermissibility.

For instance, it says that wine is impermissible.

Imāmī jurists accept the analogy of *manṣūṣ al-illa* and issue *fatwās* accordingly.¹³ In reality, it is somehow a way of following the Sunna. However, they do not accept *mustanbiṭ al-illa*. They believe that some narrations reject this type of analogy, for instance, the *ḥadīth*:

قلت لأبي عبد الله (عليه السلام): ما تقول في رجل قطع إصبعاً من أصابع امرأة كم فيها؟ قال: «عشرة من الإبل»، قلت: قطع اثنين؟ قال: «عشرون». قلت: قطع ثلاثاً؟ قال: «ثلاثون». قلت: قطع أربعاً؟ قال: «عشرون». قلت: سبحان الله! يقطع ثلاثاً فيكون عليه ثلاثون، ويقطع أربعاً فيكون عليه عشرون!؟

قال (عليه السلام): «مهلاً يا أبان! هذا حكم رسول الله (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم)، يا أبان إنك أخذتني بالقياس، والسنة إذا قيست مُحَقَّق الدين.

I asked Abū ‘Abdullāh (peace be upon him): “What do you say about a man who cut off one of a woman’s fingers?” He said: “Ten camels.” I said: “If he has cut two?” He said: “Twenty camels.” I said: “If he has cut three?” He said: “Thirty camels.” I said: “If he has cut four?” Imam said: “Twenty.” I said: “Glory be to God! For three fingers thirty camels, and for four fingers twenty camels?” He (peace be upon him) said: “Wait, Abān! This is the ruling of the Messenger of God (s). O Abān, you followed analogy. If the Sunna is compared by analogy, nothing remains of the religion.”¹⁴

2. Induction (*Istiqrā’*)

Induction is another of the tools of rational argument. In its definition, it has been said: “When we examine the various details, we can derive a

¹³ Ja’far Sobhani, *al-Inṣāf fī masā’il dām fī-hā al-khilāf* (Mu’assasat al-Imām al-Ṣādiq: 2019), 2:439.

¹⁴ Al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-Shī’a*, 29:352.

general rule from it.”¹⁵ To illustrate, suppose the census officers noticed after the census that all the people referred to are literate. Then they announce that all the people of this city are literate. A significant question to be addressed in the next section is the value of induction.

There are two types of induction: a) incomplete and b) complete induction.

Incomplete induction (*Istiqrāʾ-i nāqis*)

In induction, like analogy, the criterion is similarity between two things: 1. The similarity of something which is in the realm of the senses (such as the census of people referred to); and 2. Something which is outside the realm of the senses (such as people who have not been referred to). Such induction, therefore, is a non-definitive reason; since, in this example, there may be many illiterate people who have not been referred to. Imperfect induction cannot be regarded as proof since it only provides probable knowledge. It is clear that there is no evidence that substantiates its authority.

Complete induction (*Istiqrāʾ-i tāmm*)

Say we examine all the people of this city without any exception and we see that everyone has an educational degree; this is a definitive reason and we can say conclusively that all the people of this city are literate.

Although complete induction leads to certainty, however, such induction is practically impossible. Moreover, it cannot be a source of inference for a jurist since complete induction consists of particular pieces of information that we cast in the form of a universal proposition, without us attaining knowledge about something that was previously unknown. To put it another way, we arrive at a conclusion via induction without clinging to any logical argument. So, complete induction cannot be a source of inference.

In light of what was mentioned above, the *mustanbiṭ al-illa* analogy

¹⁵ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Jawhar al-naḍid*, 188.

and both types of induction cannot be a source of inference. Having invalidated analogy and induction as the sources of inference, the next part discusses the third one, i.e. logical deduction (*qiyās-i manṭiqī*) and its scope in the field of jurisprudence.

3. Logical deduction

It seems that Mīrzā Abū l-Qāsim al-Qummī (1737-1815) defines intellectual evidence (*dalīl-i ‘aqlī*) for the first time. He says that what is meant by intellectual evidence is any intellectual ruling that can be used to reach a religious ruling. In other words, intellectual ruling leads to religious rulings.¹⁶ In the eyes of Uṣūlīs, logical deduction is divided into a) independent dictates of reason (*al-mustaqilla al-‘aqliyya*); b) non-independent dictates of reason (*ghayr al-mustaqilla al-‘aqliyya*);¹⁷ c) understanding of benefits (*maṣāliḥ*) and harms (*maḥāsīd*). They will be addressed in turn.

Independent dictates of reason

In the first type of logical deduction, both minor and major premises are derived from intellect. Independent dictates of reason means rulings that the intellect has comprehended without the assistance of the *sharī‘a*, and the minor and major premises are both rational, such as the ruling on the “goodness of justice”. It can be illustrated with the following example:

Minor premise: Justice is intellectually good (*ḥasan*).

Major premise: Whatever is rationally necessary, *sharī‘a* makes it obligatory.

Conclusion: Justice is a religious obligation.

To explain this, we should note that sometimes intellect by itself takes into account the nature of an act and issues a ruling without

¹⁶ Mīrzā Abū l-Qāsim al-Qummī, *Qawānīn al-uṣūl* (Iḥyā’ al-kutub al-Islāmiyya: 2008), 3:7.

¹⁷ Ibid, 7-8.

considering the goodness or evil that may be involved in it. For example, from the point of view of the intellect, the nature of justice (on its own) is pleasing, whether it is for God or for man, whether in this world or in the Hereafter, whether it is for the benefit of man or apparently to the detriment of man. Thus, the human intellect distinguishes between good and evil actions, understanding the former to signify the perfection of the agent and the latter the imperfection of the doer.¹⁸

In this case, the scholars of *uṣūl* believe there is harmony and correspondence between such a general intellectual ruling and the ruling of the *sharī'a*. They argue in this way that the Divine Lawmaker is wise and never rules against common sense; therefore, it is known that whatever the intellect rules, the *sharī'a* also rules accordingly. In this regard, it is important to clarify that “the intellect can never issue an “order” with regards to God, saying that God “must” be just; rather, the task of the intellect is to disclose the true reality of God’s actions.”¹⁹

There is another, contrasting, viewpoint, which maintains that the human intellect is unable to distinguish between good and evil actions, even in a general form.²⁰ They hold that the discriminating “between good and evil can only be made on the basis of divine revelation”: that what God orders to do is good, and what He forbids is evil. Based on this theory, if God commands to cast the innocent into hell or take the sinner to heaven, it will be good and just.²¹

However, the Imāmī scholars of *uṣūl* are at one over the independent dictates of reason in this sense. One situation where Imāmī jurists utilise the dictates of the intellect for inference is with respect to the

¹⁸ Al-Ḥillī, *Kashf al-murād*, 59. See also Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ḥā'irī al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Fuṣūl al-gharawiyya fī l-uṣūl al-fiqhiyya* (Dār al-iḥyā' al-'ilm al-Islāmī: 1983), 316; Muḥammad Taqī al-Iṣfahānī, *Hidayat al-mustarshidīn* (Āl al-bayt: n.d.), 441; Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī, *Maṭāriḥ al-anẓār* (Āl al-bayt: 1983), 229.

¹⁹ Ja'far Sobhani, *Doctrine of Shi'i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices*, trans. Reza Shah-Kazami (I.B.Tauris Publishers: 2001), 49.

²⁰ Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfā* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya: 1996), 8.

²¹ Sobhani, *Doctrine*, 50.

principle of non-liability (*al-barā'a*). For instance, if a jurist doubts the prohibition of an act due to a lack of evidence from the Qur'an or *ḥadīth*, he can cling to the principle of non-liability and issue a *fatwā* that it is permissible.²²

It should be said that a person can only be questioned for disobeying the command of his master if he had already been warned about it. In other words, a manager can reprimand his employees for coming late if he has warned them about this before. Now, suppose that a *mujtahid* doubts about the obligation of an act, and having investigated comprehensively does not find any proof of the obligation from the Qur'an or narrations; in the eyes of Uṣūlīs, he can issue a *fatwā* on the non-obligation of the act. It is clear that if the master wants to rebuke the jurist for such a *fatwā*, it will be a "punishment without a declaration" (*iqāb bi-lā bayān*). Clearly, this is an example of injustice from the master and it is not compatible with divine wisdom. This can be made clear with a logical deduction:

Minor premise: The punishment of a person based on a *fatwā* that has been thoroughly researched but has not reached a conclusion is an example of "punishment without a declaration".

Major premise: The punishment without a declaration is not fair.

Conclusion: God does not punish anyone without declaration.

The non-independent dictates of intellect

The non-independent dictates of intellect are the rulings that intellect understands according to the ruling of the *sharī'a*. In other words, the minor premise is derived from *sharī'a* and the major one from intellect.

To put in another way, the non-independent dictates of intellect refer to cases in which the intellect alone cannot discover the religious ruling; instead, the intellect can discover another religious practice with the assistance of a religious ruling. For example, *sharī'a* makes a particular act obligatory, the performance of which naturally depends

²² Al-Khurāsānī, *Kifāyat al-uṣūl*, 343-4; Abū l-Qāsim al-Khū'i, *Miṣbāḥ al-uṣūl* (Dawari: 1995), 3:34.

on the fulfilment of some preliminaries. Accordingly, although the *sharī'a* has not made a statement regarding the obligation of those preliminaries, since it is not possible to perform that religious act without preliminaries, intellect discovers, from the *sharī'a* perspective, the obligation of preliminaries.

For instance, the Qur'an has made Ḥajj obligatory for affordable individuals, but it is silent about the obligation of its preliminaries, such as applying for a ticket, visa, etc. Here the intellect maintains that there is a logical connection between performing Ḥajj and its preliminaries. Therefore, the obligation of Ḥajj also requires the obligation of preliminaries (such as obtaining a visa). We can make it clear with such logical deduction:

Minor premise: Ḥajj is obligatory according to *sharī'a*.

Major premise: The preliminary act(s) of an obligatory act is obligatory.

Conclusion: The preliminaries of Ḥajj are obligatory.

As mentioned earlier, in the eyes of Uṣūlīs, logical deduction is divided into a) independent dictates of reason; b) non-independent dictates of reason; c) understanding of benefits (*maṣāliḥ*) and harms (*maḥāsīd*). Having discussed the first and second, we address the third type.

Understanding of benefits and harms

From the Imāmī perspective, the religious practices of Islam arise out of a series of existential properties, i.e. benefits and harms, inherent in the nature of things.²³ It means that God commands an act due its benefit, and likewise, He prohibits an act due to a harm. This is due to the fact that "God is the absolute Truth, thus His acts are all true, hence they are devoid of any kind of falsehood or vanity."²⁴

The Qur'anic verses reveal that all His divine commands stem from

²³ Sobhani, *Doctrine*, 90.

²⁴ Ibid, 120.

benefits just as His prohibitions emanate from harm. For instance, God prohibited wine and gambling since it is the source of enmity and it prevents His remembrance:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ يُوقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاءَ فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ وَيَصُدَّكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَعَنِ الصَّلَاةِ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُنْتَهُونَ.

Indeed Satan seeks to cast enmity and hatred among you through wine and gambling, and to hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. Will you, then, relinquish?²⁵

Moreover, the Qur'an, in the philosophy of the obligation of prayer, maintains that it has the capacity to restrain the individual from wrongful deeds. It says:

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ.

Maintain the prayer. Indeed the prayer restrains from indecent and wrongful conduct.²⁶

Moreover, Imam al-Riḍā (a) refers to the same fact in the philosophy of permissibility and impermissibility. He states that if God has permitted certain foods and drinks, it was for expediency and benefit. He adds that God has never forbidden anything unless there is harm and corruption in it.²⁷

In light of what has been mentioned, it can be concluded that God is the absolute Truth; thus, all His acts are true and devoid of any kind of falsehood or vanity. It implies that all His commands, i.e. obligations and prohibitions, stem from His divine wisdom (*maṣlaḥa* and *mafsada*).

Now, if we accept that *sharī'a* rulings are based on benefits and harm, the essential question that preoccupies the minds of jurists is to suppose

²⁵ *The Qur'an*, trans. Qara'i (ICAS: 2005), 5:91.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 29:45.

²⁷ Sobhani, *Al-Wasīf fī uṣūl al-fiqh* (Mu'assasat al-Imām al-Ṣādiq: 2018), 2:26; Ḥusayn al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il wa mustanbat al-masā'il* (Āl al-bayt: 1987), 16:26.

that a *mujtahid* becomes aware of the existence of benefit or harm in a matter after thorough research. Can he issue a *fatwā* according to that? In other words, the benefit or harm in question is one of the issues about which there is no *sharī'a* statement, but the jurist realises with his intellect that there is a benefit or harm in that act. In this case, is it possible to give a *fatwā* accordingly? Is it permissible for a jurist to take into account every benefit about which the *sharī'a* is silent regarding its validity or invalidity, and issue a *fatwā* based on it?

In response, it should be pointed out that the benefit or harm concluded by the jurist may be one of two ways:

1. The jurist's awareness of the benefit or harm of an act has reached a point where all wise individuals have a unanimous opinion about it. For example, suppose that all medical practitioners, believers or non-believers, prescribe a vaccine to prevent a life-threatening virus. In this case, the jurist, with the support of the consensus of the specialists, can reveal the religious ruling. As a result, he could issue a *fatwā* stating that vaccination is obligatory.²⁸

2. Sometimes, the jurist's cognition of the benefit or harm of an act is not in such a way that all experts are at one over it. Rather, based on a series of evaluations, he thinks this action is beneficial or harmful. In other words, benefit or harm is not as obvious as the previous type, that all intellectuals will comprehend it in the same way; rather, each jurist may reach a different conclusion based on their insight. The essential question is whether a jurist can issue a *fatwā* based on his understanding of benefit or harm. Can he rely on his cognition and discover the divine decree based on that?

Imāmī jurists believe that, in this case, the jurist cannot issue a ruling based on his personal inference. They ask: how can it be known the benefit that the jurist reached is the complete cause ('illat-i tāmm) of God's decree; perhaps there is an obstacle that the jurist is not aware of? Ayatollah Muḥammad Ḥusayn Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī, Known as al-

²⁸ Sobhani, *al-Mabsūṭ fī uṣūl al-fiqh* (n.p.: 2012), 3:95.

Kumpānī (1875-1942), refers to this fact and states that “the criteria of religious practices are not subject to a rule that a jurist can achieve.” He adds: “Wisdom can never be aware of such criteria. Therefore, a jurist cannot infer the religious ruling with his limited understanding.”²⁹

To clarify al-Iṣfahānī’s statement, it should be noted that religious rulings differ considerably in terms of benefit and harm. It means that some obligations are so important that a person is permitted to commit a sin in order to comply with them. For example, to save a person caught in a fire, you are permitted to break down the door of a house without the owner’s permission and save the burning person. In this example, although it is forbidden to break the door or window without the permission of the owner of the house, because it is important and obligatory to save a human’s life, this sin can be ignored. On the other hand, there are some sins that a person cannot commit under any condition. For example, killing an innocent individual is one of the most severe prohibitions that absolutely must be avoided, even if it leads to missing some obligations.³⁰ It is possible that a jurist considers a benefit of an act so important that he rules the act as obligatory, whereas another jurist does not view the same benefit as important and therefore does not issue the same ruling.

In sum, although the religious ruling is not separable from benefit and harm, intellect cannot always perceive them as they are. A *mujtahid*, therefore, cannot rely on his personal judgement of harms and benefits and reveal religious practices.

Following what has already been mentioned, since there is no exact measure of benefit or harm in an act, the jurist’s awareness of benefits cannot be used as the basis for inferring religious rulings. Consequently, from the Imāmī perspective, a jurist cannot issue a *fatwā* accordingly.

In sum, the logical deduction is divided, in the eyes of Uṣūlīs, into: 1. Independent dictates of reason. 2. Non-independent dictates of reason.

²⁹ Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Iṣfahānī, *Nihāyat al-dirāya fī sharḥ al-Kifāya* (Āl al-bayt: 2008), 3:349.

³⁰ Sobhani, *al-Wasīṭ*, 2:27.

3. Understanding of benefits and harms. The third one also falls into two types: a) all wise individuals are at one over the benefit or harm of a particular act; b) such a unity does not exist.

Concerning what has been discussed, the conclusion can be drawn that Imāmī Uṣūlīs believe that intellect can discover religious rulings in the independent and non-independent dictates of intellect. Moreover, a *mujtahid*, in the first type of “understanding of the benefits or harms” can also discover religious rulings with the help of intellect. In spite of this, Uṣūlīs maintain that in the second type, intellect cannot be the source of revealing religious rulings.

Contrary to the Uṣūlīs, a group of Akhbārīs believe that intellect independently cannot be the discoverer of religious rulings. They denied the authority of intellect in the realm of the derivation of religious rulings and argued that according to traditions, religious practices should be derived from the infallible and not from the intellect. Akhbārīs are the representatives of this thought stream.³¹ Their views will be analysed in turn.

The view of Akhbārīs

Akhbārī scholars, in order to reject the incapability of intellect in the realm of revealing religious practices, cling to some narrations, some of which will be referred to. This section also will try to see whether these narrations can be an obstacle for the perspective of Uṣūlīs. Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1626), in *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya*, presents four arguments, and we will discuss them in turn.

1. The silence of the lawmaker about a ruling

Al-Astarābādī asserts that Uṣūlīs discover God's decree via the assistance of intellect. This argument depends on the fact that God already had a ruling that had not reached the *mujtahid*, and now the *mujtahid* has

³¹ See al-Ḥā'irī al-Iṣfahānī, *Al-Fuṣūl*, 316; Sayyid Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī, *al-Ḥadā'iq al-nāḍira* (Āl al-bayt: n.d.), 1:126-135.

discovered it via the intellect. Nonetheless, God may have no ruling on a particular matter at all. Now, if a *mujtahid* finds its ruling based on his intellect, how can he attribute it to God? In other words, how can a *mujtahid* contend that my intellect reveals that God's ruling is this, while God has not given a ruling on this matter at all, and has remained silent?³²

In reply, al-Astarābādī's statement is in conflict with some narrations. The Prophet, in his last Ḥajj trip, stated that he conveyed what was necessary to the guidance of man and to lead them to heaven. He says:

قَالَ: خَطَبَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ع فِي حَجَّةِ الْوَدَاعِ فَقَالَ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ وَاللَّهِ مَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ يُقَرِّبُكُمْ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ وَيُبَاعِدُكُمْ مِنَ النَّارِ إِلَّا وَقَدْ أَمَرْتُكُمْ بِهِ وَمَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ يُقَرِّبُكُمْ مِنَ النَّارِ وَيُبَاعِدُكُمْ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ إِلَّا وَقَدْ نَهَيْتُكُمْ عَنْهُ.

O people, I have informed you all of what brings you close to paradise and all of what keeps you away from the fire, and have ordered you towards it. Moreover, I have prohibited you from everything that makes you close to hell and far from paradise.³³

This *ḥadīth* shows that God has rulings for all matters. Thus, if intellect discovers a ruling, it indicates that the *sharī'a* already had a ruling that the *mujtahid* was unaware of. It is clear that if the *mujtahid* had known it, he would not have sought to discover it through the intellect.³⁴

2. Narrations are the source of rulings

The most significant argument of the Akhbārī's non-authenticity of intellect is the following *ḥadīth*. Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) says:

أَمَّا لَوْ أَنَّ رَجُلًا صَامَ نَهَارَهُ وَقَامَ لَيْلَهُ وَتَصَدَّقَ بِجَمِيعِ مَالِهِ وَحَجَّ جَمِيعَ دَهْرِهِ وَلَمْ يَعْرِفْ وَلَا يَتَذَكَّرْ وَلِيَّ اللَّهِ فَيُؤَالِيَهُ وَتَكُونُ جَمِيعُ أَعْمَالِهِ بِدَلَالَتِهِ إِلَيْهِ مَا كَانَ لَهُ عَلَى

³² Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī, *Farā'id al-uṣūl* (al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1995), 1:20.

³³ Muḥammad al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* (Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1986), 2:74.

³⁴ Sobhani, *al-Mabsūṭ*, 3:97-8.

اللَّهُ ثَوَابٌ وَلَا كَانَ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْإِيمَانِ.

Suppose a person fasts every day, spends his nights worshipping, gives all his property in charity, and performs Hajj all his life but does not recognise the *wilāya* of God's successor so that all his actions are guided by His successors' guidance; in that case, such an individual will not deserve any reward. Consequently, he will not be considered a *mu'min*.³⁵

This *ḥadīth* clearly indicates that all religious rulings should be driven via the infallible, not by intellectual reasoning.³⁶

In reply, it should be noted that just as the Qur'an has a cause of revelation (*sha'n-i nuzūl*), which makes the meaning of the verse clear, the narrations also have the cause of transmission of issuing (*sha'n-i ṣudūr*). These kinds of narrations refer to some scholars of Ahl al-Sunna, such as Abū Ḥanīfa, who ignored the narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt. Instead, they only referred to the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet. In addition to the Qur'an and narrations, they paid special attention to *istiḥsān* (juristic preference), *sadd al-dharā'ī'* (prohibiting what may lead to sinning), and the like.

Contrary to Abū Ḥanīfa and the like, however, the Shī'ī jurists always cling to the Qur'an and the narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt. If the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* are silent, they look to consensus (*ijmā'*) and intellect. It seems that al-Astarābādī has not paid attention to the cause of transmission of issuing of these narrations.³⁷

3. Non-authenticity of intellect

The scholars of the Akhbārī school maintain that intellect holds no value and authenticity in the realm of jurisprudence. They refer to the following *ḥadīth* from Imam al-Bāqir (a):

³⁵ Al-Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*, 27:42.

³⁶ Al-Anṣārī, *Farā'id al-uṣūl*, 1:19.

³⁷ Sobhani, *al-Mabsūṭ*, 3:98; Sobhani, *al-Wasīṭ*, 2:28-9.

قَالَ أَبُو جَعْفَرٍ مَنْ أَفْتَى النَّاسَ بِرَأْيِهِ فَقَدْ دَانَ اللَّهُ بِمَا لَا يَعْلَمُ وَمَنْ دَانَ اللَّهُ بِمَا لَا يَعْلَمُ فَقَدْ ضَادَّ اللَّهَ حَيْثُ أَحَلَّ وَحَرَّمَ فِيمَا لَا يَعْلَمُ.

If someone issues a *fatwā* based on his opinion, he is worshipping God ignorantly and has actually opposed God; his *fatwā* is without basis.³⁸

For them this *ḥadīth* proves that intellect cannot be a source in jurisprudence, as Imam al-Bāqir (a) considered the view of such a *mujtahid* baseless.³⁹

In response, it should be clarified that the meaning of *ra'y* (opinion) is not intellect; rather, it refers to probable knowledge.⁴⁰ Therefore, if someone issues a *fatwā* based on probable knowledge that does not have a specific basis, he has actually opposed God.⁴¹

4. The Qur'an and Ḥadīth as exclusive sources

The Akhbārī scholars maintain that the Qur'an and narrations are the only acceptable sources in the jurisprudential domain.⁴² They refer to the following *ḥadīth*:

مَنْ أَخَذَ دِينَهُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِ الرِّجَالِ أَزَالَتْهُ الرِّجَالُ، وَمَنْ أَخَذَ دِينَهُ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَالسُّنَّةِ، زَالَتْ الْجِبَالُ وَلَمْ يَزَلْ.

Whoever takes his religion from the mouth of people [their undocumented opinions], the same people can expel him from his religion. But the one who takes his religion from the Qur'an and the infallible Sunna will remain steadfast in his faith and belief even if

³⁸ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:58.

³⁹ See also al-Ḥā'irī al-Iṣfahānī, *Al-Fuṣūl*, 319.

⁴⁰ Sobhani, *al-Mabsūt*, 3:98-9.

⁴¹ Muḥammad Hādī al-Sharīf al-Shīrāzī, *al-Kaṣḥf al-wāfi fī sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi* (Dār al-ḥadīth: 2009), 248-9.

⁴² See Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī, *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya wa-l-shawāhid al-makkiyya* (Jāmi'at al-mudarrisīn: 2003), 47-50.

the mountains fall.⁴³

In reply, this narration refers to those who ignored the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* from the beginning, while the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* are two primary sources for Shī'ī jurists.⁴⁴ Accordingly, if Shī'ī jurists find pieces of evidence from the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, they cling to them. Therefore, the first source of Shī'ī jurisprudence is the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. If these two are silent on a matter, the jurists go to the intellect or consensus.

Moreover, in many places the Qur'an calls upon man to make use of intellectual discernment. In addition, the infallible Imams have also stressed the significance of the evidence provided by intellect in those domains where the intellect is competent to judge; the Seventh Imam referred to revelation as outward evidence and intellect as inward evidence.⁴⁵

يَا هِشَامُ إِنَّ لِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حُجَّتَيْنِ حُجَّةً ظَاهِرَةً وَحُجَّةً بَاطِنَةً فَأَمَّا الظَّاهِرَةُ فَالرُّسُلُ
وَالْأَنْبِيَاءُ وَالْأَئِمَّةُ - وَأَمَّا الْبَاطِنَةُ فَالْعُقُولُ.

Truly God possesses two pieces of evidence which He has imposed upon mankind: outward and inward evidence. The outward one comprises the messengers, the prophets, and the Imams; and the inward one is the intellect.⁴⁶

In light of what has been mentioned, in many cases a jurist can employ intellect in the realm of jurisprudence. The narrations of the Imams do not absolutely prohibit intellect. Therefore, intellect can reveal religious rulings in the three mentioned types.

Summary

Intellect is one of God's blessings upon man. This article assessed

⁴³ Al-Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*, 27:132.

⁴⁴ Sobhani, *al-Mabsūṭ*, 3:99-100.

⁴⁵ Sobhani, *Doctrine*, 3-4.

⁴⁶ Al-Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*, 15:207.

the authority of the rule of intellect from two perspectives. First, the judgement of intellect as an example of certitude (*qaṭʿ*). Second, the validity of the rule of intellect since it is the discoverer of the laws of *sharīʿa*.

First: when a *mujtahid* reaches certainty, his certainty has three features:

1. Discovery (*kāshifiyya*): it reveals the truth, even if only for him.
2. Accountability (*munajjiziyya*): when his certainty is in accordance with the actual ruling, it makes the real ruling definitive for him. In this case, he will get rewarded for obedience, just as he is worthy of punishment for contravening the ruling.
3. Exculpability (*muʿadhdhiriyya*): if he realises after obeying that his certainty was wrong, he will be excused.

Second: the validity of intellect as a discoverer of the rules of *sharīʿa*. There are three types of rational arguments: induction, analogy and logical deduction.

1. Analogy: the transition from one thing to another, due to their similarity, is called analogy. There are two types of analogy: a) *manṣūṣ al-ʿilla* b) *mustanbiṭ al-ʿilla*. The Imāmī jurisprudents accept the analogy of *manṣūṣ al-ʿilla* and issue *fatwās* accordingly. However, they do not accept *mustanbiṭ al-ʿilla*.

2. Induction: when we examine the various details, we can derive a general rule from it. There are two types of induction: a) incomplete and b) complete. The first one is a non-definitive reason; and, consequently, cannot be regarded as proof in Imāmī jurisprudence. Although the second one, i.e. complete induction, leads to certainty, it is practically impossible. Moreover, it cannot be a source of inference since a *mujtahid* does not attain any information previously unknown.

3. Logical Deduction: in the eyes of Uṣūlis, logical deduction is divided into three types a) independent dictates of reason (*al-mustaḳilla al-ʿaqliyya*). b) Non-independent dictates of reason (*ghayr al-mustaḳilla al-ʿaqliyya*). c) Understanding of benefits (*maṣāliḥ*) and harms (*maḳāsīd*).

a) In the first type of logical deduction, both minor and major premises are derived from intellect. For instance, intellect believes that justice is good. Moreover, it claims that “what is rationally necessary, *sharīʿa* makes it obligatory”. In light of these two premises, intellect concludes that justice is a religious obligation. In this case, Imāmī scholars believe there is harmony and correspondence between such a general intellectual ruling and the ruling of the *sharīʿa*.

b) The second type, i.e. the non-independent dictates of intellect, refers to cases in which the intellect alone cannot discover the religious rulings; instead, intellect can discover another religious practice with the assistance of a religious ruling. For example, God has made Ḥajj obligatory for affordable individuals, but it is silent about the obligation of its preliminaries, such as applying for a ticket, visa, etc. Here intellect maintains a logical connection between performing Ḥajj and its preliminaries.

c) Understanding of the benefits and harms: from the Imāmī perspective, God commands an act due to benefit, and likewise, He prohibits an act due to its harm. This is due to the fact that God, as the Qurʾan states, “is the absolute Truth, thus His acts are all true, they are devoid of any kind of falsehood or vanity.” The important question is: if we accept that the yardstick for religious commands and prohibitions is the existence of benefits or harms, can a *mujtahid* issue a *fatwā* if he finds this yardstick?

In response, this article made it clear that the benefit or harm concluded by the jurist may be one of two ways.

1. The jurist’s awareness of the benefit or harm of an act has reached a point where all wise individuals have a unanimous opinion about it. In this case he could issue a *fatwā* with the support of specialists in consensus.

2. The jurist’s cognition of the benefit or harm of an act is not in such a way that all experts are at one over it. Imāmī jurists believe that, in this

case, the jurist cannot issue a ruling based on his personal inference.

This article discussed that contrary to the Uṣūlīs, a group of Akhbārīs believed that intellect cannot be the discoverer of religious rulings. They denied the authority of intellect in the realm of the derivation of religious rulings. Astarābādī, in *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya*, presents four arguments.

First: Astarābādī asserts that Uṣūlīs discover God's decree via the assistance of intellect. This argument depends on the fact that God already had a ruling that was not reached to the *mujtahid*, and was later discovered via intellect. Nonetheless, God may have no ruling on a particular matter at all.

Second: some narrations clearly indicate that all religious rulings should be driven via an infallible, not by intellectual reasoning.

Third: they hold that there is no authenticity of intellect in the realm of jurisprudence. They argue that intellect cannot be a source in jurisprudence.

Fourth: Akhbārī scholars maintain that the Qur'an and narrations are the only acceptable sources in the jurisprudential domain.

However, Imāmī Uṣūlīs reply to these four Akhbārī obstacles, and they hold that, in many places, the Qur'an calls upon man to make use of intellectual discernment.

In light of what has been mentioned, in many cases, a jurist can employ intellect in the realm of jurisprudence. The narrations of the Imams do not absolutely prohibit the intellect. Therefore, intellect can reveal the religious rulings in the three mentioned types.

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Divine Stewards of the Earth: Spiritual Ecology in the Qur’anic Narratives of Prophets

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the portrayal of Prophets in the Qur’an as exemplars of environmental stewardship within the framework of spiritual ecology. It aims to unveil the enduring relevance of prophetic narratives and demonstrate how ancient wisdom can be effectively applied to contemporary environmental challenges. The study elucidates the relationship between the Beautiful Names of God and human responsibility towards the Earth, highlighting how embodying these Divine Names in fulfilling humanity’s role as vicegerents can guide sustainable practices, advance social justice, and promote unity within communities.

The analysis of the story of Prophet Nūḥ underscores themes such as Divine guidance, adaptation to catastrophic changes, and preservation of biodiversity. In the narrative of Prophet Hūd, there is a stark warning against the neglect of stewardship and the consequences of hubris and technological misuse. The account of Prophet Šāliḥ and the miraculous she-camel includes teachings on sustainable resource management and respecting all living beings. Advice from Prophet Yūsuf on resource management showcases the necessity of strategic planning and sustainable consumption during times of abundance to prepare for future scarcity. Prophet Dāwūd exemplifies ethical leadership and a harmonious relationship with nature,

while Prophet Sulaymān's judicious use of natural forces and resources demonstrates a holistic approach to environmental management.

By learning from prophetic models presented in the Qur'an, humankind can cultivate a deeper appreciation of its role as caretakers of the Earth, guiding it towards a sustainable future that harmonises spiritual values with environmental responsibility.

KEYWORDS: stewards, vicegerents, spiritual ecology, environmental stewardship, Qur'anic narratives, Prophets

Spiritual ecology and environmental stewardship

For the purposes of this paper, spiritual ecology is defined as an approach that merges spiritual insights and practices with environmental stewardship grounded in the teachings of the Qur'an and *Ḥadīth*. It emphasises the deep connection between the natural world and human spirituality, advocating for a role that centres on the guardianship and thoughtful care of the Earth. This approach calls for a harmonious relationship between spirituality and the environment, urging humans to act as protectors of the natural world, guided by the principles and wisdom found in Islamic teachings.

Environmental stewardship is the responsible care and management of the natural environment through conservation and sustainable practices to ensure its health and preservation for future generations. It involves taking proactive steps to protect and nurture the planet, ensuring its resources and beauty remain intact for those yet to come. This includes implementing renewable energy sources, practising sustainable agriculture, reforestation projects, promoting biodiversity, reducing waste, and encouraging recycling.

The integrated ethos of spiritual ecology in Q 2:28-31

Verses 28 to 31 of Sūrat al-Baqara present us with a deeply integrated ethos of spiritual ecology. They outline a comprehensive framework that links beliefs with environmental stewardship.

Firstly, in verse 28, we are reminded of the miracle of life given by God, setting a foundation for understanding our existence and purpose:

كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكُنْتُمْ أَمْوَاتًا فَأَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

How can you deny God when you were lifeless and He gave you life, then He will cause you to die, then bring you back to life, and then you will be returned to Him?¹

Verse 29 then explains that the creation of the Earth and heavens is for human benefit:

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ أَسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَسَوَّاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَوَاتٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

He is the One Who created everything on the Earth for you. Then He turned to the heaven, fashioning it into seven heavens. It is He Who is knowledgeable about everything.²

Humans are encouraged to utilise God's creation for both material and spiritual gain. Materially, the natural world provides us with vital resources that facilitate and enhance our living conditions. This includes building materials such as wood, metals, and minerals, energy sources such as the sun, wind, water, and fossil fuels, and a diverse array of foods from plants and animals, vital for nutrition and agriculture. Additionally, nature provides us with fibres for clothing and scenic spaces such as forests, beaches, and parks, which contribute to our mental and physical well-being. The variety and beauty of nature also

¹ Q 2:28.

² Q 2:29.

serve as cultural and artistic inspiration, enriching our lives.

Spiritually, nature acts as a profound testament to God's creative power and sovereignty. Engaging with the natural world allows us to enrich our understanding of God, witnessing His wisdom and creativity manifest in the world around us. Reflecting on nature's order and beauty can bring us closer to God, fostering a sense of connection and gratitude for the bounty He has provided. It encourages humility, reminding us of our dependence on God for all things.

Then, in verse 30, we are told about our role as God's vicegerents and representatives (*khalīfa*) on Earth:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّىْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِیْفَةً

[Remember, O Prophet] when your Lord said to the angels, 'Surely, I am appointing a vicegerent on the Earth.'³

Being designated as God's vicegerents on Earth places humanity in a position of trust and responsibility. This role encompasses the duty to maintain the balance and harmony of the natural world. The term '*khalīfa*' implies that humans are stewards who must act in accordance with Divine Will, embodying justice, mercy, and sustainability in their interactions with the environment. This stewardship extends beyond mere conservation; it includes proactive efforts to nurture and restore the Earth, reflecting the Divine Names of the Creator.

Finally, in verse 31, we are told that the foundation of this Divine vicegerency is rooted in the knowledge and manifestation of God's Beautiful Names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*):⁴

³Q 2:30.

⁴Through linguistic analysis, cross-referencing with other Qur'anic verses, and citing relevant *ḥadīth*, Jawādī Āmulī presents several arguments to explain the following: 1) why the appointment of a vicegerent in verse 30 of Sūrat al-Baqara is applicable to all of humanity and not solely to Prophet Ādam; 2) why the entity being represented (*al-mustakhlaf 'anh*) is God; and 3) why the 'Names' referred to in verse 31 are God's Beautiful Names, which only human beings have the capacity to fully manifest within themselves. ('Abdullah Jawādī

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا

He taught Adam the Names, all of them.⁵

This series of verses links faith to environmental stewardship. It starts by depicting life and death cycles as expressions of God's power, setting the context for our existence and purpose. The text then highlights the creation of the Earth and heavens for human benefit, emphasising our duty for responsible management. Being designated as God's vicegerents on Earth places further emphasis on our role in protecting and sustainably managing the environment. Finally, the teaching of the Divine Names reveals that our stewardship is grounded in understanding and embodying God's attributes. The verses present a rich, integrated ethos of spiritual ecology that weaves together belief, knowledge, and responsibility. They offer a framework that encourages Muslims to view environmental stewardship not just as a moral obligation but as an integral aspect of their faith, rooted in understanding and manifesting the Divine Will in every aspect of their lives.

Environmental stewardship and the Beautiful Names

To illustrate the relationship between the Beautiful Names of God and human responsibility towards the Earth, examples of actions that reflect these Divine Names will be presented.

As stewards, humans are tasked with embodying Divine Names such as al-Muhaymin (the Guardian, the Protector), al-Mu'īd (the Restorer, the Reinstater), al-Ḥafīz (the Preserver, The Protector), and al-Muqṣit (The Equitable, The Just). While certain actions resonate with all four names, each name also has a unique focus and emphasis.

For example, al-Muhaymin emphasises the role of humans as overseers, safeguards, and protectors of the Earth. This name focuses on actions such as tracking ecosystem health to protect against degradation and advocating for laws that safeguard natural habitats.

Āmulī, *Tafsīr-i tasnīm* (Markaz-i nashr-i Isrā': 1380 Sh./2001), 3:39-63, 3:68-79.

⁵ Q 2:31

Al-Muʿīd focuses on the restoration and renewal of the natural world. It emphasises actions such as engaging in reforestation, rehabilitating damaged natural habitats, and participating in conservation efforts to recover populations of threatened species. Al-Ḥafīz centres on the preservation of the natural world from loss and harm. This Divine Name has a focus on actions such as promoting recycling, composting, and reducing single-use materials, and advocates for renewable energy sources to reduce environmental impact. Al-Muqsiṭ highlights fairness, justice, and equity in environmental stewardship. It emphasises actions such as ensuring equitable access to essential natural resources and working to reduce environmental inequalities affecting disadvantaged communities.

By aligning their actions with these Divine Names, humans can fulfil their role as stewards of the Earth, ensuring its protection, restoration, preservation, and equitable use for the benefit of all creation. In doing so, they honour the sacred trust bestowed upon them and contribute to a more just and sustainable world.

The timeless relevance of prophetic narratives

Examining the stories of past Prophets to uncover Qurʾanic insights on ethical environmental stewardship might prompt the question: How are these stories relevant to us in the 21st century? It might be argued that the ancient contexts and circumstances of these stories are too far removed from our modern technological and societal advancements to offer practical guidance.

In response, the relevance of the stories of past Prophets in addressing contemporary issues like environmental stewardship lies not in the specific contexts or technologies of their times but in the universal ethical principles they embody. The Qurʾan presents these Prophets as exemplars of virtues such as responsibility, humility, and stewardship – qualities that are indispensable for addressing modern environmental challenges. By interpreting these stories through the

lens of ethical environmental stewardship, we can extract timeless principles that transcend historical and technological changes. These principles can inspire modern initiatives and policies that are not only technologically appropriate but also ethically grounded, thereby bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary practice.

The Qur'an emphasises the enduring value of these narratives:

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ

There is certainly a moral in their [the Prophets'] stories for those possessed of intellect.⁶

This verse highlights the Qur'an's intention that the stories of the Prophets are not mere historical accounts but are rich with moral and ethical lessons intended for reflection and application by those with understanding.⁷ The term 'those possessed of intellect' signifies individuals who are capable of deep thought and discernment, suggesting that the stories of the Prophets require thoughtful contemplation to uncover their profound ethical teachings. In the context of environmental stewardship, this means that by reflecting on the virtues demonstrated by the Prophets, one can derive ethical guidelines that are highly relevant to contemporary environmental issues.

Moreover, the Qur'an conveys that all Prophets shared a united message, inviting humanity to worship the one true God:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ

We never sent a messenger before you [O Prophet] without revealing

⁶ Q 12:111.

⁷ The Holy Prophet (s) was also instructed to recount the stories of previous Prophets, highlighting their significance and the lessons they convey. This directive is mentioned in several verses: Q 19:41, 19:51, 19:54, 19:56, 38:17, 38:41, 38:45, 38:48, 46:21.

to him, 'There is no deity but Me, so worship Me [alone].'⁸

This shared message emphasises the consistency and continuity of Divine guidance throughout human history. The Prophets, though sent to different communities and at different times, all called people towards the same core principles and values. Furthermore, in the following verses, the Qur'an illustrates the fate of communities that denied their Prophets:

وَلَقَدْ كَذَّبَ أَصْحَابُ الْحِجْرِ الْمُرْسِلِينَ

Indeed, the people of Hijr rejected the messengers.⁹

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

The Thamūd rejected the messengers.¹⁰

كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ لُوطٍ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

The people of Lūṭ rejected the messengers.¹¹

Although these communities were each sent one Prophet, their denial is portrayed as a rejection of all messengers. This is because the message brought by any single Prophet is part of a continuum of Divine guidance. Therefore, the rejection of one Prophet equates to the rejection of the entire lineage of Prophethood and the unified message they brought from God.¹² This interconnectedness of the prophetic messages reinforces the notion that the principles of stewardship, ethical conduct, and spiritual ecology are not isolated teachings but part of a comprehensive, Divinely ordained framework.

⁸ Q 21:25.

⁹ Q 15:80.

¹⁰ Q 26:141.

¹¹ Q 26:160.

¹² Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr-i tasnīm*, 39:41.

Prophet Nūḥ and the preservation of life

Turning to the Qur'anic stories of the Prophets for lessons on environmental stewardship, the first narrative that will be examined is that of Prophet Nūḥ and the Ark. Prophet Nūḥ spread the message of monotheism for 950 years, sincerely and steadfastly inviting people to worship God. Despite his efforts, only approximately 80 individuals accepted his call. At the age of 1,800, God commanded him to build an ark, marking the first instance of a human constructing a vessel designed to float on water:¹³

وَأَصْنَعِ الْفُلْكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَوَحْيِنَا

'Build the Ark under Our gaze and with Our guidance.'¹⁴

The phrase 'under Our gaze and with Our guidance' means under God's supervision and with His support and revelatory teaching.¹⁵ Every aspect of the Ark's construction, including its dimensions, the type of wood used, and the quality of its craftsmanship, was directed by God.

This verse offers important lessons on environmental stewardship:

1. **Guidance in environmental efforts:** The building of the Ark under Divine guidance symbolises how environmental actions should be undertaken with a sense of Divine purpose and direction. It suggests that efforts to protect and preserve the environment should align with Divine principles and wisdom.
2. **Dependence on Divine Will:** The success of any endeavour depends on Divine help and support. The statement 'under Our gaze and with Our guidance' highlights that while human efforts are essential, their ultimate success hinges on God's will and

¹³ Rizwan Arastu, *God's Emissaries: Adam to Jesus* (Imam Mahdi Association of Marjaeya: 2014), 101.

¹⁴ Q 11:37.

¹⁵ Muhammed Husayn Tabataba'i, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Mu'assasat al-a'lami lil-muṭbū'āt: 1390/1970), 10:223; Nāsir Makārim Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr-i nimūni* (Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1371 Sh./1992), 9:90.

support. This teaches humility and recognition of the Divine in any effort to care for the planet.

3. **Preparation and responsiveness:** The command to build the Ark before the flood highlights the importance of being ready and reacting effectively to environmental warnings. It illustrates the need for proactive measures and timely actions to address impending environmental crises.

Further, God instructed Prophet Nūḥ:

فَاسْلُكْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ وَأَهْلَكَ

‘... take on board a pair [one male and one female] of every species along with your family.’¹⁶

4. **Preservation of biodiversity:** The instruction to save a pair of every species by boarding them on the Ark underscores the importance of biodiversity and the human role in its preservation. Every species has intrinsic value, and humans are responsible for protecting them from extinction.

In another place, we are told:

وَقَالَ أَزْكُبُوا فِيهَا بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَجْرُئَهَا وَمُرسَهَا

He [Prophet Nūḥ] said, ‘Board it! In the Name of God, it will sail and anchor.’¹⁷

This verse imparts significant insights into environmental stewardship:

1. **Spiritual mindset:** Prophet Nūḥ wished to start and end the voyage with the name of God, acknowledging that all actions and outcomes are under Divine governance. This approach emphasises the importance of a spiritual mindset, where environmental efforts are not merely physical acts but also spiritual practices.

¹⁶ Q 23:27.

¹⁷ Q 11:41.

2. **Stewardship under Divine governance:** Prophet Nūḥ's words serve as a reminder that humans do not control nature but are merely stewards acting under God's governance. This promotes a humble approach to environmental management, emphasising our role as caretakers rather than rulers.

Moreover, the Qur'an states:

قِيلَ يٰنُوحُ اهْبِطْ بِسَلَامٍ مِّنَّا وَبَرَكَاتٍ عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَىٰ اٰمَمٍ مِّمَّنْ مَعَكَ

It was said, 'O Nūḥ! Disembark with peace from Us and blessings upon you and upon the nations [to come] from those with you [i.e. the descendants of Prophet Nūḥ's followers].'¹⁸

This verse imparts a number of instructive lessons:

1. **Peace and blessings promised to Prophet Nūḥ and his followers:** God assured Prophet Nūḥ and his followers of peace and blessings as they fulfilled their duties to Him. Crucially, the term 'nations' (*umam*), the plural of *ummah*, and the phrase 'from those with you', indicate that this promise extends to the descendants of those original followers. Therefore, God's blessings and peace are not limited to Prophet Nūḥ and his immediate companions but extend to all future believers who have the same values. By aligning ourselves as true followers of Prophet Nūḥ and acting as God's faithful stewards on Earth, we too can receive God's peace and blessings.
2. **Survival through cooperation:** The Ark symbolises survival through cooperation and collective effort. Just as Prophet Nūḥ's followers helped him build the Ark, today's environmental challenges can be overcome when communities work together. This collective action not only helps tackle immediate issues but also strengthens community bonds and fosters a shared sense of responsibility and purpose among individuals.

¹⁸ Q 11:48.

3. **Resilience and adaptation:** Prophet Nūḥ's story exemplifies fortitude and the ability to adjust to catastrophic changes. It teaches that adapting to environmental changes and being resilient when faced with climate emergencies are crucial for survival. By embracing this adaptability, communities can develop strategies that mitigate the impact of environmental disturbances.

Prophet Hūd and the 'Ād: lessons from Iram's fall

The 'Ād were descendants of a great-great-grandson of Prophet Nūḥ. God gave them countless blessings, granting them immense physical stature and strength as well as a land of unmatched fertility and lushness. In the area referred to by the Qur'an as Aḥqāf, a region of winding, sandstone mountains in Yemen, the 'Ād constructed a city of extraordinary splendour named Iram, the City of Pillars. This city is referred to in the Qur'an:

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ ﴿١﴾ إِرَمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ ﴿٢﴾ الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ ﴿٣﴾

Did you [O Prophet] not see how your Lord dealt with the 'Ād, [the people] of Iram, [the City] of Pillars, whose like has never been matched in any land?¹⁹

Despite their technological and engineering prowess and the many blessings bestowed upon them by God, the 'Ād fell into religious and moral decline, turning to idol worship and perpetrating injustices. Prophet Hūd, the first Arabic-speaking prophet and a respected member of the community, urged the 'Ād to abandon their idolatry and warned them of Divine wrath if they continued in their ways. However, his warnings were met with violent rejection from the 'Ād's leaders. In the end, God sent a powerful storm that raged for eight days, destroying Iram and annihilating those who refused to listen to Prophet Hūd.²⁰

¹⁹ Q 89:6-8.

²⁰ Arastu, *God's Emissaries*, 126-7.

The story of the 'Ād serves as a powerful warning from God. It illustrates the consequences of failing to appreciate blessings as gifts from Him and neglecting the role of His vicegerents on Earth. It also emphasises the importance of using technology wisely and in a manner that pleases God. This Divine warning and the subsequent repercussions of the 'Ād's actions are stated in the following verse:

أَلَا إِنَّ عَادًا كَفَرُوا رَبَّهُمْ ۖ أَلَا بُعْدًا لِّعَادٍ قَوْمِ هُودٍ

Let it be known! Surely, the 'Ād rejected their Lord. Let it be known!
The 'Ād, the people of Hūd, are forever outcast [from God's mercy].²¹

The story of the 'Ād people, detailing their rise to power, rejection of Prophet Hūd, and eventual downfall, provides vital lessons on environmental stewardship:

1. **Gratitude and humility:** The 'Ād's downfall began when they took their Divine gifts for granted and drifted into extravagance, arrogance, and idolatry. This underscores the importance of recognising blessings as gifts from God to be used with gratitude and humility. By appreciating what we have as Divine gifts, we can foster contentment and embrace a more modest way of life.
2. **Sustainable use of resources:** The 'Ād's construction of Iram involved carving out enormous monolithic pillars as tall as the mountains from which they were hewn. These pillars were then moved to Iram and used as foundations for large homes, showcasing sophisticated transportation and construction skills but also suggesting potential overexploitation of natural resources. Their story serves as a cautionary tale against unsustainable resource use, reminding us to find a balance between our needs and ambitions and the health and preservation of the environment.
3. **Technology and moral responsibility:** The tale of the 'Ād serves as a reminder that technological advancement should

²¹ Q 11:60.

be coupled with moral responsibility. It should aim to serve the well-being of all creation rather than merely to display human dominance or achieve material gains. This principle urges us to consider the broader impacts of our technological pursuits on the environment and society.

Prophet Ṣāliḥ and the Thamūd: lessons from the city of Ḥijr

Prophet Ṣāliḥ belonged to the Thamūd, who were also descendants of Prophet Nūḥ. The Thamūd settled in an area close to modern-day Tabuk in Saudi Arabia. In this region, they established a magnificent city named Ḥijr. They skilfully carved their homes into the sandstone mountains and built grand palaces in the valleys using the excavated stone. Ḥijr was surrounded by natural beauty, with plentiful water from springs supporting the cultivation of crops, lush gardens, and date orchards that produced exceptional fruits. Despite the many blessings from God, the Thamūd turned to idol worship.²²

God chose Prophet Ṣāliḥ to guide the Thamūd. The following verse talks about Prophet Ṣāliḥ being sent to the Thamūd and his Divine message to them:

وَإِلَى ثَمُودَ أَخَاهُمْ صَالِحًا قَالَ يَاقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِّنْ إِلَهِ غَيْرُهُ هُوَ أَنشَأَكُمْ مِّنَ الْأَرْضِ وَاسْتَغَمَّرَكُمْ فِيهَا فَاستَغْفِرُوا لَهُ ثُمَّ تَوْبُوا إِلَيْهِ إِنَّ رَبِّي قَرِيبٌ مُّجِيبٌ

And to the Thamūd [We sent] their brother Ṣāliḥ. He said, ‘O my people, worship God. You have no deity other than Him. It was He Who produced you from the earth, and [it is He Who] wants you to make it prosper. So, seek His forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance. Surely, my Lord is Ever-Near, Ever-Responsive [to prayers].’²³

²² Arastu, *God's Emissaries*, 131-2.

²³ Q 11:61.

The term '*ista'marakum*' uses a verb form that often indicates a request or desire for an action to be carried out. This has been interpreted to mean that God desires humanity to make the Earth prosper by stewarding it properly.²⁴ He wants us to actively engage in its preservation, use its resources wisely, and ensure its sustainability for future generations.

Furthermore, Prophet Ṣāliḥ's message to seek God's forgiveness and repent is significant. His words here emphasise the importance of faith, forgiveness, and repentance in fulfilling one's duties towards the Earth. His message aligns spiritual obligations with the physical act of stewardship.

After years of unsuccessfully urging his people to abandon idol worship, Prophet Ṣāliḥ proposed a challenge to prove the power of God. First, he addressed their idols, but the idols did not respond. The Thamūd then requested a miraculous sign: for a she-camel to emerge from the mountain. Prophet Ṣāliḥ prayed to God to make this happen, and God answered his prayers. Prophet Ṣāliḥ described the she-camel as a sign of God for them:

وَيَقُومُ هَذِهِ نَاقَةُ اللَّهِ لَكُمْ آيَةٌ فَذَرُوهَا تَأْكُلْ فِي أََرْضِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَمْسُوهَا بِسُوءٍ
فَيَأْخُذْكُمْ عَذَابٌ قَرِيبٌ

O my people, this she-camel of God is a sign for you. So leave her to graze [freely] on God's Earth and do not harm her, or a swift punishment will take you!²⁵

On alternate days, the she-camel would miraculously drink all of the available water. Afterwards, she would allow the Thamūd to milk her, and her milk would be enough for everyone. The following day, the she-camel would refrain from drinking any water, permitting the Thamūd to draw water freely for themselves and their livestock. This arrangement was a test of the willingness of the Thamūd to change their ways and follow God's command. However, they struggled with this change and

²⁴Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr-i tashnīm*, 39:37-45.

²⁵Q 11:64.

killed the she-camel. In the end, the Thamūd were destroyed by an earthquake and a blast sent by God as punishment for their wrongdoings.

As with the story of the 'Ād, God uses the story of the Thamūd to caution against taking blessings for granted and neglecting the duty as God's stewards on Earth. In similar words to how He condemns the 'Ād, He says the following about the Thamūd:

أَلَا إِنَّ تَمُودًا كَفَرُوا رَبَّهُمْ ۖ أَلَا بُعْدًا لِّتَمُودَ

Let it be known! Surely, the Thamūd rejected their Lord. Let it be known! The Thamūd are forever outcast [from God's mercy].²⁶

This story highlights several key points relevant to environmental stewardship:

1. **Sustainable resource sharing management:** The command to allow the she-camel to graze freely and drink the water underscores the importance of respecting and sharing environmental resources. The narrative teaches that the Earth's resources are not solely for human consumption but are meant to be shared with all creatures in a sustainable manner. The miraculous occurrence of the she-camel drinking all the water on one day and providing enough milk for everyone symbolises the lesson that, with wise management, natural resources can sustain human communities while also meeting the needs of other living beings.
2. **Interdependence of life:** The relationship between the camel and the Thamūd highlights the interconnectedness of all living things and their environment. The story illustrates that humans and animals depend on the same resources and need each other to survive. It serves as a reminder that the well-being of one species is often linked to the well-being of others, promoting a holistic view of environmental stewardship.
3. **Obedience to Divine commands:** The Thamūd were tested by a

²⁶ Q 11:68.

Divine command, just as modern societies face the challenge of adhering to principles that ensure the well-being of the planet. This aspect of the story emphasises the importance of following guidelines and ethical standards that protect the environment, even when it requires changing long-standing behaviours.

4. **Respect for all forms of life:** The story emphasises the importance of treating all living beings with respect and kindness. The she-camel was not merely a resource but a sign from God, endowed with rights. This respect extends to recognising the intrinsic value of all creatures and the need to protect their welfare as part of our ethical and spiritual duties. Imam al-Bāqir is reported to have said, 'Indeed, God, Blessed and Exalted is He, loves the cooling of a hot liver. Whoever quenches the thirst of a hot liver, be it of an animal or other [living being], God will shade him on the day when there is no shade but His.'²⁷
5. **Resistance to change and its implications:** The Thamūd's decision to kill the she-camel demonstrates the dangers of resisting necessary changes to meet environmental needs. Their unwillingness to adapt led to their destruction, serving as a cautionary tale about the consequences of ignoring or defying sustainable practices. This point highlights the importance of embracing change to avoid detrimental impacts on the environment and society.

Prophet Yūsuf and strategic resource management in Egypt

Prophet Yūsuf faced numerous trials before rising to a position of influence in Egypt. After being sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, he eventually found favour in the household of an Egyptian official.

²⁷ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* (Dār al-ḥadīth: 1429/2008), 7:354.

However, he was falsely accused and imprisoned. While in prison, his ability to interpret dreams brought him to the attention of the king. Summoned from prison to explain a dream that foretold seven years of abundance followed by seven years of severe famine, he advised the king on how to manage resources during the years of plenty to prepare for the years of scarcity:

قَالَ تَزْرَعُونَ سَبْعَ سِنِينَ دَأَبًا فَمَا حَصَدْتُمْ فَذَرُوهُ فِي سُنْبُلِهِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّمَّا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿١٦٨﴾
ثُمَّ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ سَبْعٌ شِدَادٌ يَأْكُلْنَ مَا قَدَّمْتُمْ لَهُنَّ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّمَّا تُحْصِنُونَ ﴿١٦٩﴾

He [Prophet Yūsuf] said, ‘You will sow [grain] for seven consecutive years. Then whatever you harvest, leave in its ear [so that it does not perish], except a little that you eat. Then after that will come seven hard years, which will consume whatever you have set aside for them, except a little that you preserve.’²⁸

These verses offer valuable insights into environmental stewardship:

1. **Strategic planning:** Prophet Yūsuf advised storing surplus grain during the years of plenty to prepare for the years of scarcity. This highlights the importance of strategic planning and foresight in anticipating future environmental challenges and preparing for them in advance.
2. **Sustainable practices:** By advocating for the storage of surplus grain, Prophet Yūsuf implemented a sustainable practice that ensured the well-being of the population during times of famine. This teaches the importance of sustainable resource management and avoiding waste.
3. **Adaptation to environmental changes:** The story of Prophet Yūsuf exemplifies the ability to adapt to significant environmental changes, such as the transition from years of abundance to years of famine. This emphasises the importance of being adaptable and resilient in the face of environmental challenges. For

²⁸ Q 12:47-8.

instance, modern climate requires societies to adapt to shifting weather patterns, rising sea levels, and the increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters like hurricanes, floods, and wildfires. The Qur'anic narrative of Prophet Yūsuf highlights the need to develop flexible and adaptive strategies to cope with these changes.

Prophet Dāwūd and harmony with nature

Prophet Dāwūd's recitation of the Psalms (Zabūr) was so beautiful that the mountains and birds would glorify God along with him, highlighting his profound connection with the Divine and the natural world. This aspect of his life is described in several verses of the Qur'an:

فَفَهَّمْنَهَا سُلَيْمَانَ ۖ وَكَلَّآءَاتَيْنَا حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا ۚ وَسَخَّرْنَا مَعَ دَاوُدَ الْجِبَالَ يُسَبِّحْنَ وَالطَّيْرَ
وَكُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ ۖ

We made Sulaymān understand and granted both of them [Prophets Sulaymān and Dāwūd] sound judgement and knowledge. We made subservient the mountains and the birds to sing [Our] glory along with Dāwūd. It is We Who did [all these things].²⁹

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ مِنَّا فَضْلًا ۚ يَجِبَالُ أَوَّيْ مَعَهُ وَالطَّيْرُ

We truly granted Dāwūd a favour from Us. [We said,], 'O mountains, echo his hymns! And the birds as well.'³⁰

إِنَّا سَخَّرْنَا الْجِبَالَ مَعَهُ يُسَبِّحْنَ بِالْعَشِيِّ وَالْإِشْرَاقِ ۖ وَالطَّيْرُ مَحْشُورَةٌ ۚ كُلُّ لَهُ أَوَّابٌ

Indeed, We made the mountains subservient to sing [Our] glory along with him at eventide and sunrise. And the birds [too], in flocks, all turn to Him [in chorus with Prophet Dāwūd, glorifying

²⁹ Q 21:79.

³⁰ Q 34:10.

Him].³¹

In the context of environmental stewardship, these verses illustrate several important points:

1. **Harmony with nature:** The verses highlight the harmonious relationship between Prophet Dāwūd and the natural world, where even the mountains and birds are described as participating in the glorification of God. This imagery underscores the strong bond between humans and nature, suggesting that our actions should foster balance and harmony with the environment.
2. **Reflection on nature's glorification:** Reflecting on how mountains and birds glorify God encourages a more mindful and responsible approach to the environment. This reflection deepens our awe and reverence for God's magnificence, enhancing our understanding of God's Oneness (*tawhīd*). It highlights how every element in nature acknowledges, celebrates, and glorifies its single Creator and Sustainer, promoting a sense of sacred duty to protect and preserve the natural world.
3. **Inclusivity in environmental conservation:** The involvement of both the inanimate (mountains) and animate (birds) aspects of nature in the act of glorification shows that environmental stewardship encompasses all elements of the Earth. This inclusivity reminds us that every part of the environment, regardless of its perceived importance, plays a vital role in the overall health and balance of the ecosystem.
4. **The role of knowledge and wisdom:** The verses mention that both Prophet Sulaymān and Prophet Dāwūd were granted sound judgement and knowledge. These qualities were instrumental in their interaction with the natural world, highlighting the importance of acquiring knowledge and wisdom to understand and solve environmental challenges. This suggests that effective

³¹ Q 38:18-19.

environmental stewardship requires not only spiritual insight but also practical knowledge and sound judgement to make informed decisions.

God granted Prophet Dāwūd the ability to manipulate iron easily without the need for intense heat or heavy labour. This Divine gift enabled him to craft chain mail for protection in warfare:

وَأَلَنَّا لَهُ الْحَدِيدَ ۖ أَنْ آعْمَلْ سَبِغَتْ وَقَدِّرْ فِي السَّرْدِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ
بَصِيرٌ

And We softened iron for him, [saying,] 'Make coats of mail, measure the links well, and do righteous deeds. Indeed, I see everything you do.'³²

وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ صَنْعَةَ لَبُوسٍ لَكُمْ لِتُحْصِنَكُمْ مِنْ بَأْسِكُمْ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ شَاكِرُونَ

And We taught him how to make garments [coats of mail] for you to protect you in your battles. Then will you be grateful?³³

These verses offer insightful guidance on environmental stewardship:

1. **Preservation through supernatural abilities:** The verses highlight that Prophet Dāwūd was granted the miraculous ability to soften iron to make armour for protecting lives rather than creating weapons.³⁴ This indicates a Divine preference for preservation over destruction, underscoring the importance of using one's abilities and resources to safeguard life.
2. **Ethical leadership and peaceful stewardship:** Prophet Dāwūd exemplified ethical stewardship. Despite his extraordinary abilities, he focused on protection, spiritual growth, and communal well-being rather than military conquest. His

³² Q 34:10-11.

³³ Q 21:80.

³⁴ Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr-i mawḍūʿī-yi Qurʾān-i karīm: Sīrī-yi payāambarān dar Qurʾān* (Markaz-i nashr-i Isrāʾ: 1379 Sh./2000), 287.

example teaches the value of using power and resources ethically, promoting peace and protecting the community.

Prophet Sulaymān and the responsible use of natural forces and resources

God granted Prophet Sulaymān the ability to understand the language of birds and other creatures. His kingdom was vast and powerful, with an army composed not only of humans but also birds and jinn. The jinn would dive into the seas to retrieve hidden treasures and perform various tasks for him. Additionally, Prophet Sulaymān had control over the wind and was blessed with a fountain of molten copper.

Despite these immense blessings, Prophet Sulaymān led a life devoted to serving God. Beneath his royal attire, he wore coarse clothing made from goat hair and palm fronds, which he crafted himself. He would serve his guests fine food while opting for simpler meals for himself and his family, and he preferred the company of the poor over the wealthy.³⁵ His humility and dedication to God were evident in his everyday actions and choices.

The accounts of Prophet Sulaymān's control over the wind provides profound insights into environmental stewardship and the responsible use of natural forces as guided by Divine wisdom. This is illustrated through several verses in the Qur'an:

وَلَسُلَيْمَنَّ الرِّيحَ عَاصِفَةً تَجْرِي بِأَمْرِهِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا ۚ وَكُنَّا بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ
عَلِيمِينَ

[We harnessed] the stormy wind for Sulaymān, blowing at his command to the land We blessed. It is We Who know everything.³⁶

فَسَخَّرْنَا لَهُ الرِّيحَ تَجْرِي بِأَمْرِهِ رُخَاءً حَيْثُ أَصَابَ

³⁵ Arastu, *God's Emissaries*, 512.

³⁶ Q 21:81.

So We made the wind subservient for him, blowing gently at his command to wherever he pleased.³⁷

وَلَسَلَّيْمَنَّ الرِّيحَ غُدُوَّهَا شَهْرٌ وَرَوْاحُهَا شَهْرٌ

[We made subservient] the wind for Sulaymān: its morning course was a month's journey and so was its afternoon course.³⁸

These verses provide valuable lessons for contemporary environmental stewardship:

1. **Sustainable use of natural forces:** By using the wind for travel, Prophet Sulaymān demonstrated how natural forces can be harnessed sustainably and efficiently. This showcases the potential for humans to utilise nature in a way that does not cause harm or depletion, serving as an early model for harnessing renewable energy. It illustrates the benefits of using wind power, a clean and sustainable resource, thereby reducing reliance on non-renewable and polluting energy sources.
2. **Divine stewardship:** The phrase 'It is We Who know everything' in Q 21:81 underscores the concept of Divine vicegerency over natural resources. It emphasises that ultimate knowledge and governance belong to God and that using natural resources should be guided by an acute awareness of His omniscience and lordship.

Like his father Prophet Dāwūd, Prophet Sulaymān was taught the language of birds:

وَوَرِّثَ سُلَيْمَنُ دَاوُدَ وَقَالَ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ عُلِّمْنَا مَنْطِقَ الطَّيْرِ

Sulaymān succeeded Dāwūd. He [Prophet Sulaymān] said, 'O

³⁷ Q 38:36.

³⁸ Q 34:12. This means the wind would enable him to sail distances in a day that would normally take two months. He would travel the equivalent of one month's distance in the morning and the equivalent of one month's distance in the afternoon.

people, we have been taught the language of birds.³⁹

One of the most endearing Qur'anic stories is that of Prophet Sulaymān and the ant. As Prophet Sulaymān set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca with a vast army, he came to a valley inhabited by ants. Fearing Prophet Sulaymān's forces would accidentally crush them, one ant warned her colony to take cover in their mounds. Prophet Sulaymān overheard the ant's words, felt grateful for his Divine gift of understanding the language of creatures, and appreciated the ant's concern for the safety of her colony. Filled with a sense of gratitude, he smiled joyously in response to her words and made a prayer:

فَتَبَسَّمْ ضَاحِكًا مِّن قَوْلِهَا وَقَالَ رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَىٰ
وَلَدَيَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ صَالِحًا تَرْضَاهُ وَأَدْخِلْنِي بِرَحْمَتِكَ فِي عِبَادِكَ الصَّالِحِينَ

So Sulaymān smiled joyously in response to her words. He prayed, 'My Lord! Inspire me to be grateful for the blessings You have bestowed on me and my parents, and [inspire me] to do good deeds that please You. Admit me, by Your mercy, into [the ranks of] Your righteous servants.'⁴⁰

He then changed the course of his army to ensure the ants were not harmed.

This incident teaches several essential lessons relevant to environmental stewardship:

1. **The importance of understanding the natural world:** The ability of Prophet Sulaymān to understand the language of the ants highlights the significance of being attuned to the natural world. This understanding fosters a meaningful connection with the environment and promotes a sense of responsibility towards its preservation and care.
2. **Respect for all life forms:** Prophet Sulaymān's amused and

³⁹ Q 27:16.

⁴⁰ Q 27:19.

gentle response to the ant's concern illustrates a sincere respect for even the smallest creatures. This teaches that environmental stewardship involves recognising the value of every creature and taking steps to ensure their safety and well-being.

3. **Consideration and compassion in action:** Prophet Sulaymān's decision to redirect his army to avoid harming the ants demonstrates practical compassion and consideration for the well-being of other beings. It serves as a reminder that true leadership involves empathy and proactive measures to protect even the smallest and seemingly insignificant creatures.
4. **Gratitude for nature's gifts:** By expressing gratitude for the blessings bestowed upon him and his parents, Prophet Sulaymān acknowledged the natural world and its creatures as Divine blessings. This highlights the importance of being thankful for nature's gifts, fostering a sense of appreciation and responsibility.
5. **Leadership and environmental responsibility:** As a leader, Prophet Sulaymān set a powerful example by prioritising the protection of the environment over the convenience of his journey. This suggests that leadership at all levels has a critical role in advancing environmental stewardship. His actions show that responsible leaders should consider the environmental impact of their decisions and strive to protect natural resources.
6. **Awareness and mindfulness:** The story also reflects the importance of being aware and mindful of our surroundings and the impact of our actions. Prophet Sulaymān's sensitivity to the ant's plight teaches us to pay attention to the effects our actions have on the environment and other living beings, encouraging a culture of mindfulness and respect.
7. **Spiritual insights from the natural world:** This incident led Prophet Sulaymān to reflect on the blessings God had bestowed upon him and pray for the ability to be grateful for these gifts,

perform deeds pleasing to God, and be admitted among His righteous servants. The story highlights the profound connection between spiritual growth and the natural world, demonstrating that by observing and respecting nature, we can cultivate an enhanced understanding of God's wisdom and mercy.

In *Sūrat Sabā'*, God tells us He caused a fountain of molten copper to flow for Prophet Sulaymān:

وَأَسْلَمْنَا لَهُ دَعِيْنَ الْقِطْرِ

We caused a fountain of molten copper to flow for him.⁴¹

This verse provides significant guidance on environmental stewardship:

1. **Responsible resource management:** Prophet Sulaymān's utilisation of a fountain of molten copper and advanced metallurgical techniques highlights the importance of using natural resources wisely. It teaches the need to balance technological progress with environmental protection, ensuring that resource use does not lead to depletion or harm.
2. **Divine provision:** The fact that God caused the fountain of molten copper to flow for Prophet Sulaymān underscores the concept that God provides His devoted servants with extraordinary natural resources for their sustenance and development. Of course, these gifts come with a significant responsibility: to express gratitude to God and to use the resources in ways that align with His will.

In the next verse, God tells us about the accomplishments under Prophet Sulaymān's leadership and how he fulfilled the comprehensive needs of his people:

يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَّحْرِبٍ وَتَمْثِيلٍ وَجِفَانٍ كَلْجَوَابٍ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَتٍ ۚ أَعْمَلُوا

⁴¹ Q 34:12.

ءَال دَاوُدْ شُكْرًا وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّكُورُ

They [the jinn under Prophet Sulaymān's command] made for him whatever he wanted: sanctuaries, sculptures [of trees and the like], basins the size of small pools [for communal eating], and cauldrons [for large-scale cooking] fixed in the earth. [We said,] 'Work, O family of Dāwūd, in thankfulness, though few of My servants are thankful.'⁴²

These accomplishments address various aspects of community life and environmental stewardship:

1. **Spiritual well-being:** By building places of worship (*maḥārīb*), Prophet Sulaymān met the spiritual needs of his people. These sanctuaries would have provided areas for prayer, learning about faith, and fostering a sense of community and spiritual growth.
2. **Artistic expression and environmental awareness:** The sculptures made by the jinn under Prophet Sulaymān's command were not statues of men and women but of trees and similar natural forms. This is supported by a *ḥadīth* from *al-Kāfī*, where al-Faḍl Abī al-'Abbās reports, 'I asked Abū Ja'far [Imam al-Bāqir] about the words of God, Mighty and Majestic is He, "They [the jinn] made for him whatever he wanted: sanctuaries, sculptures, [and] basins the size of small pools." He replied, "These are not statues of men and women but statues of trees and the like."⁴³ This suggests that art was encouraged within religious guidelines and indicates an appreciation for the natural world.
3. **Cultural enrichment:** The places of worship, sculptures, and communal dining areas point to a rich cultural background. These elements would have helped build a strong sense of identity and community, fostering unity and cultural pride among the people. By integrating art and communal spaces,

⁴² Q 34:13.

⁴³ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 13:102.

Prophet Sulaymān enhanced the cultural fabric of his society.

4. **Food stewardship:** The large basins and cauldrons for communal eating and cooking illustrate Prophet Sulaymān's attention to addressing the physical and social needs of his people. By enabling the preparation and sharing of meals on a grand scale, he would have ensured that the nutritional needs of the community were met. Moreover, these communal meals would have fostered social cohesion, allowing for resource sharing and ensuring the well-being of all community members. This approach to food stewardship highlights the importance of using resources effectively to support community health and unity.
5. **Gratitude and community work:** The verse emphasises gratitude through action: 'Work, O family of Dāwūd, in thankfulness'. This instruction teaches that gratitude is not only expressed through words or prayers but also through actions that benefit the community as well. By linking the work of Prophet Sulaymān's followers with thankfulness, the verse underscores that caring for others is a way of showing appreciation for Divine blessings. The concluding part, 'though few of My servants are thankful', further highlights that such active gratitude is exceptional and highly valued by God.
6. **Strong leadership:** All these activities were conducted under Prophet Sulaymān's exemplary leadership. With a clear vision, he effectively communicated his goals to his followers and assigned tasks according to the abilities of each individual. His leadership not only ensured the successful completion of these responsibilities but also fostered a strong sense of community and environmental stewardship.

Conclusion

The Qur'an articulates the dual role of the natural world in Sūrat al-

Kahf:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لِّهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا

Indeed, We have made whatever is on the Earth an adornment for it, to test [people] as to which of them is best in deeds.⁴⁴

This verse highlights that the intrinsic beauty and bounties of the Earth serve not only for human enjoyment but also as a Divine test of our gratitude and patience. In the trial of gratitude, when individuals are blessed with beauty and abundance, they are tested on their capacity to recognise these blessings as gifts from God, express gratitude for them, and utilise them responsibly in accordance with His commands. Conversely, the trial of patience emerges during times of hardship or loss, challenging individuals to maintain their faith and trust in God, endure difficulties with perseverance, and continue engaging in good deeds without succumbing to despair.⁴⁵

The actions of Prophets Nūḥ, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Yūsuf, Dāwūd, and Sulaymān exemplify success in these Divine tests. By maintaining ethical conduct, appreciating and preserving the natural world, and acting justly and wisely across different situations, these Prophets provide compelling models for understanding and implementing environmental stewardship grounded in spiritual ecology. Their stories emphasise the importance of ethical environmental management, respectful use of resources, resilience in ecological challenges, and fostering a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. By embodying the roles of Divine vicegerents on Earth, these Prophets showed how individuals can draw upon spiritual values to foster sustainable practices, enhance social justice, and build community cohesion.

In contrast, the actions of the ʿĀd and Thamūd illustrate the consequences of failing these tests. Blessed with prosperity and power,

⁴⁴ Q 18:7.

⁴⁵ Jawādī Āmulī, *Islām wa muḥīṭ-i zīst* (Markaz-i nashr-i Isrā: 1388 Sh./2009), 217-24.

these nations exhibited ingratitude and arrogance, misusing their resources and neglecting the guidance of their prophets. Their downfall, precipitated by their failure to heed Divine warnings, serves as a stark reminder of the consequences of such negligence.

Collectively, these narratives and teachings from the Qur'an offer a profound contribution to contemporary environmental ethics, advocating for the integration of spiritual consciousness in the pursuit of ecological balance and harmony. Embracing the models of prophetic stewardship provides humanity with the insight and foresight needed to navigate the environmental crises of our time, charting a path towards a more sustainable and equitable world for future generations.

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Al-Qalam Journal



RESEARCH NOTES

Notes on the Authenticity of *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* with a New English Translation

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(with additional material from Fatima Chakroun, Maleeha Abdullah, and Mehdi Abdullah)

ABSTRACT

This article explores *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul*, a widely recited supplication among Shī‘a Muslims, focusing on its theological significance, historical usage and debates surrounding its authenticity. Despite being deeply rooted in Islamic tradition, the practice of *tawassul*, particularly through this supplication, is scrutinized both within and outside Shī‘a circles. Key issues include the appropriateness of labeling it a *du‘ā’*, a lack of a verified chain of narration, and theological concerns about intercession. This article critically examines these claims to create a comprehensive understanding of the practice’s legitimacy. The broader implications of these discussions on the concept of *tawassul* will also be examined, contributing to a deeper understanding of the overlap between the contentions with *tawassul* and anti-Shia sentiment.

Introduction

Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul is a supplication recited weekly by the majority of Imāmī Shī‘a Muslims, typically on Tuesday evenings. In this prayer, adherents seek intercession from God through His most beloved

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figures, starting with Prophet Muḥammad (s) and concluding with the Twelfth Imam, the Mahdī (may God hasten his reappearance). The term *tawassul* means seeking a means of approaching Allah, in this context, through the use of an intermediary. *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul*, along with the broader concept of *tawassul*, is a deeply rooted and authentic practice within Islam, supported by a strong theological foundation and historical usage. However, there are points of contention on the *dua* both within Imāmī Shī‘a thought and outside it. There are three main areas of contention with respect to the *Du‘ā’*. Firstly, there is a theological objection that engaging in *tawassul* is tantamount to polytheism. Secondly, this supplication diverges from the traditional definition of *du‘ā’* and therefore cannot be classified as such; third, it lacks a verified chain of transmission and therefore cannot be authenticated, nor be said to originate from one of the infallibles. While there are ways to invoke intercession outside of this particular supplication, due to its centrality in Imāmī Shī‘a recommended practice, it becomes a common target in debates on the validity of intercession. This article will discuss the aforementioned issues with respect to *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* by providing a discussion on the concept of *tawassul*, the use of *tawassul* in the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* to establish its validity from a theological perspective, and finally its origin, and label as a *du‘ā’*.

A Theological contention

The theological objection commonly raised against *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* is that directing supplications to the Prophet (s) and his family appears inconsistent with the core Islamic belief of monotheism, that Allah is the only one that has the attributes that permit him to affect existence, and therefore any prayers should be made directly to Allah, the sole Controller of all matters, otherwise it is considered as polytheism. This is further corroborated by the Qur’anic verse: “When My servants ask you about Me, [tell them that] I am indeed nearest. I answer the supplicant’s call when he calls Me. So let them respond to Me, and let

them have faith in Me, so that they may fare rightly.”² When a person holds the above belief, a question is posed as to why one would seek assistance from anyone other than God. To respond to these questions, we must linguistically unpack the concept of *tawassul*, and also its usage in the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* by Allah and those who have been sent to guide us to the right path.

The concept of *tawassul*

Tawassul - intercession - is a theological concept that has been debated amongst Muslims for centuries, with its validity being a contentious issue in Sunnī-Shī‘ī discourse, as well as intra-Shī‘ī discourses. Linguistically, originating from the root of *wasl*, it means seeking nearness to an object by means of an action³ and can be applied in various contexts to determine its meaning in technical usage. In *tawassul*, although the immediate addressee of a request may be someone other than God, the ultimate recipient of the supplication is still God. When a believer engages in *tawassul* through the Prophet (s) or his household, the intention is to seek the fulfillment of their needs from God, even if the supplication is addressed to figures such as “O Muḥammad...!” *Tawassul* involves using an intermediary (*wasīla*) through whom one’s needs are presented to God, but it is God alone who fulfills those needs. The intermediary’s role is to occasion a favorable response from God, due to His love and esteem for that intermediary. Thus, there is no question of associating partners with God, as the one engaging in *tawassul* fully acknowledges that Allah is the ultimate agent who controls all things. The intermediary is simply a beloved figure through whom the supplication is channeled in the hope of a favorable divine response. In the case of *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul*, this term would mean “seeking nearness to the Allah by means of a specific supplication.”

² Q 2:186.

³ Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-Ayn* (Mu’assisat dār al-hijra al-ṭab’a: 1989).

Having understood *tawassul* linguistically and technically, it is important to delve into our source texts, the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* corpus, to understand how Allah and the infallibles have utilised this concept and determine what they intend. By doing so, it will be possible to assert a status for *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* and its permissibility. We will now turn to the Qur’anic conception of *tawassul*, to establish a theological basis for engaging in it.

The concept of *tawassul* in the Qur’an

Building a Qur’anic conception of intercession is essential for three reasons. Firstly, it can explain how Allah intended for the concept to be understood when He used the word. Further, it can validate or invalidate our use of the term, and finally, it serves as a yardstick to understand the concept when used in the *ḥadīth* corpus and by other scholars.

In the Qur’an, the word *wasīla* has been mentioned twice explicitly in verses 5:35, and 17:57. In the former, Allah instructs the pious to seek nearness to Him through an intermediary, when returning back to Him (*tawba*). In the latter, he speaks about the polytheists of Mecca that make *du‘ā’* to angels, *jinn* and mankind, who themselves seek a means of nearness to Allah. In other words, the angels, *jinn*, and mankind have no power independent of Allah to grant the wishes of the polytheists; rather, they themselves seek an intermediary to attain nearness to Allah. Here, ‘Allama Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i (d. 1402/1981) highlights an important point: while the ultimate power to effect change in the universe is exclusively with Allah (by making reference to verse 2:165), there are numerous verses in the Qur’an indicating Allah’s conferment of power and ownership, to selected creations such as angels, *jinn*, and some from mankind⁴. This is sufficient to demonstrate the explicit usage of the term *wasīla* in the Qur’an.

We can further develop a Qur’anic understanding of how followers of some Prophets would practically seek a *wasīla* when asking for their

⁴ Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 25, trans. Amina Inloes and Tawus Raja (Tawhid Institute Australia Ltd: 2021).

requests from Allah. The Qur'an provides evidence for instances of *tawassul* in practice by the Children of Israel and the sons of Prophet Jacob (s) who sought intercession from their respective prophets to resolve their difficulties and seek forgiveness from God. Given that Allah does not rebuke them for this practice in the Qur'an, it can be implied that the practice is permitted by Allah. In the first of these verses, the Children of Israel, while wandering in the desert, implore Prophet Moses to invoke God on their behalf for a variety of foods that the earth produces, saying: "O Moses, we can never endure one [kind of] food. So call upon your Lord to bring forth for us from the earth its green herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions." [Moses] said, "Would you exchange what is better for what is less? Go into [any] settlement and indeed, you will have what you have asked."⁵ This request demonstrates their reliance on the Prophet to communicate their needs to God. The verse goes on to describe that they were punished for disobeying God and killing Prophets, however Prophet Mūsā's response to their request for supplication reflects the permissibility of seeking an intermediary.

In the second example, the sons of Prophet Jacob (s), upon recognizing their wrongdoing, approach their father and say: "O our father! Ask forgiveness of our sins for us; indeed, we have been sinners."⁶ Prophet Jacob (s) responds by affirming their request, promising, "Soon I will ask forgiveness for you from my Lord. Indeed, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful."⁷ Both examples emphasize the role of prophets as intercessors, through whom people sought divine assistance and forgiveness.

Finally, the following ayah: "And We did not send any messenger except to be obeyed by permission of Allah. And if, when they wronged themselves, they had come to you, [O Muḥammad], and asked

⁵ Q 2:61.

⁶ Q 12:97.

⁷ Q 12:98.

forgiveness of Allah and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah Accepting of Repentance and Merciful.” (4:64-5) The context and interpretation of this verse illustrates God telling the Prophet that those who sin should seek repentance from God, and should also ask the Prophet to ask God to forgive them as well.

The concept of *tawassul* in *ḥadīth*

The concept of *tawassul* is not an innovation or a novel practice as has been suggested by critiques of the *du‘ā’*. In addition to being narrated in the Qur‘an, the concept can be found in numerous narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt, which are supported by reliable chains of transmission. The prevalence of these narrations strongly affirms the legitimacy of *du‘ā’* in general, as well as the specific form of supplication through *tawassul*. A few examples, though not exhaustive, can be utilised to illustrate this point. The first being Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), who narrates from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qaṣīr, who reported:

I entered upon Abū ‘Abdillāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] (a) and said: May I be sacrificed for you, I have invented a supplication. He (a) said: Leave your invention. When a matter befalls you, seek refuge in the Messenger of God (s) and pray two rak‘as and gift them to the Messenger of God (s),” until he said: “Then take your beard with your left hand, and weep or pretend to weep, and say: ‘O Muḥammad, O Messenger of God, I complain to God and to you of my need, and to your rightly guided Ahl al-Bayt of my need, and through you I turn to God regarding my need.’⁸

Another narration from al-Kulaynī involves Imam al-Kāẓim (a), where al-Baṭā‘inī recounts the following narration:

He [Imām al-Kāẓim (a)] said to me: I have been ill for

⁸ Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi* (Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya: 2008), 6:620.

seven months, and my son has been ill for twelve months, and it has been doubled for us. Do you realise that it does not affect the whole body? Sometimes it affects the upper body and not the lower, and sometimes it affects the lower and not the whole upper body? I said: May I be sacrificed for you, if you permit me, I will tell you a *ḥadīth* from Abū Baṣīr from your grandfather, that when he was ill he would seek aid from cold water. He would have two garments: a garment in the cold water, and a garment on his body, alternating between them. Then he would call out until his voice was heard at the door of the house: "O Fāṭima, daughter of Muḥammad." He (a) said: "You have spoken the truth."⁹

The last narration from al-Kulaynī is narrated from Imām al-Bāqir (a), who advised:

When you want something, ask your Lord for it. Perform *wuḍū'* (ablution) well, then pray two *rak'as* (units of prayer). Exalt God, send blessings upon the Prophet (s), and say after the *taslīm* (salutation): 'O God, I ask You, for You are the Sovereign, and You have power over all things. What You will of a matter comes to be. O God, I turn to You through Your Prophet Muḥammad, the Prophet of Mercy (s). O Muḥammad, O Messenger of God, I turn to God, your Lord and my Lord, through you; that He may grant success to my request. O God, grant success to my request through Your Prophet Muḥammad.' Then ask your need.¹⁰

Furthermore, Ibn al-Mashhadī narrates in his *al-Mazār al-kabīr*:

It is recommended to supplicate with this supplication

⁹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 15:266.

¹⁰ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 6:627.

after the prayer of visitation, for it is narrated from him (a): ‘O God, the affliction is great, the hidden has become manifest, the veil has been lifted, the earth has become narrow, the sky has been withheld, and to You, O Lord, is the complaint, and upon You is the reliance in hardship and ease. O God, bless Muḥammad and his family, those whom You have made obedience to them obligatory upon us, and made known to us their status thereby. So grant us relief through them, a speedy relief, as quick as the blink of an eye or even quicker than that. O Muḥammad, O ‘Alī! O ‘Alī, O Muḥammad! Help me, for you are my helpers! Suffice me, for you are sufficient for me! O my Master, O Master of the Time! Help, help, help! Come to my aid, come to my aid!’¹¹

In other narrations of the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), supplications were often directed from the supplicant to the intermediary. These traditions are so extensively and consistently transmitted that they reach the level of successive narration (*tawātur*), thereby rendering the need for individual verification of their chains of narrators unnecessary. This is visible in the *ziyāra* of Imam Ḥusayn that states “I bear witness that you are upon manifest truth from your Lord. I have come to you confessing my sins. Intercede for me with your Lord!”¹² The *ziyāra* of Imam ‘Alī similarly states “So intercede for me, for you hold a praised position with Allah.”¹³ This demonstrates that *tawassul* exists in a number of supplications that are not as scrutinized as *Du‘a’ al-Tawassul*.

Given this understanding, it is clear that seeking an intermediary with God by saying ‘O Muḥammad!’, ‘O ‘Alī!’, or ‘O Fāṭima!’ or by directly

¹¹ Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Mashhadī, *al-Mazār al-kabīr* (Daftar intishārāt-i Islāmī: 1419 AH.), 591.

¹² Ja‘far b. Muḥammad al-Qummī, *Kāmil al-zīyārāt* (Dār al-Murtaḍāwiyya: 1356 Sh./1977), 210-1, *ḥadīths* 7 and 8.

¹³ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid* (Markaz buḥūth al-ḥajj wa-l-‘umra: 1987), 780.

addressing them in their supplications is found in a wide range of sources, thereby indicating its acceptance. The practice itself is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Prophet and his household, who guided their followers to seek the fulfillment of their needs through the intercession of the Infallibles. Therefore, it is incorrect to assert that this practice is not part of Shi'i traditions or Islamic heritage. If any theological concern exists, it is not with *tawassul* itself, but attempts to discredit the status of the Prophet's family for political purposes, as will be discussed in following sections.

Origins of *Du'ā' al-Tawassul*

Du'ā' al-Tawassul (Appendix A) is originally recorded in *Bihār al-anwār*, by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1699) who dedicated his life to the science of tradition. In 1659, during the Safavid period, 'Allama al-Majlisī began recording traditions and compiling them into an encyclopaedic collection,¹⁴ resulting in *Bihār al-anwār*, roughly translating to "Ocean of Lights", which has been labeled an incomparable piece of literature¹⁵ ¹⁶. It stretches over 110 volumes and includes every narration 'Allama al-Majlisī and his assistants could find. In the compilation, 'Allama al-Majlisī notes sources for the reports, which lends itself to being a point of reference in Shia studies¹⁷ ¹⁸. One of the contentious issues surrounding *Bihār al-anwār* is the authenticity of the narrations, and so it is important to note that while there are differences of opinions on which narrations found within *Bihār* are authentic, the determining

¹⁴ Paula Youngman Skreslet and Rebecca Skreslet, *The Literature of Islam: A Guide to the Primary Sources in English* (Scarecrow Press:2006), 47.

¹⁵ Skreslet and Skreslet, *The Literature of Islam*, 47.

¹⁶ Ethan Kohlberg, "Shi'i Hadith," in A. F. L Beeston, T. M Johnstone, R. B Serjeant, and G. R Smith. (eds.) *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, (Cambridge University Press: 2012). 307.

¹⁷ Ibid, 307.

¹⁸ William Chittick and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'i, *A Shi'ite Anthology*, (State University of New York Press: 1981), 17.

factor is the methodology adopted for authenticating narrations. As such there are varying levels of strength of the chain or narration, and therefore varying levels of authenticity¹⁹. Another key consideration for the acceptance of narrations is its consistency with the Qur’an²⁰. Scholars of principles of jurisprudence discuss this extensively to determine the relationship between the Qur’an and *ḥadīth*. In practice, they verify the contents of a *ḥadīth* by cross-referencing it with the Qur’an, and as long as there is no contradiction they will accept the *ḥadīth* if it passes the standards of authentication. If there is a non-resolvable contradiction between the Qur’an and *Ḥadīth*, then the *ḥadīth* will be rejected, even if its chain of narrators has been authenticated. It is important to note that in referring to the Qur’ān, the scholars will not only analyze verses with the same concepts as those mentioned in the *ḥadīth*, but also take into consideration other related verses and the overarching ethos of the message of the Qur’an.

In *Biḥār al-anwār*, *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* is introduced by ‘Allama al-Majlisi in the following way:

In an old manuscript of one of the works of our colleagues—may God be pleased with them—I found the following words: “This supplication was narrated by Muḥammad b. Bābawayh—may God have mercy on him—from the Imams (s). He said: ‘I have not supplicated to God about a matter [using this supplication] except that I have received a swift response. It reads: ‘O Allah! I do sincerely entreat You and turn towards You in the name of Your prophet, the Prophet of Mercy, Muḥammad — may Allah bless him

¹⁹ Aaron Albert Haley, “Majlisī, Muḥammad Bāqir al-.” in Emad El-Din Shahin (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics*, (Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁰ Al-Shahīd al-Thānī and ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Faḍli, *Dirāyat al-Ḥadīth*, trans. Nazmina Virjee (ICAS Press: 2002).

and his family.²¹

While this supplication is predominantly attributed to ‘Allama al-Majlisī, a similar version can also be found in *Manhāj al-ṣalāḥ* titled *al-Du‘ā’ li-l-wasā’il* (“The Supplication for Means”)²². This supplication does not have the same final component as *Bihār al-anwār*, along with other minor variations throughout.

Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul lacks an established chain of narrators, making it impossible to conclusively verify its origin from the Imams, and as such has drawn some skepticism to its validity. However, this uncertainty does not necessarily preclude its recitation, as there is a possibility it originated through the Imams, and as we have established, seeking an intermediary to seek nearness to Allah is permitted. Thus, there is a potential of bringing divine reward and facilitating the fulfillment of needs through Allah. Although it cannot be definitively established that this supplication came from the Infallible Imams, the fact that ‘Allama al-Majlisī reported finding it in reliable sources—books he considered trustworthy—and that it was narrated by Shaykh Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) suggests that its origin from the Imams (as) is plausible. If there is a reasonable likelihood of this, then engaging in *tawassul* with this supplication remains permissible, allowing us to seek its blessings and attain nearness to Allah, provided there are no other prohibitive factors. Furthermore, this supplication is included in ‘Allama al-Ḥillī’s *Manhāj al-ṣalāḥ*, a work composed four centuries before al-Majlisī’s time, and al-Majlisī himself cites it from a different source, indicating two distinct transmission routes. This dual transmission further increases the likelihood of it originating from the Imams.

²¹ Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* (Dār iḥyā’ al-turāth al-‘Arabī: n.d.), 99:241.

²² Ḥasan b. Yusuf al-Ḥillī, *Manhāj al-ṣalāḥ fī ikhtiṣār al-miṣbāḥ* (Maktabat al-‘Allama al-Majlisī: 1388 Sh./2009), 51.

The origin of contention

The topic of *tawassul* and its supposed impermissibility emerged as a point of contention in the religious sphere only after the time of Ibn Taymiyya. Prior to this, it was neither a subject of scholarly debate nor disagreement, but rather a practice ingrained in the beliefs and behaviors of Muslims at large. The legacy of Ibn Taymiyya’s injunction on *tawassul* is visible in contemporary discourses and in inter-sectarian interactions. Sunnī sources have also documented that prior to Ibn Taymiyya’s rejection, *tawassul* was not deemed problematic by either school of thought:

Among the superstitions of Ibn Taymiyya that no scholar before him said, and by which he became an example among the people of Islam: He denied seeking aid and *tawassul* through him (s), and it is not as he fabricated. Rather, *tawassul* through him (s) is good in every situation, before his creation and after it, in this world and the Hereafter.²³

The Wahhabi stance on *tawassul* is notoriously rigid, and widely known for its stark limitation of practices that have been integral to the religious foundations of many Muslims. The position taken on *tawassul* is most visible upon visit to Saudi Arabia where those seeking intercession through the Prophet receive poor treatment to the extent of punishment. The mere act of standing by the grave of the Prophet (s), addressing him, and requesting his intercession with God, or seeking the fulfillment of material or spiritual needs through him, is enough to provoke a swift and harsh reaction from the officials of Saudi Arabia.

Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792), the founder of the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia, articulates this perspective unequivocally in his writings: “Whoever worships God day and night

²³ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Jawhar al-Munazzam fi Ziyārat al-Qabr al-Sharīf al-Nabawī al-Mukarram al-Mu‘azzam*, (al-Maṭba‘ah al-Khayriyah: 1912), 171.

and then invokes a prophet or a saint at their grave has effectively taken two deities and has not genuinely affirmed that there is no god but God.” Accusations of *shirk* (polytheism) are weaponized to justify the physical removal of individuals engaging in *tawassul* from the sacred sites²⁴. Additionally, Saudi Arabia annually produces and distributes millions of books in numerous languages, which are made available to pilgrims from across the globe and in turn, circulated worldwide²⁵. These texts consistently underscore the prohibition of *tawassul*, solidifying it as a defining aspect of Wahhabi ideology, purposely juxtaposing it with Shīʿī conceptualisations of supplication. While these arguments are also rooted in contemporary geopolitics, these arguments have been used by Saudi scholars and the likes of ISIS, predating the Iranian revolution and persisting to the present day. The labeling of Shīʿī thought as polytheistic and anti-Islamic due to the veneration of the Prophet and his household can be seen as largely centered in debates on *tawassul*.²⁶

The label of “*Duʿā*”

One of the qualms with *Duʿāʾ al-Tawassul* is its status of a *duʿāʾ*. The main argument is that this supplication cannot be deemed authentic because a genuine supplication (*duʿāʾ*) is an address from a servant to his Lord, whereas this supplication is directed to the Prophet’s Household rendering it ineligible to be considered a *duʿāʾ*. Further, there are other structural components that support this particular supplication being less eligible as “*duʿāʾ*” than other widely accepted *duʿāʾ*s. An example of this is the assertion from Shaykh ʿAbbās Qummī (d. 1359/1941), correcting ʿAllama al-Majlisī by not labeling *Duʿāʾ al-Tawassul* as a *duʿāʾ*:

²⁴ Nāṣir Makārim Shīrāzī, *Tawassul: Tawḥīd yā Shirk?*, (Imām ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib: 2010).

²⁵ Makārim Shīrāzī, *Tawassul*.

²⁶ Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, “The Long Shadow of the State” in Cristophe Jaffrelot and Laurence Louer, eds. *Pan-Islamic Connections* (Oxford University Press: 2018), 220.

Second: *al-Tawassul*. ‘Allama al-Majlisī says that he found in a reliable book that Muḥammad b. Bābawayh narrated this *tawassul* from the Imams (s) and said: ‘I have not sought a means to Allah about a matter [using this invocation] except that I have received a swift response.’²⁷

The use of just the term *tawassul*, refers to the nature of the *du‘ā’* in which the supplicant is seeking a means of approaching Allah, through the use of an intermediary. This emphasizes that the practice does not constitute a supplication addressed to the Ahl al-Bayt (a). Instead, it involves seeking a means to Allah through them by requesting their intercession with Him for the fulfillment of one’s needs.

The term *du‘ā’* is used because it is the commonly accepted name for this invocation. However, while the question about referring to *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* as a *du‘ā’* is a valid question, due to its nature as a supplication, it is not incorrect to refer to it as a *du‘ā’*. Simply, it is a point of precision to refer to it as *al-Tawassul* instead of *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul*. The term *du‘ā’* has become prevalent due to the use of its introductory phrase, “O Allah! I do sincerely entreat You and turn towards You...,” or because the ultimate object of the request is Allah. Additionally, it has been transmitted in books of supplications, and according to some accounts, the Prophet instructed the Muslims to use an invocation of *tawassul*, saying, “Supplicate with this!” (*id‘ū bihi*).²⁸ This is an essential point that leads to the second part of the contention: how theologically sound is the concept of *tawassul*?

²⁷ ‘Abbās b. Muḥammad Riḍā Qummī, *Mafatīḥ al-Jinân, Les clés du paradis*, (BAA Publications: 2008), 194.

²⁸ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, .trans. Nasiruddin Al-Khattab (Darussalam Publications: 2012), 28:480, no. 17241. The editor of this edition, Shu‘ayb Arna‘ūṭ says that this tradition is repeated in other sources and that its chain of narration is authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) with trustworthy narrators (*rijāl thiqāt*).

Conclusion

The debate over the permissibility of *tawassul* (seeking intercession) arose after Ibn Taymiyya's time, prior to which it was widely accepted and practiced by Muslims. Sunnī scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī noted that Ibn Taymiyya's opposition to *tawassul* was an innovation with no precedent. This stance became central to Wahhabi ideology, which strongly opposes *tawassul* and enforces this view rigorously, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Wahhabi teachings equate seeking intercession with *shirk* (polytheism), often leading to the punishment of those practicing *tawassul* at sacred sites. Historically, *tawassul* was a widely accepted form of seeking intercession through the Prophet and his family, deeply embedded in Muslim traditions. However, Wahhabi ideology has redefined and limited this practice, viewing it as inconsistent with monotheism. Despite these objections, *tawassul* remains an important and validated practice within other Islamic traditions, particularly among Shī'ī Muslims, who continue to uphold its legitimacy.

The concept of *tawassul* - and specifically *Du'ā' al-Tawassul* - has been at the center of theological debates concerning the legitimacy of seeking intercession. Critics argue that such supplications, directed towards the Prophet's Household rather than directly to God, diverge from the traditional definition of *du'ā'*, which is an address from a servant to God alone. However, proponents of *tawassul* maintain that while intermediaries like the Prophet and his family are invoked, the ultimate recipient of the supplication is still Allah. This practice is rooted in Islamic tradition, including both Sunnī and Shī'ī sources, and is considered valid within these frameworks. Theologically, *tawassul* acknowledges Allah as the ultimate source of help, with the intermediaries serving as beloved figures whose intercession may prompt a favorable response from Allah. The debate primarily revolves around the legitimacy and understanding of intercession within Islamic theology.

Appendix A

Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul (translated by Alexander Khaleeli and Mona Makki)

The Supplication of seeking means to Allah

The Supplication:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All Compassionate, the Most Merciful.

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ وَأَتَوَجَّهُ إِلَيْكَ بِنَبِيِّكَ نَبِيِّ الرَّحْمَةِ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
وآله،

O Allah! I do sincerely entreat You and turn towards You in the name of Your Prophet, the Prophet of Mercy, Muḥammad—may Allah bless him and his family.

يا أبا القاسم
يا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ
يا إِمَامَ الرَّحْمَةِ
يا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
يا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،

O Abā l-Qāsim!

O messenger of Allah!

O leader of mercy!

O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يا أبا الحَسَنِ
 يا أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ
 يا عَلِيَّ بْنَ أَبِي طَالِبٍ
 يا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ
 يا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،

O Abā l-Ḥasan!
 O Commander of the Faithful!
 O 'Alī, son of Abī Ṭālib!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يا فَاطِمَةَ الزَّهْرَاءِ
 يا بِنْتَ مُحَمَّدٍ

يَا قُرَّةَ عَيْنِ الرَّسُولِ
 يَا سَيِّدَتَنَا وَمَوْلَاتَنَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهَةً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،

O Fāṭima, the Radiant One!
 O daughter of Muḥammad!
 O apple of the Messenger's eye!
 O our lady and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا مُحَمَّدٍ
 يَا حَسَنَ بْنَ عَلِيٍّ
 أَيُّهَا الْمُجْتَبَى
 يَا بْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهَةً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ

اَشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللهِ،

O Abā Muḥammad!
 O Ḥasan, son of 'Alī!
 O chosen one!
 O scion of Allah's Messenger!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللهِ
 يَا حُسَيْنَ بْنَ عَلِيٍّ
 أَيُّهَا الشَّهِيدُ
 يَا بْنَ رَسُولِ اللهِ
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللهِ
 اَشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللهِ،

O Abā 'Abdillāh!
 O Ḥusayn, son of 'Alī!
 O martyred one!
 O scion of Allah's Messenger!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!

O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يا أبا الحَسَنِ
 يا عَلِيَّ بْنَ الْحُسَيْنِ
 يا زَيْنَ الْعَابِدِينَ
 يا بْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
 يا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ
 يا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،

O Abā l-Ḥasan!
 O 'Alī, son of Ḥusayn!
 O ornament of the worshippers!
 O scion of Allah's Messenger!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا جَعْفَرٍ
 يَا مُحَمَّدَ بْنَ عَلِيٍّ
 أَيُّهَا الْبَاقِرُ
 يَا بْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،

O Abā Ja'far!
 O Muḥammad, son of 'Alī!
 O one who split open knowledge after the Prophet!
 O scion of Allah's Messenger!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ
 يَا جَعْفَرَ بْنَ مُحَمَّدٍ
 أَيُّهَا الصَّادِقُ
 يَا بْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ

يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،

O Abā 'Abdillāh!
 O Ja'far, son of Muḥammad!
 O one truthful in speech!
 O scion of Allah's Messenger!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا الْحَسَنِ
 يَا مُوسَى بْنَ جَعْفَرٍ
 أَيُّهَا الْكَاطِمُ
 يَا بْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ

اَشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللهِ،

O Abā l-Ḥasan!
 O Mūsā, son of Ja‘far!
 O one restrained in anger!
 O scion of Allah’s Messenger!
 O Allah’s authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا الْحَسَنِ
 يَا عَلِيَّ بْنَ مُوسَى
 أَيُّهَا الرِّضَا
 يَا بْنَ رَسُولِ اللهِ
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللهِ
 اَشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللهِ،

O Abā l-Ḥasan!
 O ‘Alī, son of Mūsā!
 O one unanimously agreed upon!
 O scion of Allah’s Messenger!
 O Allah’s authority over His creatures!

O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يا أبا جَعْفَرٍ
 يَا مُحَمَّدَ بْنَ عَلِيٍّ
 أَيُّهَا التَّقِيُّ الْجَوَادُ
 يَا بْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،

O Abū Ja'far!
 O Muḥammad, son of 'Alī!
 O devout and generous one!
 O scion of Allah's Messenger!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا الْحَسَنِ
 يَا عَلِيَّ بْنَ مُحَمَّدٍ
 أَيُّهَا الْهَادِي النَّقِيُّ
 يَا بْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،

O Abā l-Ḥasan!
 O 'Alī, son of Muḥammad!
 O pure guide!
 O scion of Allah's Messenger!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا مُحَمَّدٍ
 يَا حَسَنَ بْنَ عَلِيٍّ
 أَيُّهَا الزَّكِيُّ الْعَسْكَرِيُّ
 يَا بْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ

يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،

O Abā Muḥammad!

O Ḥasan, son of 'Alī!

O immaculate one kept in Samarrā'!

O scion of Allah's Messenger!

O Allah's authority over His creatures!

O our master and our patron!

We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,

And make you our means to Allah,

And we send you forth bearing our appeal,

O one eminent with Allah,

Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا وَصِيَّ الْحَسَنِ وَالْخَلَفَ الْحُجَّةَ
 أَيُّهَا الْقَائِمُ الْمُتَنَتِّظُ الْمَهْدِيُّ
 يَا بَنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.

O successor of Ḥasan and heir to the Imams!
 O guided and awaited one who will arise to establish justice!
 O scion of Allah's Messenger!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

[Now make your requests to Allah and they will, god-willing, be answered]

According to another narration, say after this:

يَا سَادَتِي وَمَوَالِيَّ إِنِّي تَوَجَّهْتُ بِكُمْ أُنْمَتِي وَعُدَّتِي لِيَوْمِ فَقْرِي وَحَاجَتِي إِلَى
 اللَّهِ، وَتَوَسَّلْتُ بِكُمْ إِلَى اللَّهِ، وَاسْتَشْفَعْتُ بِكُمْ إِلَى اللَّهِ، فَاشْفَعُوا لِي عِنْدَ
 اللَّهِ، وَاسْتَنْقِذُونِي مِنْ ذُنُوبِي عِنْدَ اللَّهِ، فَإِنَّكُمْ وَسِيلَتِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَبِحَبِّكُمْ
 وَبِقُرْبِكُمْ أَرْجُو نَجَاةً مِنَ اللَّهِ، فَكُونُوا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ رَجَائِي يَا سَادَتِي يَا أَوْلِيَاءَ
 اللَّهِ، صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَجْمَعِينَ وَلَعَنَ اللَّهُ أَعْدَاءَ اللَّهِ ظَالِمِيهِمْ مِنَ الْأَوَّلِينَ
 وَالْآخِرِينَ، آمِينَ رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ.

O my masters and my patrons! I turn towards Allah in your names —
 my leaders and my provision for the day of my poverty and destitution!
 — and make you my means to Allah, and I place my hope in your inter-
 cession for me with Allah. So plead on my behalf with Allah! And ask
 Allah to save me from my sins! For you are my means to Allah, and it is
 through my love for you and my proximity to you that I hope for Allah's
 salvation, so be my hope with Allah, O masters! O intimate servants
 of Allah! May Allah's blessing be upon them all, and may Allah curse
 the enemies of Allah who oppressed them, from the first and the last,
 Amen, Lord of the Worlds!

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The Theory of the Imams Being ‘Righteous Scholars’ (*‘Ulamā’ Abrār*) Has No Historical Basis: A Response to Mohsen Kadivar

Hassan Ansari¹

Introduction

Mohsen Kadivar’s views on the Scholars of Qom during the first three to four centuries of Shī‘a history are inaccurate and unsubstantiated. In this installment of our series of critiques of Kadivar’s ideas, we delve into his perspective on the notion that the Imams were nothing more than ‘upright scholars’ (*‘ulamā’ abrār*) and explore the conclusions he has drawn. In light of previous responses to him and the arguments presented in this short essay, the evidence presented in the article, “Qirā‘at-i farāmūsh shudi”² (“The Forgotten Reading”) must be called critically re-evaluated. Ultimately, the position outlined in the article appears to lack a solid historical foundation. Kadivar’s argument can be examined by reviewing the inferences he has drawn from a few cherry-picked quotations from Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) and Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991). He writes:

‘... The thinking of the Scholars of Qom was directly opposed to the doctrines of the Mufawwiḍa³. Anyone

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² Mohsen Kadivar, “Qirā‘at-i farāmūsh shudi,” Mohsen Kadivar official website, <https://kadivar.com/238/>.

³ The Mufawwwiḍa were allegedly a group of Shī‘ī extremists that emerged in the early second/eighth century, during the time of Imām al-Ṣādiq. They

who accuses the Scholars of Qom of failing to acknowledge the rightful status/position of the Imams, and does not accept their moderate religious stance, and attributes more to the Imams than they themselves have stated, belongs to the Mufawwiḍa ... The difference between the Mufawwiḍa and the Scholars of Qom, which the former have characterised as the difference between the true Shī'a and the Muqaṣṣirūn, reflects two radically different perspectives on the nature/qualities of the Imams. The Mufawwiḍa believed the Imams were superhuman beings while the Scholars of Qom did not.

Based on Shaykh al-Mufid's account, the Scholars of Qom – at least a few of whom, in his view, were indeed Muqaṣṣirūn – held a number of beliefs.

First, they denied that the Imams possess "knowledge acquired through 'unveiling'" (*ilm ladunnī*). According to them, the Imams, like other religious scholars and indeed all people, only acquire knowledge through conventional means (i.e., *ilm iktisābī*). Their approach to religious questions is no different from the approach of other scholars, meaning they too employ *ijtihād* ('judicial reasoning') to derive law from the foundational sources. Therefore, if other religious scholars seek religious rulings through valid opinions and conjectures, the Imams proceed similarly. In

are said to have adopted many of the beliefs of earlier extremist groups, particularly regarding the divine nature of the Shī'ī Imams. It is also claimed that the Mufawwiḍa believed that God had delegated power to the Prophet Muḥammad and the Imams to "create and provide for all beings and had vested in them the authority to legislate and abrogate the *sharī'a* as they decided." However, they did not claim the Prophet and the Imams to be God. See Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam: Abū Ja'far ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and His Contribution to Imāmite Shi'ite Thought* (Darwin Press: 1993), 21-22.

other words, the Imams are merely 'righteous scholars' (*'ulamā' abrār*), meaning they are pious and learned individuals whom the Prophet Muḥammad explicitly designated as leaders of humanity. They do not differ in essence and nature from other human beings.

Second, there was another group among the Scholars of Qom who also denied that the Imams possess *'ilm ladunnī*, but this group put forward an alternative account of how the Imams acquire knowledge. According to this group, before knowledge is bestowed in their hearts, the Imams are unaware of many religious sciences. This bestowal could occur through divine inspiration mediated by angels, directly without intermediaries, or acquired through human means. However, prior to this bestowal, their conscience, like other humans, was devoid of the aforementioned knowledge.

Third, attributing exaggeration (*ghuluww*) to those who deny that the Prophet and the Imams could experience inadvertent lapses (*sahw*) indicates a human-centric perspective. The Scholars of Qom rejected the superhuman attributes of the Imams, but were also religiously committed to them and to adhering to their teachings. They viewed obedience to the Imams as mandated and followed the Imams based on the Prophet's instruction. However, they did not consider this instruction to originate as a result of a unique divine nature or specialised knowledge. Shaykh al-Mufid believed in the infallibility (*'isma*) of the Imams, equating it with the Prophet's own infallibility. He considered the views of other Imāmī scholars on this matter similar to his own, except for a few who clung to the literal meaning of the narratives and presented

interpretations that were based on their presumably erroneous opinions (*Awā'il al-maqālāt*, Chapter 37, p. 64).

Unlike other topics in *Awā'il al-maqālāt*, al-Mufid did not claim the existence of a consensus among the Imāmī school on this issue. Additionally, he likely had in mind the views of his teacher, Ibn Junayd. If we consider al-Shahīd al-Thānī's report that the majority view of the Shī'a in the second[/eighth] century and the first half of the third[/ninth] century did not believe in the Imams' infallibility, it is evident that those denying this position were by no means a small minority. Nevertheless, according to al-Mufid, these rare exceptions must belong to the Scholars of Qom. On the issue of the knowledge of the judge and whether the Imams based their ruling on apparent or esoteric knowledge, al-Mufid presents three distinct opinions, without attributing them to any particular individual. (*Awā'il al-maqālāt*, Chapter 39). Following the general principle, the Scholars of Qom would consider the rulings of the Imams to be based on apparent knowledge. Even though al-Mufid deemed it possible for the Imams to know the esoteric aspects of individuals, he believed absolute unseen knowledge was exclusive to God and attributed such a belief regarding the Imams to the Mufawwiḍa (*Awā'il al-maqālāt*, Chapter 41, p.67). The Scholars of Qom did not believe in the Imams' knowledge of the Unseen.

In conclusion, with the figure of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā al-Ashʿarī in the third and fourth [Islamic] centuries, we can recognise the emergence of a dominant form of Shīʿī thought that rejected the superhuman attributes of the Imams. They perceived the Imams as upright scholars and considered their

knowledge to be acquired rather than divine. They did not subscribe to doctrines such as the Imams' possessing knowledge of the unseen, having the ability to perform miracles, and belief in the Imams' infallibility.'

To assess Kadivar's theory, it is helpful to begin by examining some of the references provided in his article. The first being what Shaykh al-Mufīd says about the infallibility in his theological treatise *Awā'il al-maḡālāt*:

On the Infallibility of the Imams

On the Infallibility of the Imams, Shaykh al-Mufid states:

'The Imams, who stand in the position of Prophets (Peace be upon them) in implementing rules, establishing boundaries, preserving the laws, and educating the masses, are infallible just like the infallibility of the Prophets. It is impermissible for them to commit minor sins save for those that have been previously mentioned to be permissible for the Prophets. They cannot err in religious matters, nor do they forget any rulings. This is the creed of the majority of the Imamites, except for a deviant minority who rely on the apparent meanings of certain traditions and narrations and propose corrupted interpretations. And the Mu'tazila unanimously oppose this position, and allow for the Imams to commit major sins or even renounce Islam.'⁴

Contrary to the explanation given by Kadivar, Shaykh al-Mufid unequivocally states that the entirety of the Imāmī school upholds the infallibility (*'iṣma*) of the Imams, which he considers an extension of Prophetic infallibility. At the same time, he emphasises that the Imāmī position is that the Imams do not experience lapses in relation

⁴ Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Mufid, *Awā'il al-maḡālāt* (Dār al-Mufid: 1413 AH), 65.

to religious matters, nor do they forget religious rulings. However, he makes an exception for a rare (*shādh*) group, saying that they rely on the apparent meanings of certain *ḥadīths* and propose corrupted interpretations.

Based on the context, and in the section where he addresses this deviant belief, it seems that Shaykh al-Mufid is specifically referring to the idea of the Prophet and Imams experiencing lapses (*sahw*), a view held by figures such as Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walīd (d. 343/954) and Shaykh al-Ṣadūq. Nonetheless, it is clear that only a small group of Imamites held this minority view on infallibility and as Shaykh al-Mufid points out, this view is based on interpretations of certain specific reports, not on foundational principles. This fringe belief emerged solely from specific interpretations of particular traditions, rather than constituting a core element of Imāmī doctrine, as the theory of 'upright scholars' appears to suggest. An example of this issue is Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's belief about the Prophet's occasional forgetfulness. This is considered a unique case based on limited traditions and does not appear to have influenced Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's general perspective on the necessity of infallibility for both the Prophet and the Imam.

On the legal rulings of the Imams

On the legal rulings of the Imams, Shaykh al-Mufid writes:

'The Imam has the authority to judge based on his knowledge, just as he judges based on the apparent testimonies. When the witnessed event contradicts the provided testimony, the testimony of the witness becomes void, and the Imam rules based on what Allah Almighty has informed him. In my opinion, it is permissible that the hidden aspects of matters might be unknown to him, so he rules based on their apparent features, even if they are contrary to the reality in the sight of God Almighty. Alternatively, God might guide

him to distinguish between a truthful and false witness, so that the truth of the situation is not hidden from him. Matters in this regard are related to divine acts of kindness (*alṭāf*), and the best interests of God's servants (*maṣāliḥ*), which, in any case, only God the Exalted knows. The followers of Imamate have three opinions on this topic:

Some contend that the judgments of the Imams (peace be upon them) are based on the apparent matters, regardless of what they might know, in all situations. Others assert that their judgments are solely on the esoteric aspects and not the exoteric, wherein disagreements can arise. There are also those who adhere to the stance I have adopted in this article, and I have not found sufficient evidence to confidently attribute this view to the Banū Nawbakht [a family of renowned Imāmī scholars in Baghdad], may God have mercy on them.⁵

These remarks by Shaykh al-Mufid in *Awā'il al-maḡālāt* are another one of Kadivar's major references. As previously mentioned, this topic is not directly connected to debates concerning the sources of an Imam's knowledge, such as whether it is acquired or divinely bestowed, nor to their knowledge of the unseen. Instead, it is a jurisprudential matter focused on judicial procedures, specifically whether an Imam can act based on his privileged knowledge or is required to issue rulings according to the apparent circumstances. The essence of Shaykh al-Mufid's argument is that with the consideration of both possibilities and relating them to divine wisdom and expediency, he suggests that there are times when God may choose not to reveal the inner dimensions of testimonies and judicial rulings to the Imam, requiring the Imam to issue judgments based on apparent evidence. Conversely,

⁵Ibid, 66.

he proposes that in certain situations, God may disclose these inner truths to the Imam, depending on divine wisdom and what best serves the interests of God’s servants. As such, Shaykh al-Mufid’s discussion is not about an Imam’s knowledge or its sources in religious law, nor is it about an Imam’s knowledge of cosmological matters (*umūr takwīnī*). The discussion focuses solely on the judicial approach an Imam should adopt when implementing legal limits and rulings, which is considered on a case-by-case basis. Even Shaykh al-Mufid’s cited opponents have not targeted the all-encompassing knowledge of the Imam. The discussion has largely been whether an Imam should act based on his knowledge or the apparent, specifically in the context of judicial procedures.

On the Knowledge of the Imams

The discussion centers the Imam’s knowledge, particularly concerning their awareness of people’s thoughts, the ability to see future events, knowledge of the unseen, and whether these are considered their defining attributes. Al-Mufid writes:

‘The Imams from the Progeny of Muḥammad (peace be upon him) knew the hidden intentions of some servants and knew events before they occurred. However, this is not a necessary component of their attributes or a condition for their leadership. Instead, God Almighty honored them with this and as a form of divine kindness to their followers to encourage them to obey them and adhere to their leadership. This is not a rational necessity, but was necessary for them from the perspective of revelation. As for the assertion that they know the unseen, it’s a manifestly objectionable claim, for such a description can only be fitting for one who knows things through Divine knowledge, not through acquired knowledge. And this can only be God, the Mighty and Majestic. On this opinion, a majority of

the followers of Imamate agree, except for those who deviated from the mainstream, such as the Mufawwiḍa and those *ghulāt* ('extremists') who identify with them.⁶

In this context, Shaykh al-Mufid distinguishes between two types of knowledge: the belief held by the *ghulāt* ('extremists') and the Mufawwiḍa, which asserts that the Imam possesses absolute knowledge of the unseen. He argues that this belief is flawed because attributing absolute knowledge of the unseen is reserved for an entity whose knowledge is intrinsic, not acquired. Intrinsic knowledge belongs exclusively to God, and thus claiming knowledge of the unseen is appropriate only for God, whose understanding is innate. In contrast, the knowledge of creatures, whether acquired (*muktasab*) or self-evident (*ḍurūrī*), is extraneous (*mustafād*), meaning it is derived from an external source rather than being inherent. .

Kadivar has conflated knowledge of the unseen (*ilm al-ghayb*) with God-given types of extraneous knowledge (*ilm mustafād ghayr muktasab*), and as such, interprets these statements as evidence – claiming non-acquired knowledge for the Imams is considered an extremist view. Extraneous knowledge involves processes such as learning, deduction, and contemplation – a concept well-known to scholars of speculative theology, particularly in relation to the views of the Mu'tazila. However, extraneous knowledge can also encompass another kind of knowledge that is rooted in divine revelation or 'creation' (*khalq*) by God. This includes 'self-evident' knowledge instilled in humans, such as the special grace received from the Prophet, as suggested by the Tradition of The City of Knowledge.

The term 'divine knowledge' (*ilm ladunnī*) does not necessarily refer to absolute knowledge of the unseen, but rather to a type of extraneous knowledge obtained through unconventional or non-acquired means. Shaykh al-Mufid's discussion pertains to knowledge about people's innermost thoughts and knowledge of future events, both of which

⁶ Ibid, 67.

have no bearing on the Imam's religious knowledge, its sources, or the various kinds of cosmological knowledge the Imam possesses.

In one instance, Kadivar referenced expressions from Shaykh al-Mufid's *Taṣḥīḥ* ('correction') on Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's *I'tiqādāt al-Imāmiyya* ('Creed of the Imāmī school'), which elicited objections regarding his interpretations. Shaykh al-Mufid's statements are as follows:

'...As for the explicit statement of Abū Ja'far - may Allah have mercy on him - accusing those who attribute shortcoming (*taqṣīr*) to the scholars and elders of Qom of being extremists (*ghūluww*), it is not the case that attributing shortcoming to this group is an indication of people's extremism. Among those referred to as elders and knowledgeable, some may indeed be guilty of shortcoming. However, the accusation of extremism should be directed at those who claim that the truthful ones are negligent, whether they are from Qom or any other region.

We have heard a clear account about Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walid - may Allah have mercy on him - from which there is no defense against the charges of shortcomings. He is quoted saying "The first degree of extremism is to deny that the Prophet, peace be upon him, and the Imam, peace be upon him, could experience lapses." If this report about him is accurate, then he has made an error, despite being amongst the scholars and elders of Qom.

We have met a group who came to us from Qom, clearly guilty of shortcomings in religion. They demote the status of the Imams - peace be upon them - claiming they did not know many of the religious rulings until they were inspired. We have seen those who say they relied on their personal judgments and deductions in

religious matters, while asserting their own status. This is the negligence that is undeniable.

And as for the sign of extremism, it is to deny the created nature of the Imams, attributing divinity and eternity to them, as they [the extremists] suggest they possess the power of creating entities and originating essences, which are beyond the capability of mere mortals. However, there is no need to pass judgment on them and determine their status solely based on what Abū Ja‘far identified as a sign of extremism in this particular instance.⁷

These statements by Shaykh al-Mufid, refute everything Kadivar has stated regarding the Scholars of Qom. This in itself is surprising that the intended meaning behind the expressions of Shaykh al-Ṣadūq and Shaykh al-Mufid has not been fully grasped.

It should be noted that part of this quote from Shaykh al-Mufid is a response to statements made by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq in his book on beliefs, where he asserts the following: ‘And the sign of the Mufawwiḍa and the *ghulāt* and their types is their attribution of shortcoming (*taqṣīr*) to the scholars and elders of Qom.’⁸ Many have misunderstood Shaykh al-Ṣadūq’s statement in his creed, *al-I‘tiqādāt*. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq is highlighting one of the key ‘signs’ or indicators used to identify extremists and delegationists, a reflection of the strong opposition held by the Qummīs against these groups. In fact, this refers to the distinct hostility they harbored toward them, sharply criticising them in their writings and accusing the Qummīs of ‘shortcoming’ – a pattern similar to the accusations found in recently discovered Nuṣayrī texts against their opponents today. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq is not suggesting that opposing the Qummīs leads to accusations of extremism, but rather, that the mark of the extremists and delegationists is that they constantly accuse

⁷ Al-Mufid, *Taṣḥīḥ i‘tiqādāt al-Imāmiyya* (Dār al-Mufid: 1993), 136-7.

⁸ See Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ṣadūq, *I‘tiqādāt al-Imāmiyya* (Kungiri-yi Shaykh Mufid: 1993), 3.

the Qummīs of these shortcomings.

Contrary to Kadivar's interpretation, this does not mean that the beliefs of the Qummīs were entirely in opposition to the extremists and delegationists on every issue, nor that the "Scholars of Qom" opposed attributing certain superhuman qualities to the Imams. The Scholars of Qom are the primary narrators of traditions that deal with these topics and precisely assign such attributes to the Imams. This becomes evident even in the most cursory examination of books like *al-Kāfī* and *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*.

In contrast, Shaykh al-Mufid, interpreting Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's statements, sought to clarify a key principle: to identify a genuine criterion for distinguishing between the various sects of *ghulāt* (extremists) and the Mufawwiḍa. The focus should be on doctrinal discussions and evidence, rather than simply on whether these groups oppose or align with the Scholars of Qom. In doing so, he enumerates these criteria. To illustrate the potential imprecision of Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's categorisation, he references the debate concerning the permissibility of the Prophet and the Imams experiencing lapses (*sahw*). He argues that Ibn al-Walīd's position would suggest a deficient level of belief in the Imams. Even though Ibn al-Walīd states that the first step of extremism is denying the lapses to the Prophet and the Imams, it remains unclear to what is considered as subsequent levels. Numerous traditions cited regarding the subject of Imamate indicate that his approach is not consistent with attributing the theory of 'upright scholars' to him.

In this context, Shaykh al-Mufid is not categorically attributing the perspective of 'shortcoming' to the Scholars of Qom, suggesting that Kadivar's interpretation may represent a misreading of the text. He is solely referencing Ibn al-Walīd's shortcoming as a counterexample to Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's statement. If there were more prominent beliefs among the chief Qummī scholars that clearly indicated their shortcomings in religion, Shaykh al-Mufid would have explicitly mentioned them. In fact, these references suggest that in Shaykh al-Mufid's view, the most significant 'shortcoming' attributed to the core

Qummī scholars was their belief – shared with Ibn al-Walīd and Shaykh al-Ṣadūq – in the inadvertence of the Prophet. This belief is invoked to refute Kadivar's position rather than to support it.

Moreover, Shaykh al-Mufīd mentions that there are people from Qom (referring to 'a group who came to us from Qom') who hold even more problematic and evidently deficient beliefs regarding the Imams. This does not imply that the mainstream Qummī scholars held these beliefs. He provides examples that seem to reflect beliefs held by only a small faction from Qom, particularly among those from Shaykh al-Mufīd's time. It is well-documented that during Shaykh al-Mufīd's era, the Qummī school was experiencing a decline, having long since passed its golden age in the latter half of the third/ninth century and the early fourth/tenth century. This may be in reference to individuals such as the two Aḥmads, the sons of Ibn al-Walīd, and Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-ʿAṭṭār (d. c. 3rd/9th century), who had close ties with the Scholars of Baghdad. If, for instance, Ibn al-Walīd had truly held the beliefs that Shaykh al-Mufīd attributes to some Scholars of Qom, it raises the question of why Shaykh al-Mufīd would only address the issue of the possibility of lapses for the Prophet – a relatively minor point.

What Shaykh al-Mufīd attributes to this limited group of Qummīs (rather than to 'the Scholars of Qom,' as Kadivar repeatedly asserts) merits further examination. Once again, it is evident that Kadivar has made an interpretational error. Shaykh al-Mufīd notes that some of these Qummīs regard the Imams as lacking specific knowledge concerning various religious and jurisprudential issues. They believe that the Imam is unaware of these sciences until God occasionally informs him about a specific matter thereby inspiring knowledge into his heart. Shaykh al-Mufīd regards this view as a disservice to the Imams. It is evident that this perspective denies the Imams' knowledge on certain jurisprudential matters, portraying them as individuals who sporadically convey knowledge that comes to them in fleeting moments. This belief stands in stark contrast to the mainstream Shīʿī viewpoint, which asserts that the Imams possess continuous and profound knowledge of religious

jurisprudence. This knowledge is derived from the grace of the Prophet, insights gained from previous Imams, careful study of their writings, and the enduring knowledge entrusted to them. This group of Qummīs did not adhere to mainstream Shī'ism and interpreted the Imam's knowledge in an unconventional way which subsequently aligned with extremist Shī'a views. Shaykh al-Mufid states that this belief is a disservice to the Imams, as it deprives the Imam of genuine knowledge and turns to extreme views to compensate.

Regarding the second point, Shaykh al-Mufid writes that some Qummīs he encountered believed that the Imam's knowledge of religion and jurisprudence was grounded in conjecture and personal opinions. Despite this stance, they still regarded the Imams as "*ulamā*" (scholars) employing the traditional Shī'i term for the Imams, as reflected in texts such as *al-Kāfi*. It has previously been explained that this belief was proposed by some Imāmiyya to justify the existence of contradictions in narrated rulings and legal decisions from the Imams. They believed that the Imam's opinion, with divine intervention, would always be correct, a view rejected by fundamental theologians. Following the Mu'tazila and Ibn Qiba al-Rāzī (d. before 317/929), as well as the foundational perspectives of the Imāmiyya, any reliance on conjecture in jurisprudence was deemed invalid. They believed the reason for having an infallible Imam and his indispensability was that the Imam was a source of certain knowledge (not speculative) for jurisprudence and that his knowledge was not based on conjecture and opinions like other jurists. Given this intellectual framework, it is natural for Shaykh al-Mufid to criticise the view attributed to some Qummīs and consider it a shortcoming. However, as previously explained, this view does not conflict with the belief in the Imam's infallibility, understood as divinely protected from making mistakes or forgetfulness in matters of jurisprudence. It represents a different perspective on the nature of the Imam's knowledge, particularly concerning jurisprudential rulings. It is not evident that this view requires a broadly opposing stance regarding the Imam's knowledge, particularly concerning the Imam's

understanding of cosmological matters or various forms of esoteric knowledge.

Conclusion

As such, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq has not asserted that the Qummīs and their scholars were “shortcomers” in relation to their views on the Imams, nor has the moderate Shī‘ī perspective, as represented by Shaykh al-Mufīd, accused the so-called ‘Scholars of Qom’ (as Kadivar refers to them) of holding such beliefs. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq does not attribute to the Qummīs an opinion consistent with the theory of the Imams being merely ‘upright scholars.’ Instead, he addresses the animosity of the extremists (*ghulāt*) and the Mufawwiḍa toward the Qummīs, with these groups accusing the Qummīs of ‘falling short’ in their views. He highlights this accusation as a means of identifying those who hold extremist views about the Imams. Similarly, Shaykh al-Mufīd attributes contrary beliefs to only a few Qummīs of his time, accusing them of falling short of the moderate perspective. How is this genuinely connected to attributing to the ‘Scholars of Qom’ the belief that the Imams possess no more knowledge than upright scholars? As previously mentioned, there is no evidence to suggest that the Scholars of Qom, as a unified group, held views on this matter that were distinct from those in Baghdad.

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Al-Qalam Journal



BOOK REVIEWS

The New Age of Empire: How Racism and Colonialism Still Rule the World¹

Written by Kehinde Andrews

Reviewed by Aula Hariri, Independent researcher

In *The New Age of Empire*, Kehinde Andrews sets out to shatter the dominant myths underpinning the progressive narrative of the West. Namely, that it was founded on scientific, industrial, and political revolutions (xiii). The first half of the book sets out to historically counter this narrative by tracing how the West was actually built on three pillars: genocide, slavery, and colonialism, producing a global system centred on White supremacy. The second half of the book sets out to show how the racist legacies of these three pillars have continued to sustain the global system that emerged after the Second World War, albeit under a modified “new age of empire” (24).

The story of the West’s rise to global dominance begins with Columbus’s voyage to the Americas in 1492, paving the way to the largest genocide in history (26). Far from being contradictory to Western values or an aberration in Western history, Andrews maintains that this genocidal approach was a consistent pattern in Western conquests, replicated in other settler colonies, like Australia (31, 35). Genocide was used to eliminate the indigenous populations and thereby empty the land to accommodate the influx of European settlers (34). With land available to cultivate, the European demand for labour grew, setting the stage for what Andrews argues was the second foundational period in Western development: the transatlantic slave trade (69).

Andrews lucidly details the decisive role of the transatlantic system in creating Europe’s wealth. He contends that the Atlantic trade—which brutally dehumanised and enslaved millions of Africans as commodities—was decisive in Europe’s rise to global dominance

¹ Allen Lane, xii+251, notes, index, ISBN: 978-0-141-99236-5

(57). Against the popular narrative that sees the Industrial Revolution in Britain as the outcome of its scientific inventions, Andrews draws out the causal connections between Atlantic slavery and industrial development (59-62). The Atlantic system supplied key commodities (sugar, tobacco, and cotton) that powered the Industrial Revolution, whilst also being heavily connected to the financial sector (banking, accounting, and insurance), which provided the necessary credit and capital that drove industrialisation.

Contrary to the popular imagination that sees Atlantic slavery as a relic of the past, Andrews contends that the transatlantic slave system is not only responsible for generating the wealth that built the West, but also for the concomitant poverty that persists to this day (57). The Atlantic slave trade represents the core logic of Western imperialism, namely the exploitation of non-Europeans by those of European descent (70). For Andrews, the Atlantic system's huge responsibility for the creation of contemporary global inequalities demands that reparations be paid. Although, he also notes that if the West were to fully pay its due, the resulting financial and political repercussions would bring about the end of Western dominance (84).

Andrews holds that it was the huge wealth generated from slavery that opened the door to European colonisation of Asia and Africa, thereby further expropriating their wealth to Europe (90). It was during this period of colonial expansion that the Enlightenment project developed, which, according to Andrews, was far from a historical coincidence (2). Instead, the racism of Enlightenment thinkers was an intellectual reflection—and justification—of the genocide, slavery, and colonialism through which Europe was violently restructuring the world (24). The resulting imperial destruction in the non-European world provided Enlightenment thinkers with the “empirical evidence” to validate their White supremacist ideas (11). For Andrews, racism cannot be disentangled from Enlightenment ideas because, notwithstanding their claims to universality, they are premised on the particular: that to be a rational, thinking, human, is to be European (11, 180). This racism is

plainly evident in the rise of racial science, pioneered by Enlightenment thinkers (7-8). Andrews maintains that equality in society reflects the knowledge it is rooted in, and therefore he advocates for the complete abandonment of the Enlightenment project (2).

In the first half of the book, Andrews cogently makes the case for the central role of genocide, transatlantic slavery, and colonialism, in understanding Western development. However, this core argument is linked to some secondary claims, not all of which are substantiated. For example, in a paragraph briefly discussing the connection between the Arab slave trade and the transatlantic trade, Andrews states that it “was Muslim scholars who first codified anti-Black racism, something later picked up by Europeans” (152). Andrews provides no reference or source for this claim, nor does he cite any examples of Islamic laws which “codified anti-Black racism.” Moreover, he provides no details about who these “Muslim scholars” were, nor clarifies what he means by the term. The only clues as to what Andrews is referring to are his separate discussions of “Arab racial thinking” (79) in which he cites “the Tunisian scholar Ibn Khaldun” (17, 18). This, however, raises questions about Andrews’ conflation between “Arab” and “Muslim” thinking. It also does not explain how he justifies his assertion that Europe’s anti-Black racism has its origins— “picked up by Europeans”—in this thinking.

The second half of the book outlines how the core racist logic of the Enlightenment framework continues to underpin the post-war version of Western imperialism, albeit now under the guise of benevolence, human rights, and liberal democracy (24, 112). This new version of empire has entailed a shift away from Western European states, towards the United States, corporations, and global institutions (the UN, IMF, and the World Bank) (115). However, Andrews is quick to point out that the new age of empire did not completely do away with colonial forms of violence, as evidenced by Western support for the violent creation of the settler colony of Israel, and its continued support of colonial violence against the native Palestinian population (133-135).

The only solution to the new age of empire is a revolutionary politics that would create an entirely new global system (206). Andrews contends that attempts to reform the current system are akin to fixing the unbroken. This is because the ills of the existing order—from police brutality to global health and wealth inequalities—are all symptoms of an inherently racist system (206). Although Andrews does not delve into the details of what a revolutionary politics entails, he is clear that it will arise amongst those who are oppressed by Western imperialism, rather than those who benefit from it (206). In this regard, he is highly critical of “the new left” that emerged in the West out of the neoliberal onslaught of the 1980s (192). Andrews takes particular issue with the new left’s national framing, which he claims includes only citizens in the West, whilst excluding its victims outside (182). Andrews maintains that these victims have equal stakes in the economic policies governing Western citizens, since the wealth that the left seeks to nationally redistribute is largely a by-product of the West’s racial exploitation of these populations outside of the West (186–187).

Andrews’ argument for the continued legacies of the three pillars—of genocide, slavery, and colonialism—is important for highlighting how the logic of Western imperialism continues to shape the contemporary world. However, his discussion of the role of states in “the non-White West” focuses only on what he describes as their “non-White collusion” in extending the “updated version” of Western imperialism, in which he includes China and the BRICS countries (152). There is no discussion of how, or even acknowledgement of the possibility that, states located outside of the West can play a role not in collusion with, but rather in resisting, challenging, and offering an alternative to the existing global order.

Although Andrews did not set out to write a prescriptive book about *how* the new age of empire can be torn down, the reader is likely to be left with precisely this question after reading his book. Perhaps a starting point, for seeking an answer, lies in tearing down the underlying foundational myths that continue to sustain Western imperialism. In this

regard, *The New Age of Empire* delivers by offering a counter-narrative to the dominant mythology surrounding the historical founding and rise of the West.

Crises and Conversions: The Unlikely Avenues of “Italian Shiism”¹

Written by Minoo Mirshahvalad

Reviewed by Mahboobeh Hami, University of Tübingen,
Germany

Minoo Mirshahvalad is an Iranian scholar who completed her PhD in Italy and is currently (2024) a postdoctoral fellow at Copenhagen University. Her dissertation examined the Twelver Shīʿī identity in a secularist context, specifically referencing Italy. She is fluent in Italian and has spent time in Italy, having the opportunity to be in contact with Shīʿī communities. *Crises and Conversions* investigates conversion to Shīʿa Islam in Italy. She is the first scholar to have explored this issue with a socio-historical methodology using experiences from very recent history. The target audience is both Muslims—in the Diaspora or born in Europe—and Europeans who have religious concerns.

Attending a conference held by Italian-converted Shīʿīs sparked the author’s curiosity and led her to write this recently published book. Her incentive to take part in the conference stemmed from the question: Why do these Italians convert to Shīʿism which is a minority in a minority (Islam) in Italy as part of Europe? While Mirshahvalad expected to meet those Shīʿī converts who were similar to Shīʿī-borns, she also encountered those who were different either in appearance or thought, the latter being followers of Julius Evola, who introduced the French philosopher René Guénon to Italy.

In her writing, the author examines the pivotal factors that influenced Shīʿī conversion and the relationship between converts and the Italian context. She investigates how conviction about the crisis of modernity contributes to conversions to the minor branch of Islam in Italy. According to her, the idea of crisis is the common element

¹Palgrave Macmillan, xiv+171, index, ISBN: 978-3-031-55876-4

between Guénonian Traditionalists and European convert Muslims. Crisis and traditionalism are the main keywords explored throughout all the chapters of this book.

The author attempts to explain the rise of Traditionalism in Italy through René Guénon who had sought the superiority of Tradition in the East. Propagators in Italy included Reghini, Giorgio, and Evola who developed their Traditionalist views, however, it was Evola who was the main gateway to Guénon's popularity in Italy. All of these propagators were inclined to fascism but since "Evola discarded the possibility of reconciliation between Romanity and Christianity" Mirshahvalad explains, their approaches were not welcomed by Mussolini (28). For Evola, the value of religion was in its being at the service of Tradition; in this regard, he praised Muslims. Evola reviewed Guénon's arguments about the East-West dichotomy and his view only diverged when he stressed the necessity of a Roman revolution of fascism. Unlike Guénon's Sufi-oriented approach, Evola provoked violence and revolt against the crisis in the modern world which contains nihilism, Semitic poison, and democratic evil.

Given Evola's thoughts about Islam, he was interested in the ancient world and its warrior nature. The old religions such as Mithraism, Zoroastrianism, Mazdaism, and Persian Gnosticism in Ancient Persia are praised by Evola because of their spirituality, which was at the service of political activities and war. Unlike Guénon, Evola believed in the Persian roots of Islam which is connected with primordial Tradition, holy war (Jihad), and the potential of esotericism. In this chapter, Mirshahvalad clearly describes how Evola's thoughts attracted converts, regardless of whether his understanding of ancient Persia and Islam was inconsistent with the historical reality or there was a misunderstanding in his deductions.

In the fourth chapter, Mirshahvalad expands on Evola's militant professors and brings the focus to their main concern regarding "Aryan Islam" and the East-West dichotomy. The author notes that "a method of building ties between Shī'ism and Italy has been to explicitly or

implicitly appeal to the nineteenth-century orientalist conviction about Shi'ism as an Iranian or Aryan Islam" (55). In Italy, the interest in Persia is mainly entertained by French intellectuals. Take Henry Corbin as an example, for him the East was just Iran. "Both Evola and Corbin contributed to the utopianisation of Iran and the esoteric ecumenism" Mirshahvalad explains (57). They highlight the roots of jihad and Shi'i messianism in the Aryan culture.

The next imperative figure considered by the author is Pio Filippani-Ronconi, the Italian Orientalist who contributed to Iran's romantic image and admired the warrior nature. He claims that Shi'ism adopted several tropes from Zoroastrianism and Christianity such as the element of king-priest that emerged in Shi'ism as Imams, the sacred bloodline created via the marriage of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī to Sassanid Shahrbanu, the unification of Christianity and Shi'ism through Narjis, the Christian mother of the hidden Imam and the idea of the hidden Imam as an avatar of Mithra, the Iranian Apollo. All these Iranian elements are expanded by the author in this chapter. Mirshahvalad then represents Roncini's and Evola's beliefs about the impact of Persia on the Hellenistic, European-medieval, and Islamic civilisations.

Adriano Romauldi is the third figure who challenges the geographic East-West divide and expands the Persian and Indian civilisations on European Tradition, whilst neo-fascist Claudio Mutti seeks to establish connections between Islam and ancient Rome with Islam announcing the unity of politics and religion through which ancient Rome and its pre-modern greatness would be saved and rebuilt. According to the author, the core of Mutti's belief is the theory of Eurasia, i.e., that Europe is part of the East and should be de-westernised so that it is not associated with the West in the same way as the United States of America.

The common central belief of all these figures is their adherence to Islam which is considered as the only remedy for the modern world and its spiritual crisis. The question that Mirshahvalad examines in the following chapter is: Why is Twelver Shi'ism perceived as the best

religion and spirituality for Traditionalists in Italy? According to her, the importance of Evola's ideology of fascism and his promotion of terrorism for Italian Traditionalists affected his followers' political and religious orientation. That is why "they supported pro-Iran Islamic movements in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Hezbollah, and Palestinian exponents" (83). She draws on the Iranian revolution in 1979 to explain the Italian approach to it. In this case, she examines the Italian magazines published during the revolution in Iran. These publications introduced Sunnism as a religion of conformism while calling the leader of the revolution "Imam" and presenting Iran as a paradise of human rights. Mirshahvalad then documents the spiritual aspects of Shī'ism in this chapter showcasing 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as the symbol of warrior, priest, and king. One of the pivotal beliefs she addresses is that of the Mahdī, the hidden Imam whose Christian mother and messianic resurgence besides Jesus illuminate the unity of Christianity and Islam. The process of the utopianisation of Shī'ī ideology is expanded in great detail.

The sixth chapter is a sociological analysis of converts' public approaches. The most important characteristic of Traditionalists is that they reduce differences between religions to their "external forms." Mirshahvalad explores the self-concept of the converts which is different from Shī'ī borns. Highlighting similarities between religious forms is a solution for Traditionalists to show the oneness of their origin. In other words, although the self is a modern Western case, Italian Shī'īs tend to find their Western way to Islam and in the process introduce new cultural elements to the religious tradition whilst eliminating harmful ones, Mirshahvalad says (104).

The next chapter is dedicated to esotericism. The esoteric Shī'ism is refabricated to correspond to an antithesis of the evils—secularism and rationalisation—of the modern world. Imams are the elite of the natural hierarchies and have the right to access the hidden truth. Besides, "Iran's revolution in 1979 has been portrayed as a utopia, a place where the platonic-Evolian ideals have become flesh" (140). Attacking the reformists of Iran and calling them American puppets, depicting

Ahmadinejad as an honest hero, and referring to Mir-Hossein Mousavi, leader of the Green Path movement as an American agent all suggest that converts seek the ancient wisdom in the ideals of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its resistance against the hegemony of the United States of America and globalisation.

The author's conclusion is summed up in the book's last chapter. "Thanks to the division between religion and culture, Italian Traditionalists can benefit from a religious upgrade but can protect themselves from a cultural downgrade"(158). She concludes that Traditionalists in Italy have different voices ranging from fascist-oriented Traditionalism to anti-church and militant approaches, and that Shī'ism in Italy has led to a Traditionalised secularism.

Mirshavalad's work is important because she traces the chain of Traditionalists and explores their consideration of Persia and Islam. This book is a descriptive analysis that leaves many questions unanswered, serving as an introduction to this subject that raises relevant questions through its investigation of the matter. In this regard, this is a valuable text that opens a window for scholars interested in such issues to further study and explore the issues raised.

