

Al-Qalam

Journal

of Advanced
Islamic Research

Vol. 2 · No. 2 · 2025





AL-QALAM JOURNAL
OF ADVANCED ISLAMIC RESEARCH

ISSN 2755-3698

ISBN PAPERBACK: 978-1-78991-203-6

ISBN HARDBACK: 978-1-78991-194-7

International Centre *for* Advanced Islamic Research (ICAIR)

www.icaair.ac · journal@icaair.ac

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Acknowledgements

Al-Qalam would like to thank Mona Makki for translating the Arabic and Farsi articles; Maleeha Abdullah and Aula Hariri for copyediting the English texts; Fatima Al-Achek for copyediting the Arabic texts; and Salim Salhab for proof-reading this issue.

Transliteration, Conventions and Abbreviations

Arabic and Persian words, names, and titles have 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

اَ	ā	اَوْ	aw
اُو	ū	اَيَّ	ay
يَ	ī		
ـَ	a		
ـُ	u		
ـِ	i		

In this Journal, all dates are given according to both the Hijri lunar and Gregorian calendars, in the following format: 61/680. The first number refers to the Hijri year and the second to the Gregorian year. To maintain consistency and brevity, the abbreviations “A.H.” and “C.E.” are omitted throughout. Dates based on the Solar Hijri calendar are marked with “Sh.”

In this Journal, “a.s.” is an abbreviation of *‘alayhi/‘alayhā/‘alayhimu al-salām* (“peace be upon him/her/them”), used by some authors as a respectful invocation after the names of the Imams and other holy Shī‘ī figures; and “s.a.w.” stands for *ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi wa-ālihī wa-sal-lam* (“may God bless him and his family and grant them peace”), used after the name of the Prophet Muḥammad.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Articles

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī in the Mirror of *al-Maḥāsin**

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University of Tehran

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Abstract

In the present work, after an investigation into the personality of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī and his father Muḥammad b. Khālīd in the books of biographical evaluation (*rijāl*) and bibliographies (*fihrist*s), as well as an examination of the chains of transmission (*isnāds*) in the surviving portion of *al-Maḥāsin* in comparison with the *isnāds* in *al-Kāfī*, it is concluded that Aḥmad al-Barqī was among the reliable authorities (*thiqāt*) and trustworthy figures in the matter of *ḥadīth*, and his extensive narration from weak transmitters (*ḍuʿafāʾ*) has little reflection, at least in the surviving portion of *al-Maḥāsin*. Likewise, the collection of books comprising *al-Maḥāsin* is among the reliable *ḥadīth* sources, and the decrease or deficiency reported in it relates to the smaller or greater number of its constituent books, not to alterations in their texts. Furthermore, a comparison of the extent of al-Barqī's narration from his teachers (*mashāyikh*) in the two books *al-Maḥāsin* and *al-Kāfī* can be considered an indication of the authenticity of the surviving portion of *al-Maḥāsin*.

Keywords: Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd, al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, sources of *al-Kāfī*, authentication (*tawthīq*).

* This article was originally published in Farsi in *Lisān-i Šidq* 1 (1391 Sh./2012): 1–94, titled “Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī dar Āyina-yi *al-Maḥāsin*.”

1. Statement of the Problem

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī is a renowned Shī'ī *ḥadīth* scholar of the 3rd/8th century. Together with his father [Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī], he engaged in the narration of many *ḥadīth* books and compiled from his vast collection of narrations a monumental work entitled *al-Maḥāsin*. Although only a small portion of this book survives today, the personalities of both father and son have been surrounded by ambiguities that have long been recounted in the statements of bibliographers and biographical evaluators (*rijālīyyūn*). According to these accounts, they narrated from weak transmitters (*ḍu'afā'*) and relied upon interrupted *ḥadīths* (*marāsīl*; *mursal* denotes a *ḥadīth* with a break in its *isnād*)—a matter that even led to Aḥmad al-Barqī's expulsion from Qom.

On the other hand, their reliability (*wathāqa*) in themselves has been affirmed. Some later scholars have attempted to clarify this ambiguity by suggesting that their problem lay in acquiring manuscript copies through finding (*wijāda*) without hearing (*samā'*) or reading (*qirā'a*). This article aims to answer the following questions by utilising the surviving portion of *al-Maḥāsin* and other evidence:

1. Are son and father reliable (*muwaththaq*) and trustworthy?
2. Were they, as some later scholars have conjectured, careless in transmitting manuscript copies of books?
3. Is the surviving portion of *al-Maḥāsin* authentic?
4. Are the reports transmitted about them also reflected in *al-Maḥāsin*?

It goes without saying that through answering these questions, the ambiguities raised concerning their personalities will be largely resolved and the truth of the matter will become clear.

2. Introduction to the al-Barqī Family and al-Barqī (the Father)

The ancestor of the al-Barqī family, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī, was from the people of Kufa and was killed by al-Ḥajjāj after the incident of Zayd b. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (a.s.). After him, his son ‘Abd al-Raḥmān fled with his own son Khālīd to the land of Qom. He settled in Barq-rūd, one of the districts of Qom.¹ Among the sons of Khālīd, the following individuals are known: Muḥammad (with the *kunya* Abū ‘Abdullāh), al-Ḥasan (with the *kuniya* Abū ‘Alī), and al-Faḍl (with the *kunya* Abū l-Qāsim).²

Among them, al-Ḥasan has been given authentication (*tawthīq*) by al-Najāshī, who mentioned his book *Kitāb al-nawādir*.³ al-Ṭūsī also counted him as the author of several books.⁴ The grandson of al-Faḍl, named ‘Alī b. al-‘Alā’, was also known as a jurist (*faqīh*).⁵

However, the most famous of these individuals must be considered Muḥammad b. Khālīd. He was a man of letters (*adīb*) and knowledgeable about reports and Arab sciences.⁶ Al-Najāshī mentions numerous books by him, the titles of some of which are consistent with his knowledge of history and Arab reports, including two books *Makkah wa-l-Madīna* and *Ḥurūb al-Aws wa-l-Khazraj*, as well as a book entitled *al-Khuṭab*, which may to some extent indicate his literary accomplishments. However, no important jurisprudential (*fiqhī*) work appears in al-Najāshī’s account. In contrast, al-Ṭūsī mentions only his *Kitāb al-nawādir*,⁷ which was a well-known title for naming *ḥadīth* (jurisprudential) books.

¹ Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Najāshī, *Rijāl* (Intishārāt-i Jāmi‘a-yi Mudarrisīn: 1986), 76; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist* (al-Maktabat al-Murtaḍawīyya: 1937), 51.

² Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 335.

³ Ibid., 61.

⁴ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 126.

⁵ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 335.

⁶ Ibid., 335.

⁷ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 54.

Careful attention to the titles of his books according to al-Najāshī's detailed account also reveals his theological inclinations. A book on the knowledge of Allāh (*ʿilm al-bārī*) and a book entitled *al-Tanzīl wa-l-taʿbīr* (or *al-Tanzīl wa-l-taghyīr*?) can indicate an aspect of these inclinations.

However, the most important discussion concerning him is his weakening (*taḍʿīf*) or authentication (*tawthīq*) as a transmitter of *ḥadīths*. The importance of this discussion stems from the fact that he is considered the most important *ḥadīth* teacher (*shaykh*) of his son.

Regarding Muḥammad b. Khālīd, an explicit *tawthīq* of him has been made by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī. Al-Ṭūsī, while mentioning him among the companions of Imam al-Riḍā (a.s.), calls him trustworthy (*thiqa*).⁸

In contrast, al-Najāshī considers him weak (*daʿīf*) in the matter of *ḥadīth*.⁹ Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī also calls some of his *ḥadīths* objectionable (*munkar*), pointing to his extensive narration from *ḍuʿafāʾ* and his reliance on *marāsīl*.¹⁰ Ibn Dāwūd mentions him among the praised (*mamdūḥ*) and *muwaththaq* narrators,¹¹ and ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī accepts his *tawthīq*.¹² Ayatollah al-Khūʾī considers his *tawthīq* by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī to be without opposition and does not regard al-Najāshī's statement as clearly indicating the *taḍʿīf* of Muḥammad b. Khālīd; rather, he considers this *taḍʿīf*, according to the text, to be directed at his *ḥadīths*, meaning that *daʿīf* and *munkar* reports are found in his *ḥadīths*. He then reinforces this point by citing Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī.¹³ Thus, the person of Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī himself was reliable and

⁸ Al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī* (al-Maktabat al-Ḥaydariyya: 1961), 363.

⁹ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 335.

¹⁰ Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī, *Rijāl* (Muʾassasa-yi Ismāʿīliyyān: 1364 Sh./1985), 1:93.

¹¹ Ḥasan b. ʿAlī Ibn Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-Rijāl* (Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran: 1963), 309.

¹² ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl fī maʿrifat al-rijāl* (Dār al-Dhakhāʾir: 1990), 139.

¹³ Abū l-Qāsim al-Khūʾī, *Muʿjam rijāl al-ḥadīth wa-tafṣīl ṭabaqāt al-ruwāt* (Markaz-i Nashr-i Āthār-i Shīʿa: 1989), 16:66–67.

trustworthy, but his extensive narration from *du‘afā’* and reliance on *marāsīl* initially diminishes the credibility of his *ḥadīths*—unless he narrates *ḥadīth* from a reliable individual.

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, as previously mentioned, lists him among the companions of Imam al-Kāẓim, al-Riḍā, and al-Jawād (a.s.).¹⁴ However, in the chapter on the companions of Imam al-Hādī (a.s.), he makes no mention of him. The same is true of his status in *Rijāl al-Barqī*, whose author was from his own family.¹⁵ Accordingly, his death should be estimated at approximately the year 220/835-836 at the latest.

Muḥammad Bāqir al-Bahbūdī (d. 2015) has a statement about him and also about his son Aḥmad, which will be discussed in what follows.

3. Introduction to al-Barqī (the Son)

Al-Barqī (the son), or Abū Ja‘far Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd, was born, according to some estimates, around the year 200/815-816.¹⁶ He is counted among the companions of Imam al-Jawād and Imam al-Hādī (a.s.).¹⁷ He also lived through the time of Imam al-‘Askarī (a.s.) and the Minor Occultation (*al-ghayba al-ṣughrā*).

According to al-Najāshī’s report from Ibn al-Ghaḍā’irī, the year of his death was 274/887, and according to his report from al-Barqī’s grandson through his daughter, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Mājilawayh, it was 280/893.¹⁸

He was a great *ḥadīth* scholar (*muḥaddith*) who, in addition to learning from his father, received *ḥadīth* from numerous teachers. The

¹⁴ Al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 343, 363, and 377.

¹⁵ Sayyid Muḥammad Jawād Shubayrī, “Barqī,” *Dānishnāma-yi Jahān-i Islām*.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd Al-Barqī, *Rijāl* (Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran: 1963), 57 and 59; al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 373 and 383.

¹⁸ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 77.

number of his teachers has been mentioned as approximately 200.¹⁹

His reliability (*wathāqa*) in himself is confirmed by al-Najāshī,²⁰ al-Ṭūsī,²¹ and Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī.²² However, all have noted his narration from *du'afā'* and reliance on *marāsīl*. Al-Ṭūsī explicitly mentions the abundance of his narrations from *du'afā'*.²³ Thus, he too, like his father, has been deemed trustworthy in himself. Nearly all later scholars have also accepted his *wathāqa*.²⁴

Of course, his narration from *du'afā'* has also caused him some problems. Among these, Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī reports that Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Īsā expelled him from Qom. Although there is no explicit statement about the precise reason for this expulsion, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Īsā later brought him back to Qom and apologised.²⁵ Ibn Dāwūd and 'Allāma al-Ḥillī refer to Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Īsā's presence at his funeral procession barefoot and without a turban in order to make amends for what he had done to him.²⁶

Thus, his reliability is confirmed by the majority of scholars of biographical evaluation (*'ulamā' al-rijāl*) and *ḥadīth* and has rarely been subject to doubt.²⁷

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 76.

²¹ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 51.

²² Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī, *Rijāl*, 39.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ From the first category, one can refer to the following: al-Bahā'ī, *Mashriq al-shamsayn wa-ikṣīr al-sa'adatayn* (Maktabat Baṣīratī: n.d.), 277; al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *al-Ri'āya fī 'ilm al-dirāya* (Maktabat Ayatollah al-'Uzmā al-Mar'ashī al-Najāfī: 1987), 370–371; 'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl*, 15; Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn, *Muntaqā l-jumān fī aḥādīth al-ṣiḥāḥ wa-l-ḥisān* (Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1982), 43.

²⁵ Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī, *Rijāl*, 39.

²⁶ Ibn Dāwūd, *Rijāl*, 40; 'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl*, 14.

²⁷ Perhaps the only remaining point in his possible weakening is a phrase at

Al-Bahbūdī, while confirming the *wathāqa* of both father and son, has provided an explanation for the weakness of their *ḥadīth*. He interprets the expression attributed to Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī regarding Muḥammad b. Khālīd as follows: What is meant by his *ḥadīth* being “known” (*ma'rūf*) is narration through direct *samā'* and *qirā'a*, while the *munkar* portion refers to al-Barqī's acquisition by way of *wijāda* from the books and early foundational collections (*uṣūl*) of the companions.²⁸

Likewise, regarding al-Barqī (the son), after quoting the statements of the biographical evaluators, he concludes that he was neither a liar nor someone who concealed his sources (*mudallis*), but rather sometimes proceeded to acquire books by way of finding without sufficient care in identifying authentic manuscripts.²⁹

His view regarding this narrator is roughly the same as regarding his father, and he emphasises their acquisition of manuscripts of *uṣūl* by way of *wijāda*.

In evaluating his view, it must be said that this conclusion is not explicitly stated in the biographical works and is largely of an interpretive (*ijtihādī*) nature. Perhaps one could extend the carelessness in acquiring *ḥadīth* from *ḍu'afā'* and reliance on *marāsīl* to laxity in relying on manuscripts as well; however, it should be noted that laxity in relying on manuscripts is not a logical consequence of narrating from *ḍu'afā'*. Given the emphasis of some early scholars on preserving the *ḥadīth* heritage, acquiring narrations from *ḍu'afā'* and recording *marāsīl* is conceivable because they contain *ḥadīth* from the *Ahl al-*

the end of one of the narrations in *al-Kāfi*, in which Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā tells another narrator that he wished this narration had been transmitted through a route other than al-Barqī. Regarding the explanation of this (not entirely clear) statement and its lack of contradiction with al-Barqī's reliability, see al-Khū'i, *Muḥjam*, 2:265–266.

²⁸ Muḥammad Bāqir al-Bahbūdī, *Ma'rifat al-ḥadīth* (Markaz-i Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī wa Farhangī: 1362 Sh./1982), 203.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

Bayt (a.s.); but at the same time, care in obtaining authentic and reliable manuscripts—where possible—has no conflict with the aforementioned approach. This is also seen to some extent in the practice of many classical authorities on *ḥadīth*, such as ‘Allāma al-Majlisī. But apart from this point, which indicates the somewhat conjectural nature of al-Bahbūdī’s interpretation, there is ample evidence demonstrating the incorrectness of this assertion as well.

The first indication is that according to the explicit statement of Ibn al-Ghaḍā’irī,³⁰ the criticism was not directed at al-Barqī himself, but only concerned the individuals from whom he narrated.³¹ Now, if al-Barqī had relied on manuscripts acquired by way of *wijāda*, the criticism would have been directed at him, whereas in fact it was directed at his teachers.

The second indication is that al-Najāshī’s practice in mentioning chain of transmission (*ṭarīq*) for books is one of complete brevity, and for this purpose he suffices with mentioning only one or two chains.³² Accordingly, in presenting the chains of transmission for books, as a rule he selects the most reliable chain. By consulting al-Najāshī’s *Fihrist* [*Rijāl al-Najāshī*], it is observed that in many cases, when mentioning the chains of transmission for books, he mentions a chain containing Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd or his father and confines himself to that. In total, in his work, in 76 instances, the chain presented contains Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd or his father. Among these, in 40 instances the name of Aḥmad appears alone in the chain. The name of Muḥammad b. Khālīd appears alone in 7 instances, and Aḥmad’s narration from his father is mentioned in 29 instances. Among these 76

³⁰ Ibn al-Ghaḍā’irī, *Rijāl*, 39.

³¹ The people of Qom criticised him, but the criticism is not directed at him. Rather, the criticism is directed at those from whom he narrates, for he did not care from whom he took narrations, following the method of the traditionists (*ahl al-akhbār*).

³² Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 3, 116, and 231.

instances, in 37 cases the author of the book has been given *tawthīq*, in 6 cases he has been weakened (*taḍʿīf*), and in the remaining cases no authentication or weakening has been mentioned.³³

Accordingly, it is observed that al-Najāshī, in mentioning the chains of transmission for books and compilations, readily cites Muḥammad b. Khālīd and his son, and even adopts this practice in transmitting the books of reliable narrators (*thiqāt*).

Among the noteworthy instances of reliance on a chain containing Muḥammad b. Khālīd or his son, despite the existence of other chains, is the following. Al-Najāshī, regarding Muḥammad b. Murāzīm b. Ḥakīm,³⁴ Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbd al-Khālīq³⁵ and Muḥammad b. al-Haytham,³⁶ explicitly states that their books were narrated by a group of companions, yet he has selected the chain containing Muḥammad b. Khālīd or his son.³⁷ Another similar case concerns Bakr b. Ṣāliḥ's *Nawādir*, where al-Najāshī points to the variation in the book according to its narrators

³³ Some of the reliable narrators (*thiqāt*) whose books are transmitted through chains containing either son or father are listed in al-Najāshī's *Rijāl* with these numbers: 50, 125, 147, 256, 276, 353, 463, 470, 637, 713, 925, 986, 1074, 1178, 1202, 1217, 1221, 1228. Likewise, examples of weak narrators whose books are transmitted through chains containing al-Barqī the son or the father include: 56, 593, 863, 942. Others are also listed with these numbers: 33, 70, 108, 110, 126, 128, 129, 789, 790, 1238, 1241, 1242, 1244, 1246, 1249, 1250, 1255, 1263.

³⁴ Ibid., 365.

³⁵ Ibid., 27.

³⁶ Ibid., 362.

³⁷ Of course, as an exception to this method, one should mention the books of Ḥusayn b. Saʿīd, in which al-Najāshī, quoting from his teacher Ibn Nūḥ, presents various chains for his books (including a chain containing al-Barqī), and then adds from his words that what is customary among the companions is the chain of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā al-Ashʿarī (ibid., 59).

and presents al-Barqī's chain.³⁸

Another indication is that an expression similar to that used for both father and son has been mentioned regarding Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. 'Imrān al-Ash'arī;³⁹ however, when examining his books, only unreliable narrators (*ghayr muwaththaq*) have been excluded,⁴⁰ which indicates the soundness of his transmission from *thiqāt*. Al-Bahbūdī has also not suggested the possibility of his acquiring manuscripts by way of *wijāda*.⁴¹

Accordingly, it must be concluded that al-Barqī son and father were among the reliable transmitters of the *uṣūl* and compilations (*muṣannaḥāt*) of earlier scholars, and their transmission from reliable narrators is entirely trustworthy.

Regarding the levels of knowledge and piety of al-Barqī (the son), two other expressions from al-Najāshī are also noteworthy. In introducing Aḥmad b. Ismā'īl b. 'Abdullāh, after describing him as a man of merit, learning, and knowledge, and counting him as the author of unparalleled books, he refers to his relationship with al-Barqī (the son) and considers him to have been raised by al-Barqī.⁴² Similar is his expression regarding al-Barqī (the son)'s grandson through his daughter, named 'Alī b. Abī l-Qāsim 'Abdullāh b. 'Imrān, where after authenticating him and noting that he was a *faqīh*, *adīb*, and scholar (*fāḍil*), he mentions that he was raised by al-Barqī (the son).⁴³

Among the other indications of his renown is a report that Shaykh 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Qazwīnī has cited in his work known as *al-Naqḍ*, quoting from the author of *Ba'd faḍā'ih al-rawāfiq*. In this statement, he attributes the Imāmī school of thought to a number of Shī'ī notables and

³⁸ Ibid., 109.

³⁹ Ibid., 348.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 189–191.

⁴² Ibid., 97.

⁴³ Ibid., 261.

mentions Ibn al-Barqī among them.⁴⁴ Ibn al-Nadīm has also counted both father and son as Shīʿī jurists.⁴⁵

4. *Al-Maḥāsin*

The collection of books known as *al-Maḥāsin* is the most important work of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī. This book was very large and extensive. In composing this work, al-Barqī had in view the compilation of religious knowledge.⁴⁶ Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, in introducing the *Kitāb al-ādāb* from Ibn ʿUqda, calls it a large book comprising numerous books similar to *al-Maḥāsin*.⁴⁷

It has been demonstrated that *ḥadīth* books, from early books and *uṣūl* of the companions to the final compilation in the form of the Four Books (*al-kutub al-arbaʿa*), have passed through different stages. One of the important developments in this process was the writing of comprehensive works (*kutub jāmiʿ*) using the *ḥadīth* heritage. There were many writers of comprehensive works before the authors of *al-kutub al-arbaʿa*.⁴⁸ Al-Barqī, by virtue of the book *al-Maḥāsin*, should be counted among the most important writers of comprehensive works in the 3rd/9th century. The multiplicity of his works and their comprehensiveness inspired the composition of many later books and also served as a reference for their composition, and this book remained accessible even in later centuries. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī in the book *al-Fihrist*

⁴⁴ Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, Introduction.

⁴⁵ Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 276–277.

⁴⁶ Muḥammad Ibn Idrīs, *Mustaṭrafāt al-sarāʾir* (Intishārāt-i Jāmiʿa-yi Mudarrisīn: 1990), 640.

⁴⁷ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 69.

⁴⁸ For further acquaintance with the phenomenon of compiling comprehensive collections (*jāmiʿ*-writing) and earlier authors of *ḥadīth* compilations, see Majid Maarif, *Pazhūhishī dar Tārīkh-i Ḥadīth-i Shīʿa* (Muʾassasa-yi Farhangī-Hunari-yi Dārīh, Tehran: 1376 Sh./1997), 452–456; Kāzīm Ṭabāṭabāʾī and ʿAlī Riḍādād, “Jāmiʿ- Nivīsān-i Pish az Kulaynī,” *Ulūm-i Ḥadīth* 51 (1388 Sh./2009), 9–35.

explicitly states his access to a number of the books of *al-Maḥāsīn*, and then adds the names of other books from the list of Ibn Buṭṭa,⁴⁹ while al-Najāshī merely mentions the names of the books according to Ibn Buṭṭa's list.⁵⁰ In comparing these two lists of names, it should be said that the names of 47 books from al-Najāshī's list appear exactly in the list of books that al-Ṭūsī had at his disposal, which are:

*Al-Tarāḥum wa-l-ta'āṭuf, al-Tabṣira, al-Rafāḥiyya, al-Zayy, al-Zīna, al-Marāfiq, al-Marāshid, al-Ṣiyāna, al-Firāsa, al-Ḥaqā'iq, al-Ikhwān, al-Khaṣā'iṣ, al-Ma'ākil, Maṣābiḥ al-ẓulm, al-Thawāb, al-'Iqāb, al-Ma'isha, al-Nisā', al-Ṭib, al-'Uqūbāt, al-Safar, Adab al-naḥs, al-Taḥdhīr, al-Tahdhīb, al-Tasliya, Adab al-mu'āshara, Makārim al-akhlāq, Madhām al-akhlāq, Madhām al-af'āl, al-Ḥayā*⁵¹, *al-Ṣafwa, al-Furūq, al-Gharā'ib, al-'Ajā'ib, al-Manāfi', al-Dawājīn wa-l-rawājīn, al-Shi'r wa-l-shu'arā', al-Nujūm, al-Zajr wa-l-fā'l, al-Du'ā', al-Ajnās wa-l-ḥayawān, Faḍl al-Qur'ān, al-Amthāl, al-Tārīkh, al-Naḥw, al-Afānīn wa-l-nawādir.*

The names of 16 other books in al-Najāshī's list appear in al-Ṭūsī's list with some kind of change and alteration, which are presented comparatively in Table 1.

A remarkable point is that al-Najāshī mentions 18 books that al-Ṭūsī has not mentioned, nor has he cited their names from the supplement to Ibn Buṭṭa's list. These books are:

Al-Najāba, al-'Uwayṣ, al-Mashārib, al-Ṭabaqāt, Afāḍil al-a'māl, Akhaṣṣ al-a'māl, al-Masājid al-arba'a, al-Hidāya, Makārim al-af'āl, al-Ihtijāj, al-Laṭā'if, al-Maṣāliḥ, Ṣawm al-ayyām, al-Buldān wa-l-masāḥa, al-Azāhīr, Aḥkām al-anbiyā' wa-l-rusul, al-Aṣfiya wa-l-riwāya.

⁴⁹ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 52–53.

⁵⁰ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 77.

⁵¹ Al-Ṭūsī also reports that this book was called *al-Nūr wa-l-raḥma* (al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*.)

No.	<i>Fihrist [Rijāl] al-Najāshī</i>	<i>Fihrist al-Ṭūsī</i>	Notes
1	<i>al-Tablīgh wa-l-risāla</i>	<i>al-Iblāgh</i>	
2	<i>al-Mawāʿiẓ</i>	<i>al-Zuhd wa-l-mawāʿiẓ</i>	
3	<i>al-Mawāhib</i>	<i>al-Mawāhib wa-l-ḥuṣūṣ</i>	
4	<i>Tafsīr al-ḥadīth</i>	<i>Tafsīr al-aḥādīth wa-aḥkāmihā</i>	
5	<i>Aḥādīth al-jinn wa-Iblīs</i>	<i>Badʾ khalq Iblīs wa-l-jinn</i>	
6	<i>al-Awāmīr wa-l-zawājir</i>	<i>al-Zawājir</i>	
7	<i>Maʿānī l-ḥadīth wa-l-taḥrīf</i>	<i>al-Maʿānī wa-l-taḥrīf</i>	
8	<i>ʿIlal al-ḥadīth</i>	<i>Ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth</i>	
9	<i>al-Ansāb</i>	<i>al-Maʿāthir wa-l-ansāb</i>	
10	<i>al-Maghāzī</i>	<i>Maghāzī l-Nabī</i>	
11	<i>al-Maḥbūbāt</i>	<i>al-Maḥbūbāt wa-l-makrūhāt</i>	Two books merged into one in <i>Fihrist al-Ṭūsī</i> .
12	<i>al-Makrūhāt</i>		
13	<i>al-Samāʾ</i>	<i>Khalq al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ</i>	Two books merged into one in <i>Fihrist al-Ṭūsī</i> .
14	<i>al-Araḍīn</i>		
15	<i>al-Taḥrīf</i>	<i>al-Takhwīf</i>	Likely one is a scribal error for the other.
16	<i>Taʿbīr al-ruʾyā</i>	<i>al-Taʿbīr/al-Ruʾyā</i>	Al-Ṭūsī mentions two separate books.

Table 1. Comparison of the titles of 16 other books of *al-Maḥāsin*.

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī also, in the supplement he quotes from Ibn Buṭṭa's list, mentions the names of 9 books from the books found in al-Najāshī's list; however, he also mentions the names of 4 books: *al-Ṭibb*,

al-Tibyān, *al-Tahānī*, and *al-Taʿāzī*, the first two of which are not mentioned in al-Najāshī's list, and the latter two are not part of *al-Maḥāsin* but are included among al-Barqī's other works. This situation also exists regarding the book *Akḥbār al-umam*, because al-Ṭūsī places this book under the name *Ansāb al-umam* among *al-Maḥāsin*, but al-Najāshī considers it among his other works.

Likewise, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī mentions the names of 22 books in the collection to which he himself had access, which are not mentioned in al-Najāshī's quotation from Ibn Buṭṭa's list. These books are:

Al-Makāsib, *al-Maʿarīd*, *al-Shawāhid min Allāh ʿazza wa-jalla*, *al-Sawm (al-Shawm)*, *al-Arkān*, *al-Māʿ*, *al-Fahm*, *al-ʿIlal*, *al-ʿAql*, *Gharīb kutub al-Maḥāsin*, *al-Taʿwīl*, *al-Imtiḥān*, *al-ʿAyn*, *al-Tyāfa wa-l-qiyāfa*, *al-Ṭayr*, *al-Ḥiyal*, *al-Taḥwīd*, *Thawāb al-Qurʾān*, *al-Muntakhabāt*, *al-Duʿāba wa-l-mizāḥ*, *al-Tarḡīb*, and *Banāt al-nabī ṣallā Allāh ʿalayhi wa-ālih wa-azwājuh*.

Thus, according to al-Najāshī's account, the books of *al-Maḥāsin* comprise 90 books, while according to Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's account, they number more than 100 books. Close examination of the titles of the books shows that *al-Maḥāsin*, in addition to its unparalleled comprehensiveness in *ḥadīth*, also encompasses matters somewhat beyond the sphere of *ḥadīth*, addressing in some of its books topics such as biographical evaluation and biographical classes (*ṭabaqāt al-rijāl*), genealogies (*ansāb*), military expeditions (*maghāzī*), and others, which brings the book considerably close to being a type of encyclopaedia.⁵²

Given the magnitude and scope of this book, it appears that in its transmission through subsequent generations, there was to some extent both addition and omission in the number of books. The expressions of al-Najāshī and al-Ṭūsī indicate this very matter:

⁵² Among the evidence that the late Muḥaddith Armawī presented in the introduction to *al-Maḥāsin* for this matter are the references made by al-Masʿūdī in *Murūj al-dhahab* and al-Rāfiʿī in *al-Tadwīn fī dhikr akḥbār al-Qazwīn* from al-Barqī (the son); see al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, Introduction.

[Al-Najāshī:] He compiled books, among them *al-Maḥāsin* and others, and additions and omissions have been made to *al-Maḥāsin* ...⁵³

[Al-Ṭūsī:] He compiled many books, among them *al-Maḥāsin* and others, and additions and omissions have been made to *al-Maḥāsin*. So, among what has reached me of them: ...⁵⁴

However, al-Bahbūdī reads this expression as *zayyada* and attributes it to the author himself, explaining that al-Barqī sometimes included some of his books as part of *al-Maḥāsin* and sometimes did not.⁵⁵

In any case, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's expression clarifies that what is meant by "additions and omissions" (*zīd wa-naqṣ*) is not changes in the text of the books of *al-Maḥāsin*, but rather in the number of its books; for after mentioning this phrase, he proceeds with the particle *fa* ("so") to list the names of the books of *al-Maḥāsin*. This point is consistent with the increase and decrease in the number of books, not with changes in their texts.

Among other descriptions of the book *al-Maḥāsin*, one must note the important statement of al-Ṣadūq in the introduction to *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, where he considers *al-Maḥāsin* to be among the well-known books, a reference and relied-upon work among the Shī'īs, and also among his own sources in composing *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*.⁵⁶ This matter gives extraordinary importance to this book. This point shows that there was not much variation in manuscripts or disorder in these books up to the time of al-Ṣadūq. Otherwise, calling them a reference and relied-upon work would be somewhat meaningless.

⁵³ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 76.

⁵⁴ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 52.

⁵⁵ Al-Bahbūdī, *Ma'rifat*, 166.

⁵⁶ Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh* (Daftar-i Intishārāt-i Islāmī: 1992), 3.

In the biography of Muḥammad b. ‘Abdullāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, al-Najāshī has brought another important point about *al-Maḥāsin*. ‘Abdullāh b. Ja‘far, the author of *Qurb al-isnād*, is among the distinguished figures of Qom who also attained extensive hearing of *ḥadīth* in Kufa.⁵⁷ Muḥammad b. ‘Abdullāh is also called *thiqa* and reliable (*wajh*) by al-Najāshī.⁵⁸ Muḥammad—whose access must have been very extensive due to his father’s extensive hearing of *ḥadīth*—regarding the motivation for composing the books *al-Ḥuqūq*, *al-Awā’il*, *al-Samā’*, *al-Arḍ*, *al-Masāḥa wa-l-buldān*, *Iblīs wa-junūduh*, and *al-Iḥtijāj*, said that he had lost the books of *al-Maḥāsin* on these subjects and could not obtain them; therefore, by referring to *uṣūl* and *muṣannafāt*, he produced works similar to the books of *al-Maḥāsin*.⁵⁹

Two important points become clear from this statement. First, that by possessing al-Barqī’s books, he considered himself free from needing to refer to the original sources, and the more important point is that the narrations of al-Barqī’s book could be obtained from the original sources and early compilations—even by another reliable narrator. This matter indicates the authenticity of al-Barqī’s sources and references in composing *al-Maḥāsin*.⁶⁰

In the statements of later scholars such as Qāḍī Nūrullāh al-Shūsh-tārī and Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, there are also descriptions of this

⁵⁷ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 219–220.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 354.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 355

⁶⁰ The only unclear point in this matter is that Muḥammad b. ‘Abdullāh, two generations after al-Barqī (he usually narrates from Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd through his father), states that copies of some of the books of *al-Maḥāsin* were not available, which is not entirely consistent with al-Ṣadūq calling these books well-known (*mashhūr*), though this should certainly be understood as referring to some of the books of *al-Maḥāsin*.

book which we refrain from mentioning here.⁶¹

5. The Extant *al-Maḥāsin*

A large portion of *al-Maḥāsin* has been lost over time. What remains of this book at present is only 11 books, which are:

- *Kitāb al-ashkāl wa-l-qarā'in*, containing narrations in which the numbers 3 to 10 are used, as well as the testaments of the Prophet and the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a.s.).

- *Kitāb thawāb al-a'māl*, containing narrations about the reward for good deeds.

- *Kitāb 'iqāb al-a'māl*, containing narrations about the punishment for reprehensible deeds.

- *Kitāb al-ṣafwa wa-l-nūr wa-l-raḥma*, containing narrations about the station and rank of the Messenger of God and the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a.s.) and their followers.

- *Kitāb maṣābiḥ al-ẓulam*, containing discussions on the recognition and knowledge of truth.

- *Kitāb al-'ilal*, containing the reasons and wisdoms of religious rulings.

- *Kitāb al-safar*, containing rulings and narrations about travel.

- *Kitāb al-ma'ākil*, concerning the rulings on foods and drinks.

- *Kitāb al-mā'*, containing rulings on waters.

- *Kitāb al-manāfi'*, containing rulings on seeking guidance (*istikhāra*) and consultation.

- *Kitāb al-marāfiq*, containing rulings on dwellings, cleanliness, and means of transportation.

Careful attention to the titles of the books of *al-Maḥāsin* shows that al-Barqī considered many innovative and interesting subjects in composing *ḥadīth* books, and *ḥadīth* scholars after him, such as al-Ṣadūq, also undertook more extensive compilations on titles close to his

⁶¹ See al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, Introduction, 10–11.

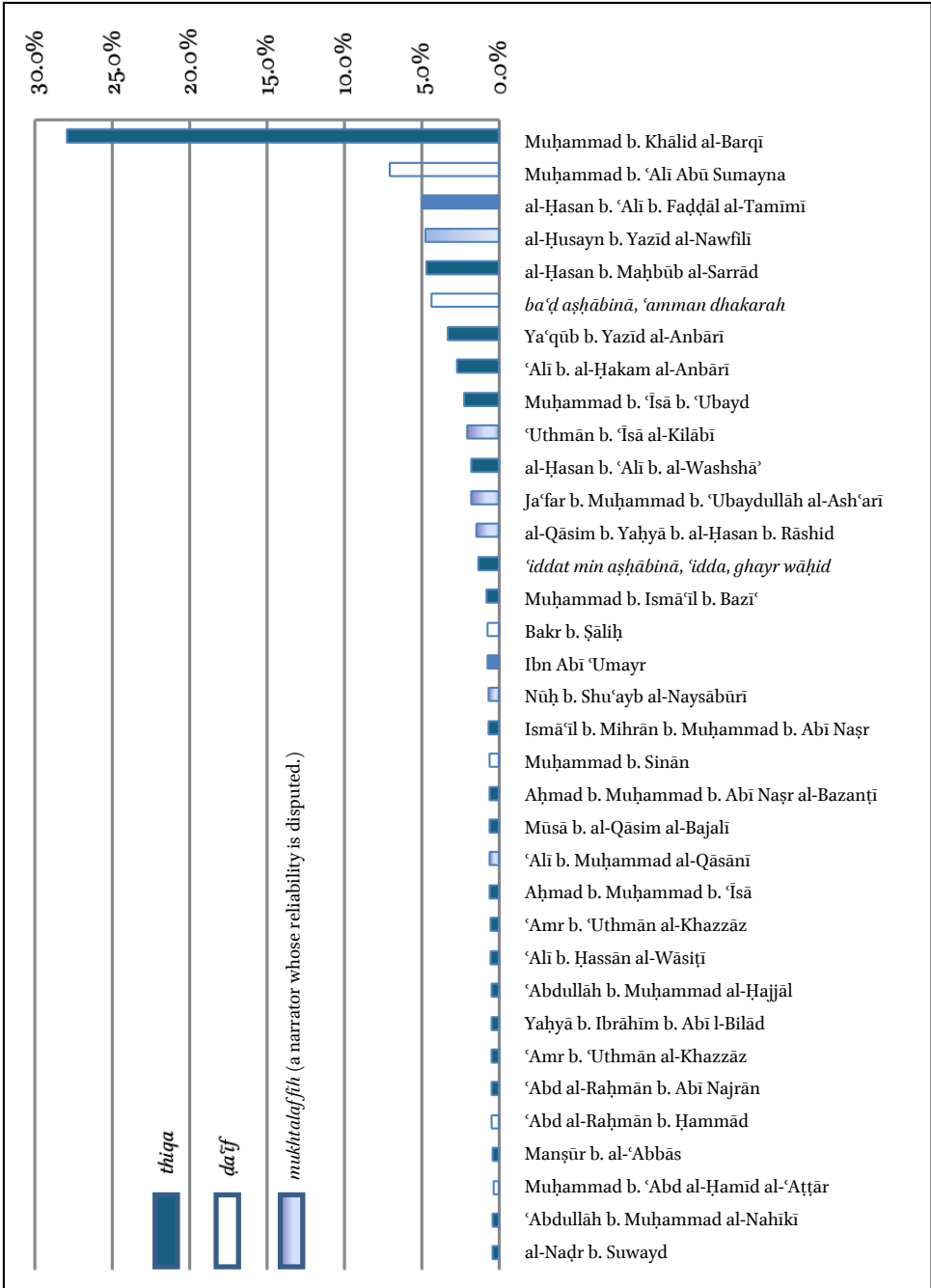
works.

6. The Teachers of al-Barqī

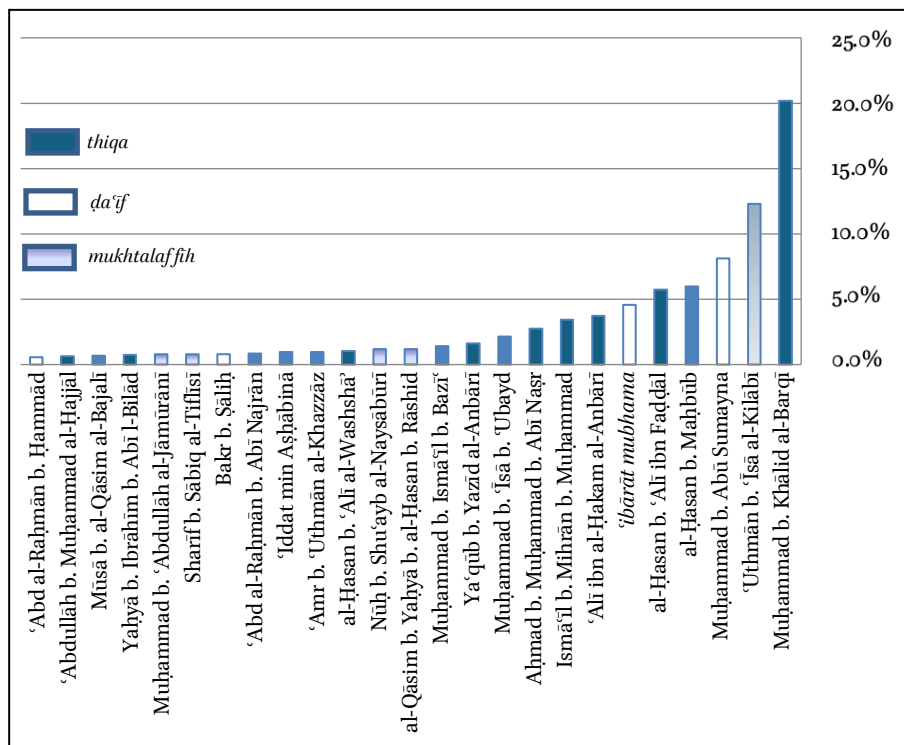
Regarding the teachers of al-Barqī (the son), two collections can be of assistance. First, the remaining parts of *al-Maḥāsin*, and second, the book *al-Kāfi*, which contains many narrations from al-Barqī. The search for the number of narrations from each of al-Barqī's teachers in *al-Maḥāsin* was conducted with the help of the *Noor Jāmi' al-Aḥādīth* software version 2.5, and all the *ḥadīth* teachers of Aḥmad al-Barqī (the son) from whom 10 or more narrations have been transmitted are included in these statistics. In total, more than 80 percent of the narrations in *al-Maḥāsin* are taken from these teachers. Among these teachers, the most important teacher of Aḥmad al-Barqī must be considered his father. In total, 27.9 percent of the narrations in *al-Maḥāsin* are transmitted from Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī. Graph 1 below represents the important teachers of al-Barqī in *al-Maḥāsin*. In this chart, the empty columns represent teachers who were weakened by al-Najāshī, and individuals without *tawthīq* or *taḍīf* are also identified.

It is observed that the highest statistics relate to authenticated individuals, and in total 56.8 percent of al-Barqī's teachers in the narrations of *al-Maḥāsin* have been considered authenticated by al-Najāshī. Also, 11.7 percent belong to teachers who have not been authenticated or weakened by al-Najāshī. Likewise, 13.1 percent are among the teachers weakened by al-Najāshī.

Based on these statistics, it must be said about Aḥmad al-Barqī that his extensive transmission from *ḍu'afā'* has not occurred, at least in the remaining portion of *al-Maḥāsin*, and perhaps it appeared in his other works.



Graph 2. Teachers of al-Barqī (the son) as cited in *al-Maḥāsīn*.



Graph 2. Teachers of al-Barqī (the son) as cited in *al-Kāfi*.

Other statistics can be obtained using the narrations transmitted from Aḥmad al-Barqī in *al-Kāfi*. The results of these statistics are seen in Graph 2.

To compare these two statistics with each other, important points must be noted: First, it is possible that al-Kulaynī’s narration from al-Barqī in some cases was in the form of *shaykh ijāza* (“authorisation from a teacher”), and in reality, he narrated the book of one of al-Barqī’s teachers through him in *al-Kāfi*. As a clear example of this type, reference should be made to Sharīf b. Sābiq al-Tiflīsī, who was the narrator of the book of Faḍl b. Abī Qurra,⁶² and al-Barqī’s narrations from him in *al-Kāfi* relate to the book of Faḍl b. Abī Qurra and have no connection to *al-Maḥāsin*.

⁶² Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 308.

No.	Name of <i>Shaykh</i>	Percent of al-Barqī's narrations from the shaykh in <i>al-Maḥāsin</i>	Percent of al-Barqī's narrations from the shaykh in <i>al-Kāfi</i>
1	Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Barqī	27.9	20.2
2	Muḥammad b. 'Alī Abū Sumayna	7.1	8.1
3	al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb al-Sarrād	4.7	6
4	al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Faḍḍāl al-Tamīmī	4.9	5.8
5	Vague expressions (<i>'ibārāt mubhama</i>)	4.3	4.6
6	'Alī b. al-Ḥakam al-Anbārī	2.7	3.7
7	Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Naṣr al-Bazanṭī	0.6	2.8
8	Muḥammad b. 'Īsā b. 'Ubayd	2.2	2.1
9	Ya'qūb b. Yazīd al-Anbārī	3.3	1.6
10	Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Bazī'	0.8	1.4
11	al-Qāsim b. Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥasan b. Rāshid	1.5	2.1
12	Nūḥ b. Shu'ayb al-Naysābūrī	0.7	1.2
13	al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Washshā'	1.8	1.0
14	'Amr b. 'Uthmān al-Khazzāz	0.4	1.0
15	<i>'idda min aṣḥābinā</i>	1.3	1.0
16	'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Najrān	0.4	0.8
17	Bakr b. Ṣāliḥ	0.7	0.8
18	Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm b. Abī l-Bilād	0.4	0.7
19	Mūsā b. al-Qāsim al-Bajalī	0.6	0.7
20	'Abdullāh b. Muḥammad al-Ḥajjāl	0.5	0.6
21	'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥammād	0.4	0.6

Table 2. Comparison of the percentages of al-Barqī's narrations from his *shaykhs* in *al-Kāfi* and *al-Maḥāsin*.

For other cases of this type, reference should be made to probable cases such as ‘Uthmān b. ‘Īsā al-Kilābī in narrating the book of Samā‘a b. Mihrān, Muḥammad b. ‘Abdullāh al-Jāmūrānī in narrating the book of Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ḥamza, and also the book of Ismā‘īl b. Mihrān,⁶³ which was narrated by al-Barqī (the son).

By not considering these individuals among these two lists, it becomes clear that there is considerable similarity between these two lists of teachers. More importantly, the percentage of narrations belonging to each teacher relative to the total chains in *al-Maḥāsin* and *al-Kāfi* has very little difference. Table 2 above shows a comparative comparison between these two lists along with their differences.

The numerous similarities between these two lists of teachers and the proportion of narrations from them can, in addition to demonstrating al-Kulaynī’s use of *al-Maḥāsin* in composing *al-Kāfi*, also serve as evidence for the authenticity of the surviving portion of *al-Maḥāsin*. Of course, this matter requires more extensive research, which will be undertaken at another opportunity.

7. Conclusion

In this article, through an examination of biographical sources, while introducing the important al-Barqī family, the *wathāqa* of two of their most important members—namely Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī (the father) and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī (the son)—was investigated and evidence was presented. On the other hand, the attribution of narrating from manuscript copies (*nusakh wijāda*) by them was critically examined and its incorrectness was demonstrated with some evidence.

Given the ambiguities surrounding *al-Maḥāsin*, by examining the *isnāds* of the surviving portion of the book, it was shown that although narration from *ḍu‘afā’* exists in *al-Maḥāsin*, the highest proportion of

⁶³ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 35.

narrations belongs to reliable teachers. On the other hand, in a comparison between the list of al-Barqī's teachers in the extant *al-Maḥāsin* on the one hand and al-Kulaynī's narrations from him in *al-Kāfī* on the other, evidence can be presented for the authenticity of the surviving portion of *al-Maḥāsin*.

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Kitāb Akhbār al-Qā'im* by 'Allān al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī: A Source for Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī in Compiling *al-Kāfi

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Abstract

'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abān al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī, known as 'Allān al-Kulaynī, was among the Imāmī narrators of the era of the Minor Occultation (260/874 to 329/940-941). Among the early Imāmī biographical scholars, only al-Najāshī (d. 450/1058) provided his biographical account and explicitly affirmed his reliability. He has been identified as the maternal uncle of Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940), and many narrations from him are quoted in *al-Kāfi*. A considerable portion of these narrations appears in *Kitāb al-ḥujja* of *al-Kāfi*. According to a well-known view among Imāmī scholars, he collected the narrations of his book from earlier *ḥadīth* collections. Based on this, the question arises as to which book was his written source for transmitting these narrations. This article seeks to evaluate the hypothesis of 'Allān al-Kulaynī's transmission of narrations from a written source by al-Kulaynī through collecting and analysing these narrations. The documentary and content-based evidence of these narrations support their transmission from *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im* by 'Allān al-Kulaynī. The content of a significant portion of these narrations concerns the twelfth Imam, which is in complete alignment with the title of his book.

Keywords: Shī'ī *ḥadīth* collections, sources of *al-Kāfi*, Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im*, 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī, 'Allān al-Kulaynī.

1. Introduction

The history of Imāmī *ḥadīth* indicates that the primary concern of the earliest narrators and *ḥadīth* scholars was writing down *ḥadīth* and preserving them in the form of small booklets. The exhortations of the Imams regarding the importance of writing, preserving, and disseminating these written materials were not without effect in this regard.¹ The companions always carried writing instruments with them so that they could immediately write down the words of the Imams upon hearing them.² This method was the customary practice of Imāmī narrators and *ḥadīth* scholars in the early centuries, to the extent that the transmission of knowledge during the era of the two truthful ones (al-ṣādiqayn), Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/733) and Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), through *ḥadīth* writings became a common practice among them. The result was that numerous written works were produced in the forms of *nuskha* (manuscript), *kitāb* (book), *aṣl* (foundational book), *muṣannaḥ* (compilation), *jāmi'* (comprehensive collection), *nawādir* (miscellanies), and *masā'il* (questions-and-answers), many of which have been catalogued and described in the bibliographical works (*fihris*) of early scholars such as the *Fihris* of Abū Ghālīb al-Zurārī (d. 368/978), the *Fihris* of Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Najāshī (d. 450/1058) and the *Fihris* of Shaykh Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067).

The *ḥadīth* writings of the era of the Imams' presence generally served as sources and references for later works. Important later *ḥadīth* sources—especially the early comprehensive *ḥadīth* collections such as the four canonical *ḥadīth* books (*al-kutub al-arba'a*)—were compiled and organised based on these writings. A look at *al-ku-*

¹ See, for example, Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, ed. 'Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1363 Sh./1984), 1:52.

² Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs, 'Alī b. Mūsā, *Muhaj al-da'awāt wa manhaj al-'ibādāt* (Dār al-Dhakha'ir: 1991), 219–220 and 834–835.

tub al-arbaʿa demonstrates this point. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) explicitly states in the introduction to *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh* that he derived the *ḥadīth* of his book from famous and reliable writings, and following this statement, he mentions the names of some of them.³ The statements of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī in the *Mashyakha* of *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār* also clearly show that he derived the *ḥadīth* of his books from written sources. Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940) also followed the same method in composing *al-Kāfī* and collected its *ḥadīth* from *uṣūl* and compilations (*taṣānīf*) that preceded him.

It is clear that these early written sources did not all enjoy the same level of credibility amongst later scholars. Some gained acceptance among *ḥadīth* scholars and *ḥadīth* schools because they had been presented to one of the Imams, who had confirmed the attribution of their contents to his ancestors, or by virtue of their widespread acceptance among *ḥadīth* scholars, their widespread acceptance in the community, and their agreement with commonly accepted books.⁴ Today, by identifying and retrieving *ḥadīth* from early *ḥadīth* writings in *ḥadīth* collections such as *al-kutub al-arbaʿa*, one can refer to the trust or distrust of earlier scholars in them as evidence for accepting or rejecting *ḥadīth*, in addition to the biographical qualities of their transmitters—a method that was not only considered by earlier scholars⁵ but was

³ Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar Ghaffārī (Muʿassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1993), 1:3–4.

⁴ For these criteria, see Hamid Bagheri, “Manbaʿ-ī Muʿtabar wa Nishāna-hā-yi ān Nazd-i Muḥaddithān-i Mutaqaddim-i Imāmī: Niḡāhī bi Jāyigāh-i Manbaʿ-ī Maktūb dar Ḥadīth-Pazhūhī-yi Qudamā,” *Pazhūhish-hā-yi Qurʾān wa Ḥadīth* 47, no. 1 (1393 Sh./2014), 7–20.

⁵ See, for example, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bahāʾī al-ʿĀmilī, *Mashriq al-shamsayn wa iksīr al-saʿadatayn*, ed. Mahdī Rajāʾī (Bunyād-i Pazhūhish-hā-yi Islāmī: 2008), 26–30; Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, *Rawḍat*

also employed by some later scholars such as Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659). In *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn*, paying attention to this method, he considered and accepted *ḥadīth* as authentic in cases where he identified that they had come from the book of 'Ubaydullāh b. 'Alī al-Ḥalabī.⁶

The present article seeks to identify one of Shaykh al-Kulaynī's written sources in compiling *al-Kāfī*—namely *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im* by 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī—by studying multiple pieces of textual and paratextual evidence. The importance of this book stems from several aspects. First, it was compiled during the era of the Minor Occultation (*al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*), so due to its temporal proximity to its subject, it can be considered an important source for it. The trustworthiness (*wathāqa*) of its author is another point that increases the overall credibility and importance of the book. Also, Shaykh al-Kulaynī's kinship with the author and his direct access to this work adds to its importance.

2. Biography of 'Alī b. Muḥammad 'Allān al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī

The available information about 'Allān al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī's biography and life circumstances is very limited. Even this scant information is accessible through al-Najāshī's report. According to al-Najāshī, he is Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abān al-Rāzī al-Kulaynī, known as 'Allān.⁷ Based on an *isnād* in *al-Kāfī*, 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-

al-muttaqīn fī sharḥ man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh, ed. Ḥusayn Mūsawī Kirmānī and 'Alī Panāh Ishtihārdī (Mu'assasa-yi Farhangī-yi Islāmī-yi Kūshānpūr: 1986), 14:55, 233 and 239.

⁶ Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn*, 1:135 and 206, 2:211 and 4:347.

⁷ Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī (Fihrist asmā' muṣannifī l-shī'a)*, ed. Mūsā al-Shubayrī al-Zanjānī (Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1996), 260. 'Allāma al-Ḥillī's expression for recording the title "Allān" is as follows: "With the unpointed 'ayn vowelled with an *a*, the *lām* doubled, and

Kulaynī al-Rāzī heard a *ḥadīth* in the year 279/892 from Muḥammad and al-Ḥasan, the sons of ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm. Thus, he lived in the second half of the 3rd/9th century and during the era of the Minor Occultation. Therefore, his reports about the twelfth Shī‘ī Imam can be considered important and noteworthy due to their temporal proximity.

In biographical (*rijāl*) sources, several individuals from one family have been introduced under the title “‘Allān al-Kulaynī,” namely: ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm⁸, his father Muḥammad⁹, his brother Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm¹⁰, and their father Ibrāhīm b. Abān¹¹.

Apparently, “‘Allān” was Ibrāhīm’s title, and for this reason his children and grandson were also referred to by this title.¹² Thus, it is widely

the *nūn*” (Ḥasan b. Yūsuf al-Ḥillī, *Īdāḥ al-ishtibāh*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥassūn (Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1991), 221).

⁸ See al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 260; Ḥasan b. Yūsuf al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl fi ma’rifat al-rijāl*, ed. Jawād Qayyūmī (Mu’assasat Nashr al-Fiqāha: 1997), 187; Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥillī, *Rijāl Ibn Dāwūd*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥusaynī Urmawī (Dānishgāh-i Tehran: 1342 Sh./1963), 248; Abū l-Qāsim al-Khū‘ī, *Mu’jam rijāl al-ḥadīth* (n.p.: 1413/1993), 13:137–138.

⁹ See Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī*, ed. Jawād Qayyūmī (Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1995), 439; ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣa*, 250; Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ardabīlī, *Jāmi‘ al-ruwāt wa izāḥat al-ishtibāhāt ‘an al-ṭuruq wa-l-Isnād* (Dār al-Aḍwā’: 1983), 2:44; al-Khū‘ī, *Mu’jam*, 15:238.

¹⁰ See al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 407; ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣa*, 69; Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥillī, *Rijāl*, 23; al-Khū‘ī, *Mu’jam*, 2:23.

¹¹ See Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Wāfi*, ed. Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn Ḥusaynī (Manshūrāt Maktabat al-Imām Amīr al-Mu‘minīn ‘Alī ‘alayhi al-salām al-‘Āmma: 1986), 1:33; al-Ardabīlī, *Jāmi‘ al-ruwāt*, 2:465; Muḥammad Bāqir al-Mūsawī al-Shaftī, *al-Rasā’il al-rijāliyya*, ed. Mahdī Rajā’ī (Maktabat Masjid al-Sayyid bi-Iṣfahān: 1997), 503.

¹² For example, see Muḥammad Ja‘far al-Khurāsānī al-Karbāsī, *Iklil al-manhaj fi taḥqīq al-maṭlab*, ed. Sayyid Ja‘far Ḥusaynī Ashkiwarī (Dār al-Ḥadīth: 2004), 477; al-Wahīd al-Bihbahānī, “*Ta’līq al-Manhaj al-maqāl*,” in *Manhaj al-maqāl fi taḥqīq aḥwāl al-rijāl*, Lithographic edition (1889), 406;

accepted that this belonged to all of the individuals.¹³

Al-Najāshī in his biographical note for Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī refers to the genealogical relationship between him and 'Allān al-Kulaynī, introducing 'Allān as al-Kulaynī's maternal uncle.¹⁴ According to many scholars, the intended meaning of "Allān al-Kulaynī" here is 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm, from whom al-Kulaynī transmitted many reports directly in *al-Kāfi*.¹⁵

Muḥammad b. Ismā'il al-Ḥā'irī al-Māzandarānī, *Muntahā l-maḡāl fī aḥwāl al-rijāl* (Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyā' al-Turāth: 1996), 7:415; Abū l-Hudā al-Kalbāsī, *Samā' al-maḡāl fī 'ilm al-rijāl*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Qazwīnī (Mu'assasat Walī al-'Aṣr li-l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya: 1999), 3:364–366). Such a viewpoint can also be inferred from the expressions of Sayyid Baḥr al-'Ulūm; see Mahdī Baḥr al-'Ulūm, *Rijāl al-Sayyid Baḥr al-'Ulūm*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Maktabat al-Ṣādiq: 1363 Sh./1984), 3:82–83.

¹³ See al-Shahīd al-Thānī, "*Ḥāshiyat Khulāṣat al-aḡwāl*," in Riḍā Mukhtārī (ed), *Rasā'il al-Shahīd al-Thānī* (Bustān-i Kitāb: 2002), 2:1051–1052; al-Shaftī, *al-Rasā'il*, 503. Also see Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn*, 14:424; Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ta'liqa 'alā Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, ed. Mahdī Rajā'ī (al-Khayyām: 1983), 20; al-Khū'i, *Mu'jam*, 24:142. However, Fāḍil al-Astarābādī and Abū l-Hudā al-Kalbāsī opposed this view that 'Allān was also a title of Ibrāhīm; see Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Fāḍil al-Astarābādī, *Manhaj al-maḡāl fī taḥqīq aḥwāl al-rijāl al-ma'rūf bi-l-Rijāl al-kabīr* (Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyā' al-Turāth: 2002), 237; Abū l-Hudā al-Kalbāsī, *Samā' al-maḡāl*, 1:250–251; also see Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Kalbāsī, *al-Rasā'il al-rijālīyya*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Dirāyatī (Dār al-Ḥadīth: 2002), 3:348.

¹⁴ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 377.

¹⁵ For examples, see Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn*, 14:400; Muṣṭafā al-Tafrishī, *Naqd al-rijāl* (Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyā' al-Turāth: 1998), 4:355; al-Karbāsī, *Samā' al-maḡāl*, 477; Muḥammad Amīn al-Kāzīmī, *Hidāyat al-muḥaddithīn ilā ṭarīqat al-muḥammadiyyīn al-ma'rūf bi-Mushtarakāt al-Kāzīmī*, ed. Mahdī Rajā'ī (Maktabat Ayatollah al-Mar'ashī al-Najafī: 1985), 78; Baḥr al-'Ulūm, *Rijāl*, 3:83; al-Māzandarānī,

Al-Najāshī used two expressions to denote his reliability: “trustworthy” (*thiqa*) and “reliable” (*‘ayn*).¹⁶ Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥillī, ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, and others also described him using these same two expressions from al-Najāshī.¹⁷ According to al-Najāshī, ‘Allān was killed during his journey to Mecca.¹⁸ This was apparently the same pilgrimage journey for which, according to al-Najāshī’s report, he sought permission from the twelfth Imam, who instructed him to postpone it for that year and not to perform the pilgrimage, but he disobeyed and embarked on this journey.¹⁹ The reason implied for the Imam’s opposition to ‘Allān’s pilgrimage journey was his being killed during this journey. Shaykh ‘Abdullāh al-Māmaqānī (d. 1351/1932) believed that the attestations to the trustworthiness of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm from scholars of *rijāl* flatly contradicted the report of his non-compliance with the prohibi-

Muntahā l-maqāl, 5:50; Ḥusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Khātimat Mustadrak al-Wasā’il* (Mu’assasat Āl al-Bayt li-lḥyā’ al-Turāth: 1995), 5:236; Muḥammad Taqī al-Tustarī, *Qāmūs al-rijāl* (Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 2004), 12:134–135. Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631) considered this to be the famous opinion of his era; see Mīr Dāmād, *al-Rawāshiḥ al-samāwiyya*, ed. Ghulām Ḥusayn Qayṣariyyahā and Ni‘matullāh Jalīlī (Dār al-Ḥadīth: 2002), 107. He also repeated this statement in his commentary on the principles section of *al-Kāfi*, but he himself did not accept it. Rather, he believed that ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm was al-Kulaynī’s maternal cousin; see Mīr Dāmād, *Ta’līqā*, 19–20; also see Mīr Dāmād, *al-Rawāshiḥ*, 174.

¹⁶ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 260.

¹⁷ See ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣa*, 187; Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥillī, *Rijāl*, 248; al-Tafrishī, *Naqd al-rijāl*, 3:291; al-Ardabīlī, *Jāmi‘ al-ruwāt*, 1:596; ‘Alī al-Burūjirdī, *Ṭarā’if al-maqāl fī ma‘rifat ṭabaqāt al-rijāl*, ed. Mahdī Rajā’ī (Maktabat Ayatollah al-Mar‘ashī al-Najafī: 1990), 1:209; al-Khū’ī, *Mu‘jam*, 13:137–138.

¹⁸ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 261.

¹⁹ Ibid.

tion of the twelfth Imam against going on pilgrimage, and he expressed amazement that this was accepted.²⁰ However, Ayatollah al-Khū'i does not consider the report of 'Allān's seeking permission from the twelfth Imam for his intended pilgrimage journey to be incompatible with his trustworthiness as a narrator, because it is possible that he interpreted the Imam's "order" as "advisory guidance" (*amr irshādī*)—most of their commands to their companions were of this type—and not as an "authoritative command" (*amr mawlawī*).²¹

It should be mentioned that some scholars have cited evidence to authenticate Sahl b. Ziyād al-Ādamī as a narrator, which includes the transmission of distinguished scholars from him, who alongside narrators such as al-Faḍl b. Shādhān, Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-'Aṭṭār al-Qummī, Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, Muḥammad b. Ja'far al-Asadī, Muḥammad b. Qūlawayh al-Qummī, Sa'd b. 'Abdullāh al-Ash'arī al-Qummī, and others, transmitted from 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm known as 'Allān.²²

3. 'Allān al-Kulaynī's Narrations in *al-Kāfī*

The name of 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm 'Allān al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī appears in the *isnāds* of many narrations in Imāmī *ḥadīth* books. The largest volume of narrations from him is found in al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*.

Al-Kulaynī transmitted *ḥadīth* from him directly in two ways: one by explicitly mentioning his name in the chain of transmission, and the other through his presence among the group referred to as "a number of our companions from Sahl b. Ziyād" (*'idda min aṣḥābinā 'an Sahl*

²⁰ 'Abdullāh al-Māmaqānī, *Tanqīḥ al-maqāl fi aḥwāl al-rijāl*, lithograph edition (n.p.: n.d.), 2:302

²¹ Al-Khū'i, *Mu'jam*, 13:138.

²² Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣāliḥ al-Mu'allim, *Uṣūl 'ilm al-rijāl bayna l-naẓariyya wal-taṭbiq (taqrīran li-baḥṭh samāḥat Ayatollah al-Ḥāj al-Shaykh Muslim al-Dāwarī)* (n.p.: 1996), 514.

b. Ziyād). Despite the explicit mention of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī’s fame by the nickname “Allān” in the *isnāds* of some *ḥadīths*,²³ it is surprising that al-Kulaynī in *al-Kāfi*, despite the many narrations he transmitted from him (see the discussion below), never introduced him with the title ‘Allān anywhere. Rather, only in one instance is the expression “Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī” seen in this book.²⁴

At the beginning of the *isnāds* of many narrations in *al-Kāfi*, the name “Alī b. Muḥammad” is seen.²⁵ Among al-Kulaynī’s teachers, in addition to ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm ‘Allān al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī, there were two others also named “Alī b. Muḥammad”: one was ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Sulaymān and the other was ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Abī l-Qāsim Mājilawayh. In *al-Kāfi*, no *ḥadīth* is seen transmitted through ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Sulaymān; rather, al-Kulaynī’s transmissions from him are limited to two narrations reported by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq.²⁶ Apparently, al-Kulaynī sometimes refers to ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Abī l-Qāsim by the name “Alī b. Muḥammad b. Bundār”²⁷ or “Alī b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abdullāh.”²⁸ Accordingly, regarding “Alī b. Muḥammad” at the beginning of the *isnāds* of *ḥadīths* in *al-Kāfi*, there is the possibility that one of these two transmitters is intended—either ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī or ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Bundār. This matter has caused disagreement among scholars. Many scholars believe that the first person is intended by “Alī b.

²³ For example, see al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni‘ma*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1992), 2:485–486; al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Sayyid Hāshim Ḥusaynī Ṭīhrānī (Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: n.d.), 159–160; al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. Ḥusayn al-‘Alamī (Mu’assasat al-‘Alamī li-l-Maṭbū‘āt: 1992), 1:125 and 145.

²⁴ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 5:541.

²⁵ For examples, see *ibid.*, 1:10, 20, 28; 2:5, 28, 157; and 3:37.

²⁶ Al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, 1:132; al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, 176.

²⁷ For examples, see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 2:241–242; 3:23.

²⁸ For examples, see *ibid.*, 1:11 and 31; 3:69 and 161; 4:6.

Muḥammad” at the beginning of the *isnāds* in *al-Kāfi*,²⁹ but Ayatollah al-Khū'ī holds that the second transmitter—namely 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Bundār, who is the same as 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Abī l-Qāsim 'Abdullāh b. 'Imrān al-Barqī—is intended.³⁰ The best evidence that “'Alī b. Muḥammad” at the beginning of the *isnāds* in *al-Kāfi* refers to 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī is that Shaykh al-Ṣadūq has transmitted some of al-Kulaynī's *ḥadīth* from *al-Kāfi* in his works and has rendered the unqualified “'Alī b. Muḥammad” in these *isnāds* as “*'Alī b. Muḥammad al-ma'rūf bi-'Allān*” (“'Alī b. Muḥammad known as 'Allān”).³¹ Another indication in this regard is the thematic agreement of many of these narrations with the title of 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī's book, namely *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im*.³²

Thus, his name appears at the beginning of al-Kulaynī's *isnāds* in three forms: 'Alī b. Muḥammad (493 narrations), 'Alī (10 narrations), and 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī (1 narration). Accordingly, the total number of narrations that Shaykh al-Kulaynī transmitted from him in *al-Kāfi* is 504 narrations.³³

One contemporary researcher has mentioned the titles “'Alī b.

²⁹ For examples, see Aḥmad al-Ardabīlī, *Majma' al-fā'idā wa-l-burhān fī sharḥ Irshād al-adhān*, ed. Muḥtabā 'Irāqī and others (Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: n.d.), 2:400; Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī, *Istiqṣā' al-i'tibār fī sharḥ al-Istibṣār* (Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyā' al-Turāth: 1999), 3:237; Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, ed. 'Alī 'Āshūr (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī: 2000), 1:78; al-Kāshānī, *al-Wāfi*, 1:81; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭurayḥī, *Jāmi' al-maḡāl fī-mā yata'allaq bi-aḥwāl al-ḥadīth wa-l-rijāl*, ed. Muḥammad Kāẓim al-Ṭurayḥī (Mu'assasat al-Tārikh al-ʿArabī: 2011), 113; al-Shaftī, *al-Rasā'il*, 504.

³⁰ Al-Khū'ī, *Mu'jam rijāl al-ḥadīth*, 13:135–136 and 162.

³¹ For examples see al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī* (Mu'assasat al-Ba'tha: 1997), 351; idem., *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, 1:132–135, 186; idem., *al-Tawḥīd*, 186. For these *ḥadīths* in *al-Kāfi*, see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:105 and 120–123.

³² This matter will be addressed further below.

³³ These counts are taken from the *Dirāyat al-Noor* software.

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm” and “Alī b. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm,” from whom al-Kulaynī transmitted 4 and 1 narrations respectively,³⁴ but these names are not seen at the beginning of the *isnāds* of narrations in the existing *al-Kāfi*. The total number of narrations that Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī transmitted through *‘idda min aṣḥābinā ‘an Sahl b. Ziyād* comprises 1554 narrations.³⁵

Al-Kulaynī’s other narrations from ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī are in the form of *‘idda min aṣḥābinā ‘an Sahl b. Ziyād*, and according to ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī’s report from al-Kulaynī, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad is among them:

Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī said in his book *al-Kāfi* in many reports ... and whenever I mention in my aforementioned book “*‘idda min aṣḥābinā ‘an Sahl b. Ziyād*,” they are ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b.³⁶ ‘Allān, Muḥammad b. Abī ‘Abdillāh, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, and Muḥammad b. ‘Aqīl al-Kulaynī.³⁷

This part of the *isnād* is among the famous *isnāds* that one contemporary researcher³⁸ has extracted as one of the famous *isnāds* of *al-kuṭub al-arba‘a*. The eleventh *isnād* of this collection is as follows:

‘Idda min aṣḥābinā ‘an Sahl b. Ziyād from Ja‘far b. Muḥammad

³⁴ ‘Abd al-Rasūl al-Ghaffār, *al-Kulaynī wa-l-Kāfi* (Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1996), 503.

³⁵ This count is taken from the *Dirāyat al-Noor* software.

³⁶ Fāḍil al-Astarābādī (as quoted by al-Shaftī, *al-Rasā’il*, 503; also see Abū l-Hudā Kalbāsī, *Samā’ al-maqāl*, 1:249) believes that the word “b.” here is superfluous and the correct title is “Alī b. Muḥammad ‘Allān.” However, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Shaftī opposed this possibility and believed that ‘Allān was the title of all four members of this family; see al-Shaftī, *al-Rasā’il*, 503.

³⁷ ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, *al-Khulāṣa*, 430. For examples of al-Kulaynī’s narrations in this manner, see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:28; 2:4, 14, 16, 21, 26, 51 and 79.

³⁸ See Muḥammad Jawād al-Shubayrī, *Uṣūl al-rijāl*, (Dār al-Badhra: 2018), 88.

al-Ash'arī from 'Abdullāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh from Abī 'Abdillāh ...

Apparently, some *isnāds*, such as the following *isnād*, are another formulation of this same *isnād*:

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan and 'Alī b. Muḥammad from Sahl b. Ziyād, and Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā from Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, all from Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Ash'arī from 'Abdullāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh, and 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm from his father from Ḥammād b. 'Īsā from al-Qaddāh from Abū 'Abdullāh ...³⁹

Sometimes al-Kulaynī transmitted the narration alone through 'Alī b. Muḥammad from Sahl from Ja'far al-Ash'arī from Ibn Maymūn al-Qaddāh from Imam Ṣādiq:

'Alī b. Muḥammad from Sahl b. Ziyād from Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Ash'arī from 'Abdullāh b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh from Abū 'Abdullāh ...⁴⁰

Despite al-Kulaynī's numerous narrations from 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī in these two ways, it is surprising that Ayatollah al-Khū'i in his biographical account of 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm, after reporting al-Najāshī's statements and mentioning that he was al-Kulaynī's maternal uncle, and quoting 'Allāma al-Ḥillī's identification of *'idda min aṣḥābinā 'an Sahl b. Ziyād*, notes that although he was among Shaykh al-Kulaynī's teachers, he has not found any narration from Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb from him in *al-Kāfi* or any other book:

And accordingly, 'Alī b. Muḥammad known as 'Allān is among al-Kulaynī's teachers, but we have not found in *al-Kāfi* or elsewhere any narration of Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb from him ...⁴¹

³⁹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:34, "Chapter on the Reward of the Scholar and the Student," *ḥadīth* 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1:40, *ḥadīth* 3.

⁴¹ Ibid., 13:137.

The noteworthy point is that Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī did not include all his narrations from ‘Allān al-Rāzī in *al-Kāfī*. Evidence for this is a narration that Shaykh al-Ṣadūq transmitted through Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Iṣām al-Kulaynī from Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī from ‘Allān, which does not appear in *al-Kāfī*. The *isnād* and text of Shaykh Ṣadūq’s narration is as follows:

Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Iṣām (may God be pleased with him) narrated to us, saying: Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī narrated to us, saying: ‘Allān al-Rāzī narrated to me, saying: “One of our companions informed me that when the servant girl of Abū Muḥammad became pregnant, he said: ‘You will bear a male child, and his name is Muḥammad, and he is the Qā’im (*al-Qā’im*) after me.’”⁴²

4. Shaykh al-Kulaynī’s Source for Narrating the Reports of ‘Allān al-Kulaynī

We have said that Shaykh al-Kulaynī transmitted *ḥadīth* directly from ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī, known as ‘Allān al-Kulaynī, in two ways: one by explicitly mentioning his name at the beginning of *isnād*, and the other in the form “*‘idda min aṣḥābinā ‘an Sahl b. Ziyād*.”

The narrations of the first type encompass a wide and diverse range of doctrinal, jurisprudential, and ethical topics. Narrations from him have been transmitted in various sections of the *Uṣūl*, *Furū‘*, and *Rawḍa* of *al-Kāfī*. Among his narrations in the *Uṣūl* section, they are found in various chapters of *Kitāb al-ḥujja* (“Book of Proof”). The question is whether Shaykh al-Kulaynī derived these narrations from a written source authored by ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī. Al-Najāshī mentioned only one work by him titled *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā’im* and had access to it through two intermediaries, namely Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Nu‘mān, known as Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022),

⁴² Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 2:408.

from Ja'far b. Muḥammad b. Qūlawayh al-Qummī (d. 368/978): "Muḥammad informed us, saying: 'Ja'far b. Muḥammad narrated to us, saying: 'Alī b. Muḥammad narrated to us.'"⁴³

The title of this book corresponds with the subject matter of narrations from him in various chapters of *al-Kāfi*, so it is highly probable that this work was Shaykh al-Kulaynī's written source for transmitting these narrations. Muḥammad Ja'far b. Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Khurāsānī al-Karbāsī (d. 1175/1761) is the first and only scholar to have called attention to this matter.⁴⁴ According to him, most of the existing narrations in *al-Kāfi* regarding the birth of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī and the twelfth Imam that mention the name of 'Alī b. Muḥammad at their beginning are derived from this book:

In *al-Kāfi*, most of the mentions of 'Alī b. Muḥammad at the beginning of the *isnād* regarding the birth of Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī and the birth of the Master correspond to his book.

Although according to one view, "considering the title of his book and the narrations transmitted from him in *al-Kāfi*, it appears that the *ḥadīth* from the two chapters on indication and explicit designation (*ishāra wa naṣṣ*) regarding the Imamate of Imam al-'Askarī and the twelfth Imam were derived from his book,"⁴⁵ it should be noted that based on certain evidence, it is possible that Shaykh al-Kulaynī's narrations from this written source were not limited to the two chapters on the birth of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī and the twelfth Imam—"Chapter on the Birth of Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī" (*Bāb mawlid Abī Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī 'alayhimā l-salām*) and "Chapter on the Birth of the Master" (*Bāb mawlid al-Ṣāhib 'alayhi al-salām*)—or the two chapters on indication and explicit designation regarding the Imamate of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī and Imam of the Age—"Chapter

⁴³ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 260–261.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 382.

⁴⁵ 'Abd al-Riḍā Ḥammādī and 'Alī Riḍā Ḥusaynī, "Bāzshināsī-yi Manābi'-i Kulaynī dar Tadwīn-i *Kāfi*," *Ḥadīth Pazhūhī* 6, no. 11 (1393 Sh./2014), 185.

on Indication and Explicit Designation Regarding Abū Muḥammad” (*Bāb al-ishāra wa-l-naṣṣ ‘alā Abī Muḥammad ‘alayhi al-salām*) and “Chapter on Indication and Explicit Designation Regarding the Master of the House” (*Bāb al-ishāra wa-l-naṣṣ ilā Ṣāḥib al-Dār ‘alayhi al-salām*).

Based on al-Najāshī’s reports on the chains of narration (*ṭuruq riwāyī*) of *ḥadīth* books, he does not have a prominent presence in their transmission.⁴⁶ His name is only seen in the chain of transmission for the books of two authors in al-Najāshī’s *Fihrist*; one is the book of his teacher in transmission, Abū Sa‘īd Sahl b. Ziyād al-Ādamī al-Rāzī, and the other is the books of Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Shammūn (d. 258/871). Al-Najāshī has introduced two books for Sahl b. Ziyād: *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* and *Kitāb al-nawādir*. His chain to the latter book is through ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī:

He has *Kitāb al-nawādir*. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad reported it to us, saying: ‘Ja‘far b. Muḥammad narrated to us, from Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb, who said: “‘Alī b. Muḥammad narrated to us, from Sahl b. Ziyād, and a group narrated it from him.”⁴⁷

Al-Najāshī has also introduced three books for Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Shammūn: *Kitāb al-sunan wa-l-ādāb wa makārim al-akhlāq*, *Kitāb al-ma‘rifā*, and *Kitāb nawādir*. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī narrated all these books through his teacher Sahl b. Ziyād from the author:

Aḥmad b. ‘Alī reported to us, saying: “Ibn Abī Rāfi‘ narrated to us, from Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb, from ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, from Sahl b. Ziyād, from Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Shammūn with

⁴⁶ It should be noted that according to al-Najāshī’s own statement, he did not intend in his catalogue to report all the chains of transmission for a *ḥadīth* book; see al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 185.

all his books except the confused material (*takhlīt*).⁴⁸

Since most of the narrations of 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī in *al-Kāfī* are transmitted from Sahl b. Ziyād, it is possible that he served as Shaykh al-Kulaynī's intermediary in transmitting narrations from Sahl b. Ziyād's book. According to one view:

In most cases, he played the role of a transmission chain (*tarīq*) to the books of others. Among these, 199 narrations in *al-Kāfī* were received from Sahl b. Ziyād and 70 narrations from Ṣāliḥ b. Abī Ḥammād al-Rāzī. Sahl b. Ziyād was the author of the book *al-Nawādir*, which was transmitted to al-Kulaynī through 'Alī b. Muḥammad and made available to other teachers (*mashāyikh*). Ṣāliḥ b. Abī Ḥammād also authored two books titled *Khuṭab Amīr al-Mu'minīn* and *al-Nawādir*. Most of Ibn Abī Ḥammād's narrations in *al-Kāfī* are from Imam al-Bāqir, Imam al-Ṣādiq and Imam al-Kāẓim, which appear to have been taken from his book *al-Nawādir*, and 'Alī b. Muḥammad is the transmission chain to his book.⁴⁹

Although this possibility is not far-fetched in cases such as the narrations of *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* in *al-Kāfī*, it seems unlikely, at least regarding some chapters of *Kitāb al-ḥujja*.

It appears that the life and activity of 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī during the period of the Minor Occultation led him to compose a book about the twelfth Imam titled *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im*. During this period, the Imāmī Shī'ī community faced a new crisis in the form of the Imam's occultation and a new style of leadership. Some narrations transmitted from him in *al-Kāfī* are also clearly related to this crisis—narrations that deal with the conceptualisation of the dual nature of the present and absent Imam and explicitly affirm the truth and reality of the Imam's occultation through the words of previous Imams.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 336.

⁴⁹ Ḥammādī and Ḥusaynī, "Bāzshināsī," 5.

The context for the emergence of these crises was the doubt and disagreement within the Imāmī Shīʿī community regarding the existence of a male child for Imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. An example of these doubts is reflected in the treatise of Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Aḥmad Ibn Bashshār refuting the theory of the Imāmī Shīʿīs who followed Imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī and who, after that Imam’s martyrdom, believed in the Imamate and occultation of his son. He considers the claim of the special companions of Imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī that the Imam had a son to be baseless, asserting that before the Imam’s martyrdom, no one had seen such a child or heard anything about him, and since the time of claiming his existence, no one has yet seen him.⁵⁰ This issue, in turn, confronted the continuity of the Imamate with another challenge. The Imāmī Shīʿīs, who, based on narrations about the number of Imams believed in the Imamate of twelve Imams, became perplexed in determining the identity of the twelfth Imam. With the non-acceptance of the existence of a son for Imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, ultimately one of that Imam’s brothers would be proposed as the bearer of the responsibility of imamate, just as a group of Shīʿīs after the Imam’s martyrdom came to believe in the Imamate of one of his two brothers, Muḥammad and Jaʿfar. Ibn Bashshār was one of the followers of the sect called “Jaʿfariyya” who believed in the Imamate of Jaʿfar.⁵¹ Although according to the Shīʿī theory and analysis of the course of Imamate, the infallible Imam must be from the lineage of the Prophet, according to this same perspective, the succeeding Imam must always be the son of the preceding Imam. The exception to this rule is only in the case of Imam al-Ḥasan al-Mujtabā and Imam al-Ḥusayn, where the

⁵⁰ For a report of this claim and Ibn Qiba al-Rāzī’s response to it, see al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 1:51–63.

⁵¹ See *ibid.*, 1:52–53. Regarding this sect, see Saʿd b. ʿAbdullāh al-Ashʿarī al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-l-firaq*, ed. Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr (Markaz-i Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī wa Farhangī: 1361 Sh./1982), 101.

course of Imamate continued through the brother after the martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥasan.

Given this issue, the narrations that 'Alī b. Muḥammad transmitted regarding the exclusivity of the Imamate of two brothers—one after the other—in Imam al-Ḥasan and Imam al-Ḥusayn can be interpreted as a response to the challenge of the era of the Minor Occultation and the claims of believers in the Imamate of the sons of Imam al-Ḥādī, namely Muḥammad and especially Ja'far, after Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī.

If we consider the efforts of 'Alī al-Kulaynī in this historical analytical context pertaining to the era of the Minor Occultation, the narrations transmitted from his book in *al-Kāfī* would not be limited to a few chapters and a few brief narrations. Accordingly, it can be hypothesised that the *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im* of 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī contained two types of narrations. The first type consists of narrations that respond to the challenge of the era of the Minor Occultation and specifically to the existence and birth of a male child for Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, the continuity of the course of Imamate in him, and his being seen by some Shī'is—which we term “specific narrations” (*khāṣṣ*). These narrations are mostly reports with short *isnāds* whose reporters are the special companions of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī. The other type consists of narrations that address some foundational or peripheral issues of the Imamate of the Imam of the Age, such as the exclusivity of the Imamate of two brothers in Imam al-Ḥasan al-Mujtabā and Imam al-Ḥusayn with an approach of negating the Imamate of Ja'far, the occultation of the twelfth Imam, emphasis on the dual concept of the present Imam and the absent Imam, and the validity of the Imamate of a young child—which we term “general narrations” (*'āmm*). These narrations generally have long chains of transmission and recount the words of previous Imams. If this analysis is correct and 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī's book contained both types of narrations, its volume should be considered as extending beyond a few meagre narrations in a few limited chapters.

Before providing a detailed reference to the two types of narrations and their content analysis, it is necessary to emphasise that this categorisation is based on textual and *isnād*-based evidence and indicators, and in no way indicates certainty. Similarly, the demarcation between these two types of narrations is also based on evidence that is neither clear nor definitive.

It should be noted that in addition to al-Kulaynī, his student Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm, known as Kātib al-Nu'mānī (d. 380/990), in his book *al-Ghayba*,⁵² Shaykh al-Ṣadūq in his book *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma*,⁵³ al-Khazzāz al-Qummī (one of the scholars of the 4th/10th century) in *Kifāyat al-athar*,⁵⁴ and Shaykh al-Ṭūsī in his *Kitāb al-ghayba*⁵⁵ have also transmitted narrations from the book of 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī.

4.1 First Type: Specific Narrations

One of the chapters of *Kitāb al-ḥujja* in *al-Kāfi* that is completely consistent and harmonious with the title and subject of *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im* by 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī is "Chapter on Indication and Explicit Designation of the Master of the House [the twelfth

⁵² For examples, see Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba*, ed. Fāris Ḥassūn Karīm (Anwār al-Hudā: 2002), 68–69, 95–96, 132, 137–138, 151–152 and 155–156. It is noteworthy that all these cases are through Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī.

⁵³ For examples, see al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 2:435–436: through Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī; also see *ibid.*, 2:437, 483, 485 and 486.

⁵⁴ 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Khazzāz al-Qummī al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar fi-l-naṣṣ 'alā l-a'immat al-ithnā 'ashar*, ed. 'Abd al-Laṭīf Ḥusaynī (Intishārāt-i Bidār: 1981), 293–294, quoting from Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī.

⁵⁵ For examples, see al-Ṭūsī, Muḥammad b. Ḥasan, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ed. 'Ibādullāh Ṭīhrānī and 'Alī Aḥmad Nāṣiḥ (Mu'assasat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyya: 1991), 200, 268, 269, 284 and 297.

Imam]" (*Bāb al-ishāra wa-l-naṣṣ ilā ṣāḥib al-dār*).⁵⁶ Among other evidence for Shaykh al-Kulaynī's transmission from *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im*, in addition to the contextual appropriateness and harmony of the content and substance of these narrations with the title of 'Alī b. Muḥammad's book, is that most of these narrations are transmitted by narrators other than Sahl b. Ziyād. Of the six narrations that Shaykh al-Kulaynī transmitted in this chapter, four of them—namely narrations numbers 1, 3, 4, and 6—are from 'Alī b. Muḥammad. In the first narration, 'Alī b. Muḥammad transmits from Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Bilāl that he received a message from Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī twice regarding that Imam's successor: once two years before that Imam's death and the second time three days before his death. In the third narration of the chapter, 'Alī b. Muḥammad transmits from Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Kūfī from Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Makfūf from 'Amr al-Ahwāzī that Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī showed his son to him and explicitly states that he would be the master of the affair of the Imamate after that Imam. In the fourth narration, 'Alī b. Muḥammad reports from Ḥamdān b. Aḥmad al-Qalānisī his conversation with 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd al-'Amrī (d. before 267/880)—the first deputy (*nā'ib*) among the four deputies—regarding the death of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī and the designation of his successor. In the sixth narration, 'Alī b. Muḥammad transmitted from al-Ḥusayn and Muḥammad, the sons of 'Alī b. Ib-rāhīm, from Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Abdī from 'Abd Qays from Ḍaw' b. 'Alī al-'Ijlī from a Persian man whose name he mentioned, reporting the account of his honour of being in the service of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī and seeing that Imam's son.

In addition to the last narration, it appears that 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī also transmits in his book reports concerning those who saw the twelfth Imam during the lifetime of his noble father or after it. This is because the "Chapter on Naming Those Who Saw Him

⁵⁶ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:328–329.

[the twelfth Imam]⁵⁷—which comes after “Chapter on Indication and Explicit Designation of the Master of the House”—also has a similar situation to the previous chapter. On one hand, its title and the content of its narrations are completely aligned with the title of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī’s book, and on the other hand, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad transmitted its narrations from narrators other than Sahl b. Ziyād. Among the 15 narrations of this chapter, 12 narrations are transmitted from ‘Alī b. Muḥammad. As is evident from the text of the reports, narrations 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 14 refer to seeing the twelfth Imam in childhood years and during the lifetime of Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, while narrations 6, 7, and 15 refer to seeing the twelfth Imam during the period of his Imamate and presumably in his youth and middle age. In narration 5, there is no indication or sign regarding the twelfth Imam’s age.

Other narrations transmitted from the book of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī appear in the chapter entitled “Chapter on the Prohibition of the Name” (*Bāb fī l-nahy ‘an al-ism*).⁵⁸ At the beginning of the *isnāds* of the first two narrations out of the four narrations in this chapter, the name of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad can be seen. Once again, the same two previous indicators are observable here as well: one structural-transmissional (transmission from narrators other than Sahl b. Ziyād) and the other being content alignment with the title of his *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā’im*. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad transmitted the first narration through two intermediaries from Imam al-Hādī. In this narration, the twelfth Imam first referred to the succession of Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī and then stated that people would not see the successor of his successor with their eyes, prohibited mentioning his name, and recommended that they call him “the Proof from the Family of Muḥammad” (*al-Hujjat min Āl Muḥammad*). In the second narration,

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1:329–332.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1:332–333.

reference is made to the reason and philosophy behind not mentioning his name. According to the report of 'Alī b. Muḥammad from Abū 'Abdullāh al-Ṣāliḥī, after the death of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, one of his companions asked him to inquire about the twelfth Imam's name and location. The answer came: "If you tell them the name, they will reveal it, and if they know the location, they will point it out."

The narrations of Shaykh al-Kulaynī from 'Alī b. Muḥammad in "Chapter on the Birth of the Master" (*Bāb mawlid al-ṣāḥib*)⁵⁹ are almost certainly from his *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im*. Among the 31 narrations in this chapter, 23 cases—narrations numbered 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 31—are transmitted from 'Alī b. Muḥammad. Among them, narrations numbered 8, 20, 26, 29, and 31 were reported by 'Alī b. Muḥammad without any intermediary whatsoever.

4.2. Second Type: General Narrations

Narrations from 'Alī b. Muḥammad from Sahl b. Ziyād al-Ādamī appear in two chapters: "The Indication and Explicit Designation of Abū Ja'far the Second" (*al-Ishāra wa-l-naṣṣ 'alā Abī Ja'far al-Thānī*)⁶⁰ and "The Indication and Explicit Designation of Abū Muḥammad" (*al-Ishāra wa-l-naṣṣ 'alā Abī Muḥammad*)⁶¹ in the *Kitāb al-ḥujja* of al-Kāfī. It is possible that these were taken from *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im*, because firstly, in other related chapters (namely the chapters on indication and explicit designation regarding the Imamate of Imam 'Alī to Imam al-Riḍā and the chapter on indication and explicit designation regarding the Imamate of Imam al-Hādī), there are no narrations with this *isnād*. Secondly, the content of his narrations in these two chapters is somehow connected to the subject of the twelfth Imam. It is natural that the presence of explicit designations (*nuṣūṣ*) regarding

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1:514–525.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1:320–323.

⁶¹ Ibid., 1:325–328.

the Imamate of Imam al-Jawād in the book of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī should have a logical reason and justification. A common issue between the Imamate of Imam al-Jawād and the twelfth Imam could be the justification for this matter. We know that one of the important challenges facing the Imamate of Imam al-Jawād was the issue of childhood Imamate and the nature of his knowledge.⁶² A similar challenge has also been raised regarding the Imamate of the twelfth Imam. Perhaps this common challenge was a reason for ‘Alī b. Muḥammad to transmit the explicit designations indicating the Imamate of Imam al-Jawād in his book. The reference to the explicit designations of the Imamate of Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī could also be because a group of Shī‘īs, after the martyrdom of Imam al-Hādī, believed in the Imamate of his elder son, namely Sayyid Muḥammad (d. 252/866) known as “Sabu‘ al-Dujayl”⁶³—the uncle of the twelfth Imam.⁶⁴ If this claim is correct, the continuation of the line of Imamate and its connection to him would be disrupted and face a serious challenge.

A similar analysis can be made regarding the second narration in the chapter “The Establishment of Imamate in Descendants and That It Does Not Return to a Brother or Uncle or Others Among Relatives” (*Thabāt al-imāma fi l-a‘qāb wa annahā lā ta‘ūd fi akhin wa lā ‘ammin wa lā ghayrihimā min al-qarābāt*)⁶⁵ transmitted from ‘Alī b. Muḥa-

⁶² For example, see al-Ash‘arī al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt*, 95–99; Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā’il al-imāma* (Mu’assasat al-Ba‘tha: 1993), 388–390.

⁶³ “Sabu‘ al-Dujayl” means “the lion of Dujayl.” “Dujayl” was the name of a populated region around a river of the same name in northern Iraq near Sāmarrā’; see Yāqūt b. ‘Abdullāh al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-buldān* (Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī: 1979), 2:443.

⁶⁴ Al-Ash‘arī al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt*, 101 and 109–110; Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Fīraq al-shī‘a*, ed. Muḥammad Kāẓim Mūsawī (Markaz Karbalā’ li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Buḥūth: 2018), 135–136, 141–142 and 146–147.

⁶⁵ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:286.

mmad from Sahl b. Ziyād: 'Alī b. Muḥammad from Sahl b. Ziyād from Muḥammad b. al-Walīd from Yūnus b. Ya'qūb from Abī 'Abdillāh that he heard him say: "God has refused to place it [the Imamate] with two brothers after al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn."

The title of the chapter and the content of the narration clearly evoke the course of Imamate after the martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī. After his martyrdom, his brother Ja'far (d. 271/884) claimed the position of Imamate.⁶⁶ Some Shī'īs also believed in the Imamate of Muḥammad—the elder brother of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī—as the successor of Imam al-Hādī or even Imām al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī himself.⁶⁷ The narration, by emphasising the exclusive nature of Imamate between two brothers specifically regarding the two grandsons of the Prophet, shows bias regarding the denial of the claims to Imamate by Muḥammad and Ja'far during the period of the Imamate of the twelfth Imam. The other narrations in the chapter also allude to this same matter in some way.

The third narration from the three narrations of the next chapter—"A Miscellany on the State of Occultation" (*Bāb nādir fī ḥāl al-ghayba*)—has also been transmitted from 'Alī b. Muḥammad.⁶⁸ The narrations related to the occultation of the twelfth Imam constitute another category of narrations that Shaykh al-Kulaynī apparently transmitted from the book of 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī in the "Chapter on Occultation" (*Bāb fī l-ghayba*). His name appears at the beginning of the *isnāds* of six narrations out of 31 narrations in this chapter, namely narrations numbers 2, 7, 13, 14, 22, and 24.⁶⁹ As is evident from the title of the chapter, these narrations allude to the issue

⁶⁶ Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 1:43–44 and 319; 2:475. Also see: al-Ash'arī al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*, 110–111; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 139–141.

⁶⁷ Al-Ash'arī al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt*, 101, 109–110; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 135–136, 141–142 and 146–147.

⁶⁸ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:335.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:335–343.

of occultation and present recommendations in this regard from the Imams. In the second narration, Imam al-Kāẓim mentions preserving religion during the period of occultation; in narration number 7, the conversation of al-Aṣḥagh b. Nubāta with Imam ‘Alī regarding the duration of occultation and some conditions of that period; in narration number 13, part of a sermon of Imam ‘Alī regarding the necessity of the existence of God’s proof (*ḥujjat Allāh*) whether manifest or hidden; in the fourteenth narration, the exegesis of Q 67: 30 (“Say: Have you considered if your water should go down into the earth, then who would bring you flowing water?”) regarding the Imam’s occultation by Imam al-Kāẓim; the exegesis of Q 81:15 and Q 81:16 (“But nay! I swear by the stars that recede, that run their course and hide themselves”) regarding the Imam’s occultation in the year 260/874 by Imam al-Bāqir; and the statement of the condition for the appearance (*ẓuhūr*) by Imam al-Hādī in narration number 24. As is evident, the content of these narrations is aligned with the title of *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā’im*. Narrations 2, 7, 22, and 24 have been transmitted respectively from al-Ḥasan b. ‘Īsā b. Muḥammad, ‘Abdullāh b. Muḥammad b. al-Khālīd, Ja‘far b. Muḥammad, and “some of our companions” (*ba‘ḍ aṣḥābinā*), but narrations 13 and 14 have been transmitted from Sahl b. Ziyād.

The multiplicity and dispersion of the intermediaries and transmission chains of these narrations make it almost impossible that Shaykh al-Kulaynī transmitted them from a written source other than *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā’im* by ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī.

Apparently, the first narration of the “Chapter on the Dislike of Setting Times” (*Bāb karāhiyyat al-tawqīt*) is also from the book of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad. The content of this narration is a conversation between Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī and Imam al-Bāqir. He spoke to Abū Ḥamza about two instances of delay in the matter of appearance (*ẓuhūr*), one due to the killing of Imam al-Ḥusayn and the other because of the dis-

closure of this secret by some companions. After that, the time of appearance became a mysterious matter even for the Imams.⁷⁰

The sixth narration from the “Chapter on Purification and Testing” (*Bāb al-tamhīṣ wa-l-imtihān*) in *Kitāb al-ḥujja* is also from 'Alī b. Muḥammad from Sahl b. Ziyād with a topic concerning the appearance of the saviour. In this narration, Imam al-Ṣādiq introduces conditions for the Shī'is and Shī'ī community as prerequisites for his appearance, such as testing, sifting, despair of improvement in difficult conditions, and the happiness and wretchedness of the righteous and the wicked.⁷¹

The third and seventh narrations among the seven narrations of the chapter “That Whoever Knows His Imam Will Not Be Harmed Whether This Matter Comes Early or Late” (*Bāb annahu man 'araḥa imāmahu lam yaḍurrahu taqaddama hādhā l-amru aw ta'akhhara*)⁷² are from 'Alī b. Muḥammad from Sahl b. Ziyād, which apparently belong to the second type of narrations from *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im* by 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī. In the third narration, Imam al-Ṣādiq spoke in response to Abū Baṣīr al-Asadī's question about the time of relief (*faraj*) and its meaning and explained its relationship with awaiting relief for him. In the seventh narration as well, he emphasised the necessity of knowing the Imam of one's time, stating that if one knows him, advancing or delaying in the matter of appearance will bring no harm to the individual, and knowing the Imam enables a person to find a place in the Imam's tent as one who awaits.

The fifth and final narration from the “Chapter on Whoever Worships God Almighty without an Imam from God, Exalted be His Majesty” (*Bāb fī-man dāna Allāh 'azza wa jalla bi-ghayr imām min Allāh jalla jalāluhu*) is also from 'Alī b. Muḥammad. In this narration, Imam al-Ṣādiq emphasised the necessity of recognising the true Imam and

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1:368.

⁷¹ Ibid., 1:370–371.

⁷² Ibid., 1:371–372.

avoiding divine punishment as a consequence of accepting his leadership (*imāma*), in contrast to the torment of the community due to accepting the leadership of a false Imam.⁷³

Two narrations numbered 4 and 5 from the “Chapter on the States of the Imams in Age” (*Bāb ḥālāt al-a’imma ‘alayhim al-salām fi l-sinn*) also relate in some way to the topic of the twelfth Imam. In these two narrations, reference is made to the possibility of leadership (*imāma*) for young children. In the fourth narration from Imam al-Ṣādiq, the possibility of leadership for a five-year-old child is mentioned, and in the fifth narration from Imam al-Jawād, the possibility of a child under seven or even five years old being an *Imam* is emphasised. These two narrations completely correspond with the age of the twelfth Imam at the time of his noble father’s death and the beginning of his period of leadership. It seems that in these two narrations, groundwork was laid for accepting this matter—the Imamate of the twelfth Imam at five years of age.⁷⁴

The first narration from the “Chapter on the Births of the Imams” (*Bāb mawālīd al-a’imma*) is narrated by ‘Alī b. Muḥammad from ‘Abdullāh b. Ishāq al-‘Alawī through his *isnād* from Imam al-Ṣādiq. In this *ḥadīth*, the Imam refers to drinking a special beverage on the night of the conception of his own seed, that of his fathers, and that of his son Imam al-Kāzim, which was more fluid than water, softer than butter, sweeter than honey, cooler than snow, and whiter than milk, and which came from heaven through a divine unseen agent.⁷⁵ From the Imam’s expression, it can be understood that drinking this beverage was among the special characteristics of the infallible Imam at the time of his conception. Presumably with such an understanding, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad narrated this tradition in his book as a sign of leadership (*imāma*) that would also include the twelfth Imam. The seventh

⁷³ Ibid., 1:376.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 1:383–384.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1:385–387.

and final narration of this same chapter is also narrated by 'Alī b. Muḥammad from “*idda min aṣḥābinā*” and clearly speaks of the ten signs of leadership from the tongue of Imam Bāqir.⁷⁶ Apparently, he considered the implication of these *ḥadīth* to be generally inclusive of the twelfth Imam as well, and thus included them in his book.

Three narrations—the second, fifth, and seventh—from the “Chapter on the Jinn Coming to Them and Asking Them about the Landmarks of Their Religion and Seeking Their Guidance in Their Affairs” (*Bāb anna al-jinn ya'tihim fa-yas'alūnahum 'an ma'ālim dīnīhim wa yatawajjahūn fi umūrihim*) are narrated by 'Alī b. Muḥammad through his *isnād* from Imam al-Ṣādiq, Imam al-Riḍā, and Imam al-Bāqir respectively, concerning the presence of a group of *jinn*s in the presence of the Imam and their raising of religious questions and inquiries about the lawful and unlawful to those noble ones.⁷⁷ Similar to the two previous narrations, apparently 'Alī b. Muḥammad considered this matter to be among the general characteristics of all the Imams, and therefore narrated it in his book.

The ninth *ḥadīth* narrated in the “Chapter on What Is Obligatory of the Imam's Right upon the People and the People's Right upon the Imam” (*Bāb mā yajib min ḥaqq al-imām 'alā l-ra'īyya wa ḥaqq al-ra'īyya 'alā l-imām*) is from 'Alī b. Muḥammad from Sahl b. Ziyād concerning the people's right upon the Imam. According to the statement of Imam al-Riḍā in this narration, a debtor who has borrowed money for a righteous cause should be given respite for up to one year. If he finds relief and can pay it himself, well and good; otherwise, the Imam must pay his debt from the public treasury.⁷⁸

The sixth narration of the “Chapter on All the Earth Belonging to the Imam” (*Bāb anna al-arḍ kullahā li-l-imām*) is also from 'Alī b. Muḥammad from Sahl b. Ziyād concerning the worldly share of the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1:388–389.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 1:394–397.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1:407.

Prophet. In this *ḥadīth*, Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī responded to Muḥammad b. Rayyān’s question about a narration stating that the Messenger of God has no share in the world except the one-fifth (*khums*), answering that the world and everything that revolves upon it belongs to the Messenger of God.⁷⁹ (This narration could also, from ‘Alī b. Muḥammad’s perspective, be expressing a general characteristic of the infallible Imam, which is why he included it in his book.)

The third narration in the “Chapter on the Imam’s Conduct Regarding Himself, Food, and Clothing When He Assumes Authority” (*Bāb sīrat al-imām fi nafsihi wa fi l-maṭ‘am wa-l-malbas idhā waliya l-amr*) is from ‘Alī b. Muḥammad from Ṣāliḥ b. Abī Ḥammād, reporting the argument of Imam ‘Alī with ‘Āṣim b. Ziyād regarding this matter. Apparently, ‘Āṣim had adopted an austere ascetic lifestyle and was being harsh on himself and his family in this regard. The Imam, referring to verses from the Qur’ān,⁸⁰ rebuked him for this deviation and harshness toward his children and wife. However, ‘Āṣim reminded him of his own way of being content with coarse food and rough clothing. The Imam responded by explaining to him one of the duties of the Imam: “Indeed, God Almighty has made it obligatory upon the leaders of justice to place themselves at the level of the weak and powerless people, so that poverty and hardship do not drive the poor from their place.”⁸¹ Apparently, this narration also, from ‘Alī b. Muḥammad’s perspective, expresses a general characteristic of the infallible Imam regarding the quality of life and the necessity of considering the condition of the needy in society, which is why he included it in his book.

Despite narrating several traditions from ‘Alī b. Muḥammad in the “Chapter Containing Points and Excerpts from the Revelation Concerning Authority” (*Bāb fihi nukāt wa nutaḥ min al-tanzīl fi l-wilāya*)⁸²,

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1:409.

⁸⁰ Q 55:10–11, 55:19–20, 55:22, 93:11.

⁸¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:410–411.

⁸² Ibid., 1:412–436, no. 28, 37, 38, 84, 85, 88 and 91.

narration number 75 can be considered related to the concept of the existence of two types of Imams—the present Imam and the absent Imam. In this narration transmitted from Imam al-Kāẓim, two Qur'ānic expressions “an abandoned well” (*bi'r mu'aṭṭala*) and “a lofty palace” (*qaṣr mashīd*) in Q 22:45 are respectively interpreted as referring to the silent Imam (*imām ṣāmit*) (another concept for “absent Imam”) and the speaking Imam (*imām nāṭiq*) (a substitute concept for “present Imam”).

The third narration among the three narrations in the “Chapter on All the Imams Standing by God's Command and Guiding to Him” (*Bāb anna al-a'immat 'alayhim al-salām kullahum qā'imūn bi-amri Allāh ta'ālā hādūn ilayh*)⁸³ is from 'Alī b. Muḥammad. Due to the close connection between the content of this narration and the title of 'Alī b. Muḥammad's book, it can be considered as Shaykh al-Kulaynī's source for transmitting this narration. In this narration, it is reported from Imam al-Šādiq in the exegesis of the concept of Imam in the verse “On the day We shall call every people by their Imam”⁸⁴ that what is meant is the Imam who is among them and who is the *Qā'im* of the people of his time. In this narration, every infallible Imam is introduced as the “standing Imam” (*imām qā'im*) of his era.

5. Conclusion

'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abān al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī, who is known in the sources by the title 'Allān al-Kulaynī and whose trustworthiness is explicitly affirmed by al-Najāshī and others following him, is among the prolific narrators (*kathīr al-riwāya*) whose main narrations are transmitted in *al-Kāfī*. An examination of the narrations transmitted from him in *al-Kāfī* shows that a considerable number of them have thematic and content-related affinity with the title and sub-

⁸³ Ibid., 1:536–537.

⁸⁴ Q 17:71.

ject matter of *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im*. This indicates that in all likelihood, this book was Shaykh al-Kulaynī's source for transmitting them. Apparently, the narrations of this book were of two types in terms of theme and content. The first type comprises specific reports about him such as the birth of the twelfth Imam and the existence of a male child for Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, the sighting of the twelfth Imam by some companions, and allusions and explicit designations (*naṣṣ*) regarding the imamate of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī and the twelfth Imam. Another general characteristic of these narrations is that they are reported with short *isnāds* from narrators who were direct witnesses to such matters related to the Imam. However, the second type consists of narrations from previous Imams containing general truths about the twelfth Imam and issues related to him, such as emphasis on the principle of the existence of occultation, the dual division of present Imam and absent Imam, the disapproval of setting times for his emergence (*karāhiyyat al-tawqūt*), and events and concepts applicable to the twelfth Imam such as the general characteristics and features of the infallible Imam and Imamate. The structural feature of the narrations of the latter category is that they mostly have long chains of transmission, and 'Alī b. Muḥammad has generally transmitted them from Sahl b. Ziyād, unlike the first type, which 'Alī b. Muḥammad has generally narrated from narrators other than Sahl b. Ziyād.

Another point is that the volume of narrations of the second type is greater than that of the first category. Here there are two possibilities. First, that *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im* of 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī contained only narrations of the first type. According to this possibility, it must be said that this book did not have a large volume, unless it is said that Shaykh al-Kulaynī was content with transmitting only these few instances from it. The latter case seems somewhat unlikely, because due to Shaykh al-Kulaynī's direct access to the content of the book and his closeness to the author and his trustworthiness, the opposite is more probable. The other possibility is that both categories of narrations are from *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā'im* and its content

comprised both types of narrations. According to this possibility, it can be said that this book had a considerable volume—especially in the second section of narrations.

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Kitāb Akhbār al-Qā'im by 'Allān al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī

maqāl fī taḥqīq aḥwāl al-rijāl, Lithographic edition: 1889.

Al-Kulaynī: Insights into His Life and Methodology

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Abstract

Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941) is considered one of the most influential scholars in Twelver Shī‘ism, with his magnum opus, *al-Kāfi*, considered to be the premiere work of *ḥadīth* and one of the main sources for theological doctrine (*‘aqīda*) and practical jurisprudence (*fiqh*) among Twelver Shī‘is. Despite the recognition that al-Kulaynī’s work has achieved in Shī‘ī discourse, unfortunately, not much is known about his life, motivations, and approach, especially in the English-speaking Shī‘ī world. This paper seeks to correct this by introducing the individual and his methodology. The paper combines a close reading of the available historical details of his life, together with an analysis of the relevant sections from the author’s *muqaddima* (preface), wherein one would expect to find answers to such questions.¹

Keywords: Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, *ḥadīth*, *‘ilm al-rijāl*, *maqūla* of ‘Umar b. Ḥaṇẓala, *takhyīr*.

1. Biographical Elements

Details about the life of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb b. Ishāq al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī (d. 328/940 or 329/941) are scant.² Incidental details

¹ A proper treatment of the contents of *al-Kāfi*, including al-Kulaynī’s organisation/arrangement of the material and the few authorial remarks he makes therein are beyond the scope of the current paper.

² Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* studies in Western academia is still in its infancy. There exists

are known, such as the fact that he was one-eyed (*aʿwar*),³ but others are not, such as the year of his birth.⁴ What can be gleaned from the geographical descriptor (*nisba*) attached to his name is that his ancestral home was Kulayn (he may have even been born there), a small village in the district of Rayy (to be found within present-day Tehran).⁵

A major influence on al-Kulaynī would have been the scholarly

no monograph dedicated to al-Kulaynī's life nor a study of *al-Kāfi*. A notable contribution is by Andrew J. Newman who touches upon the life and methodology of al-Kulaynī in his published work which will be cited where necessary; see Andrew J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shīʿism: Ḥadīth as Discourse between Qum and Baghdad* (Routledge: 2000), Chapter 6. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Hasan Ansari are aware of this lacuna stating: "aside from a few rare or brief articles devoted to our author/compiler or to particular aspects of his work, no monograph synthesis, carried out in accord with historical and critical perspectives, has yet been accorded to this great scholar and to the milieu in which his magnum opus first saw the light." Their self-described "modest" attempt at filling this gap is very good at setting the historical background of al-Kulaynī's life, and describing the different intellectual currents of his age, but does not dissect his methodology in any detail (the *muqaddima* is mentioned in passing but not quoted from even once!); see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Hasan Ansari, "Perfecting a Religion: Remarks on al-Kulaynī and His Summa of Traditions," in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qurʾān and the Speaking Qurʾān: Scriptural Sources of Islam between History and Fervor* (Columbia University Press: 2016).

³ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī*, ed. Jawād al-Qayyūmī (Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 2009), 439.

⁴ Considering that al-Kulaynī dies in 329/941 and taking an estimated average life-time of 70 years or so means that he was born around 260/872, the date in which the *ghayba al-ṣuġhrā* (lesser occultation) of the twelfth Imam is supposed to have begun.

⁵ For more informed speculation about the village of Kulayn and where it is located within Rayy, see Amir-Moezzi and Ansari, "Perfecting a Religion," 138.

pedigree of his immediate family. The early Imāmī bibliographer, al-Najāshī (d. 450/1058), notes that al-Kulaynī's maternal uncle, 'Allān al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī, was a trustworthy (*thiqa*) narrator of *ḥadīth* and notable figure (*'ayn*).⁶

Beyond this, all information or details about al-Kulaynī's life must be inferred on the back of his magnum opus, *al-Kāfi*, upon which his legacy rests. The book, when studied closely and looking especially at the names of his direct authorities in the chains (*asānīd*), tells the story of a long and arduous journey for the sake of acquiring *ḥadīth*.⁷

Al-Kulaynī must have taken the first real steps towards his education in his native Rayy, as was typical for any budding *ḥadīth* scholar.⁸ al-Kulaynī would then have gone to Qom, which is closest to Rayy, and by this time, a prominent centre for Shī'ī *fiqh*, *ḥadīth* and general

⁶ Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, ed. Mūsā al-Shubayrī al-Zanjānī (Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1997), 206.

⁷ In the present work, al-Kulaynī's itinerary has been reconstructed from the proposal of the contemporary Iranian researcher Muḥammad Bāqir al-Bahbūdī with slight modifications; see the introduction in al-Bahbūdī, *Ṣaḥīḥ man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh* (Mu'assasat al-Wafā: 1987).

⁸ Apart from his uncle, the aforementioned 'Allān al-Kulaynī, whose full name is 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abān, al-Kulaynī's other known teacher in Rayy is one Muḥammad b. 'Aqīl al-Kulaynī. It is the opinion of the author of the present work that a third known teacher should be added. In criticism of the proposal of al-Bahbūdī, al-Kulaynī should be considered to have met up with Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. Muḥammad b. 'Awn al-Asadī (d. 312/924) in Rayy and not Kufa. This is because al-Asadī had already relocated to Rayy from Kufa sometime before the year 290/902-903; see al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* (Mu'assasat al-Ma'arif al-Islāmiyya: 2004), 415. All three men transmit to al-Kulaynī the famous works of the controversial narrator Sahl b. Ziyād al-Ādamī who had fled to Rayy after being chased out of Qom under the accusation of *ghuluww*; see al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl fi ma'rifat al-rijāl*, ed. Jawād al-Qayyūmī (Mu'assasat Nashr al-Faqāha: 2010), 430.

scholarship. The importance of this trip can be glimpsed by the fact that most of the *ḥadīth* that al-Kulaynī would come to include in *al-Kāfi* are on the authority of his Qummī *mashāyikh* (teachers), with his most prominent *shaykh*, ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Hāshim (alive in 307/919-920), occurring in the chains of almost a third of the more than 16,000 *ḥadīth* found in *al-Kāfi*.⁹

A stay in Naysābūr would have followed¹⁰ before setting out for Kufa,¹¹ the ancient seat of Imāmī Shī‘ism and the epicentre of its earliest proponents. We know that al-Kulaynī journeyed even further west after leaving Iraq, with his travels possibly culminating in Damascus, Syria.

The Sunnī scholar Ibn ‘Asākir’s (d. 571/1176) massive *Ta’rīkh Madīnat Dimashq* contains profiles of thousands of personalities who were resident in Damascus or happened to pass through the town and its surrounding environs. He has an entry for al-Kulaynī in which he says:¹²

مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَعْقُوبَ، وَيُقَالُ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَلِيٍّ، أَبُو جَعْفَرٍ الْكُلَيْنِيُّ، مِنْ سُيُوحِ
الرَّافِضَةِ، قَدِمَ دِمَشْقَ، وَحَدَّثَ بِعَلْبِكَ ...

⁹ Apart from ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm, al-Kulaynī’s three other Qummī teachers: Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-‘Aṭṭār, Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Ash‘arī (d. 306/918), and al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Ash‘arī, account together for almost another third of the contents of *al-Kāfi*.

¹⁰ To study with Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bunduqī, famously known as Bandafar, a key intermediary to the important works of the outstanding scholar of his generation: al-Faḍl b. Shādhān (d. 260/873).

¹¹ Al-Kulaynī took there from Ibn ‘Uqda Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd (d. 332/944 or 333/945), Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Razzāz (d. 316/928), and Ḥumayd b. Ziyād al-Dihqān (d. 310/923). This latter was a particularly prolific transmitter of the early works known as the *uṣūl*.

¹² ‘Alī b. al-Ḥasan Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. Sukayna al-Shihābī (Maṭbū‘āt Majma‘ al-Lugha al-‘Arabiyya bi-Dimashq: 2005), 65:316.

Muhammad b. Ya'qūb, and it is said Muḥammad b. 'Alī, Abū Ja'far al-Kulaynī. From among the *shuyūkh* of the Rāfiḍa. He travelled up to Damascus and narrated *ḥadīth* in Baalbek ...¹³

Of course, there is a degree of speculation in the above reconstruction, but what is known for sure is that al-Kulaynī returned to his native Rayy after his travels, for it is here that al-Najāshī places him:

شَيْخُ أَصْحَابِنَا فِي وَقْتِهِ بِالرَّيِّ، وَوَجْهُهُمْ.

The *shaykh* of our companions [i.e. the Shī'a] in Rayy in his time and their preeminent one.¹⁴

It is also here where having made his mark as a scholar that al-Kulaynī would have started authoring *al-Kāfī*.

al-Najāshī says:

صَنَّفَ الْكِتَابَ الْكَبِيرَ الْمَعْرُوفَ بِالْكُلَيْنِيِّ يُسَمَّى الْكَافِي فِي عِشْرِينَ سَنَةً.

He authored the big book, famously named after al-Kulaynī,¹⁵ and which is [actually] entitled *al-Kāfī*, in [a period of] twenty years.¹⁶

¹³ Ibn 'Asākir names one 'Abdullāh b. Muḥammad b. Dhakwān (d. 380/990 or 383/993) among those who narrate from al-Kulaynī. The latter was a judge (*qāḍī*) in Baalbek; see Muḥammad b. Mukarram b. 'Alī Ibn Manẓūr, *Mukhtaṣar tārikh Dimashq* (Dār al-Fikr: 1409/1989), 13:297–298. I contend that Ibn 'Asākir could place al-Kulaynī in Baalbek because he saw a *ḥadīth* (which he does not cite) in which the aforementioned 'Abdullāh b. Muḥammad b. Dhakwān narrates from al-Kulaynī while specifying that this transmission happened in Baalbek. For a parallel case where Ibn 'Asākir is able to place someone in Baalbek because of this exact scenario, see Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madinat Dimashq*, 63:115.

¹⁴ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 377.

¹⁵ They would refer to the book as “*Kitāb al-Kulaynī*” or al-Kulaynī's book.

¹⁶ Ibid.

It is only towards the end of his life¹⁷ and after having completed authoring *al-Kāfi*¹⁸ that al-Kulaynī relocated to Baghdad where he resided in the *Darb al-Silsila* (Chain Road) which was within the Kufan Gate (district).¹⁹

¹⁷ This is also the opinion of Ayatollah Ḥusayn al-Burūjirdī (d. 1961); see Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī al-Burūjirdī, *Iṭlāl al-rijāl wa-l-ḥadīth*, ed. Muḥammad Mahdī Najaf (Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 2000), 18–19. This is contrary to Newman who holds that al-Kulaynī was already in Baghdad in 300/912–913 and authored *al-Kāfi* there; see Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shiism*, 94–96. There is no evidence that al-Kulaynī was in Baghdad before 327/938–939. The latter date, given by al-Ṭūsī in a quotation provided in this paper, is the second undisputed anchor about his life apart from the year of his death. I do not completely rule out an early visit as an anonymous student, for Baghdad had become the centre for scholarship in the Islamic world beginning from the second half of the 2nd/8th century onwards; but, scholars who postulate a long stay in Baghdad or him taking up residence there before the late date are to be ignored for the weight of circumstantial evidence is against this. If al-Kulaynī had a long stay in Baghdad he would have also surely featured in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm (written in 377/987) who was active as a copyist in Baghdad, or the *Ta'rikh Baghdad* of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071); see Amir-Moezzi and Ansari, “Perfecting a Religion,” 126.

¹⁸ Consider how al-Ṣadūq received *al-Kāfi* from intermediaries who are from Kulayn and greater Rayy such as Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. 'Iṣām al-Kulaynī and Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Sinānī who is said to have relocated to Rayy; see Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, ed. 'Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1992), 4:534. This means that al-Kulaynī would have taught *al-Kāfi* locally before setting out for Baghdad.

¹⁹ Baghdad as a city was girdled with a circular wall and pierced by four monumental gates: Basran Gate to the southwest, Kufan Gate to the southeast, Khurāsān Gate to the northeast, and Syrian Gate to the northwest. These gates were used to divide the city into four districts; see Sylvie

This is where al-Kulaynī began teaching and formally transmitting his work to students in live audition sessions as late as the last year of his life.

Al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) gives us these details when recording one of his chains to *al-Kāfi*:²⁰

وَأَخْبَرَنَا بِهِ أَيْضًا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ عُثْمَانَ الْمَعْرُوفُ بِابْنِ الْحَاشِرِ، عَنْ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ أَبِي رَافِعٍ، وَأَبِي الْحُسَيْنِ عَبْدِ الْكَرِيمِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ نَصْرِ الْبَزَّازِ بَيْتَيسَ وَبَعْدَادَ، عَنْ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ مُحَمَّدَ بْنِ يَعْقُوبَ الْكُلَيْنِيِّ، جَمِيعَ مُصَنَّفَاتِهِ وَأَحَادِيثِهِ سَمَاعًا وَإِجَازَةً، بِبَعْدَادَ بَبَابِ الْكُوفَةِ بِدَرْبِ السِّلْسِلَةِ، سَنَةَ سَبْعٍ وَعِشْرِينَ وَثَلَاثِمِائَةً.

Aḥmad b. ‘Ubdūn, well-known as Ibn al-Ḥāshir, also reported it to us [i.e. the book *al-Kāfi*] from Aḥmad b. Abī Rāfi‘ and Abū l-Ḥusayn ‘Abd al-Karīm b. ‘Abdullāh b. Naṣr al-Bazzāz in Tinnīs²¹ and Baghdad, from Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-al-Kulaynī, all his *muṣannafāt* (authored works) and *ḥadīth*, via *samā‘* (direct hearing from him) and *ijāza* (what he gave license for), in Baghdad, at the Kufan Gate, at the *Darb al-Silsila* (Chain Road), in the year 327 [938-939 C.E.].

Another invaluable testimony is by the prolific narrator, Abū Ghālīb al-Zurārī (d. 368/978), who resided in Baghdad and studied directly under al-Kulaynī. He says the following when listing out the

Denoix, “Founded Cities of the Arab World from the Seventh to the Eleventh Centuries,” in Salma K. Jayyusi et al. (eds.), *The City in the Islamic World* (Brill: 2008), 1:130. The district by the Kufan Gate had its own graveyard where al-Kulaynī and other prominent scholars were buried.

²⁰ Al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya: 2007), 10:383.

²¹ A medieval island-city in Lake Manzala, Egypt which is currently not populated having been abandoned.

books in his possession:²²

وَجَمِيعُ كِتَابِ الْكَافِي تَصْنِيفُ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ يَعْقُوبَ الْكُلَيْنِيِّ، رَوَاتِي عَنْهُ،
بَعْضُهُ قِرَاءَةً وَبَعْضُهُ إِجَازَةً، وَقَدْ نَسَخْتُ مِنْهُ كِتَابَ الصَّلَاةِ وَالصَّوْمِ فِي نُسخَةٍ،
وَكِتَابَ الْحَجِّ فِي نُسخَةٍ، وَكِتَابَ الطُّهْرِ وَالْحَيْضِ فِي جُزْءٍ، وَالْجَمِيعُ مُجَلَّدٌ، وَعَزَمِي
أَنْ أَنْسَخَ بَقِيَّةَ الْكِتَابِ إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ، فِي جُزْءٍ وَاحِدٍ، وَرَقِّي طَلْحِيّ.

The whole of the book *al-Kāfi*, authorship of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-al-Kulaynī. My transmission [directly] on his authority. A part of it is *qirā'a* [i.e. what was read out to him] and a part of it is *ijāza* [i.e. what he gave license for]. I have transcribed from it [in my own handwriting] *kitāb al-ṣalāt* and *kitāb al-ṣawm* in a single *nus-kha* (document), *kitāb al-ḥajj* in a single *nuskha*, and the *kitāb al-ṭuhr wa-l-ḥayḍ* in a *juz'* (fascicule).²³ The whole [work] is *mujallad* (a leather-bound volume).²⁴ It is my intention to copy the rest of the book, if Allāh wills, in a single *juz'*²⁵ of *Ṭalḥi*²⁶ paper.

²² Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Abū Ghālib al-Zurārī, *Risālat Abī Ghālib al-Zurārī ilā ibn ibnihi fī dhikr āl A'yan*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā al-Ḥusaynī al-Jalālī (Maktab al-A'lām al-Islāmī: 1990), 176–177.

²³ A *juz'* seems to have been a fascicule of about 20 folios; see Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Brill: 2007), 61.

²⁴ A *mujallad* was larger than a *juz'* since it consisted of several *juz'* bound together in a single “volume.”

²⁵ In this context a “single *juz'*” is to be understood as whole work running to the end without break.

²⁶ Ṭalḥī paper was a kind of fine-quality paper manufactured in Egypt and named after Ṭalḥa b. Ṭāhir (d. 215/830), one of the early operators of a paper mill in Islam and the governor of Khurāsān under the Abbasid Caliph Ma'mūn (d. 218/833); see Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid, “Šinā'a al-kitāb al-'arabī al-makḥṭūṭ,” *Annales Islamologiques* 31, no. 1 (1997), 9.

Baghdad had long become the most important city in the Islamic world with leading scholars in all the different fields flocking there. Its prominence as a centre for Shīʿī scholarship at this time rivalled that of Qom. It is likely that al-Kulaynī chose to present his work in Baghdad because if it were to gain acclaim there, it would be universally acclaimed.²⁷

The work's significance became readily apparent²⁸ and *al-Kāfi* was well-received as the number of students who transmitted it from the author attests.²⁹

²⁷ The choice can also be explained by the fact that Qom already boasted a number of super-compilations that collected vast number of *ḥadīth* across different topics, such as *Nawādir al-ḥikma* by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā (d. 280/893), *al-Maḥāsin* by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd (d. 274/888 or 280/894), and *al-Raḥma* by Saʿd b. ʿAbdullāh (d. between 299–301/911–913), whereas there was no similar work that had a Baghdadi imprint. This point was made by Ali al-Nawfali in a private correspondence to the author of the present work. Thanks is also due to Ali al-Nawfali for reviewing the present work and suggesting numerous improvements.

²⁸ Already al-Mufid (d. 413/1022), and speaking only two generations after al-Kulaynī in Baghdad, describes *al-Kāfi* as: “among the most revered books of the Shīʿa and the most replete with benefit”; see Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nuʿmān al-Mufid, *Taṣṣiḥ al-iʿtiqād* (al-Muʿtamar al-ʿĀlamī li-Alfiyya al-Shaykh al-Mufid: 1993), 70. For the reception of the Four Books in a later period, see Amin Ehteshami, “The Four Books of Shīʿī Ḥadīth: From Inception to Consolidation,” *Islamic Law and Society* 29, no. 3 (2021).

²⁹ Al-Najāshī and al-Ṭūsī name no less than 8 students who heard the work in Baghdad: Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abī Rāfiʿ al-Ṣaymarī, Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Kūfī, Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Saʿīd al-Kūfī, Abū Ghālīb al-Zurārī (d. 368/978), Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. Qūlawayh (d. 368/978), ʿAbd al-Karīm b. ʿAbdallāh al-Bazzāz, Hārūn b. Mūsā al-Tallaʿukbarī (d. 385/995), and Abū Mufaḍḍal al-Shaybānī (d. 387/997). A full analysis of all the known transmitters of *al-Kāfi* can be found in al-Burūjirdī, *Iṭlāl al-rijāl wa-l-ḥadīth*, 46–56.

Al-Najāshī recalls the work being taught in his own early years:³⁰

كُنْتُ أَتَرَدُّ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْمَعْرُوفِ بِمَسْجِدِ اللَّؤْلُؤِيِّ، وَهُوَ مَسْجِدٌ نَقَطَوِيهِ
النَّحْوِيُّ، أَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ عَلَى صَاحِبِ الْمَسْجِدِ، وَجَمَاعَةٌ مِنْ أَصْحَابِنَا يَفْرَأُونَ
كِتَابَ الْكَافِيِّ عَلَى أَبِي الْحُسَيْنِ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ أَحْمَدَ الْكُوفِيِّ الْكَاتِبِ، حَدَّثَكُمْ مُحَمَّدٌ
بْنُ يَعْقُوبَ الْكَلِينِيُّ.

I used to frequent the *masjid* famously known as Masjid al-Lu'lu'i, and it is the *masjid* of Niftawayh al-Nahwī,³¹ so as to learn the Qur'ān at the hands of the Imam [lit. *ṣāhib*] of the *masjid*, while a group of our companions would be reading aloud the book *al-Kāfi* to Abī l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Kūfi al-Kātib [saying:] "Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī narrated to you."

Al-Kulaynī died in Baghdad and was buried there. Al-Ṭūsī gives two different death years in his two books. In the *Fihrist* he says:

وَتُوفِّيَ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَعْقُوبَ سَنَةَ ثَمَانٍ وَعَشْرِينَ وَثَلَاثِمِائَةٍ بِبَغْدَادَ، وَدُفِنَ بِبَابِ
الْكُوفَةِ فِي مَقْبَرَتِهَا، قَالَ ابْنُ عَبْدِوَنَ: رَأَيْتُ قَبْرَهُ فِي صَرَاةِ الطَّائِي، وَعَلَيْهِ لَوْحٌ
مَكْتُوبٌ فِيهِ اسْمُهُ وَاسْمُ أَبِيهِ.

Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb died in the year 328 [939-940 C.E.] in Baghdad and was buried by the Kufan Gate in its graveyard. Ibn 'Ubdūn said: I had seen his grave in Ṣirāṭ al-Ṭā'i and on it was a board in which was written his name and the name of his father.³²

While in the *Rijāl* he says:

³⁰ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 377.

³¹ Niftawayh (d. 323/935) was a prominent grammarian. His *masjid* was located in Baghdad.

³² Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Jawād al-Qayyūmī (Mu'assasat Nashr al-Faqāha: 2008), 211.

مَاتَ سَنَةَ تِسْعٍ وَعِشْرِينَ وَثَلَاثِمِائَةٍ، فِي شَعْبَانَ، فِي بَغْدَادَ، وَدُفِنَ بِيَابِ الْكُوفَةِ.

He died in the year 329 [941 C.E.] in [the month of] Sha'bān in Baghdad and was buried by the Kufan Gate.³³

Al-Najāshī, who is writing after al-Ṭūsī, gives al-Kulaynī's death year as 329/940-941 and provides an extra detail:

وَمَاتَ أَبُو جَعْفَرٍ الْكُلَيْنِيُّ رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ بِبَغْدَادَ سَنَةَ تِسْعٍ وَعِشْرِينَ وَثَلَاثِمِائَةٍ، سَنَةَ تَنَاقُطِ النُّجُومِ، وَصَلَّى عَلَيْهِ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ جَعْفَرٍ الْحُسَيْنِيُّ أَبُو قِيرَاطٍ، وَدُفِنَ بِيَابِ الْكُوفَةِ، وَقَالَ لَنَا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ عَبْدِوَنَ: كُنْتُ أَعْرِفُ قَبْرَهُ، وَقَدْ انْدَرَسَ.

Abū Ja'far al-Kulaynī, may Allāh have mercy on him, died in Baghdad, in the year 329 [940-941 C.E.], the year of the scattering of the stars.³⁴ Muḥammad b. Ja'far al-Ḥasanī Abū Qīrāṭ prayed over him and he was buried at the Kufan Gate. Aḥmad b. 'Ubdūn said to us: I used to know [the location of] his grave but it has become effaced.³⁵

The fact that it was Abū Qīrāṭ Muḥammad b. Ja'far al-Ḥasanī (d.

³³ Al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī*, 439.

³⁴ Presumably because there was an observable meteor shower that year. However, Muḥammad Taqī al-Tustarī (d. 1415/1994) questions whether al-Najāshī got this wrong as there is no record in the historical chronicles of any abnormal celestial activity in 329 as opposed to the year 323; see Muḥammad Taqī al-Tustarī, *Qāmūs al-Rijāl* (Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1989), 9:661. Al-Tustarī quotes al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956 or 346/957) who states: "There was in the year 323 a great and fearsome falling of the stars, and it happened on the night in which the Qarāmiṭa attacked the pilgrims of Iraq on the road to Kufa"; see 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādīn al-jawhar*, ed. Charles Pellat (Manshūrāt al-Jāmi'a al-Libnāniyya: 1974), 5:21.

³⁵ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 377–378.

345/956), who is identified by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071)³⁶ as the distinguished *naqīb*³⁷ of all the Ṭālibids³⁸ in Baghdad, who prayed over al-Kulaynī's dead body, indicates that al-Kulaynī had already made his mark in Baghdad and his fame only kept growing posthumously.

Al-Ṭūsī describes al-Kulaynī as possessing an “esteemed status” (*jalīl al-qadr*) and says that he was “knowledgeable about reports” (*‘ālim bi-l-akhbār*).³⁹ Al-Najāshī labels him “the most trustworthy of people in *ḥadīth*” (*awthaq al-nās bi-l-ḥadīth*).⁴⁰

The praise transcends sectarian boundaries and the Sunni scholar Ibn Athīr (d. 606/1209) famously names al-Kulaynī as the “reviver” (*mujaddid*) of the Imāmiyya in the 3rd/9th century.⁴¹

2. Why Did al-Kulaynī Author *al-Kāfī*?

What can be gleaned from a critical passage in al-Kulaynī's introduction is that he decided to author the book in response to the request of an unnamed contemporary,⁴² who confessed his inability to choose which report to follow in the face of contradictory reports.

Al-Kulaynī paraphrases the latter's request as follows:⁴³

³⁶ Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Thābit al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād*, ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma’rūf (Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī: 2001), 2:525–6.

³⁷ The official title “*naqīb*” was first created by the Caliph al-Musta‘īn bi-llāh (d. 252/866) and usually given to a descendant of ‘Alī in each town whose role it was to manage the affairs of other Ṭālibids.

³⁸ Ṭālibids were descendants of the Prophet's uncle Abū Ṭālib.

³⁹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī*, 439.

⁴⁰ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 377.

⁴¹ Al-Mubārak b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr, *Jāmi‘ al-uṣūl fi aḥādīth al-rasūl*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā‘ūt (Maktabat al-Ḥulwānī: 1392/1972), 11:323.

⁴² Al-Kulaynī addresses him as *akhī* or “brother” throughout the introduction.

⁴³ Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1968), 1:8.

وَذَكَرْتَ أَنَّ أُمُورًا قَدْ أَشْكَلَتْ عَلَيْكَ، لَا تَعْرِفُ حَقَائِقَهَا لِاخْتِلَافِ الرِّوَايَةِ فِيهَا، وَأَنَّكَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ اخْتِلَافَ الرِّوَايَةِ فِيهَا لِاخْتِلَافِ عِلَلِهَا وَأَسْبَابِهَا، وَأَنَّكَ لَا تَجِدُ بِحَضْرَتِكَ مَنْ تُدَاكِرُهُ وَتُفَاوِضُهُ مِمَّنْ تَتَّقَى بِعِلْمِهِ فِيهَا.

You mentioned that matters have become confusing for you: you cannot discern the true position in them because of differences in the reports concerning them. And [you mentioned] that you understand that differences in the reports is because of differences in their [i.e. the reports'] circumstances and occasions,⁴⁴ and [you mentioned] that you do not find in your presence⁴⁵ one whose knowledge of them [i.e., the reports] you trust and with whom you could discuss and consult.

Because of this, the unnamed contemporary wants al-Kulaynī, whose knowledge of *ḥadīth* he trusts, to author a collection of reports across all subjects to which he can refer and freely take from:

وَقُلْتُ إِنَّكَ تُحِبُّ أَنْ يَكُونَ عِنْدَكَ كِتَابٌ كَافٍ يُجْمَعُ فِيهِ مِنْ جَمِيعِ فُنُونِ عِلْمِ الدِّينِ، مَا يَكْتَفِي بِهِ الْمُتَعَلِّمُ، وَيَرْجِعُ إِلَيْهِ الْمُسْتَشِيرُ، وَيَأْخُذُ مِنْهُ مَنْ يُرِيدُ

⁴⁴ Reports of the Imams could differ due to a difference in circumstances (*ilal*) and relevant occasions (*asbāb*). The circumstance or occasion may at times be preserved in the report itself or may be lost. An illustrative example is when the Imam allows one companion to repay the superegregatory prayers (*nawāfil*) missed by day at night when on a journey but does not allow another to do the same. Upon inquiry the Imam reveals that he allowed the former because he has the strength for it; see al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*, 2:17. Now if this explanation were not preserved, one would have generalised the Imam's response and it would seem to be contradicting other reports.

⁴⁵ This is presumably because the petitioner was living in a remote region far away from the main intellectual centres of the Shī'ī world at the time such as Qom and Baghdad.

عِلْمَ الدِّينِ وَالْعَمَلَ بِهِ بِالْأَثَارِ الصَّحِيحَةِ عَنِ الصَّادِقِينَ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ وَالسُّنَنِ
الْقَائِمَةِ الَّتِي عَلَيْهَا الْعَمَلُ، وَبِمَا يُؤَدِّي فَرَضَ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَسُنَّةَ نَبِيِّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ
عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ.

You said that you desire to have with you a “sufficient” book (*kitābun kāf*) in which the whole range of religious knowledge (*‘ilm al-dīn*) is gathered. [A book] that can suffice for a student (*muta‘allim*); to which a seeker of guidance (*mustarshad*) can make reference; and from which can take the one who desires [to acquire] the knowledge of religion and acting upon it on the basis of authentic reports (*āthār al-ṣaḥīḥa*) from the *ṣādiqīn* (truthful ones) [i.e., Imams], peace be upon them, and the established *sunan* (precedents), upon which action is [supposed to be] based, and by which the obligation of Allāh, mighty and majestic, and the *sunna* of His prophet, blessings of Allāh be upon him and his family, is fulfilled.

The title al-Kulaynī chose for the book, *al-Kāfī* or “The Sufficient,” is directly related to the unnamed contemporary’s appeal for a *kitābun kāf* (“sufficient book”) above. That is to say, the book had to cover all subjects such that no additional book is needed.

Also of note is that the target audience of the book was not restricted to senior scholars, rather, the book was envisioned as being useful for students beginning their journey of seeking knowledge, as well as those among the laity who merely wanted to discharge their obligations under the law.

This may help explain why al-Kulaynī does not typically delve into technical detail in the book, nor elaborate on the strengths and weaknesses of arguments made by previous scholars who had taken different positions about a matter, before giving justification for his own personal preference.

Al-Kulaynī ends the passage by encapsulating the fervent hope the

unnamed contemporary had for the book:

وَقُلْتُ: لَوْ كَانَ ذَلِكَ، رَجَوْتُ أَنْ يَكُونَ ذَلِكَ سَبَبًا يَتَدَارَكُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى بِمُعُونَتِهِ
وَتَوْفِيقِهِ إِخْوَانَنَا وَأَهْلَ مِلَّتِنَا، وَيُقْبِلُ بِهِمْ إِلَى مَرَادِهِمْ.

You said that if this [book] were to happen then you hope that it would become a means through which Allāh, the Exalted, takes hold of our brethren and co-religionists, by His assistance and facilitation, and leads them to their ultimate goals.

3. Did al-Kulaynī Only Include the *Ṣaḥīḥ*?

While there is no explicit declaration in al-Kulaynī's words to the effect that "there is nothing but the *ṣaḥīḥ* in my book," the unnamed contemporary had requested a practical book for acquiring religious knowledge and acting upon it in day-to-day life "based on the authentic reports (*āthār al-ṣaḥīḥa*) from the *ṣādiqīn* [Imams]," and al-Kulaynī seemingly fulfils this. Al-Kulaynī says towards the end of the introduction which was evidently written after⁴⁶ he had finished composing the book:⁴⁷

وَقَدْ بَسَّرَ اللَّهُ، وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ، تَأْلِيفَ مَا سَأَلْتُ، وَأَرْجُو أَنْ يَكُونَ بِحَيْثُ تَوَحَّيْتُ،
فَمَهْمَا كَانَ فِيهِ مِنْ تَفْصِيلٍ فَلَمْ تُفْصِرْ نَيْتُنَا فِي إِهْدَاءِ النَّصِيحَةِ، إِذْ كَانَتْ

⁴⁶ Apart from speaking of the work as finished in the passage translated, another piece of evidence demonstrating that al-Kulaynī's introduction was written after completing the book is when he comments in the introduction that he not fully satisfied with the length of *Kitāb al-ḥujja* (a sub-book) as found within *al-Kāfi* and promises: "If the appointed term [i.e. death] is delayed then we shall author a book that is more comprehensive and complete than it, wherein we will fulfil its due, if Allāh, the Exalted, wills"; see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:9. Alas! He was never able to accomplish this.

⁴⁷ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:9.

وَاجِبَةٌ لِإِخْوَانِنَا وَأَهْلِ مِلَّتِنَا، مَعَ مَا رَجَوْنَا أَنْ نَكُونَ مُشَارِكِينَ لِكُلِّ مَنْ افْتَبَسَ مِنْهُ، وَعَمِلَ بِمَا فِيهِ فِي دَهْرِنَا هَذَا، وَفِي غَايِرِهِ إِلَى انْقِضَاءِ الدُّنْيَا.

Allāh, may He be praised, has made easy the authoring of what you requested. I hope that it is as you had envisioned. Whatever deficiency there may be in it then [rest assured that] there was no shortage in our intention to present goodly counsel [through it]. For that is obligatory [on us] towards our brothers and co-religionists. Besides our hope that we be a partner [in the reward] of whoever is guided through it, and acts based upon what is in it, in this present age of ours, and in the future, until the end of the world.⁴⁸

Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104/1693) was one of the first scholars to draw attention to this passage⁴⁹ and use it to assert that al-Kulaynī only included the reports that were *ṣaḥīḥ*.

Surely, however, this is a case of reading too much into what is essentially flowery prose—as is conventional in the introduction of books—and seeking from it a precision that is not there. An easy demonstration of this is that not all the reports in the book are from the “*ṣādiqīn*” or Imams; rather, fallible figures such as companions and others are quoted,⁵⁰ so if this is possible then perhaps the condition

⁴⁸ I say: It has happened as he hoped because of the sincerity of his intention. May Allāh reward him amply!

⁴⁹ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā al-Ḥusaynī al-Jalālī (Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth: 1993), 30:195–197. This position is taken up and defended vigorously by Mirzā al-Nūrī (d. 1320/1902); see Ḥusayn al-Nūrī, *Khātimat Mustadrak al-Wasāʾil* (Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth: 2008), 3:480.

⁵⁰ Sayyid al-Khoei mentions 12 examples of al-Kulaynī narrating from an individual other than the Imams; see Sayyid Abū l-Qāsim al-Khoei, *Muʿjam*

that all the reports should be *ṣaḥīḥ* is also not as water-tight.

Furthermore, and even if it is granted that it was al-Kulaynī's aim to strictly include only the *ṣaḥīḥ*, then what al-Kulaynī deemed to be *ṣaḥīḥ* in his eyes is not binding on the scholars who came after him, mainly because he does not specify or define what *ṣaḥīḥ* means to him and how he arrives at such a judgment which may be subjective and open to dispute.⁵¹

See addendum 2 for the difference between how *qudamā'* (early scholars) and *muta'akhhirīn* (later scholars) use the term "*ṣaḥīḥ*."

4. Al-Kulaynī and the Three Principles

Al-Kulaynī must have been aware of the presence of fabricated reports attributed to the Imams, but he does not explain his methodology of selecting reports for inclusion in the book.

However, there is a critical passage towards the end of the introduction where al-Kulaynī outlines three general principles that should be followed in the face of contradiction between reports, for this was the greatest concern of the unnamed contemporary who prompted the authoring of the book:

فَاعْلَمْ يَا أَخِي، أَرْشَدَكَ اللَّهُ، أَنَّهُ لَا يَسَعُ أَحَدًا تَمْيِيزُ شَيْءٍ مِّمَّا اخْتَلَفَتِ الرِّوَايَةُ

rijāl al-ḥadīth (Mu'assasat al-Imām al-Khū'ī al-Islāmiyya: n.d.), 1:83–85. This is not an exhaustive list and there are other instances that could be added.

⁵¹ Thus, we find that scholars who come immediately after al-Kulaynī such as al-Ṣadūq and al-Ṭūsī did not deal with all the reports in *al-Kāfī* as though they were above reproach and went on to reject a number of them. Sayyid al-Khoei gives one example of al-Ṣadūq rejecting a report in *al-Kāfī* in favour of a *tawqī'* (rescript) which he had in his possession in the handwriting of the Imam; see al-Khoei, *Mu'jam rijāl al-ḥadīth*, 1:26. He also gives five examples of al-Ṭūsī doing the same; see al-Khoei, *Mu'jam rijāl al-ḥadīth*, 1:28–33.

فِيهِ عَنِ الْعُلَمَاءِ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ بِرَأْيِهِ.

Know then, O my brother, may Allāh guide you, that it does not befit anyone to prefer one thing [position over another] in that [matter] which the reports from the scholars [the Imams] have opposed [each other] by using his personal opinion.

إِلَّا عَلَى مَا أَطْلَقَهُ الْعَالَمُ يَقُولُهُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: «أُعْرَضُوهَا عَلَى كِتَابِ اللَّهِ، فَمَا وَافَقَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ فَخُذُوهُ، وَمَا خَالَفَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ فَرُدُّوهُ».

Except [on the basis of] that which the scholar [Imam] had stated in his words: “Compare it with the Book of Allāh, so that which is consistent with the Book of Allāh, Mighty and Majestic, then take it, and that which opposes the Book of Allāh then reject it.”

وَقَوْلُهُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: «دَعُوا مَا وَافَقَ الْقَوْمَ، فَإِنَّ الرُّشْدَ فِي خِلَافِهِمْ».

And his words: “Abandon that which is in agreement with the group [i.e., the non-Shī‘a], for the truth is in opposing them.”⁵²

وَقَوْلُهُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: «خُذُوا بِالْمُجْمَعِ عَلَيْهِ، فَإِنَّ الْمُجْمَعِ عَلَيْهِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ».

And his words: “Take that which is united upon, for there is no doubt in that which is united upon.”

⁵² Newman renders this as: “there is integrity (*rushd*) in the disagreement within the community” which is a complete mistranslation and makes it seem as though the Imam was encouraging disagreement within the Shī‘ī community!; see Newman, *The Formative Period*, 100. In fact, *qawm* here refers to the non-Shī‘ī and adopting a position which is contrary to theirs will lead to *rushd* or guidance (not integrity) because it will have circumvented *taqiyya* as is explained in this paper.

al-Kulaynī's Introduction	The <i>maqḥūla</i> of 'Umar b. Ḥaṇẓala
إِلَّا عَلَى مَا أَطْلَقَهُ الْعَالَمُ بِقَوْلِهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: «أَعْرَضُوهَا عَلَى كِتَابِ اللَّهِ، فَمَا وَافَقَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ فَخُذُوهُ، وَمَا خَالَفَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ فَرُدُّوهُ».	قَالَ: يُنْظَرُ، فَمَا وَافَقَ حُكْمُهُ حُكْمَ الْكِتَابِ.
وَقَوْلُهُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: «دَعُوا مَا وَافَقَ الْقَوْمَ، فَإِنَّ الرُّشْدَ فِي خِلَافِهِمْ».	قَالَ: مَا خَالَفَ الْعَامَّةَ فَفِيهِ الرِّشَادُ.
وَقَوْلُهُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: «خُذُوا بِالْمُجْمَعِ عَلَيْهِ، فَإِنَّ الْمُجْمَعِ عَلَيْهِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ».	فَإِنَّ الْمُجْمَعِ عَلَيْهِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ.

Table 1. The comparison of al-Kulaynī's introduction and the *maqḥūla* of 'Umar b. Ḥaṇẓala.

Note that all the three principles to be used in dealing with contradiction are derived directly from the words of the Imam, which confirms the depiction of al-Kulaynī as a traditionist who does not see “reason” as having a primary role in defining creed or law.

A careful analysis of the key words found in this passage reveals that all three principles are to be found in a single report which al-Kulaynī himself transmits in *al-Kāfi* (see Table 1).⁵³ This is the report called the *maqḥūla* (accepted report) of 'Umar b. Ḥaṇẓala.⁵⁴

Now that it is known that the *maqḥūla* very likely influenced al-Kulaynī's thinking, since principles found in it also appear near-verbatim

⁵³ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:67–68.

⁵⁴ So-called because the report is traditionally “accepted” by scholars even if its chain is not technically *ṣaḥīḥ*. While the rest of the narrators in the chain are *thiqa*, 'Umar the primary narrator himself is unmentioned in the books of *rijāl*. Of course, this fact in of itself would not necessarily make his report not *ṣaḥīḥ* in the estimation of the *qudamā'* as is explained in addendum 2 of this paper.

in his introduction, it would be useful to delve deeper into it.⁵⁵

4.1 Analysing the *maqḅūla*

The *maqḅūla* is a significant report much discussed by Shīʿī jurists to this day because it addresses what is to be done when reports narrated by different companions contradict each other. The Imam provides principles to be applied sequentially to resolve the deadlock.

The *maqḅūla* begins with the companion ʿUmar asking Imam al-Ṣādiq whether it would be allowed for two Shīʿa who have a dispute between themselves about a debt or inheritance (financial matter) to go to the *sultān* (temporal ruler) and the *quḍāt* (judges) to obtain a ruling from them.

The Imam likens this to submitting to the authority of the *ṭāghūt* (authorities apart from Allāh), and whatever gain issues from the ruling to be illegitimate even if one was in the right.⁵⁶

Rather, the correct course of action would be to seek out from among the Shīʿī one who has “transmitted our [i.e., the Imams’] *ḥadīths*,” has looked into “our *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*” and has “known our rulings,” and submit to his judgment, for the Imam officially appoints such a one as judge over the disputants.

ʿUmar asks what should be done if the disputing parties agree between themselves to each appoint a candidate who meets the above criteria to look into the issue, and the two come to opposing judgments, basing their difference on divergent reports attributed to “you” (i.e., the Imams).

⁵⁵ Newman discusses al-Kulaynī’s *muqaddima* but does not link it to the *maqḅūla* of ʿUmar b. Ḥaṇẓala as is done in the present work.

⁵⁶ While the context of the *maqḅūla* has to do with opposing verdicts of judges in a court setting, it was considered to have great ramifications for cases of contradictory reports in so far as the Imāmi judges were not ruling based on their *raʾy* (personal opinion) or *qiyās* (analogical reasoning) but textual reports attributed to the Imams which could contradict.

The Imam declares that the ruling to be followed is the one pronounced by the one who is the more morally upright (*a'dal*) of the two, the more learned (*afqah*), the more truthful in speech (*aṣḍaq*), and the more pious (*awra*).

‘Umar asks what is to be done when both candidates are equally matched in these areas such that “no-one of them has precedence over the other.”

The Imam replies:⁵⁷

فَقَالَ: «يُنْظَرُ إِلَى مَا كَانَ مِنْ رَوَايَتِهِمْ عَنَّا فِي ذَلِكَ الَّذِي حَكَمَّا بِهِ، الْمُجْمَعُ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَصْحَابِكَ، فَيُؤْخَذُ بِهِ مِنْ حُكْمِنَا، وَيُتْرَكُ الشَّأْدُ الَّذِي لَيْسَ بِمَشْهُورٍ عِنْدَ أَصْحَابِكَ، فَإِنَّ الْمُجْمَعُ عَلَيْهِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ».

You look for that report attributed to us and on whose basis they rule which is *mujma‘ ‘alayhi* [united upon] by your fellows so it is taken as being our judgment, and the *shādh* which is not famous in the estimation of your fellows is abandoned, for there is no doubt in that which is united upon.

‘Umar asks:

قُلْتُ: «إِذَا كَانَ الْحَبْرَانِ عَنْكُمَا مَشْهُورَيْنِ قَدْ رَوَاهُمَا التِّقَاتُ عَنْكُمَا؟»

What if both reports from you are famous (*mashhūr*) and narrated by *thiqāt* (trustworthy narrators) from you?

The above quoted statement is key, because it is a restatement of ‘Umar’s understanding of where one stands so far in the decision tree:

⁵⁷ Notice that it is at this stage that the Imam shifts from the personal qualities of the candidate (and transmitter of reports from the Imam) to the nature of the report itself. This is important because what was required of the Shī‘ī was to submit to the authority of the Imam as per the words of a narrator they could trust, not to directly engage in criticism of the *matn* (content of the report) based on our deficient intellect.

What if both reports are transmitted by those matched in their trustworthiness (*thiqāt*), on top of which, none of the reports are “united upon,” that is, both reports (and the positions they advocate) are famous and widely accepted (*mashhūr*) such that neither can be considered *shādh*?⁵⁸

To put it differently, the Imam has given two tie-breakers in cases of contradiction so far: The relative *wathāqa* (trustworthiness) of the two knowledgeable individuals and the *shuhra* (fame) of the prooftext or position they advocate.

It is when both are equally balanced that the Imam introduces an additional principle saying:

قَالَ: «يُنْظَرُ فَمَا وَافَقَ حُكْمُهُ حُكْمَ الْكِتَابِ وَالسُّنَّةِ وَخَالَفَ الْعَامَّةَ، فَيُؤْخَذُ بِهِ، وَيُتْرَكُ مَا خَالَفَ حُكْمُهُ حُكْمَ الْكِتَابِ وَالسُّنَّةِ وَوَافَقَ الْعَامَّةَ».

You look into [them], so that [report] whose ruling is consistent with the ruling of the Book and the *sunna* and opposes the ‘*amma* [non-Shī‘ī] then it is taken, and that [report] whose ruling opposes the ruling of the Book and the *sunna* and is in agreement with the ‘*amma* is abandoned.

This principle is a joint one with two related variables: Consistency with the Qur’ān and the *sunna* while at the same time deviation from the practice of the ‘*amma*. Many have misunderstood this and treat each independently. Opposition with the ‘*amma* only becomes a factor when a consistency test against Qur’ān and the *sunna* cannot break the dead-lock.

‘Umar is aware of this fact and neutralises the first variable by asking what is to be done when both referred-to *faqīhs* (knowledgeable

⁵⁸ The Imam draws a distinction between *mujma‘ ‘alayhi* and the *shādh*, defining the latter as “that which is not famous among your companions.” Consequently, the author of the present work feels reasonably justified in defining *mujma‘ ‘alayhi* as that which most (not all of the companions) are “united upon,” in other words, the majority.

scholars)⁵⁹ buttress their position from the Qur'ān and the *sunna*, and one of the reports (and its purport) matches with the position of the *‘amma* while the other does not.

In other words, none of the reports can be said to be opposing the Book and the *sunna*, and the only distinction that can be drawn between them is how they stack up with the practice of the *‘amma*. Only then does the Imam instruct him to favour:

مَا خَالَفَ الْعَامَّةَ فَنِيهِ الرَّشَادُ.

That which opposes the *‘amma*, for there is guidance in it.

‘Umar proceeds to the scenario when both positions match the practice of the *‘amma*. The Imam answers that one should abandon the one that “their” rulers and judges are “more inclined towards.”

‘Umar’s final question is what to do if one cannot choose between the reports in all these different aspects. Everything being the same, the Imam asks him to “suspend” making a decision until “you meet your Imam.”

This is because:

فَإِنَّ الْوُقُوفَ عِنْدَ الشُّبُهَاتِ، خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْإِقْتِحَامِ فِي الْهَلَكَاتِ.

Halting in the face of doubts is better than rushing headlong into manifold destruction.

5. Did al-Kulaynī Apply *‘Ilm al-Rijāl*?

Al-Kulaynī mentions three of the principles found in the *maqbulā* in his introduction as follows:

1. Comparing with the Book of Allāh (and the *sunna*).
2. Taking that which opposes the *‘amma*.

⁵⁹ It is worthy of note that this is how ‘Umar comes to refer to the two candidates.

3. Looking for the “united upon” or consensus position. Alternatively, the “famous report” that is widely accepted.

There is one principle found in the *maq̣būla* which al-Kulaynī does not mention. This is the Imam’s initial response: Preferring the report of the one who is more morally upright, learned, truthful in speech, and pious; what ‘Umar succinctly put as “that which is transmitted by the *thiqāt*.”

Evaluating the status of a narrator in this way is a principle inspired directly from the words of the Imam and is essentially what is called *‘ilm al-rijāl*.⁶⁰

But why does al-Kulaynī not mention this principle at all? Is it because the *maq̣būla* is not the text which al-Kulaynī had in mind when writing the introduction after all? There are other reports which mention the principle of “comparing with the Qur’ān” which al-Kulaynī could have been referencing, but the other two principles are only found in the *maq̣būla*.

It is possible that al-Kulaynī forgot to mention it. For, he does not give the principles in the order they appear in the *maq̣būla* which perhaps indicates that he was relying on memory when recalling the contents of the *maq̣būla*.

Another possibility is that this principle goes unmentioned; being the first principle given by the Imam, it is assumed and already factored in by al-Kulaynī when selecting *ḥadīth* for inclusion, with the three remaining principles coming into play only when the reports of narrators well-matched in their status per *‘ilm al-rijāl* contradict.

This last possibility is strengthened when it is noted that a now-lost *Kitāb al-rijāl* is attributed to al-Kulaynī.⁶¹ Could this book have also

⁶⁰ This is a sufficient answer to those who claim that evaluating the *rijāl* has no basis in the *madhhab*. Does one need the Imam to tell us to prefer the report of the reliable one over the unknown or the suspect, when this is common sense and practised by all ‘*uqalā*’ (rational beings)?

⁶¹ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 377.

contained the grading of narrators, or was it more akin to the *Kitāb al-Rijāl* attributed to Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī (d. 274/888 or 280/894) which merely consists of names of narrators arranged chronologically?

It must be noted that the fact that al-Kulaynī does not mention *‘ilm al-rijāl* at all in the introduction means that all this remains speculative and more work needs to be done to determine how much importance al-Kulaynī attached to *‘ilm al-rijāl* if any.

6. The Utility of the Three Principles

Apart from *‘ilm al-rijāl* which does not get a mention, al-Kulaynī is ultimately pessimistic even about the three principles which he does mention in the introduction. The problem is not the principles themselves which are given by the Imam, but his (and our) inability to employ them effectively to solve the problem of contradictions in the majority of cases.

As he says:

وَنَحْنُ لَا نَعْرِفُ مِنْ جَمِيعِ ذَلِكَ إِلَّا أَقَلَّهُ.

But we do not know [the true position] from all that except a small minority.

The logic behind the first principle, which calls for selecting the report which is consistent with the Qur’ān,⁶² is that the authentic words of the Imams can never contradict the Qur’ān, as both originate from the same Divine stream. The problem is that both rulings may appear consistent to the reader, with the Qur’ān seemingly silent one way or another about a lot of rulings.⁶³

⁶² Note that the *maqḥūla* mentions both the Qur’ān and the *sunna* whereas al-Kulaynī only mentions the Qur’ān.

⁶³ According to Sayyid Ali al-Sistani, this principle can be very useful in the hands of a competent *faqīh* since comparing with the Qur’ān does not

The logic behind the second principle, which calls for selecting the report opposed to the *‘amma*, is that a number of the statements of the Imams were issued under *taqiyya* (dissimulation) as a result of the repressive atmosphere faced by the Imams and the Shī‘ī community. The Imams would sometimes answer in accordance with the position of the majority to safeguard detection of the Shī‘ī who would stand out if they diverged from the norm. The true position in such cases is the opposite of that which agrees with the *‘amma*. The problem is that the *‘amma* themselves are divided over a number of rulings, such that one cannot say what opposing them would entail in all cases.⁶⁴

The logic behind the third principle, which calls for selecting the report which is famous and backed up by the majority of the companions, is that the Imams would have ensured that the majority of their close companions had united upon the true position regardless of any *taqiyya*. The problem is that it is difficult for us to identify what the originally famous position of the companions was in specific cases.⁶⁵

7. A Way out of the Maze: The Principle of *Takhyr*

It is because he cannot apply the three principles effectively in most

mean finding the exact ruling in the Qur’ān but looking at which report is more attuned to the ‘spirit’ of the Qur’ān. This requires one to possess a holistic grasp of the Qur’ān and its underlying ethos; see Ali al-Sistani, *Hujjiyya khabar al-wāḥid*, transcribed by Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Rabbānī (n.p.: 2016), 23.

⁶⁴ This principle is effective for those practices which had become sectarian boundary-markers such as wiping the feet instead of washing them during ritual ablution, combining prayers, temporary marriage etc.

⁶⁵ The author of this present work considers this to be the greatest *qarīna* (contextual indicator) which has been lost with the passage of time. We cannot tell what the *mashhūr* position was among the earliest *aṣḥāb*. Of course, some of this is reflected in the number of reports in support of a position; but numerical superiority could be obscuring a more complex situation.

cases that al-Kulaynī comments:⁶⁶

وَلَا نَجِدُ شَيْئًا أَحْوَطَ وَلَا أَوْسَعَ مِنْ رَدِّ عِلْمِ ذَلِكَ كُلِّهِ إِلَى الْعَالِمِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ،
وَقَبُولِ مَا وَسِعَ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ فِيهِ بِقَوْلِهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: «بِأَيِّمَا أَخَذْتُمْ مِنْ بَابِ
التَّسْلِيمِ وَسِعَتْكُمْ».

And we do not find anything more in keeping with caution and more accommodating than ascribing the true knowledge of all that to the scholar [Imam] and accepting the lenience there is in the matter [as found] in his words:⁶⁷ “Whichever you take if done in submission covers you [pl].”

This is al-Kulaynī’s fall-back position to be used for the overwhelming majority of cases when he is unable to identify the true report in cases of contradiction: admit failure to recognise the true position which only the Imam knows, while taking advantage of the leeway given by freely selecting any of the reports (*takhyīr*) to act upon so long as it is attributed to the Imams. This suffices with the rationale that Allāh will accept it by virtue of one’s sincerity in attempting to follow the only legitimate authorities.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:9.

⁶⁷ Al-Kulaynī is quoting here a *ḥadīth* which he himself transmits in *al-Kāfi* and in which the companion Samā’a b. Mihrān asks Imam al-Ṣādiq what should be done if one encounters two contradictory transmissions, one permitting something and the other forbidding it. The Imam responds that he should “postpone” the decision until he can meet with one who informs him of the true position (i.e., the Imam). Al-Kulaynī immediately comments that in a variant of this report the Imam says: “Whichever [of the two] you take if done in submission covers you [sg.]”; see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:66.

⁶⁸ Newman mischaracterises the intent of the Imam by rendering this state-

The significance of this principle for al-Kulaynī is that it does not require some evidence to be martialled in support of one position or another (which is a difficult bar to clear) but merely “submission.”

This approach to resolving contradictions between reports in the *ḥadīth* corpus may not sit well with other scholars who come after him and have a more stringent criteria before acting upon a report.

8. Conclusion

Can the insights brought to the fore in this paper—al-Kulaynī’s pessimism in his ability to employ the three principles effectively, and his lenience in arbitrarily selecting any of the contradictory reports—be used to build a profile of al-Kulaynī as a traditionist who considers any attribution to the Imam as carrying weight by default, such that he acts upon any report, even if it is technically “weak,” if there is nothing contradicting it? This would explain why he does not provide a methodology for selecting *ḥadīth* in the first place, but only principles to resolve contradictions. However, much more work is needed to support such a conclusion.

ment: “Whatever you adhere to from the domain of *al-taslīm* [your surrender i.e. becoming a Muslim] is your strength. Allāh has facilitated [this], and to him be praise”; see Newman, *The Formative Period*, 100. First of all, it is not clear where he gets the last part “Allāh has facilitated ...” It is likely that he has taken the words of al-Kulaynī that follow and mistakenly considered them to be the words of the Imam. More importantly, the crux of what the Imam is saying and which al-Kulaynī wants to highlight, that it is permissible to choose (*takhyīr*) any of the contradicting reports and act upon it as long as done in submission to the Imam, is totally obfuscated by drawing an unwarranted link between *taslīm* in this context and becoming a Muslim as well as unjustifiably translating *wasī’akum* as “your strength.” His conclusion that “al-Kulaynī clearly did not see it as his task to reconcile apparently contradictory texts” which was “left to the Imam” whose return “was clearly expected to be imminent” is thus built on an erroneous basis; see Newman, *The Formative Period*, 101.

Addendum 1: Was *al-Kāfi* Approved by the Twelfth Imam?

There exists a claim that because *al-Kāfi* was authored during the lesser occultation when there still existed a link between the twelfth Imam and the larger community through his appointed deputies, the book was presented to the Imam who endorsed it.

The earliest that such thinking can be traced back to is in the words of Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266):⁶⁹

وَهَذَا الشَّيْخُ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَعْقُوبَ كَانَ حَيًّا فِي زَمَنِ وَكَلَاءِ الْمَهْدِيِّ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ:
عُثْمَانُ بْنُ سَعِيدٍ الْعَمَرِيُّ، وَوَلَدُهُ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ مُحَمَّدٌ، وَأَبِي الْقَاسِمِ حُسَيْنُ بْنُ
رُوحٍ، وَعَلِيُّ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ السَّمَرِيُّ، وَتُؤَيِّ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَعْقُوبَ قَبْلَ وَفَاةِ عَلِيِّ بْنِ
مُحَمَّدٍ السَّمَرِيِّ؛ لِأَنَّ عَلِيَّ بْنَ مُحَمَّدٍ السَّمَرِيَّ تُوِيَ فِي شَعْبَانَ سَنَةِ تِسْعٍ وَعِشْرِينَ
وَأَلَاثَمَائَةِ، وَهَذَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَعْقُوبَ الْكَلْبِيِّ تُوِيَ بِعُغْدَاذَ سَنَةِ ثَمَانٍ وَعِشْرِينَ
وَأَلَاثَمَائَةِ، فَتَصَانِيفُ هَذَا الشَّيْخِ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَعْقُوبَ وَرَوَايَاتُهُ فِي زَمَنِ الْوُكَلَاءِ
الْمَذْكُورِينَ فِي وَقْتِ نَحْدُ طَرِيقًا إِلَى تَحْقِيقِ مَنْقُولَاتِهِ وَتَصْدِيقِ مُصَنَّفَاتِهِ.

This *shaykh* Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb was alive in the period of the deputies (*wukalā’*) of the Mahdī, upon him be peace: ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī, his son Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad, Abū l-Qāsim Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ, and ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Sammārī. Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb died before the death of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Sammārī, for ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Sammārī died in Sha‘bān of the year 329 [941 C.E.]; whereas Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-al-Kulaynī died in Baghdad in the year 328 [939-940 C.E.]. Thus, the works authored by this *shaykh* Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb and his transmissions were in the period of the aforemen-

⁶⁹ ‘Alī b. Mūsā b. Ja‘far Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Kashf al-mahajja li-thamarat al-muhja* (Mu‘assasat Būstān Kitāb: 2009), 220.

tioned *wukalā*' and in a time where there existed an avenue for confirming his narrations and verifying his works.

Ibn Ṭāwūs merely opens the door to this possibility; however, it later assumes a life of its own among some. In particular, the following quotation is attributed to the Akhbārī scholar Mīrẓā Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Nabī (killed 1232/1817):⁷⁰

السَّيِّحُ أَبُو جَعْفَرٍ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَعْقُوبَ الْكَلِينِيُّ الرَّازِي، مُحْيِي طَرِيقَةِ أَهْلِ الْبَيْتِ عَلَى رَأْسِ الْمِائَةِ الثَّالِثَةِ، الْمُؤَلِّفُ لِجَامِعِ «الْكَافِي» فِي مُدَّةِ عِشْرِينَ سَنَةً، الْمُتَوَقَّى قَبْلَ وَفُوعِ الْعَبِيَّةِ الْكُبْرَى رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَالْأُولَى. وَكَتَابُهُ مُسْتَعْنٍ عَنِ الْإِطْرَاءِ، لِأَنَّهُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ كَانَ بِمَحْضَرِ نَوَائِهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ، وَقَدْ سَأَلَهُ بَعْضُ الشَّيْعَةِ مِنَ النَّائِيَةِ تَأْلِيفَ كِتَابِ «الْكَافِي» لِكُونِهِ بِحَضْرَةِ مَنْ يُفَاوِضُهُ وَيَذَكِّرُهُ مَنْ يَتَّقَى بِعِلْمِهِ، فَأَلَّفَ وَصَنَّفَ وَشَنَّفَ، وَحَكِي أَنَّهُ عُرِضَ عَلَيْهِ، فَقَالَ: «كَافٍ لِشَيْعَتِنَا».

The *shaykh* Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī, the enlivener of the path of the *ahl al-bayt* in the 3rd century [9th century C.E.], the author of the compilation '*al-Kāfi*' over a period of 20 years, who died before the occurrence of the greater occultation, may Allāh be pleased with him in the first [world] and the last. His book transcends mere praise, for he, may Allāh be pleased with him, was in the presence of his [i.e., the twelfth Imam's] deputies, and one of the Shī'a living in a remote land requested him to author the book "*al-Kāfi*" since he was in the presence of one with whom he could confer and dis-

⁷⁰ Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt fī aḥwāl al-ʿulamāʾ wa-l-sādāt* (Maktabat Ismāʿīliyyān: 2011), 6:116. Al-Khwānsārī (d. 1313/1895) is quoting from Mīrẓā Muḥammad's work *Munyat al-murtād fī dhikr nufāt al-ijtihād*.

cuss, whose knowledge he trusts, so he compiled, authored, and did well.⁷¹ It is related that it [i.e. the book] was presented to him [i.e. the Imam] so he commented: “It is sufficient for our Shī‘a.”

Here, an entirely unsourced report can be seen in which the book was in fact presented to the Imam and the Imam responded with a positive approbation. Even Mīrzā al-Nūrī (d. 1320/1902), whose reputation in being liberal in accepting *ḥadīth* is well-deserved, has this to say about this report, which he notes is being quoted widely:⁷²

وَلَيْسَ غَرَضِي مِنْ ذَلِكَ تَصْحِيحُ الْخَبَرِ الشَّائِعِ مِنْ أَنَّ هَذَا الْكِتَابَ عُرِضَ عَلَى الْحُجَّةِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ فَقَالَ: «إِنَّ هَذَا كَافٍ لِشِيعَتِنَا» فَإِنَّهُ لَا أَصْلَ لَهُ، وَلَا أَثَرَ لَهُ فِي مُؤَلَّفَاتِ أَصْحَابِنَا.

My aim in this [discussion] is not to confirm the widespread report to the effect that this book was presented to the *ḥujja* and so he responded, “this is sufficient for our Shī‘a”; for, this [report] has no basis (*aṣl*) nor trace in the works of our fellows.

While the possibility that the work was presented to the Imam hypothetically exists, if such a thing had happened, there would surely

⁷¹ As has been noted in this paper, the anonymous individual who prompted al-Kulaynī to author the book complained of not having access to one whose knowledge of the reports he could “trust”, with whom he could “discuss,” and to whom he could “defer.” Mīrzā Muḥammad takes this to mean that al-Kulaynī had access to such a one and that this was code language alluding to the deputy and through him the Imam. However, in the opinion of this present work’s author, this is reading too much into that statement.

⁷² Ḥusayn al-Nūrī, *Khātimat Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, 3:470. Note that Mīrzā al-Nūrī is confident that the book was actually presented to the Imam and tries to argue for this, but not on the basis of this supposed report.

be some positive evidence indicating it. No wonder then ‘Allāma al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1699) uses quite harsh words for a scholar whom he does not name, most likely Khalil al-Qazwīnī (d. 1089/1678),⁷³ who used to state it as fact:⁷⁴

وَأَمَّا جَزْمُ بَعْضِ الْمُجَازِفِينَ بِكَوْنِ جَمِيعِ الْكَافِي مَعْرُوضًا عَلَى الْقَائِمِ عَلَيْهِ
السَّلَامُ لِكَوْنِهِ فِي بَلَدَةِ السُّفَرَاءِ فَلَا يَخْفَى مَا فِيهِ عَلَى ذِي لُبٍّ.

As for the assertion of one of the foolhardy to the effect that the whole of *al-Kāfi* was presented to the Qā’im because he was in the land of the envoys (*sufarā’*) then [the incorrectness of] this is not hidden from anyone who possesses the slightest intellect.

Addendum 2: Only a Third of *al-Kāfi* Is *Ṣaḥīḥ*

A staple of contemporary anti-Shī’ī polemics is that most of *al-Kāfi* is *da‘f* (weak). This begs the question; if al-Kulaynī was aiming to collect the *ṣaḥīḥ*, how might this have arisen?

The exact number of *ḥadīth* found in *al-Kāfi* is subject to dispute depending on how you count.⁷⁵ Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1772) quotes

⁷³ Hence ‘Abdullāh al-Afandī (d. 1130/1717) says in Khalil’s entry: “Amongst his stranger opinions is the position that *al-Kāfi* as a whole was looked over by the *ṣāḥib* (i.e. twelfth Imam) who deemed it good ... and that all its reports are true and obligatory to act upon”; see ‘Abdullāh al-Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā’ wa ḥiyāḍ al-fuḍalā’* (Manshūrāt Maktabat Ayatollah al-‘Uzmā al-Mar‘ashī al-Najafī: 1982), 2:261.

⁷⁴ Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Mir’āt al-‘uqūl fī sharḥ akhbār āl al-rasūl* (Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1983), 1:22.

⁷⁵ The latest edition of *al-Kāfi* by the Dār al-Ḥadīth, which runs to 15 volumes, puts the number at 15,413.

an unnamed scholar⁷⁶ giving the following breakdown “as per the terminology coined by the *muta’akhhirīn*”:⁷⁷

قَالَ بَعْضُ مَشَايِخِنَا الْمُتَأَخِّرِينَ: «أَمَّا الْكَافِي فَجَمِيعُ أَحَادِيثِهِ حُصِرَتْ فِي سِتَّةٍ عَشَرَ أَلْفَ حَدِيثٍ وَمِائَةٍ وَتِسْعَةٍ وَتِسْعِينَ حَدِيثًا، وَالصَّحِيحُ مِنْهَا بِاصْطِلَاحِ مَنْ تَأَخَّرَ خَمْسَةُ آلَافٍ وَاثْنَانِ وَسَبْعُونَ حَدِيثًا، وَالْحَسَنُ مِائَةٌ وَأَرْبَعَةٌ وَأَرْبَعُونَ حَدِيثًا، وَالْمَوْثِقُ مِائَةٌ حَدِيثٍ وَأَلْفُ حَدِيثٍ وَثَمَانِيَةٌ عَشَرَ حَدِيثًا وَالْقَوِيُّ مِنْهَا اثْنَانِ وَثَلَاثُمِائَةٌ حَدِيثٍ وَالضَّعِيفُ مِنْهَا أَرْبَعُمِائَةٌ وَتِسْعَةُ آلَافٍ وَخَمْسَةُ وَثَمَانُونَ حَدِيثًا».

As for *al-Kāfi*—the total number of reports in it comes to 16,199 reports: 5072 are *ṣaḥīḥ*, 144 are *ḥasan*, 1118 are *muwaththaq*, 302 are *qawī* and 9485 are *ḍa’īf*.

This would mean that only about 31 percent of the book is *ṣaḥīḥ* and approximately 59 percent of the book is weak. However, this line of attack is borne out of ignorance as to the difference between *ṣaḥīḥ* as it has come to be defined by the *muta’akhhirīn* and the way it was understood by the *qudamā’* such as al-Kulaynī.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ This is most likely Shahīd al-Thānī (d. 965/1557 or 966/1558).

⁷⁷ Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Baḥrānī, *Lu’lu’at al-Baḥrayn fī l-ijāzāt wa tarājīm rijāl al-ḥadīth*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-‘Ulūm (Maktabat Fakhrāwī: 2008), 376–377. If you add these numbers together, the total is not 16,121 not 16,199. Āqā Buzurg al-Tihrānī (d. 1970) reproduces the same count but with an error in the number of *muwaththaq* which is given as 178 instead of 1118; see Muḥammad Muḥsin al-Tihrānī, *al-Dharī’a ilā taṣānīf al-Shī’a* (Dār Al-Aḍwā’: 1983), 17:245.

⁷⁸ In the opinion of this present work’s author, the era of al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) can be considered to be the boundary-marker between the age of the *qudamā’* (early scholars) and the *muta’akhhirīn* (later scholars). This is for many reasons, but chief among them is that those who came after al-Ṭūsī do not have independent routes to earlier material except predominantly via al-Ṭūsī himself.

The modern definition,⁷⁹ which is highly specific and based solely on studying the narrators in the chain of a report, is anachronistically back-projected to a period before it was in use.⁸⁰ A *ṣaḥīḥ* report for the *qudamā'* (early scholars)—according to later reconstruction—was any report that they were confident originated from the Imam.⁸¹ This could be a report of a *thiqa* narrator (in accordance with the modern definition), but also a report that is weak in chain but whose meaning is established by corroboration (numerous reports saying the same thing), or even the report of narrator about whom nothing good or bad is known (*majhūl*) provided there is no disqualifying factor.⁸²

Put another way, the technical definition of *ṣaḥīḥ* as applied by later scholars is merely a subset of how the earlier scholars applied it. The glaring categorical error of judging an early book with a standard developed later should be obvious.

Another problem with the modern four-fold classification is that a lot of diverse phenomena is subsumed under the single category of *ḍaʿīf* without distinguishing between different shades of weakness. Thus, both the outright *mawḍūʿ* (fabrication) and a report with a single

⁷⁹ Fully connected chain of consisting of solely *thiqa* and Imāmī narrators.

⁸⁰ The origins of the modern four-fold classification of *ḥadīth* can be traced back to Aḥmad b. Ṭāwūs (d. 673/1274) and his student ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325).

⁸¹ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-ʿĀmilī, *Mashriq al-shamsayn wa iksīr al-saʿadatayn*, ed. Mahdī al-Rajāʾī (Muʿassasat al-Ṭabʿ wa-l-Nashr al-Ṭabīʿa li-l-Āstāna al-Raḍawiyya al-Muqaddasa: 2008), 26; Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī, *Muntaqā l-jumān fī l-aḥādīth al-ṣiḥāḥ wa-l-ḥisān*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Muʿassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1983), 14–15.

⁸² Muḥammad Taqī al-Tustarī, who was the most original *ḥadīth* scholar of his generation in the opinion of this present work's author, says: "So we see that the *qudamā'*, and just as they act upon (purport of) the report whose transmitters are praise-worthy, also act upon the report whose transmitters are not weakened. It is only the reports of those censured which they repudiate"; see al-Tustarī, *Qāmūs al-Rijāl*, 1:38.

majhūl narrator technically fall under the same category.

A large percentage of the 9000 or so weak-by-chain reports in *al-Kāfi* are labelled so merely because they contain one or two *majhūl* narrators in the chain with the chain being perfectly fine otherwise. These are narrators who may not have been declared *thiqa* but nothing negative is known about them. Many of them would have been reporting what they heard accurately and there are other ways of gaining confidence in their reports.

Consequently, when the reports on the same topic and those placed in the same chapter by al-Kulaynī are studied together, instead of looking at each report in isolation, one finds that a lot of the *ḍaʿīf* reports are corroborated by other reports in the chapter or share the same meaning with *ṣaḥīḥ* reports, altering the statistics significantly.⁸³

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⁸³ Consider a scenario where a chapter in *al-Kāfi* has a total of 7 reports. 2 reports are *ṣaḥīḥ* per the modern definition and 5 are weak-in-chain, but all 7 reports are essentially saying the same thing. How many *ṣaḥīḥ* reports do we have? A count which only looks at each report in isolation says 2 whereas in reality it is 7.

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Tawassul, Istighātha, and Shafā‘a in Twelver Shī‘ī Islam: A Qur’ānic, Ḥadīth, and Historical Analysis of Their Compatibility with Tawḥīd

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Abstract

This article investigates the theological validity of three devotional practices—*tawassul*, *istighātha*, and *shafā‘a*—through which believers seek divine favour via intermediaries. Focusing on their role within Twelver Shī‘ī Islam, it explores ongoing debates about their permissibility and compatibility with the doctrine of Islamic monotheism (*tawḥīd*). The study contextualises their evolution from pre-Islamic Arabia, where polytheistic intermediary practices were reoriented under Islam to affirm divine sovereignty, and traces their continuity through early Islamic, post-Prophetic and contemporary periods. By examining key Qur’ānic verses and *ḥadīth* from both Shī‘ī and Sunnī sources, the study establishes that intermediaries operate solely under God’s permission, negating accusations of polytheism (*shirk*). From a Twelver Shī‘ī theological perspective, such practices are understood as manifestations of Divine Mercy that operate entirely under God’s authority. The article refutes Salafi-Wahhabi critiques, particularly objections to posthumous intercession, by arguing that Prophets and Imams retain a spiritually dynamic role in *barzakh* (the intermediate realm), enabling them to intercede by divine will. The study concludes that *tawassul*, *istighātha*, and *shafā‘a* reinforce monotheistic principles, enhance spiritual connectivity, and remain integral to Shī‘ī devotional practice.

Keywords: *Tawassul, istighātha, shafā‘a, intercession, tawḥīd, shirk.*

1. Introduction

The use of intermediaries in Islamic spiritual practice—particularly *tawassul*, *istighātha*, and *shafā'a*—has long been a subject of debate in the Muslim world. These practices involve seeking help from God through the mediation of the Prophet (s.a.w.), the Imams (a.s.), other revered personalities,¹ sacred objects, and symbols² associated with divine grace and blessings. While many Muslims view these practices as means of strengthening their connection to God, others view them as reliance on beings other than Him, raising theological concerns about their permissibility.

This article explores the validity of *tawassul*, *istighātha* and *shafā'a* from a Twelver Shī'ī perspective by examining pertinent verses from the Qur'ān,³ *ḥadīth* literature, and historical sources. These are analysed alongside secondary sources comprising extensive commentary from Twelver Shī'ī scholars. The study assesses the theological implications of these practices and investigates whether they align with the core principles of Islam or represent a departure from its original

¹ By “revered personalities,” I refer to individuals who, while not divinely appointed like the Prophet (s.a.w.) or the Imams (a.s.), are held in high esteem due to their elevated spiritual status, as perceived in the eyes of God. This includes figures such as ‘Abbās and Zaynab, the children of ‘Alī (a.s.), and Muḥammad, the son of ‘Alī al-Hādī (a.s.).

² Sacred objects and symbols (*sha'ā'ir Allāh*) refer to sacred landmarks, rituals, and objects that signify devotion to God and serve as means of spiritual remembrance. The Qur'ān designates *al-Ṣafā* and *al-Marwa* as part of these sacred symbols (Q 2:158) and emphasises that revering them is a sign of piety (Q 22:32). Exegetes interpret *sha'ā'ir* broadly, encompassing acts of worship, sacred sites, and objects associated with Divine remembrance. In the Shī'ī tradition, this concept extends to mourning rituals for Imam al-Ḥusayn (a.s.), relics of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a.s.), and other elements that foster spiritual connection to God.

³ The Qur'ānic translations in this article are generally based on Ali Quli Qarai's translation.

teachings.

2. Definition of Key Terms

The terms *tawassul*, *istighātha*, and *shafā'a* derive their technical meanings from their original lexical roots, forming the basis for their theological interpretations. This link between language and usage is essential for understanding these concepts within the framework of Islamic belief and practice.

The root *w-s-l* is defined as “to seek to gain access or turn with a request.”⁴ *Tawassul*, or *wasīla*, refers to “a means of becoming near to a thing; it may be rendered a means of access, nearness, intimacy, ingratiating oneself, attachment, or connexion.”⁵ In practice, *tawassul* refers to seeking nearness to God through revered personalities, sacred objects, or symbols associated with Divine Grace.

As for *gh-w-th*, it is defined as “call for help, aid, succour.”⁶ *Is-tighātha*, is therefore, defined as “the act of seeking, desiring, or demanding aid or succour, either from or by means of a person or entity.”⁷ In practice, it refers to seeking help or aid directly from the Prophets, Imams, other revered figures, sacred objects or symbols associated with Divine authority and blessings, while keeping in mind the authority vested in them by God. It represents a more direct form of seeking assistance from the intermediary compared to *tawassul* as the intermediary is directly called upon.

Sh-f' is defined as “to double, attach, add, subjoin, enclose.”⁸ *Shafā'a* is defined as “the act of joining oneself to another as an

⁴ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J Milton Cowan (Spoken Language Services, Inc: 1976), 1069.

⁵ Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Librairie du Liban: 1863), 3053.

⁶ Wehr, *A Dictionary*, 687.

⁷ Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2305.

⁸ Wehr, *A Dictionary*, 478.

aider to him or a petitioner on their behalf; and in most instances the former person is one of higher station than the latter.”⁹ In theological terms, *shafā'a* denotes intercession: the act of an exalted figure—such as a Prophet or Imam—petitioning on behalf of an individual. This includes both seeking forgiveness in the hereafter and invoking blessings in this world.¹⁰

Istishfā' is therefore defined as seeking or asking for *shafā'a*. In its technical usage, it differs from *istighātha* in that it includes an explicit request to God, with the intermediary merely being asked to supplicate or intercede on one's behalf.

Tawassul and *shafā'a* are frequently translated as “intercession.” However, to preserve their distinct theological functions, *tawassul* is rendered in the present work as “mediation,” *shafā'a* as “intercession,” and *istishfā'* as “requesting intercession.” *Istighātha* is rendered as “imploration,” reflecting its urgent and direct appeal to a revered figure for assistance, always within the framework of Divine authority.

These terms, which are interpreted differently across various Islamic schools of thought, will be used throughout the present work in accordance with the specific definitions outlined above.

⁹ Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1571.

¹⁰ The Shī'ī scholars are unanimous in affirming that *shafā'a* encompasses the pardoning of sins in the hereafter. As for this world, Ja'far Subḥānī mentions that up until the 8th/14th century, there was consensus on its affirmation (Ja'far Subḥānī, *al-'Aqida al-Islāmiyya 'alā Ḍaw' Madhhab Ahl al-Bayt* (a.s.) (Mu'assasat al-Imām al-Ṣādiq: 1998), 247). Some scholars maintain that *shafā'a* can also be sought for both spiritual and material benefits, as revered figures may serve as means for Divine Mercy in securing forgiveness and worldly blessings. This view is supported by supplications taught by the Imams (a.s.), including those of Imam al-Sajjād (a.s.) (the likes of *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya—Du'ā' 20: Makārim al-Akhlaq*) in which he invokes blessings upon the Prophet (s.a.w.) and his family as a means of attaining Divine favour in this world.

Term	Translation	Definition	Direction of Request	Example
<i>Tawassul</i> (تَوَسَّلُ)	Mediation	Seeking closeness to God by invoking the status of revered figures, sacred objects, symbols, or rituals associated with Divine Grace.	The believer petitions God, using the intermediary as a means.	"O God, I ask You by Your Messenger, the Messenger of Mercy."
<i>Istighātha</i> (اِسْتِغَاثَة)	Imploration	Directly imploring an intermediary for aid, while implicitly recognising that any assistance comes only through God's will.	The believer addresses the intermediary, while acknowledging that any help is granted by God.	"O Muḥammad, help me in this matter."
<i>Istishfāʿ</i> (اِسْتِشْفَاع)	Request for intercession	The act of the believer asking an intermediary to intercede with God on their behalf, seeking mercy or benefit.	The believer asks the intermediary to intercede with God.	"O ʿAlī, I ask you to intercede for me with God."
<i>Shafāʿa</i> (شَفَاعَة)	Intercession	The act of intercession itself, whereby an intermediary appeals to God on behalf of a believer, seeking mercy or benefit.	The intermediary appeals to God on behalf of the believer.	The Prophet (s.a.w.) appeals to God: "O Lord, forgive this believer, for he sought nearness to You through me and trusted in Your mercy."

Table 1. Meanings and functions of *tawassul*, *istighātha*, *istishfāʿ*, and *shafāʿa*.

1	All involve seeking divine aid through revered personalities, objects, or symbols associated with God's grace.
2	Each practice relies on Divine Will and permission.
3	They function as means to strengthen the believer's connection to God.
4	They affirm the elevated status of the intermediaries.
5	They reinforce the belief that intermediaries possess no independent power; all efficacy is contingent upon God's decree.

Table 2. Similarities between *tawassul*, *istighātha* and *shafā'a*.

3. Historical Context

3.1 Pre-Islamic Arabia (Period of *Jāhiliyya*)

In pre-Islamic Arabia, various tribes practiced polytheism, worshipping multiple idols and deities alongside God.¹¹ While many acknowledged God as the ultimate Creator and Sustainer,¹² they believed these idols and tribal gods could serve as intermediaries to gain His favour. They perceived God as distant and beyond direct access, leading them to

¹¹ In *Kitāb al-aṣnām*, Ibn al-Kalbī records that the idol Wadd was worshipped by the Kalb tribe, Suwa' by Hudhayl, Yaghūth by Madhhij and Jurash, Ya'ūq by Khaywān and Naṣr by Ḥimyar (Hishām Ibn al-Kalbī, *Kitāb al-aṣnām* (al-Maṭba'at al-Amīriyya: 1914)). A similar account is attributed to Ibn 'Abbās, though with slight variations in details, as noted in *Tafsīr al-Mizān* in the discussion under Q 71:23 (Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Tafsīr al-Mizān*, trans. Tawus Raja, <https://www.almizan.org/>, accessed 31st March 2025, 39:47–49). Additionally, *Kitāb al-aṣnām* documents other tribes that engaged in idol worship and lists the idols they adopted.

¹² Q 29:61:

﴿وَلَيْنَ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَسَحَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ فَأَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ﴾

If you ask them, "Who created the heavens and the earth and disposed the sun and the moon?" They will surely say, "God." Then where do they stray?

Q 29:63 also affirms this belief.

seek blessings, protection, and guidance through these intermediaries. However, they attributed to these idols an independent influence or authority in facilitating their needs, a belief that fundamentally contradicted the concept of God's absolute oneness and sovereignty.¹³ Numerous idols were placed atop and inside sacred places of worship like the Ka'ba and became pilgrimage sites, reinforcing the cultural and spiritual significance of these intermediaries. Rituals of pilgrimage often included sacrifices, offerings, and prayers directed towards the idols independently.

Despite the prevalence of polytheism, traces of monotheistic understanding existed, as reflected in their acknowledgment of God's Supreme authority. However, this understanding was overshadowed by their reliance on intermediaries, driven by the subtle belief that God's favour was accessible only through them. Satan had deceived people into believing that noble figures of the past possessed independent power. This misconception led people to create idols in their honour and eventually worship them, straying from the worship of God alone.¹⁴

¹³ There is an apparent contradiction in the belief of the pagans, which the Qur'an highlights in Q 29:63:

﴿وَلَيْنَ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ نَزَّلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَوْتِهَا لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ﴾

And if you ask them, "Who sends down water from the sky, with which He revives the earth after its death?" They will surely say, "God." Say, "All praise belongs to God!" But most of them do not exercise their reason. The pagans failed to reconcile their recognition of God's supreme authority with their reliance on powerless intermediaries, whom they regarded as partners to God. Despite recognising God's absolute control over the forces of nature, they still sought the intercession of idols or other figures they believed had some power in their lives. This contradiction exposed their inability to fully grasp the monotheistic principle that God alone holds ultimate authority and power.

¹⁴ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān*, 39:48.

Differences	Pagan Practices	Islamic Reorientation
1	Idols and tribal gods were believed to have independent authority.	Intermediaries act only by God's will and permission.
2	Idols and tribal gods were seen as necessary to access God.	Intermediaries are honoured, but God remains directly accessible.
3	Practices were condemned by the Qur'ān (Q 29:63).	Practices were affirmed by the Qur'ān under divine sanction (Q 5:35).

Table 3. Differences between pagan practices of intermediaries and Islamic reorientation.

Islam condemned these practices but did not abolish the concept of intermediaries altogether. Instead, it reoriented it within a monotheistic framework. The Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* clarified that mediation could only occur with God's permission. This transformation marked a significant theological shift, preserving the innate human inclination to seek assistance but now strictly aligning it with monotheistic principles.

3.2 Early Islam

With the revelation of the Holy Qur'ān, God reaffirmed the legitimacy of seeking intermediaries, emphasising that such practices, when done in accordance with Divine Will, hold a rightful place in Islam.

One notable example is the incident of Prophet Ya'qūb, who, after losing his sight due to grief over his son Yūsuf, used Yūsuf's shirt as a means to regain his vision.

﴿فَلَمَّا أَنْ جَاءَ الْبَشِيرُ أَلْقَاهُ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ فَارْتَدَّ بَصِيرًا﴾

When the bearer of good news arrived, he cast it [the shirt of Yūsuf] on his face, and he regained his sight (Q 12:96).

This act, performed through God's will, highlights the acceptance of intermediaries as a means for Divine intervention, demonstrating that such practices were not only acknowledged but also sanctioned by God, as prophets are divinely protected from committing anything forbidden.

Furthermore, the Qur'ān firmly established the foundations of intermediaries when it told the Prophet (s.a.w.):

﴿وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا اللَّهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ الرَّسُولُ لَوَجَدُوا اللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَحِيمًا﴾

Had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and pleaded to God for forgiveness, and the Apostle had pleaded forgiveness for them, they would have surely found God clement and merciful (Q 4:64).

This practice was subsequently upheld by the community.¹⁵ They sought forgiveness, victory in battles, cure of ailments, and rain through the Prophet (s.a.w.). These examples demonstrate a Divinely sanctioned tradition of seeking God's blessings through His chosen servants, objects and symbols associated with Divine blessings, as long as it is understood that the intermediary is only a means and does not possess independent power.

3.3 Post-Prophetic to Pre-Occultation

After the demise of Prophet Muḥammad (s.a.w.), his companions continued to seek intermediation through him by visiting his grave and supplicating to God through his status. Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī al-Andalusī, a Sunnī exegete, mentions in his exegesis of the aforementioned verse (Q 4:64), that he found a narration reported from 'Alī (a.s.) that he said:

قَدِمَ عَلَيْنَا أَعْرَابِيٌّ بَعْدَمَا دَفَنَّا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بِثَلَاثَةِ أَيَّامٍ، فَرَمَى

¹⁵ Illustrative examples of this will be discussed in the following section.

بِنَفْسِهِ عَلَى قَبْرِهِ، وَحَنَّا مِنْ تُرَابِهِ عَلَى رَأْسِهِ، ثُمَّ قَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، قُلْتُ فَسَمِعْنَا قَوْلَكَ، وَوَعَيْتَ عَنِ اللَّهِ، فَوَعَيْنَا عَنْكَ، وَكَانَ فِيمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ: ﴿وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ﴾ الْآيَةَ، وَقَدْ ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي، وَجِئْتُ أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ ذَنْبِي، فَاسْتَغْفِرْ لِي مِنْ رَبِّي، فَنُودِيَ مِنَ الْقَبْرِ أَنَّهُ قَدْ غُفِرَ لَكَ.

An Arab came to us three days after we had buried the Messenger of God (s.a.w.) and threw himself on his grave and sprinkled some of its soil on his head. Then he said, "O Messenger of God, we heard your words, and you understood from God, so we understood from you, and among what God revealed to you was, 'And if they had wronged themselves, they had come to you' [Q 4:64]. I have wronged myself and have come to ask for the forgiveness of God for my sin, so ask forgiveness for me from my Lord." Then there was a call from the grave, "You have been forgiven."¹⁶

Additionally, the Companions practiced *tawassul* through figures like 'Abbās, the Prophet (s.a.w.)'s uncle, as recorded in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*:

... أَنَّ عُمَرَ بْنَ الْخَطَّابِ، كَانَ إِذَا فَحَطُوا اسْتَسْقَى بِأَبْعَاسِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الْمُطَّلِبِ، فَقَالَ: اَللّٰهُمَّ اِنَّا كُنَّا نَتَوَسَّلُ اِلَيْكَ بِنَبِيِّنَا صَلَّى اللّٰهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، فَتَسْقِينَا، وَاِنَّا نَتَوَسَّلُ اِلَيْكَ بِعَمِّ نَبِيِّنَا، فَاسْقِنَا. قَالَ: فَيُسْقَوْنَ.

Whenever there was drought, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb used to ask God for rain through al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, saying, "O God, we used to ask You for rain through our Prophet, and You would give us. Now we ask You for rain

¹⁶ Muḥammad b. Yūsuf Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya: 1993). Accessed 31st March 2025, <https://quran-tafsir.net/hayyan>.

through the uncle of the Prophet, so give us rain.” And they would be given rain.¹⁷

Figures such as Yazīd b. Aswad were likewise approached to supplicate for rainfall.¹⁸

The Imams (a.s.) also emphasised the importance of visiting the grave of the Prophet (s.a.w.), performing *tawassul* through him, and seeking *istighātha* from him.¹⁹ They taught that these practices are not

¹⁷ Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 62, *ḥadīth* 60, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/>, accessed 31st March 2025.

¹⁸ Mu‘āwiya b. Abū Sufyān asked for rain from Yazīd b. al-Aswad. He said, “O God, we seek intercession from You through our best ones. O Yazīd, raise your hands to God” (Ṣā‘ib ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, *Ziyāra wa-l-tawassul min al-maṣādir al-‘aqā’id ‘ind al-Shī‘a al-Imāmiyya* (Markaz al-Risāla: 2000), 148).

¹⁹ In a detailed narration on the etiquette of *ziyāra* (visitation) of the Prophet (s.a.w.)’s grave, Imam al-Ṣādiq (a.s.) instructs that at the closest location to the Prophet (s.a.w.)’s head by his grave, one should say, “I testify that you are the Messenger of God and you are Muḥammad, son of ‘Abdullāh. I testify that you announced the messages of your Lord, advised your nation, fought in the way of God, and worshipped God with wisdom and by giving good counsel, until that which is certain [death] came to you. You fulfilled your obligations and were kind toward the believers and harsh toward the disbelievers. Therefore, God granted you the highest honoured position of the honourable ones.” He continues, “O God, You said, ‘And had they, when they were unjust to themselves, come to you and asked forgiveness of God and the Messenger had (also) asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God Oft returning (to mercy), Most Merciful’ [Q 4:64]. I have come to Your Prophet, repenting and asking for forgiveness for my sins, and I have turned to You through Your Prophet, the Prophet of Mercy, Muḥammad. O Muḥammad, I have turned to God, Your Lord and mine, through you, so that He forgives my sins.” Imam al-Ṣādiq (a.s.) further advises, “If you have a request, face the *qibla* with your back toward the grave, raise your hands, and ask for your

limited to seeking forgiveness, but also include seeking blessings, divine mercy, and healing, even through objects associated with the Prophet (s.a.w.), such as his pulpit²⁰ and the marble surrounding his grave.²¹ They made clear that seeking the Prophet (s.a.w.)'s intercession is a manifestation of God's mercy, not a contradiction to monotheism, and a means through which a person attains what God has decreed for them.²² In the Twelver Shī'i creed, the practices of *tawassul* and *istighātha* naturally extended to the Imams (a.s.), who are regarded as the Prophet (s.a.w.)'s Divinely appointed successors and chosen intercessors.

request. [If you do this,] your request will more likely be granted, God willing" (Ibn Qulawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt* (al-Maṭba'at al-Mubārakat al-Murtaḍawiyya: 1937), 2: chapter 3, *ḥadīth* 1).

²⁰ Imam al-Ṣādiq (a.s.) is reported to have said, "After you finish your invocations next to the grave of the Prophet, proceed to the pulpit. Rub your hands on it and then hold its two bottom knobs. Rub your face and eyes on them, for it is said that they cure the eyes. Thereafter, stand by the pulpit, praise God, glorify Him, and then ask for your needs. The Messenger of God said, "There is a garden from the gardens of Paradise between my pulpit and my grave. My pulpit is placed over an oasis from the oases of Paradise, and its pillars were built in Paradise" (Ibid., 2: chapter 3, *ḥadīth* 2).

²¹ Imam al-Kāẓim (a.s.) reports that his father (Imam al-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said that his grandfather (Imam al-Bāqir (a.s.) said, "Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn [Imam al-Sajjād (a.s.)] used to stand next to the grave of the Prophet and say *salām* to the Messenger of God and testify that he announced the message of God. Then he used to recite any prayer that would come to his mind. Thereafter, he would lean his back on the very delicate green marble that is attached to the grave of the Messenger of God and recite a specific supplication" (Ibid., 2: chapter 3, *ḥadīth* 3).

²² Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt* (Maktabat Ayatollah al-Mar'ashī al-Najafi: 1983), 86, *ḥadīth* 6.

3.4 Post-Occultation

After the occultation of the twelfth Imam (a.s.), Shī'ī scholars played a crucial role in preserving the foundations of *tawassul*, *istighātha* and *shafā'a*. These concepts were documented in works such as *al-Kāfi* by al-Kulaynī. While al-Kulaynī primarily focused on compiling and preserving authentic narrations from the Imams (a.s.), his meticulous effort laid the groundwork for later scholars to delve deeper into these narrations. Subsequent scholars offered detailed analysis to clarify the theological significance of seeking mediation through the Prophet (s.a.w.), the Imams (a.s.) and sacred objects and symbols.

During this period, *ziyāra*²³ was further established as a cornerstone of Shī'ī devotional life. Works like *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* by Ibn Qūlawayh documented the merits and etiquettes of visiting these shrines, emphasising the benefits of doing *tawassul* and *istighātha* through these holy figures at their resting places.

Shī'ī scholars, such as 'Allāma al-Ḥillī in *Kashf al-murād* and Ib-rāhīm b. 'Alī al-Kaḥ'amī in his supplicatory books, *al-Balad al-amīn* and *Miṣbāḥ al-Kaḥ'amī*, actively defended these practices, particularly when confronted with accusations of polytheism and innovation by Sunnī scholars and reformist movements, such as the school of Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya.

3.5 Contemporary Responses

The rise of Salafism and Wahhabism intensified scrutiny of Shī'ī Twelver practices, leading to increased accusations of polytheism and

²³ *Ziyāra* refers to the act of visiting sacred sites or shrines, typically of revered personalities. Among the prominent locations for *ziyāra* are the Prophet (s.a.w.)'s Mosque in Medina, the shrine of Imam 'Alī (a.s.) in Najaf, the shrine of Imam al-Ḥusayn (a.s.) in Karbala and the shrine of Imam al-Riḍā (a.s.) in Mashhad. These visits hold deep spiritual significance, serving as a means to seek closeness to God and honour the legacy of these holy figures.

innovation. This period saw the destruction of gravesites in Baqī' cemetery and restrictions on supplicating to the Prophet (s.a.w.) at his graveside.

Despite these challenges, Shī'ī scholars have steadfastly maintained the permissibility of *tawassul*, *istighātha* and *shafā'a*. Ayatollah Sayyid Abū l-Qāsim al-Khū'ī was asked a question on the permissibility of asking for a child, sustenance, protection, safety, and the like directly from the Infallibles (a.s.), not because they create or provide sustenance, but because they are the means to God Almighty in fulfilling needs and do not do anything except with His permission. The Ayatollah simply responded by saying: "There is no problem if it is with that intention."²⁴

Ayatollah Sayyid Muḥammad Sa'īd al-Ḥakīm in his *istiftā'*²⁵ on his website responds to someone who asked about the permissibility of saying "O 'Alī!". He says:

Yes, that is permissible, because seeking help from other than God is permissible if it is based on faith and belief that God is the Creator and Authority, and that all powers and abilities begin with Him and return to Him, and that the one seeking help does not receive help except with His permission. As we see when a person falls into a situation in which he needs the help of others, he may seek help from his brother or his clan or something similar.²⁶

When Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani was informed of a group who directed their requests to Imam 'Alī (a.s.), placing their hopes in him

²⁴ Mīrzā Jawād al-Tabrīzī, *Šīrāt al-najāh* (Daftar-i Nashr-i Barguzīdī: 1995), 1:466 (Question 1306).

²⁵ *Istiftā'* refers to the act of seeking a formal legal opinion (*fatwā*) from a qualified Islamic jurist.

²⁶ Office of Grand Ayatollah al-Ḥakīm, "Fatwas & Questions, Question 3," <https://www.alhakeem.com/ar/questions/27/2/>, accessed 30th March 2025.

and not supplicating (exclusively) to God, he was asked about the validity of such practices. He responded:

We do not think that anyone calls upon Imam ‘Alī with the assumption that he is independent in his affairs and acts in the world as a god. In fact, everyone who calls upon him and asks him for something, calls upon him because he is one of the close vicegerents of God, so he is an intermediary between God and His creation. God Almighty only forbade seeking mediation from those for whom God did not give proof and authority, such as idols, but He did not forbid seeking mediation from the Prophets and vicegerents.²⁷

These scholars—and many more—have emphasised that *tawassul*, *istighātha*, and *shafā’a* remain deeply rooted in Qur’ānic principles and authentic traditions, forming a vital component of Shī’ī spiritual practice.

4. The Qur’ānic Basis

The verses presented in this section do not represent an exhaustive list addressing *tawassul*, *shafā’a*, and *istighātha*. They are merely a selection intended to illustrate key principles and conditions found within the Qur’ānic discourse on these topics.

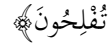
4.1 *Tawassul*

The permissibility of *Tawassul* is acknowledged in the Qur’ān, and the verses selected in this section serve as a representative sample to demonstrate the validity and legitimacy of this practice within the Qur’ānic framework.

4.1.1 First Verse

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ وَجَاهِدُوا فِي سَبِيلِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ

²⁷ Muḥammad Kāzīm al-Jashī, *al-Fawā'id al-Fiqhiyya* (Dar al-Wilā': 2006), 2:174 (Question 448).



O you who have faith! Be wary of God, and seek the means of recourse to Him, and wage *jihād*²⁸ in His way, so that you may be felicitous (Q 5:35).

In this verse, God enjoins the believers with three fundamental commandments that must be adhered to in order to attain felicity. The first commandment is to remain conscious of Him by being wary and mindful of His presence. The second is to seek a means of recourse (*tawassul*) to Him, and the third is to strive and wage jihad in His path.

The concept of a “means of recourse” mentioned in the verse can be understood in two ways: a general meaning and a specific meaning.

- a. General meaning: This refers to any action that brings one closer to God. Examples include holding firm belief in God and His Divinely Appointed Guides, performing the obligatory daily prayers, and fulfilling other mandatory acts of worship. These actions serve as general pathways to achieve nearness to the Divine.
- b. Specific meaning: Within the broader understanding, there exists a specific interpretation, which includes seeking closeness to God by asking Him through the intercession of revered figures and sacred objects and symbols.²⁹

The specific meaning is further supported by the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) concerning this verse, such as the following report

²⁸ *Jihād* refers to the exertion of one's utmost power, effort, endeavour, or ability in contending with an object of disapproval. It encompasses three forms: a visible enemy [in war], against the devil, and against one's lower self.

²⁹ Adapted from Nāṣir Makārim Shirāzī, *al-Amthāl fī Tafṣīr Kitāb Allāh al-Munzal* (Mu'assasat al-A'lā li-l-Maṭbū'āt: 2013), 3:694.

transmitted by Salmān³⁰ from Imam ‘Alī (a.s.):

... أَعْطَاهُ الْوَسِيلَةَ فِي الْوَصِيَّةِ، وَلَا يُخَلِّي أُمَّتَهُ مِنْ وَسِيلَتِهِ إِلَيْهِ، وَإِلَى اللَّهِ، فَقَالَ:
﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ﴾.

God has given him [Prophet Muḥammad (s.a.w.)] the means of intercession, and his nation will not be left without his means of intercession to Him and to God. God said, “O you who have faith! Be wary of God, and seek the means of recourse to Him” (Q 5:35).³¹

4.1.2 Second Verse

﴿قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا اسْتَغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا خَاطِئِينَ﴾ قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ
رَبِّي إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

They [the brothers of Yūsuf (a.s.)] said, “Father! Plead with God for forgiveness of our sins! We have indeed been erring.”

He said, “I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you; indeed, He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful” (Q 12:97–98).

This is one of the clearest verses supporting the permissibility of *tawassul*. After realising their mistakes, the brothers of Prophet Yūsuf (a.s.) turned to their father, Prophet Ya‘qūb (a.s.), asking him to act as an intermediary and plead for God’s forgiveness on their behalf. Prophet Ya‘qūb (a.s.) accepted their request, promising to seek forgiveness for them. By highlighting this interaction, the Qur’ān demonstrates that seeking forgiveness through an intermediary is not only compatible with monotheism but is also a means of attaining God’s

³⁰ Salmān al-Muḥammadī—commonly known as Salmān al-Fārisī—was a close companion of the Prophet Muḥammad (s.a.w.) and Imām ‘Alī (a.s.). Imām al-Ṣādiq (a.s.) stressed calling him “al-Muḥammadī” instead of “al-Fārisī”.

³¹ Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-Darajāt*, 216.

mercy and approval.

4.1.3 Other Verses

﴿وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا اللَّهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ الرَّسُولُ لَوَجَدُوا اللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَحِيمًا﴾

Had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and pleaded to God for forgiveness, and the Apostle had pleaded forgiveness for them, they would have surely found God Clement and Merciful (Q 4:64).

﴿وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا يَسْتَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ لَوَّا رُؤُوسَهُمْ وَرَأَيْنَهُمْ يَصْطَدُونَ وَهُمْ مُسْتَكْبِرُونَ﴾

When they are told, “Come, that God’s Apostle may plead for forgiveness for you,” they twist their heads, and you see them turn away disdainfully (Q 63:5).

Both these verses strongly affirm the legitimacy of *tawassul* through the Prophet (s.a.w.). In the first verse, the Qur’ān explicitly connects God’s mercy and forgiveness to the act of seeking the Prophet (s.a.w.)’s intercession, stating that had they come to him, they would have surely found God merciful. This demonstrates that while forgiveness ultimately comes from God, approaching Him through the Prophet (s.a.w.) is a highly recommended and effective means of receiving God’s mercy. By including the Prophet (s.a.w.)’s plea in the process, the verse further highlights the elevated role of the Prophet (s.a.w.) as an intermediary between God and His creation. It underscores that turning to him for intercession is not only permissible but a means to expedite Divine Forgiveness.

In the second verse, the hypocrites are told, “Come, that God’s Apostle may plead for forgiveness for you”—yet they remain arrogant and stubborn. God condemns them for refusing to humble themselves by seeking the Prophet (s.a.w.)’s intercession. This disdainful rejection

of the Prophet (s.a.w.)'s role as an intermediary is portrayed as a sign of arrogance and spiritual failure. The verse implies that seeking the Prophet (s.a.w.)'s intercession is not only permissible but an act of humility and acknowledgment of his special status with God.

Together, these verses affirm that seeking forgiveness through the Prophet (s.a.w.) is a divinely sanctioned practice that aligns with monotheism. It reflects the recognition of the Prophet (s.a.w.)'s unique position as a bridge between the believers and their Creator, emphasising that such intercession is an honoured and encouraged means of attaining God's forgiveness and mercy.

4.1.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of *tawassul* is deeply rooted in the Qur'ān and is both permissible and encouraged in Islam. The verses quoted above illustrate the legitimacy of approaching God through Divinely chosen intermediaries like the Prophet (s.a.w.) and the righteous servants of God. These verses highlight that seeking mediation—whether through the Prophet (s.a.w.), Imams (a.s.), or other righteous figures—does not contradict monotheism. Rather, it affirms it by recognising God as the ultimate source of mercy and forgiveness, while also emphasising humility, obedience, and acknowledgment of God's chosen intermediaries, thus aligning fully with Islamic teachings.

4.2 *Istighātha*

Istighātha, as a standalone concept previously defined, is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'ān. However, certain Qur'ānic verses describe situations where individuals seek assistance from God's creation, and these scenarios can serve as evidence for its permissibility under certain conditions.

Some of the instances mentioned in the Qur'ān are as follows.

4.2.1 The Israelite Seeking Help from Prophet Mūsā (a.s.)

﴿وَدَخَلَ الْمَدِينَةَ عَلَىٰ حِينٍ غَمَلَةٍ مِنْ أَهْلِهَا فَوَجَدَ فِيهَا رَجُلَيْنِ يَقْتَتِلَانِ هَٰذَا

مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ وَهَذَا مِنْ عَدُوِّهِ فَاسْتَعَاثَهُ الَّذِي مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ عَلَى الَّذِي مِنْ عَدُوِّهِ
فَوَكَرَهُ مُوسَى فَقَضَى عَلَيْهِ ﴿١٥﴾

[One day] he entered the city at a time when its people were not likely to take notice. He found there two men fighting, this one from among his followers and that one from his enemies. The one who was from his followers sought his help against him who was from his enemies, So Moses hit him with his fist, whereupon he expired (Q 28:15).

This verse directly uses the word *istaghāthahu* ("he sought his help"). The follower of Prophet Mūsā (a.s.), oppressed by his enemy, sought direct aid from Prophet Mūsā (a.s.), who responded by intervening. Since he was a follower, the Prophet could have told him to ask God for assistance or to endure patiently, but he intervened instead. This incident shows that seeking assistance from a righteous person in a worldly matter is permissible when done with the understanding that ultimate power resides with God.

4.2.2 The People Asking Dhū l-Qarnayn for Assistance

﴿قَالُوا يَا ذَا الْقَرْنَيْنِ إِنَّ يَأْجُوجَ وَمَأْجُوجَ مُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَهَلْ نَجْعَلُ لَكَ
خَرْجًا عَلَىٰ أَنْ تَجْعَلَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَهُمْ سَدًّا﴾
﴿قَالَ مَا مَكَّنِّي فِيهِ رَبِّي خَيْرٌ فَأَعِينُونِي بِقُوَّةٍ أَجْعَلْ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُمْ رَدْمًا﴾

They said, "O Dhul Qarnayn! Gog and Magog are indeed causing disaster in this land. Shall we pay you a tribute on condition that you build a barrier between them and us?"

He said, "What my Lord has furnished me is better. Yet help me with some power, and I will make a bulwark between you and them" (Q 18:94–95).

The people directly requested help from Dhū l-Qarnayn to construct a barrier against Gog and Magog. He accepted their request, while acknowledging that his ability to help stems from God. This example underscores the permissibility of seeking assistance from individuals for protection and problem-solving with the understanding that it is only through God's power that one can be helped. It is similar to the situation where a believer goes to a doctor for medical help, knowing fully well that the ultimate curer is God.

One might object that these incidents occurred during the lifetimes of Prophet Mūsā (a.s.) and Dhū l-Qarnayn, and that *istighātha* after death is invalid. This objection will be addressed in the section "Refutation of common misconceptions" (Argument 2).

4.3 *Shafā'a*

4.3.1 Verses Supporting *Shafā'a*

The following are some of the verses that demonstrate that *shafā'a* is a privilege granted by God to certain individuals, such as Prophets and righteous servants, in accordance with His will and wisdom.

﴿مَا مِنْ شَفِيعٍ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ إِذْنِهِ﴾

There is no intercessor, except after His leave (Q 10:3).

﴿مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ﴾

Who is it that may intercede with Him except with His permission (Q 2:255)?

4.3.2 Verses Seemingly Opposing *Shafā'a*

Other verses seemingly oppose *shafā'a*.

﴿لَيْسَ لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ وَلِيٌّ وَلَا شَفِيعٌ﴾

Besides him (God) they will have neither friend nor intercessor (Q 6:51).

﴿فَمَا نَنْفَعُهُمْ شَفَاعَةُ الشَّافِعِينَ﴾

So the intercession of the intercessors will not avail them (Q 74:48).

﴿أَمْ آتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ شُفَعَاءَ﴾

﴿قُلْ لِلَّهِ الشَّفَاعَةُ جَمِيعًا﴾

Have they taken intercessors besides God?

Say, "All intercession rests with God" (Q 39:43/44)

4.3.3 Reconciling the Two Sets of Verses

The verses concerning *shafā'a* in the Qur'ān may initially appear contradictory, with some affirming it under certain conditions and others seemingly negating it altogether. However, as all these verses are part of the Qur'ānic revelation, they must be understood in a manner that maintains their coherence. A closer analysis shows that these verses in fact complement each other by outlining the conditions, limitations, and ultimate purpose of intercession in Islamic doctrine.

All the verses that affirm *shafā'a* set out specific conditions. The first is that God's permission is essential, and no intercession can occur without His authorisation. The second is that the intercessor must be granted authority to intercede.

Furthermore, the one on whose behalf intercession is sought must also be approved.

The Qur'ān says:

﴿وَلَا يَشْفَعُونَ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَرَضَىٰ﴾

And they do not intercede except for someone He approves for (Q 21:28).

However, *shafā'a* becomes ineffective for persistent sinners or polytheists. The Qur'ān tells the polytheists:

﴿وَلَا يَمْلِكُ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ الشَّفَاعَةَ إِلَّا مَنْ شَهِدَ بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

Those whom they invoke (in worship) besides Him have no power of intercession, except those who are witness to the truth and who know for whom to intercede (Q 43:86).

This verse highlights that invoking false deities demonstrates a lack of acknowledgment of God's authority, thereby disqualifying one from benefiting from divinely sanctioned intercession.

Furthermore, the promise of *shafā'a* on the Day of Judgment must not be viewed as an unconditional guarantee. Every individual is ultimately responsible for their own actions. If a person neglects accountability, relies solely on the prospect of *shafā'a*, and persists in deliberate sinfulness, they will not benefit from the intercession of those granted permission to intercede.

In addition, *shafā'a* is a favour granted by God, and He must be recognised as the ultimate authority. If one neglects this fundamental principle, the prospect of *shafā'a* will hold no benefit for them.

In conclusion, the verses do not contradict one another; rather, they establish the parameters of *shafā'a*. *Shafā'a* is a Divinely regulated mercy: It is neither absolutely denied nor unconditionally granted. It is a manifestation of God's mercy, bestowed in accordance with His justice and wisdom, and operates within the framework of divine accountability.

5. *Ḥadīth* Literature

The *ḥadīth* cited in this section are drawn from both Shī'ī and Sunnī sources and serve as representative examples of how the concepts of *tawassul*, *shafā'a*, and *istighātha* were understood and practiced in the early Islamic tradition. While not all of these narrations may meet the highest standards of authenticity (*ṣaḥīḥ*), the abundance and consistency of such reports across diverse collections and contexts strongly reinforce the foundational presence of these practices.

5.1 Tawassul

5.1.1 Shī'a

Below are two profound examples from Imam al-Bāqir (a.s.), and one from Imam al-Sajjād (a.s.), that highlight the role of *tawassul* in times of need.³²

Imam al-Bāqir (a.s.) narrates that a man came to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and said, "O Messenger of God, I have a [large] family, and I am indebted; and my situation has become difficult. Please teach me a prayer through which God will provide me enough to pay my debts and help my family." The Messenger of God said, "Perform ablution properly, then perform a two-unit prayer completed with bowing and prostrating in each unit. Thereafter say:

يَا مَاجِدُ، يَا وَاحِدُ، يَا كَرِيمُ، أَتَوَجَّهُ إِلَيْكَ مُحَمَّدُ نَبِيَّكَ، نَبِيَّ الرَّحْمَةِ. يَا مُحَمَّدُ،
يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، إِنِّي أَتَوَجَّهُ بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ رَبِّكَ وَرَبِّ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ.

O Majestic, O One, O Gracious, I turn to You through Muḥammad, Your prophet, the prophet of mercy. O Muḥammad, O Messenger of God, I have turned to you before God, your Lord and the Lord of all things ...³³

In another narration, Imam al-Bāqir (a.s.) provides further guidance on seeking help from God through *tawassul*. He says, "if you want to ask your Lord for something, perform ablution, perform a two-unit prayer, speak of the greatness of God [in it], send salutations to Muḥammad and his progeny, and upon completion say:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ بِأَنَّكَ مَلِكٌ، وَأَنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ مُفْتَدِرٌ، وَأَنَّكَ مَا
تَشَاءُ مِنْ أَمْرٍ يَكُونُ. اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَتَوَجَّهُ إِلَيْكَ نَبِيَّكَ مُحَمَّدٍ نَبِيَّ الرَّحْمَةِ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ

³² These are in addition to the ones cited in the post-prophetic to pre-occultation section.

³³ Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī. *al-Kāfi*, 3, book 4, chapter 94, *ḥadīth* 2.

عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ). يَا مُحَمَّدُ، يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، إِلَيَّ أَتَوَجَّهُ بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ رَبِّكَ وَرَبِّي لِيُنْجِحَ
لِي طَلِبَتِي. اَللَّهُمَّ بِنَبِيِّكَ أُنْجِ لِي طَلِبَتِي بِمُحَمَّدٍ، ثُمَّ سَلْ حَاجَتَكَ.

O God, I ask You, for You are the King and You have power over all things. And whatever You will of something, will be. O God, I turn to You through Your Prophet, Muhammad, the Prophet of Mercy (s.a.w.). O Muhammad, O Messenger of God, I turn through you to God, Your Lord and my Lord, so that He grants me my request. O God, through Your Prophet, Muhammad, grant my request. Then ask for your needs.³⁴

Furthermore, in Du‘ā’ Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī, Imam al-Sajjād (a.s.) explicitly appeals to Divine generosity through the Prophet (s.a.w.) and his family, saying:

أَيْنَ كَرَمُكَ يَا كَرِيمُ؟ بِهِ وَمُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ فَاسْتَنْقِذْنِي.

Where is Your generosity, O Generous One? Through it, and through Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad, rescue me!

This supplication illustrates that Divine generosity is sought through the noble intercession of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a.s.), reinforcing the concept of *tawassul*.

5.1.2 Sunnī

Similarly, Sunnī traditions also offer evidence supporting the practice of *tawassul*. As mentioned in Section 3.3, the report in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* provides significant evidence in support of *tawassul*. Another widely cited Sunnī *ḥadīth* provides further validation of the practice.

Al-Tirmidhī quotes a report, which he and Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī grade as *ṣaḥīḥ*, from ‘Uthmān b. Ḥunayf, who narrates that a

³⁴ Ibid., 3, book 4, chapter 95, *ḥadīth* 7.

blind man came to the Prophet (s.a.w.) and said, "Supplicate to God to heal me." The Prophet (s.a.w.) replied, "If you wish, I will supplicate for you, and if you wish, you can be patient, for that is better for you." The man said, "Then supplicate for me." The Prophet (s.a.w.) instructed him to perform ablution properly and then to supplicate with this prayer:

اَللّٰهُمَّ اِنِّيْ اَسْأَلُكَ، وَاتَّوَجَّهُ اِلَيْكَ بِنَبِيِّكَ مُحَمَّدٍ نَّبِيِّ الرَّحْمَةِ. اِنِّيْ تَوَجَّهْتُ بِهٖ اِلَى رَّبِّيْ فِيْ حَاجَتِيْ هَذِهِ لِتُقْضٰى لِيْ، اَللّٰهُمَّ فَسَّغْهُ لِيْ.

O God, indeed, I ask You and turn to You through Your Prophet Muḥammad, the Prophet of mercy. Indeed, I have turned through him [Muḥammad] to my Lord regarding this need of mine, so that it may be fulfilled for me. O God, accept his intercession on my behalf.³⁵

This supplication emphasises the Prophet (s.a.w.)'s status as a Divinely appointed intermediary, reflecting the permissibility and effectiveness of *tawassul* as a means of seeking God's assistance. By guiding the blind man to invoke God through the Prophet (s.a.w.), this narration not only underscores the legitimacy of intercession but also demonstrates the Prophet (s.a.w.)'s acknowledgment of his role as a means of Divine Mercy.

5.2 *Istighātha*

5.2.1 *Shī'a*

The two Shī'ī *ḥadīth* cited earlier in 5.1.1 from Imam al-Bāqir (a.s.) regarding *tawassul* also affirm *istighātha*, as they explicitly include the phrase, "O Muḥammad, O Messenger of God, I turn to you before God." This direct invocation highlights the practice of seeking help through the Prophet (s.a.w.) in a way that emphasises the role of the Prophet

³⁵ Muḥammad b. 'Abdullāh al-Tabrīzī, *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ* (al-Maktab al-Islāmī: 1979), 2495, book 9, *ḥadīth* 263.

(s.a.w.) as an intermediary.

A similar *ḥadīth* is reported from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a.s.), which includes the additional phrase:

يَا مُحَمَّدُ، يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، أَشْكُو إِلَى اللَّهِ وَإِلَيْكَ حَاجَتِي، وَإِلَى أَهْلِ بَيْتِكَ
الرَّاشِدِينَ حَاجَتِي، وَبِكُمْ أَتَوَجَّهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ فِي حَاجَتِي.

O Muḥammad, O Messenger of God, I complain to God and to you regarding my need, and to the rightly guided ones of your household regarding my need. Through you, I turn to God for the fulfilment of my need.³⁶

This narration highlights the close relationship between *tawassul* and *istighātha* whereby a believer makes an appeal to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a.s.) and turns to God through them as well.

Furthermore, in a detailed narration outlining the etiquettes of *ziyāra*, Imam al-Ṣādiq (a.s.) recommends the following supplication be recited:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّكَ قُلْتَ: ﴿وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا اللَّهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ
لَهُمُ الرَّسُولُ لَوَجَدُوا اللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَحِيمًا﴾. وَإِنِّي أَتَيْتُ نَبِيَّكَ مُسْتَغْفِرًا تَائِبًا مِنْ
دُنُوبِي، وَإِنِّي أَتَوَجَّهُ إِلَيْكَ بِنَبِيِّكَ نَبِيِّ الرَّحْمَةِ، مُحَمَّدٍ (ص). يَا مُحَمَّدُ، إِنِّي أَتَوَجَّهُ
إِلَى اللَّهِ رَبِّي وَرَبِّكَ بِكَ، لِيَغْفِرَ لِي دُنُوبِي.

O God! You said, “Had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and pleaded to God for forgiveness, and the Apostle had pleaded forgiveness for them, they would have surely found God Clement and Merciful (Q 4:64).” I have come to Your Prophet, repenting and asking for forgiveness for my sins, and I have turned to You through Your Prophet, the Prophet of Mercy, Muḥammad

³⁶ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 3: book 4, chapter 95, *ḥadīth* 1.

(s.a.w.). O Muḥammad! I have turned to God, Your Lord and mine, through you, so that He forgives my sins.³⁷

This supplication not only highlights *tawassul* by directly appealing to God through the Prophet (s.a.w.) but also affirms *istighātha* by emphasising the practice of pleading to the Prophet (s.a.w.) directly. The verse referenced within the narration (Q 4:64) also reinforces the concept of seeking divine mercy through the Prophet (s.a.w.)'s intercession, as explained earlier, demonstrating that these practices are deeply rooted in both the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*.

5.2.2 Sunnī

Similar to the Shī'ī *ḥadīth* on *tawassul*, the second Sunnī *ḥadīth* quoted in section 5.1.2 also addresses *istighātha*. Additionally, the *ḥadīth* cited from Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī al-Andalusī in section 3.3 further reinforces the concept of *istighātha*.

5.3 *shafā'a*

5.3.1 Shī'a

In his book *al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Abū l-Qāsim al-Khū'ī writes that the narrations reported from the Prophet (s.a.w.) and his successors (a.s.) on *shafā'a* reach the level of *tawātur*.³⁸

He then cites the following narration from al-Barqī on the authority of Mu'āwiya b. Wahb, who said:

I asked Abū 'Abdullāh (a.s.) [al-Ṣādiq] about the saying of God, "None shall speak except whom the All-beneficent permits and who says what is right (Q 78:38)." He said, "By God, we are the

³⁷ Ibn Qulawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, book 2, chapter 3, *ḥadīth* 1. Graded *Ṣaḥīḥ* by most Shī'ī jurists.

³⁸ *Tawātur* refers to the transmission of a report by such a large number of narrators across successive generations that it would be inconceivable for them all to have colluded in fabricating it. Abū l-Qāsim al-Khū'ī, *al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Maktabat al-Imām al-Khū'ī al-Āmma: 2020),

ones permitted to speak in that situation, and we are the ones who say what is right.” I said, “May I be your ransom! What do you say when you speak?” He said, “We glorify our Lord, send blessings upon our Prophet, and intercede for our Shī‘a. [When we do this,] our Lord does not turn us away.”

This statement emphasises the key agents of intervention being the Prophet (s.a.w.) and his family.

Further, in his Supplication upon completing the reading of the Qur’ān,³⁹ Imam Ali Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (a.s.), prays:

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ، وَشَرِّفْ بُنْيَانَهُ، وَعَظِّمْ بُرْهَانَهُ، وَثَقِّلْ مِيزَانَهُ،
وَتَقَبَّلْ شَفَاعَتَهُ، وَقَرِّبْ وَسِيلَتَهُ.

O God, send blessings upon Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad, honour his structure, magnify his proof, make his scale heavy, accept his intercession, and near his mediation.

This supplication reflects the deep connection between the Qur’ān, the Prophet (s.a.w.) and his family, emphasising their role in intercession and seeking God’s acceptance of their mediating authority.

5.3.2 Sunnī

The *ḥadīth* from Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī al-Andalusī, cited in 3.3 and further referenced in 5.2.2, also points to *shafā‘a*. It states:

فَنُودِيَ مِنَ الْقَبْرِ: أَنَّهُ قَدْ غُفِرَ لَكَ.

Then there was a call from the grave that you have been forgiven.

This implies that the forgiveness was granted as a result of the Prophet (s.a.w.)’s intercession on behalf of the Arab man.

³⁹ Supplication 42 of *Ṣaḥīfa as-Sajjādiyya*.

Furthermore, Abū Hurayra 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ṣakhr al-Dawsī narrates from the Prophet (s.a.w.) that he said:

الشُّفَعَاءُ خَمْسَةٌ: الْقُرْآنُ، وَالرَّحِمُ، وَالْأَمَانَةُ، وَنَبِيُّكُمْ، وَأَهْلُ بَيْتِ نَبِيِّكُمْ.

Intervention is done by five: the Qur'ān, kinship, trust, your Prophet, and the family of your Prophet.⁴⁰

6. Theological Implications

The practices of *tawassul*, *istighātha* and *shafā'a* carry profound theological significance for both Twelver Shī'ī Islam and the broader Muslim community. These practices address key themes such as the Oneness of God, access to Divine Mercy, spiritual hierarchy, and a believer's relationship with God and his chosen guides.

6.1 Twelver Shī'ī Perspective

Tawassul, *istighātha*, and *shafā'a* reflect the Twelver Shī'ī belief in God's ultimate authority and mercy, while affirming the unique spiritual status of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and the Imams (a.s.). They serve to strengthen a believer's connection with God through recognised intermediaries without compromising *tawḥīd*. Any invocation is understood as entirely dependent on God's will, safeguarding these practices from any association with *shirk*.⁴¹ These practices also affirm the guardianship of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and his vicegerents, recognising them as a means through which believers can access God's Divine Mercy, thereby strengthening their connection with them and adding an element of hope in God's Divine Mercy through them.

⁴⁰ Al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-'Ummāl fī Sunan al-Aqwāl wa al-Af'āl* (Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliya: 2005), 7:214.

⁴¹ *Shirk* refers to the act of associating partners with God, whether by attributing divine qualities to other beings or entities, or by worshipping anyone or anything other than God. It is considered the gravest sin in Islam, as it directly contradicts the core principle of *tawḥīd*, the oneness of God.

6.2 Sunnī Perspective

In Sunnī theology, *tawassul*, *istighātha* and *shafā'a* are generally considered permissible through the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.), but only under specific theological boundaries.⁴² They must explicitly affirm God's absolute oneness (*tawhīd*) without attributing independent power to the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.).

However, the Salafī-Wahhabi school takes a more restrictive stance on *tawassul*, *istighātha*, and *shafā'a*. They argue that direct supplication to God without intermediaries is the only acceptable form of worship, citing verses such as:

﴿وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ﴾

Your Lord has said, "Call Me and I will hear you!" (Q 40:60)

While *tawassul* through the Prophet (s.a.w.) during his lifetime is unanimously accepted, seeking intercession or aid from the Prophet (s.a.w.) or other revered personalities after their death is viewed as impermissible, as it is seen as *shirk*. *Istighātha* is rejected outright on the grounds that it implies reliance on entities other than God. Similarly, *shafā'a* is accepted only in the context of the Day of Judgment.⁴³

6.3 Summary

Both Shī'ī and Sunnī theology emphasise that *shafā'a* is a manifestation of God's mercy, granted solely by His will. Central to both perspectives is the principle of *tawhīd*, where *tawassul*, *istighātha*, and *shafā'a* must always affirm God's ultimate authority and power. Any belief

⁴² Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya quotes this opinion from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in his book *Majmū' min al-fatāwā l-kubrā*, 5:72.

⁴³ Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya presents this opinion as his stance throughout his book *Qā'ida jalīla fi al-tawassul wa-l-wasīla* (al-Idārat al-ʿĀmma li-l-Ṭab': 1999).

suggesting that intermediaries possess independent power or authority constitutes *shirk* and is unanimously rejected.

At the same time, these practices recognise a Divinely ordained spiritual hierarchy, where Prophets, Imams and revered personalities are viewed as chosen channels for Divine blessings and mercy. Their elevated status is not seen as a challenge to God's authority but as a testament to their proximity to Him and their role in aiding believers by His permission. This understanding bridges the theological gap between Divine Sovereignty and human agency, underscoring that all mediation and supplication ultimately return to God's Will.

7. Refutation of Common Misconceptions

To address common misconceptions about intermediaries, this section critically examines the arguments of scholars from the *Salafi* school, particularly Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya and Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb. Their critique focuses on *istighātha* and *shafā'a*, often viewing them as forms of *shirk*. Drawing from their writings and contemporary lectures, this analysis evaluates their claims through Qur'ānic, *ḥadīth* and theological lenses, comparing them with broader Islamic perspectives.

7.1 Argument 1: The Exclusivity of God in Responding to Supplications and the Role of Intermediaries

﴿لَهُ دَعْوَةُ الْحَقِّ وَالَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ لَا يَسْتَجِيبُونَ لَهُمْ بِشَيْءٍ﴾

Only to Him belongs the true invocation; and those whom they invoke besides Him do not answer them in any wise (Q 13:14).

Critics often cite this verse to make three key claims:

Firstly, they argue that only God responds to supplications, and any entities invoked besides Him—such as the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) or the Imams (a.s.)—have no power to answer.

Secondly, they contend that seeking help through intermediaries

resembles the actions of pre-Islamic idolaters, making it incompatible with monotheism (*tawhīd*).

Thirdly, they assert that even if one believes the Prophet (s.a.w.) or the Imams (a.s.) act only by God's permission, invoking them is still irrational, since God alone makes decisions—rendering intermediaries unnecessary.

7.1.1 Response

Invoking revered figures does not imply that they independently possess Divine power. Instead, it acknowledges their closeness to God and their role as intermediaries to seek His favour. This understanding aligns with the principle that while these figures are revered, it is ultimately God who remains the source of power and decision-making.

Moreover, the Shī'ī Twelver school draws a clear distinction between the concept of mediation and idolatry, as shown by the points in Table 3.

Furthermore, the word *dūn* (دُون), mentioned in the verse, is defined as “Other than, beside, or besides, exclusively of, or not as used before.”⁴⁴ This carries a sense of exclusivity, which may imply that invoking these figures suggests their power and ability are independent of God. If one were indeed to believe in their independent or exclusive power, this would constitute *shirk*. However, as previously established, these invocations are made with the understanding that any power possessed by these figures is entirely contingent on God's permission and will.

Additionally, historical examples, such as the sons of Prophet Ya'qūb (a.s.) asking him to seek forgiveness on their behalf (Q 12:97–98), support the legitimacy of seeking intermediation from revered personalities, even while affirming that God alone grants forgiveness.

⁴⁴ Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 939.

7.2 Argument 2: The Dead Cannot Intercede

Critics argue that intercession is limited to those still alive in the physical world. While they acknowledge Qur'ānic verses such as Q 2:154 and 3:169, which affirm that martyrs are alive, they maintain that this refers to a distinct mode of existence in *barzakh*,⁴⁵ not the worldly life. On this basis, they contend that martyrs cannot hear the living and thus cannot be invoked for intercession.

7.2.1 Response

Islamic traditions—across both Sunnī and Shī'ī schools—affirm that the spiritual life of Prophets and martyrs enables them to hear the living and intercede on their behalf, due to their elevated status with God. This theological view draws upon Qur'ānic descriptions of the continued life of martyrs and is reinforced by the well-established tradition of visiting the graves of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and his family. The following analysis will examine this perspective through relevant Qur'ānic verses, authenticated *ḥadīths* and the insights of Shī'ī scholars.

The Holy Qur'ān states:

﴿وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتٌ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ﴾

Do not call those who were slain in God's way "dead." Rather, no, they are living, but you are not aware (Q 2:154).

﴿وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ﴾

Do not suppose those who were slain in the way of God to be dead; no, they are living and provided for near their Lord (Q 3:169).

These verses highlight the elevated status of martyrs, suggesting

⁴⁵ *Barzakh* refers to the intermediate realm or state of existence in which souls dwell between death and the Day of Resurrection.

that their spiritual life grants them a unique position within the divine order. If interpreted merely as referring to their existence in *barzakh* and their reception of provision, this would not set them apart from others residing in the intermediate realm. However, the first verse specifically highlights the unseen life of martyrs, implying a unique form of connectedness to the worldly realm—one that transcends ordinary human comprehension.

Additionally, Islamic tradition—as conveyed by the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) and later narrated by the Imams of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a.s.) and by ‘Ā’isha, the Prophet’s wife—affirms the ongoing connection between the living and the deceased, even when visiting the graves of ordinary believers.

‘Ā’isha narrates that the Prophet (s.a.w.) would visit the Baqī‘ cemetery in the last part of the night and would say:

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ دَارَ قَوْمٍ مُؤْمِنِينَ، وَأَنَا كُمْ مَا تُوْعَدُونَ، عَدَا مُؤْجِلُونَ، وَإِنَّا إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ لَاحِقُونَ، اَللّٰهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِأَهْلِ بَقِيعِ الْعَرْقَدِ.

Peace be upon the abode of the community of believers.
What you were promised, arrived. Tomorrow will be our prescribed term, and surely, we will join you, God willing.
O God, forgive the people of Baqī‘ al-Gharqad.⁴⁶

Similarly, Imam al-Ṣādiq (a.s.) advises us to visit graveyards and greet the deceased by saying:

السَّلَامُ عَلَى أَهْلِ الدِّيَارِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمِينَ، أَنْتُمْ لَنَا قَرِطٌ، وَنَحْنُ - إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ - بِكُمْ لَاحِقُونَ.

Peace be upon the inhabitants of the dwellings from among the believers and Muslims. You have preceded us,

⁴⁶ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* book 11, *ḥadīth* 131, *Sunnah.com*. Accessed 10th May 2025, <https://sunnah.com/muslim>.

and we, God willing, shall join you.⁴⁷

These greetings underscore the belief that even ordinary deceased believers remain aware of the greetings and prayers offered to them. This awareness naturally extends even more profoundly to those elevated in rank, such as the Prophet (s.a.w.) and the Imams (a.s.), who serve as the guardians of faith.

Multiple authentic narrations⁴⁸ from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a.s.) state:

أَمَّا إِنَّهُ يَسْمَعُكَ مِنْ قَرِيبٍ، وَيَبْلُغُكَ عَنْكَ إِذَا كُنْتَ نَائِيًا.

He [the Messenger of God (s.a.w.)] hears your voice [if you perform his *ziyāra*] from nearby and he will be informed of you [if you perform his *ziyāra*] from far.⁴⁹

The abundance of narrations affirming the spiritual life and sanctity of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and the Imams (a.s.) has led to the common practice of addressing them with reverence during shrine visits. Ib-rāhīm b. 'Alī al-Kaḥ'amī illustrates this devotional approach by recommending that visitors begin their salutation with the following acknowledgment:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعْتَقِدُ حُرْمَةَ صَاحِبِ هَذَا الْمَشْهَدِ الشَّرِيفِ فِي غَيْبَتِهِ كَمَا أَعْتَقِدُهَا فِي حَضْرَتِهِ، وَأَعْلَمُ أَنَّ رَسُولَكَ وَخُلَفَاءَكَ (عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ) أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَكَ يُرْزَقُونَ، يَرَوْنَ مَقَامِي، وَيَسْمَعُونَ كَلَامِي، وَيَرُدُّونَ سَلَامِي.

O God, I believe in the sanctity of the owner of this holy shrine in his absence as I believe in it in his presence. I

⁴⁷ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī. *Wasā'il al-Shī'a* (Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt: 1993), 3, 225, *ḥadīth* 3470–3473.

⁴⁸ Authenticated in accordance with the methodology of Abū l-Qāsim al-Khū'i.

⁴⁹ Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, 2, chapter 2, *ḥadīth* 5 and 6; al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-shī'a*, 14, 337.

also know for sure that Your Messenger and Your representatives (peace be upon them) are alive, finding their sustenance in Your presence; they can see my place, hear my words, and respond to my greetings.⁵⁰

This invocation affirms the continued sanctity of the Prophets and Imams even after their physical departure from this world, equating their spiritual presence with their temporal existence. It also asserts their ability to perceive and respond to the greetings of visitors, further emphasising their living connection with God and their followers.

Under this understanding, the recitation of salutations, blessings, and supplications at their graves acquires profound significance. If one were to believe that the Prophet (s.a.w.) or the Imams (a.s.) could neither hear nor respond, such acts would carry diminished spiritual value. In contrast, affirming their awareness and sanctity lends deeper meaning to these practices and underpins the longstanding tradition of visiting their shrines and seeking their intercession.

7.3 Argument 3: *Tawassul* and *Istighātha* Lack Clear Evidence

Critics contend that *tawassul* and *istighātha* lack explicit support in the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*, suggesting that if these practices were truly divinely sanctioned, they would be explicitly mentioned in the Qurʾān.

7.3.1 Response

As demonstrated in Section 4 and 5, both the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* provide substantive foundations for *tawassul* and *istighātha*. The Qurʾān establishes a clear foundation for these practices, while numerous *ḥadīth* offer explicit illustrations of *tawassul* and *istighātha*. However, critics often attempt to interpret Qurʾān verses in a manner that ex-

⁵⁰ ‘Abbās al-Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān* (Maktabat al-Faqīh: 2004), section 3, chapter 2; and Ibrāhīm b. ‘Alī al-Kaḥmī, *Miṣbāḥ junnat al-amān al-wāqīya wa jannat al-īmān al-bāqīya* (Muʾassasat al-Nuʾmān: 1992), 554.

cludes these practices, seeking hidden meanings or alternative interpretations. Similarly, when encountering supporting *ḥadīths*, critics often scrutinise their chains of transmission with heightened scepticism. In other cases, they seek to limit the scope of the narrations by reinterpreting their context or confining them to specific historical circumstances, thereby undermining their significance or dismissing credible narrations.

8. Conclusion

The practices of *tawassul*, *istighātha* and *shafā'a* are deeply rooted within Islamic theology and spirituality, particularly within the Twelver Shī'ī perspective. A close examination of Qur'ān verses, *ḥadīth* literature and historical practices throughout different eras demonstrates that these forms of intermediation are not only permissible but also encouraged, provided they uphold the core principle of God's absolute oneness and authority.

The Qur'ān affirms the legitimacy of *tawassul* and *shafā'a*, outlining their conditions, while *ḥadīth* from both Sunnī and Shī'ī sources offer further support.

Although critics—especially within the Salafi-Wahhabi school—reject these practices, their objections often arise from a misreading or selective interpretation of sources, rather than conclusive scriptural evidence. Crucially, unlike pre-Islamic idol worship, Islamic intermediation never attributes independent power to the intercessors; their role is always understood as contingent upon God's will.

Far from contradicting monotheism, these practices deepen the believer's relationship with God by fostering love for His chosen servants and reaffirming reliance on His mercy. As such, *tawassul*, *istighātha*, and *shafā'a* remain legitimate expressions of devotion and avenues for spiritual proximity to the Divine.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr

Shaykh Mohammed Ali Ismail, whose insight, patience, and critical feedback significantly enhanced the quality of this work.

My heartfelt thanks also go to Shaykh Akeil Hassan and Sayyid Muhammad Qazwini for their generous support with proofreading, sentence refinement, and formatting suggestions—particularly during moments of difficulty.

I am also grateful to Hawza Online for providing a platform for advanced study and research in the Islamic sciences through its post-graduate-level Further Studies Programme, under which this article was written.

Finally, I wish to extend my deepest appreciation to my parents for their unwavering support, patience, and prayers, and for raising me with a deep love and reverence for the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a.s.).

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Research Notes

On the Authenticity of *Ziyārat ‘Āshūrā’*: A Text-Critical Approach*

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The authenticity and the chain of narration (*isnād*) of the text known as *Ziyārat ‘Āshūrā’* have been subjects of discussion among Shī‘ī scholars. Beyond its spiritual significance and the personal experiences of the believers, often recounted in Shī‘ī traditions and literature, this text holds immense historical importance. In this note, I will not delve into discussions on the authenticity of this text’s *isnād*, on which numerous studies have already been conducted. Among these, the writings of the prominent jurist and expert in the science of narrators, Aya-tollah Sayyid Musa al-Shubayri al-Zanjani, stand out. Within Shī‘ī tradition, this *ziyāra* text is primarily narrated from Imam al-Bāqir. Here, I merely aim to demonstrate that, based on internal textual criticism, it is plausible to attribute this text to the late Umayyad period. I shall summarise this in a few points:

1. Within the *ziyāra* text, there is no content that appears anachronistic or inconsistent with its purported time of emergence. The references to the Imams and the Prophet’s family align with beliefs prevalent during the end of the Umayyad era, with no indications of ideas that evolved later. The themes presented in the text mirror the conditions of Shī‘īs during the late Umayyad period, capturing their sentiments concerning the tragedies endured by the Prophet’s household and their feelings towards the

* This note was originally published in Persian on *Barrasī-hā-yi Tārikhī* (blog), <https://ansari.kateban.com/post/1640>.

Umayyads—emotions which are corroborated by primary historical sources from that era.

2. The themes of allegiance (*wilāya*) and disassociation (*barā’a*) apparent in the text are also congruent with the general atmosphere of the first half of the 2nd/8th century. This is evident to those familiar with the religious sectarian history of that period.
3. Throughout the *ziyāra* text, there is an emphasis on disassociating from the Umayyads, a trend that was evidently expanding among Shī‘ī circles during the late Umayyad period. This essentially constituted the Shī‘ī identity for a broad spectrum of Umayyad opponents, who, while opposing the Umayyads, expressed loyalty to the Prophet’s family. Despite specific Shī‘ī trends at that time, the majority united around the central tenet of rejecting Umayyad rule. The primary focus of this *ziyāra* text is on overtly disassociating from the Umayyads. This focus in itself indicates the text’s authenticity. Often, in later fabricated texts, influenced by prevailing atmospheres and general sentiments, the expressions of disassociation become broader, losing the specific emphasis on the Umayyads, who by then were a past era. Such broader terms could be interpreted as referring to the ‘Abbāsīd period or even encompassing evolved Shī‘ī views on the scope of disassociation.

Another point to note is that this *ziyāra* text mentions several adversaries of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, such as Ibn Ziyād, Shimr, and ‘Umar b. Sa‘d. This suggests that it was composed at a time when these names were still familiar to its audience. The emphasis on such figures in a text that was produced during the late Umayyad period is entirely consistent with the prevailing sentiments of the Shī‘a community regarding the oppression and injustices they felt were meted out, by individual Umayyad leaders and their agents, against the *Ahl al-Bayt*. If the text had been written during a later period, it would undoubtedly reflect the circumstances of that era, possibly omitting the frequent mention

of specific individuals and various Umayyad families or their supporters. The fact that the text speaks of curses and damnation upon the Umayyad dynasty, their family, and their murderous agents “for all eternity” is a clear indication that it was written during a time when these families were in power and were beneficiaries of the oppressive Umayyad regime. Their followers, or in another interpretation of the *ziyāra* text, their community (*umma*) were actively perpetrating injustices against the *Ahl al-Bayt*, highlighting the juxtaposition of the “community” versus the “household of the Prophet.”

The overall tone of this *ziyāra* text, which is directed against the Umayyads, does not suggest a text written at a time when the Umayyads had already fallen from power, and logically there would no longer have been a tangible reason to express such strong anti-Umayyad sentiments. The text speaks of peace (*silḥ*) and war (*ḥarb*) concerning the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their adversaries, and then immediately expresses curses towards families like Āl Ziyād, Āl Marwān, the Umayyads, and their agents, thereby clarifying who these adversaries are. When this text mentions the Āl-Marwān family and the Umayyads, it is evident that it was articulated in an environment where these families were still in power. The intent behind this text was to highlight that, although the actual murderers of al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī and his companions might no longer be alive, their lineage continued. Even if they distanced themselves from the actions during the time of Yazīd, the Umayyad caliph, they still followed the same path, and opposition to their remnants was still necessary. This perfectly captures the atmosphere a decade or two before the Abbasid Revolution and portrays the condition of Shī‘ī groups in the early 2nd/8th century in Kufa.

A section of this *ziyāra* text also describes the oppression that the supporters of the *Ahl al-Bayt* faced from their adversaries, which precisely reflects the challenging anti-Alid and anti-Shī‘a environment towards the end of the Umayyad period. Indeed, this text, which is both promotive and confrontational, emphasises stirring Alid sentiments

and anti-Umayyad feelings by repeating emotive phrases that are profoundly impactful. Consequently, this text can be characterised as revolutionary, making complete sense within the framework of the late Umayyad period and aligning with the revolutionary tendencies and Alid/Shī’a sentiments against the Umayyads.

The subsequent point concerning the tone we encounter in the text of *Ziyārat ‘Āshūrā’* pertains to the theme of anticipation and fostering hope for the uprising of an individual from the *Ahl al-Bayt* of Muḥammad to seek vengeance and confront the enemies of the *Ahl al-Bayt*; adversaries who have obstructed the *Ahl al-Bayt* from their rightful statuses (*marātib*). The text’s phrase in the initial mention of this theme reads: “... to grant me the pursuit of your revenge alongside a victorious Imam from the *Ahl al-Bayt* of Muhammad...” The term victorious (*manṣūr*) is among those expressions that have been fully validated, through independent sources, within the Shī’ī milieu and the combative Shī’ī factions during the late Umayyad era. In my opinion, the emphasis on this matter in the *ziyāra* text should be considered its primary focus, serving as a manifesto for the Shī’a opposition against the Umayyads during that period. The second instance in *Ziyārat ‘Āshūrā’* where the theme of revenge and association with the Imam is mentioned is: “...to bestow upon me the pursuit of my revenge alongside a guiding Imam, manifestly speaking the truth from you.” What’s described here about the conditions of that Imam is what the Shī’a sought during the Umayyad’s final period concerning a rightful Imam. The term manifest (*ẓāhir*) possibly refers to the background and belief based on the well-known *Ḥadīth* of Kumayl from the Commander of the Faithful prevalent among the Shī’a concerning two types of Imams (*qā’im*)—the manifest uncovered (*ẓāhir makshūf*) and the fearful submerged (*khā’if maghmūr*). This belief was the source of discussions and splits among Shī’a in the early periods.

To conclude, our discussion indicates that, the *Ziyārat ‘Āshūrā’* text can be analysed for its authenticity and its attribution to the late

Umayyad period by employing an internal historical critique methodology and historical semiotics. Although this method cannot precisely indicate whether this text is truly attributed to Imam al-Bāqir, for this matter, the *isnād* and transmitter criticism have always been the Shī'ī scholars' references. Even if we assume that this text is not from the Imam, it seems that, from a purely historical perspective, *Ziyārat 'Āshūrā'* can be deemed a Shī'ī promotional text from the late Umayyad reign. It likely circulated as a manifesto and a covert promotional text among certain Shī'ī factions and has been read traditionally as a Shī'ī text. This text, however, was later preserved among Twelver Shī'ī scriptures. Still, it is evident that the foundations of these later documents rely on older texts that circulated among the Shī'a for over two centuries and were ultimately narrated, recorded, and compiled in canonical books.

When analysing the *isnāds* and texts of the first few Islamic centuries, relying solely on traditional methods to verify their authenticity is insufficient. Particularly for the historian of beliefs and doctrines, an internal critique of the text and comparison with other validated texts is exceedingly essential and enlightening.

On the Validity of the Chain of Narration for *Ziyārat al-Arbaʿīn**

Sayyid Muḥammad Riḍā al-Sīstānī

The chain of transmission (*isnād*) for the 40th Day Visitation (*Ziyārat al-Arbaʿīn*) reads as follows: Shaykh Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) narrated in *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid*, saying:

A group of our companions informed us from Abū Muḥammad Hārūn b. Mūsā b. Aḥmad al-Tallaʿukbarī, who said: Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Maʿmar narrated to us; he said: Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Masʿada and al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Faḍḍāl narrated to me, from Saʿdān b. Muslim, from Ṣafwān b. Mihrān al-Jammāl who said: “My master [Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad] al-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said to me regarding the Fortieth Day Visitation: ‘Visit at the rising of the day and say: Peace be upon the friend of God and His beloved, peace be upon the intimate of God and His chosen one, peace be upon the pure one of God and son of His pure one, peace be upon al-Ḥusayn the oppressed martyr, peace be upon the prisoner of afflictions and the slain of tears....’”¹

This narration is the primary evidence used to demonstrate the recommended nature of visiting Imam al-Ḥusayn (a.s.) on the 20th of Ṣafar, commemorating forty days after his martyrdom. There should be no doubt about its complete indication of this recommendation

* This paper was originally published in Arabic in Sayyid Muḥammad Riḍā al-Sīstānī, *Qabasāt min ʿilm al-rijāl* (Dār al-Muʿarrikh al-ʿArabi: 2022), 3:655–658.

¹ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* (Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1407/1986), 6:113; idem., *Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid* (Muʿassasa Fiqh al-Shīʿa: 1990), 2:788.

given the narration clearly reveals its connection to visiting Imam al-Ḥusayn (a.s.). In addition, there is no doubt that—in the understanding of the believers, as passed down from predecessor to successor—the title *Ziyārat al-Arbaʿin* specifically refers to visiting the Imam (a.s.) on the occasion of the 40th day.

Nevertheless, an objection has been raised regarding the completeness of this narration's *isnād*, even though its completeness can be established since it includes only two individuals whose reliability is questioned:

1. Saʿdān b. Muslim, who is not explicitly deemed reliable in the biographical (*rijālī*) works, but he is among the narrators of Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad Ibn Qūlawayh's (d. 368/978) *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*² and among the teachers of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr (d. 217/832).³ His reliability can be established according to these two well-known principles: namely, trustworthiness inferred from being among the narrators of Ibn Qūlawayh, or from being among the teachers of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr. However, I accept the second principle but not the first.
2. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Maʿmar, who is also not explicitly deemed reliable in the biographical works, but it is noteworthy that Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990) mentioned him in his *Fihrist*⁴ as "Abū l-Ḥusayn ... Ibn Maʿmar al-Kūfī" among the Shīʿī jurists, traditionists, and scholars, indicating he was among the notable figures of his time. No criticism has been reported about him, which necessitates accepting his narrations.

² Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad Ibn Qūlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* (Dār al-Murtaḍawiyya: 1356 Sh./1977), *al-Khitām*, 6.

³ Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi fī ʿilm al-dīn* (Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1986), 1:178.

⁴ Muḥammad b. Ishāq Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist Ibn al-Nadīm* (Dār al-Maʿrifa: 1997), 274.

As for ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Mas‘ada, the lack of confirmation of his reliability is not problematic, because Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Ma‘mar narrated from both him and al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Faḍḍāl together, and the reliability of the second is sufficient.

I say: Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Ma‘mar was indeed one of those who narrated from Ḥamdān b. al-Mu‘āfā,⁵ who died in 265/878-888, and from Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī l-Khaṭṭāb,⁶ who died in 262/875-876, and they are both from the seventh generation of *ḥadīth* transmitters. Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941)⁷ and Furāt b. Ib-rāhīm al-Kūfī (d. 352/963),⁸ who are from the ninth generation, narrated from him. Therefore, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Ma‘mar must be from the eighth generation, though it appears from al-Talla‘ukbarī’s narration—who is from the tenth generation—that he lived long enough to be encountered by the scholars of that generation as well.

According to the chain or narrations, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Ma‘mar narrates from Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Mas‘ada and al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Faḍḍāl. However, the latter belongs to the sixth generation, and so it would not have been possible for Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Ma‘mar—from the eighth generation—to narrate from him directly, suggesting a possible missing intermediary, as shown in *isnād* 1:

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī → al-Talla‘ukbarī → Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Ma‘mar
→ <missing intermediary?> → Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b.
Mas‘ada *wa* (and) al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Faḍḍāl → Sa‘dān b. Muslim
→ Ṣafwān b. Mihrān al-Jammāl → Imām al-Ṣādiq (a.s.).

In light of this, it seems probable that the conjunction *wa* (“and”) in *isnād* 1 is, in fact, a corruption of the preposition ‘an (“from”), as has occurred in dozens of instances in *ḥadīth* books. This would then suggest a different chain of narration, as shown in *isnād* 2 (the chain of

⁵ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī* (Dār al-Thaqāfa: 1993), 630.

⁶ Al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, 3:66.

⁷ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 8:18.

⁸ Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī* (Kitābchī: 1376 Sh./1997), 8.

narrators with *ʿan* instead of *wa*):

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī → al-Tallaʿukbarī → Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Maʿmar
→ Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Masʿada → al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī
b. Faḍḍāl → Saʿdān b. Muslim → Ṣafwān b. Mihrān al-Jammāl →
Imām al-Ṣādiq (a.s.).

Accordingly, ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Masʿada serves as an intermediary between Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Maʿmar and al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Faḍḍāl. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Masʿada—who appears from some *isnāds* to be the grandson of Masʿada b. Ṣadaqa—is considered from the seventh generation, since Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Maʿmar (who is also from the eighth) narrates from him, and his narration from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Najrān (who is from the sixth generation, like Ibn Faḍḍāl) has been recorded.

Thus, it becomes clear that the problem in the mentioned *isnād* is not limited to the presence of Saʿdān b. Muslim and Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Maʿmar—issues that could be addressed by what was previously discussed—but also includes ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Masʿada. Additionally, the claim that there is sufficient ground to accept the narration of Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Maʿmar because he was among the notable figures, coupled with the absence of criticism against him, is only valid according to the methodology of some scholars. However, this approach cannot be considered sufficient for establishing reliability.

Of course, one could argue that Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Maʿmar's status as a well-known Shīʿī jurist, traditionist, and scholar is in itself sufficient grounds for relying on the material he narrates, but this requires further consideration.

However, it can be said that, aside from what has been mentioned above, it is possible to establish the reliability of the aforementioned narration, because Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Maʿmar and ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Masʿada were not among the authors of books but rather among the scholars who granted licenses for the transmission of books written by others. It is noteworthy that Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Najāshī

(d. 450/1058) counted the *Kitāb al-ziyārāt* among al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Faḍḍāl’s books.⁹ It appears that al-Talla‘ukbarī—whom Shaykh al-Ṭūsī explicitly stated had narrated all foundational works and compilation¹⁰—extracted Ṣafwān b. Mihrān al-Jammāl’s aforementioned narration from that book. Since the books of the Banū Faḍḍāl were well-known and recognised in that era, there is no need to examine the chain of transmission when relying on what has been extracted from them.

In conclusion, my recommended approach to the question of the validity of the *isnād* of the *Ziyārat al-Arba‘in* is to accept the completeness of its *isnād*, and specifically the possibility of relying upon it in establishing the recommendation of the 40th day (*arba‘in*) visitation.

⁹ Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī* (Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1365 Sh./1986), 36.

¹⁰ Al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī* (Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1373 Sh./1994), 449.

Reviews

***The Language of Tears: My Journey into the World of Shi'i Muslim Women.* By Bridget Blomfield. White Cloud Press, 2015. 160 pages. ISBN: 978-1935952428.**

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Bridget Blomfield's *The Language of Tears: My Journey into the World of Shi'i Muslim Women* offers an intimate ethnographic account of Shī'ī Muslim women living in the United States. Through personal anecdotes and community observations, gained through immersion in Shī'ī communities, she explores how ritual, identity, and faith intersect in the lives of these women. Centring two Islamic female figures—Prophet Muḥammad's daughter, Fatima, and granddaughter, Zaynab—Blomfield examines how historical legacies of resilience and piety are lived and reinterpreted across generations. This study brings visibility to a marginalised and often mischaracterised group, highlighting the complexity, agency, and spiritual depth of Shī'ī women's lives in a Western context.

Blomfield begins the first chapter by providing her own story of attending Arabic classes alongside young children. In this process she provides informative descriptions regarding general Shī'ī belief and practices, such as fasting and charity. Blomfield's anecdotes also include reflections on her own navigation as self-described outsider, which either granted her special privileges or, although less often, excluded her entirely. Blomfield discusses her experiences through formal structures, such as the school institution, but also informal relationships she built with her participants while doing the research. One of the interesting facets that Blomfield picks up on is the enthusiasm of the women regarding her interest in learning Arabic and in Shī'ism.

She speaks to their underlying desire for her to convert which, with more exposure to Shī'ī belief, they see as inevitable.

In Chapter 2, Blomfield then moves on to provide an analysis of the importance of two female Islamic figures, Fatima and Zaynab. She describes the way the women in her study utilise both women as a source of strength, resilience, and piety. An important finding of Blomfield's research is the way in which the figures of both Fatima and Zaynab are invoked varyingly by women of different ages. Fatima, labelled "the lady of heaven," is described as love, wisdom, and as a symbol of hope for humankind (23). The women invoke her qualities in their times of need and weep with her in times of sadness. Blomfield notes a particular appeal of Zaynab amongst college-aged Shī'ī women (19). This discussion is particularly interesting because it illustrates the negotiations of identity and religion for American Shī'ī girls and women. They negotiate religious rulings, coming to conclusions based on their own experiences and negotiate hybrid identities of being Muslim and American, as well as from their respective ethnic backgrounds. Due to characterising Zaynab as a powerful, out-spoken leader, they feel granted the permission to be the same. Blomfield speaks of a more "fluid" identity for the younger women who identify with both the Islamic and cultural values of their mothers, while rejecting the elements of that identity that do not line up with their understandings of equality (47). In this section, the young girls also discuss their opinions on a number of controversial issues within the Muslim community, such as arranged marriages and polygamy. The use of Zaynab as a female archetype guides their contributions to community discourses on these issues.

The discussion of Zaynab provides a transition to a discussion in Chapter 4 regarding Muharram ritual practices, as she is considered the original mourner in the story of Ashura. This chapter thoroughly explains the significance of Muharram to Shī'ī Muslims and specifically how its significance is translated into lived experiences. Blomfield describes her own engagement with Muharram practices, such as

listening to lamentations and acts of mourning, such as weeping and the beating of the chest. Although these traits vary from culture to culture, Blomfield visits a mosque that caters to three different languages and ethnicities and so she is able to capture a general idea of practices without being caught up in cultural specifics. although she does provide details on cultural diversity in the following chapters. She illustrates the way Shī'ī women and men lament over the events of Karbala, and she provides her own reactions to the story, as well as the mourning and the practices she witnesses. An essential point is the demonstration of how the community connects the events of Karbala to contemporary struggles of injustice, using generational mourning in conjunction with current grief-invoking events.

In the remaining three chapters, Blomfield provides culturally specific anecdotes featuring the Iranian, Iraqi and Pakistani Shī'ī women she encounters. While the three groups have many practices in common, Blomfield draws attention to the diversity among them. Due to the fact that Blomfield was visiting many of these women in their homes to attend Muharram rituals, she was also able to analyse home dynamics and infer class differentiations.

Blomfield concludes her book with an epilogue about her trip to Iran. She details the interactions she has with locals as an American woman and her experience visiting holy sites. Each city she visits offers her different experiences; Qom offers her a scholarly city, Mashhad a place where she visits shrines, and Tehran the capital. As she does in the earlier parts of the book, she makes notes of all the occurrences that surprise her. The honesty of these statements are pleasant additions to the book that showcase an authentic interaction when experiencing different cultures.

The structure of Blomfield's book is commendable for effectively presenting the key elements of Muharram ritual and practice, while also offering insight into how these rituals are interpreted and lived by Shī'ī women. Given the wide range of social issues uniquely affecting women, covering each one in full depth within a short book presents

an understandable challenge. However, one area where the book falls short is in the discussion of Zaynab in Chapter 3. In attempting to weave together various issues that impact young Shi'i women, Blomfield drifts from the central focus on Zaynab. The connection between the chapter's topics and its namesake feels tenuous, relying primarily on the idea that young women view Zaynab as a "feminist" figure, and that the issues discussed are therefore feminist in nature (33). A more compelling approach would have been to explore how young women actively engage with the figure of Zaynab—within and beyond their communities, as a source of empowerment and guidance in achieving their goals. Many of the other topics addressed in the chapter could have naturally aligned under this broader umbrella. In this way, Blomfield missed an opportunity to more deeply embed Zaynab into the narrative and fully explore her contemporary significance.

While it reads that Blomfield is looking to demonstrate that Shi'i women are similar to the average American woman, in the exotifying of the practice, food and identities, she draws further emphasis on the differences and potentially draws the Shi'i Muslim women as foreign or odd. There are sections that seem to be exotifying practices and culture, some even as blatant as calling Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran "exotic places," when the reality is they are simply seen as home to Blomfield's research participants (33). She also compares being a refugee from Iraq to her own relocation from California to Nebraska, a misshapen comparison when discussing the struggles of those fleeing war and political turmoil (35).

Additionally, Blomfield makes an unseemly point early on in her book when she relays an anecdote regarding attending a female-only celebration. She states her surprise at the women—who seemingly only dressed in dark colours—wearing clothing she deemed "sexy and beautiful" and as they were wearing "sequined dresses and danced in the living room" (xxiii). While this point is meant to illustrate the necessity in complexifying the identities of Muslim women, beyond ominous veiled figures, Blomfield's emphasis on their engagement with

otherwise stereotypical Western liberal values in this manner, seems distasteful. Indeed, as Blomfield shows, the women she engages with emphasise their piety and modesty, and therefore Blomfield's publicising of such private details does little to add to her findings. Later in the following chapter, Blomfield repeats this finding in a much better contextualised manner through an anecdote of her attendance of a celebration (27).

One of the elements Blomfield does well is capturing the diversity of perspective within a small group. She accounts for differences in language, class, and ethnicity in addition to age. She successfully illustrates the appeal in the different women based on the different experiences of two generations of Shī'ī women. What she does not capture, or at least selectively omits, are more rigid interpretations of Muharram ritual and practice. Like all groups, despite immigrating to the United States, people maintain rigidity in cultural expectations and practice. For example, in regard to labelling Zaynab a "feminist", Blomfield does not capture how even amongst younger generations there can be disapproval for such labelling, although this may be more related to the associations of the term itself. Quietist interpretations of the story of Ashura rejects the active revolutionary interpretations that would read Zaynab in this frame. There are interpretations of the story of Karbala that view its purpose as stagnant. The view here being that Zaynab's situation was dire and out of the ordinary for her typical behaviour. One of the participants Blomfield speaks to states a similar assertion; that Shī'īs are quietest and do not belong in politics (80). This idea is contested within Shī'ī spheres, with more prominence given to the view that Blomfield finds in her young research subjects. This book is a valuable contribution to ethnographic research on Shī'ism in North America, particularly with a gender-specific focus. This is a relatively new area of study, with English-language research only gaining momentum in the 20th century, after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, which drew global attention to Shī'ism. Shī'īs are often described as "a minority within a minority," and as such, were rarely

the central focus of academic research, frequently relegated to footnotes in studies on over-generalised Muslim topics. Despite some shortcomings, the book's focused exploration of this minority group is a welcome and necessary scholarly endeavour. It is especially suitable for non-Muslim readers interested in understanding the significance of Muharram rituals within Shī'i communities. One of the book's key strengths is its portrayal of the diversity within the group under study and the trust that the author appears to establish with the community she studies. Blomfield's humility throughout the research process is evident, and she is openly accepted by the community, even being initiated through ritual practice. This speaks volumes about the depth of the relationships she built and the respect with which she conducted her fieldwork.

A Critical Review of Safūra's Personality in *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretations* by Barbara Stowasser

Batool S. Arastu

Jamiat Al-Zahra

Abstract

Barbara Stowasser, while introducing Safūra (a.s.)—the wife of Mūsā (a.s.)—in her book *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretations* has created doubts in the mind of the reader by mentioning that Safūra (a.s.) was standing away from the shepherds as she had no strength to push them aside and no one except Mūsā (a.s.) could move the heavy stone which covered the well. Further doubt is raised by the claim that women can work in Islam only if there is a “need,” and while mentioning her “bashful gait” she comes to the conclusion that this demeanour separated her from a slave in the past and at present from her modernist sister who tries to behave like a man. These doubts have been cleared in this paper by stating that Safūra (a.s.) stood away from the men because of her modesty, and the stone that Mūsā moved single handedly used to be moved by ten men. Further, the present work argues that a woman can work in Islam as long as she abides by the rules laid down by Islam, and that Stowasser's conclusion on Safūra's bashful walk was an error as it was based on invalid comparison; rather, the Qur'ānic verse had mentioned it to emphasise and appreciate her modesty.

1. Introduction

The Qur'ān has given an exceptional status to women by mentioning

them as mothers, wives and daughters of Prophets and other dignitaries. Some women—including Safūra (a.s.), the wife of Prophet Mūsā (a.s.)—have been praised in the Qur'ān. Considering the status of women in the Qur'ān and their role in Islamic society, Islamic and non-Islamic researchers have conducted research in this field. However, Barbara F. Stowasser, in her book *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretation* has created doubts in the mind of the reader by stating that Safūra and her sister could not water their flock because shepherds had placed a large stone on the well which only Mūsā could remove; or else, they lacked the strength to drive the shepherds away, hence standing away from them. She adds another doubt by stating that in Islam, women can work only if there is a “need,” implying that women cannot have a career. Furthermore, regarding Safūra's “bashful walk,” she criticises this description by stating that Safūra walked like a true female and did not behave like a man, which in turn separates her from a slave, as well as from her modernist sister who tries to behave like a man.

Stowasser's book has been analysed, and reports have been written by Kathryn Kueny, Amina Wadud—Muhsin and Deb Sugars. None, however, have referred to the story of Safūra (a.s.) mentioned in her book. The aim of the present work is to answer the doubts raised by Stowasser in her description of Safūra with the help of Qur'ān and traditions.¹ This research is of utmost importance as it can defend the role of women in the Qur'ān and assert that women are not weak creatures and can have a role in society so long as it is within the framework of Islam.

Key Shī'ī sources used for this article include *Tafsīr-i Nimūna*, *Tafsīr al-mīzān*, *Majma' al-bayān*, *Jawāmi' al-jāmi'*, *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* and *Tafsīr al-Qummī*. Some important Sunnī sources used include *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm wa-l-sab' al-mathānī*, *Maḥāṭib al-*

¹ A greater endeavor would be to study all the women that are mentioned in Stowasser's book; due to constraints, this has not been possible.

*ghayb, Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān.*²

The paper has been divided into three sections as follows:

1. Misconception 1: Modesty or weakness?
2. Misconception 2: Need or freedom?
3. Misconception 3: "Bashful gait."

The Author: Barbara F. Stowasser is a researcher in the field of "Women in Islam." She was born in 1935 in Germany. She studied at the University of Muenster, Germany and received her M.A. in 1959 from UCLA and her Ph.D. in 1961 from the University of Muenster, Germany. She passed away in 2012. Stowasser was a member of the faculty at Georgetown University, where she was also holder of the Sultanate of Oman Chair in Arabic and Islamic Literature, a core member of the faculty of Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS) and thrice director of the Center. She has many publications, most notably, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretation* (1994), *The Islamic Impulse* (1987) and *Islamic Law and the Challenges of Modernity* (2004).

The book *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretation* is a study on the women of Islamic sacred history. It narrates their stories in Qur'ān and interpretation and traditions. The current paper has examined the wife of Mūsā—Safūra—in classical exegesis (*tafāsīr*).

2. Misconception 1: Modesty or Weakness?

According to *tafāsīr*, Safūrā³ or Safūra⁴ or Safra⁵ or Safūrya⁶—who has

² The Qur'ānic commentaries listed were accessed mostly through the software *Jāmi' Tafāsīr Noor*.

³ Nāṣir Makārim-Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr-i Nimūna* (Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1995), 16:69.

⁴ Ibid.; Faḍl b. Ḥasan Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān*, (Farāḥānī: 1981), 18:186.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Shihāb al-Dīn Mahmūd b. 'Abdullāh al-Ālusī, *Rūh al-ma'ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-‘aẓīm wa-l sab’ al-mathānī* (Jāmi' Tafāsīr: 1853), 10:269.

been referred to in the Qur'an in *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ*—was the daughter of Prophet Shoaib (a.s.). Stowasser has referred to her father as the “shepherd” in her book, likely as there is a controversy in the *tafāsīr* with regard to his identity.⁷ Upon analysis of Shī'ī and Sunnī *tafāsīr*, a difference of opinion can be seen. Some say that Shoaib passed away before Safūra's encounter with Mūsā (a.s.); others posit that Safūra's father was the nephew of Shoaib. However, the majority of commentators believe that her father was indeed Prophet Shoaib.⁸

The story begins when she and her younger sister Liy'a⁹ are waiting with their flock of sheep near the well, which was likely situated near the outskirts of Madyan. Mūsā (a.s.), after fleeing from Egypt, has just reached Madyan. Madyan.¹⁰ He notices a group of shepherds competing with each other to water their flocks of sheep or their camels.¹¹ A little away from them, on the slope¹² he notices two young girls holding back their flock.¹³ This is described in Q 28:23–24 as follows:

﴿وَلَمَّا وَرَدَ مَاءَ مَدْيَنَ وَجَدَ عَلَيْهِ أُمَّةٌ مِّنَ النَّاسِ يَسْكُنُونَ وَوَجَدَ مِنْ دُونِهِمُ امْرَأَتَيْنِ

⁷ Stowasser has referred to her father as the “shepherd” in her book, likely as there is a controversy in the *tafāsīr* in regard to his identity; see Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretation* (Oxford University Press: 1994), 60.

⁸ Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān*, 18:183; Muḥammad b. Hasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Dār al-Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabiyya: n.d.), 8:143.

⁹ Liy'a or Safira; see Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān*, 18:186.

¹⁰ Midian: Midian was in the “northwest Arabian Peninsula, on the east shore of the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea”: see “Midian,” *Wikipedia*, <https://bit.ly/3lLuNS7/>; Makārim-Shirāzī, *Tafsīr-i Nimūna*, 9:200; “Madyan,” *Wikishia*, <https://bit.ly/31gbGs9>.

¹¹ Al-Ālusī, *Rūh al-ma'āwī*, 10:269.

¹² Faḍl b. Ḥasan Ṭabarsī, *Jawāmi' al-jāmi'*, Persian translation (Jāmi' Tafāsīr Noor: n.d.), 4:519.

¹³ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Tafsīr al-mizān*, Persian translation (Daftar-i Intishārāt-i Islāmī-yi Jāmi'a-yi Muḥaddisin-i Hawza-yi Ilmiyya-yi Qom: 1995), 16:33.

تَدُودَانِ قَالَ مَا حَطْبُكُمَا قَالَتَا لَا نَسْقِي حَتَّى يُصْدِرَ الرِّعَاءُ وَأَبُونَا شَيْخٌ كَبِيرٌ
فَسَقَى هُمَا

When he arrived at the well of Madyan, he found there a throng of people watering [their flocks], and he found, besides them, two women holding back (*tadhūdān*) [their flock]. He said, “What is your business?” They said, “We do not water [our flock] until the shepherds have driven out [their flocks], and our father is an aged man.” So he watered [their flock] for them.

Regarding why the girls were holding back their flock, Ṭabāṭabā'ī writes that *tadhūdān* in the above verse is derived from the word *dha-wa-da* which means to stop or to block. This implies that the girls were stopping their sheep from going towards the water, or that they were stopping them from mingling with other flocks.¹⁴ Ṭabarsī similarly writes that the two women held their flocks back either because they did not want people to get closer to their flock, they were not strong enough to pull the water from the well, or they did not want their flock to mingle with others,¹⁵ whereas Rāzī and Ṭabāṭabā'ī posit that it was out of modesty, i.e., in order to avoid mingling with the men watering their flocks.¹⁶ Stowasser's view that they did not come forward and approach the shepherds because they had no strength to jostle or to shove aside the male crowd is not found in the *tafāsīr*; instead, the *tafāsīr* mention they had no strength to pull the water out of the well.

The story continues: Mūsā (a.s.) becomes curious. He approaches the girls to ask what has stopped them from watering their flock. They

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān*, 18:181.

¹⁶ Ibid.; Fakhrudīn al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-ghayb* (Dār al-Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabiyya: 1999), 24:588; Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'ān* (Harper Collins: 2015), 951.

reply that they were waiting for the others to leave,¹⁷ at which point they would allow their sheep to drink from the water remaining in the troughs as they themselves had no strength to pull the water from the well.¹⁸

It was also obvious that these girls were avoiding confronting the shepherds out of their sense of modesty. Before the question could arise of the possibility of help from their father or a brother, it appears they—pre-emptively—informed Musa (a.s.) that their father was an old man¹⁹ and was not fit to take care of the sheep; it can also be assumed they had no brother,²⁰ thus being compelled to do the job themselves.²¹ Working as a shepherdess was not a dishonor for them; perhaps interacting with the male shepherds was.²²

Mūsā is upset to hear of this discriminatory state of affairs—where the women had to wait until the men left to water their sheep.²³ Some commentaries mention that he then approaches the shepherds and moves them aside,²⁴ alerting them to their selfish and discriminatory

¹⁷ Q 28:23.

¹⁸ Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān*, 18:181. In those times they had stone troughs near the well where they would pour the water in it from the well to water their flock. Julye Bidmead, "Women and wells in the Hebrew Bible," *Bible Odyssey*. Accessed March 2020, <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/women-and-wells-in-the-hebrew-bible>.

¹⁹ Q 28:23.

²⁰ 'Abdullāh Jawādī Āmulī, "Dars-i Tafsīr-i Ayatollah Jawādī, Āyāt-i 22 tā 24 Sūra-yi Qaṣaṣ", *Madrasa-yi Fiqāhat*. Accessed 11th November 2021, <https://eshia.ir/feqh/archive/text/javadi/tafsir/91/910711>.

²¹ Nāṣir Makārim-Shīrāzī, *Qīṣṣa-hāyi Qur'an* (Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya: 2003), 238; idem., *Tafsīr-i Nimūna*, 16:56.

²² Āmulī, "Dars-i Tafsīr."

²³ Makārim-Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr-i Nimūna*, 16:57.

²⁴ Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān*, 18:181.

approach to obtaining water.²⁵ In any case, the narrative continues that the shepherds give Mūsā (a.s.) the bucket—heavy enough to require ten men to pull²⁶ from the well—and deliberately do not offer him help to humiliate him. Mūsā (a.s.) throws the bucket in the well, drains the water singlehandedly²⁷ and waters the flock. Being a stranger in the land—tired and hungry from his journey—does not stop him from helping the oppressed.²⁸ This displays his physical strength as well as his spiritual strength.

It is likely that in this era, shepherds covered their wells with large stones to keep dirt, dust and contamination out; both humans and animals consumed the same water. Other explanations for the use of these stones include: preventing the lambs of the flock from being drowned in it, securing a scarce water supply; protecting the well from receiving damage from the heat of the sun, or preventing sand from filling up the well.²⁹ The stone was usually heavy—needing a few men to move it—to prevent it from being moved by the wind.

Stowasser in *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretation* creates doubts in the mind of the reader by saying that Safūra (a.s.) and her sister could not water their flock because the shepherds had placed a large stone on the well, which only Mūsā (a.s.) could remove; or else, they lacked the strength to drive the shepherds away and that is why they were standing away from them. She writes in this regard:

²⁵ Makārim-Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr-i Nimūna*, 16:57. On the contrary, other commentators suggest that history has not recorded the approach he took to convince the shepherds to give him the bucket; see Āmulī, “Dars-i Tafsīr.”

²⁶ ‘Abd ‘Alī b. Jum‘a al-‘Arūsī al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn* (Ismā‘īlyān: 1994), 4:121; ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* (Jāmi‘ Tafāsīr Noor: n.d.), 2:138.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Makārim-Shīrāzī, *Qiṣṣa-hāyi Qur’ān*, 238; Makārim-Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr-i Nimūna*, 16:57.

²⁹ Joseph Benson, “Genesis 29, Benson Commentary,” *Bible Hub*. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/benson/genesis/29.htm>.

Of Moses' wife the Qur'ān only tells that she was an old Madynite sheepherder's daughter. In some *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, she is identified as Zippora [Safura] ... The story has also been embellished with some further details. It is said that the sheepherder's daughters could not water their small flock because the shepherds had placed a large stone on the well, which only Moses could remove. Else, they lacked the strength to jostle the male crowd.³⁰

She narrates that Safūra (a.s.) and her sister Liya could not water their small flock because of one of the two following reasons:

1. The shepherds had placed a large stone on the well, which only Moses could remove.
2. They lacked the strength to push or shove the male crowd.

The first consideration assumes that no one else could remove the large stone on the well. If this was the case, why did the shepherds place a stone on the well in the knowledge that they could not remove it? Were they not there to water their flocks too? If they were there to water their flocks then how did they do it when the well was covered? Or did they cover the well after they watered their flocks to tease the girls and not allow them to access the water? Did they want the girls to plead them to remove the stone?

Stowasser further suggests that nobody could remove the stone except Mūsā (a.s.).³¹ This then begs the question; how did the shepherds place the stone in the first place if none was strong enough to remove it? Moreover, if they did not have the strength to remove it, did they not worry about how they would draw the water the following days? How did the girls water their flock before Mūsā (a.s.) entered the scene? If they had no strength to remove the stone, then did they have no access to the water before Mūsā's advent? There must then have

³⁰ Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 60.

³¹ Ibid.

been another way with which they quenched the thirst of their flock.

Stowasser further posits that the second reason that did not allow them to water their flocks was that they lacked the strength to push through the male crowd. This implies that if they had the physical strength, they certainly would have pushed the shepherds aside—who were all male—and made their way to the well. Another possible implication of a “lack of strength” is that they did not have the courage to approach the shepherds and demand their right, and thus avoided them; had they the courage, they would have elbowed the shepherds aside and drawn the water for their flock.

It could be that Stowasser was influenced by the Bible; the Bible narrates that the girls were at the well to draw water but the shepherds showed up and drove them away. This implies that the girls were weak and did not have the courage to stand up for their right.³² Another important point to be noted is that Stowasser’s main sources are mostly the *qīṣaṣ* (Qur’ānic stories) and not the *tafāsīr* (interpretations, exegesis); the latter being a more authentic and reliable source.

3. Misconception 2: Need or Freedom?

Stowasser suggests that in Islam, women can work only if there is a “need,” implying that woman cannot have a career. She writes in this regard:

This Qur’ānic story, then, here serves as scripturalist proof that Muslim women’s work outside of the home is religiously ac-

³² Related verses from the Bible are as follows: (1) Exodus, Chapter 2, verse 15: ... *but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well*; (2) Exodus, Chapter 2, verse 6: *Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father’s flock*. (3) Exodus, Chapter 2, verse 17: *Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock*.

ceptable only as long as it is truly unavoidable Muslim society, be it the immediate neighbourhood or society at large, must take cognizance when a woman is compelled by circumstances to leave her "natural arena" to work elsewhere, and it must help her out so that she may safely return to her home. As for the woman, she must strive with all her might to settle the contingency at the earliest moment possible ... They had not worked outside of the home because of preference but because of need; and they eliminated this need at the earliest possibility. This, then, presents a model to be followed by all believing Muslim women.³³

According to Stowasser, a Muslim woman can work outside the house only under the condition that there is a "need" for her. If she is working outside the house, she should keep looking for opportunities to eliminate the need so that she can return home. In addition, society needs to help the woman so that she can return home.

However, there is no Qur'anic evidence to back up this view. If anything, the verses under discussion (Q 28:23–4) actually demonstrate that a woman can work outside the house. If it was against the law then Allāh would not have mentioned the story of Safūra (a.s.) and her sister Liya playing the role of shepherdess, working outside. In addition, when looking into the traditions, it can be seen that women worked outside the house at the time of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) with his tacit approval, i.e., without objection. For example, Hawlā' used to sell perfume as noted in the following tradition:

مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَحْيَى، عَنْ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ، عَنْ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ أَبِي نَجْرَانَ، عَنْ صَفْوَانَ، عَنْ خَلْفِ بْنِ حَمَّادٍ، عَنِ الْحُسَيْنِ بْنِ زَيْدٍ الْهَاشِمِيِّ، عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع)، قَالَ: جَاءَتْ زَيْنَبُ الْعَطَّارَةُ الْخَوْلَاءُ إِلَى نِسَاءِ النَّبِيِّ (ص) وَبَنَاتِهِ، وَكَانَتْ تَبِيعُ مِنْهُنَّ الْعِطْرَ. فَجَاءَ النَّبِيُّ (ص) وَهِيَ عِنْدَهُنَّ، فَقَالَ: إِذَا أَتَيْتَنَا طَابَتْ

³³ Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 61.

يُيُونُنَا. فَقَالَتْ: بَيُّوتُكَ بِرِيحِكَ أَطْيِبُ، يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ. قَالَ: إِذَا بَعْتَ فَأَحْسِنِي،
وَلَا تَغْشِي فَإِنَّهُ أَنْتَى وَأَنْتَى لِلْمَالِ ...

Zaynab al-‘Aṭṭāra al-Hawlā’ used to come to the wives and daughters of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and sell them perfume. The Prophet (s.a.w.) came while she was in their house, and he said, “When you come to us, our houses become sweet smelling.” al-Hawlā’ said, “Your houses are sweet smelling because of you, O Messenger of God.”³⁴

In continuation of this conversation between the Messenger of God (s.a.w.) and al-Hawlā’, it is written that the Prophet said, “Whenever you sell perfume, sell correctly and do not be fraudulent. Do not mix the perfume with anything, because piety is better and keeps the wealth more.”³⁵

Other women were also known to have businesses at the time of our Prophet (s.a.w.). The famous among them was his first wife Khadīja (a.s.),³⁶ whose business flourished to neighboring countries. Businesswomen would also visit our Prophet and ask him regarding Islamic law. For example, Umm Anmār was a businesswoman who came to the Prophet and he taught her to refrain from deceiving during trade.³⁷ It is clear that Prophet knew of these instances and did not

³⁴ Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi* (Jāmi‘ al-Ḥadīth Noor: n.d.) 8:153, *ḥadīth* 143.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya li-Ibn Hishām* (Dār al-Qalam: n.d.), 1:199

³⁷ Nāhid Ṭayyibī, *Gūna-Shināsī-yi raftār-i Payāambar-i A’zam bā Zanān* (Ṭahā: 1963), 83. Other examples can be found in the traditions. Umm Mubashshir Anṣārī owned a garden of date-trees outside Medina and would manage its affairs. She was advised to stop working there by her nephew Jābir b. ‘Abdullāh as she was in her *‘idda* (the waiting period for

object or stop them; he even advised and guided them when they came to him with questions.

Thus, contrary to Stowasser's claim, Islam does not stop women from working outside the home. In fact, according to Islamic tradition, if she works, the money that she earns is her own to do as she pleases; it is man who is responsible for her—and the family's—expenses (extending to food, clothing and a comfortable home), a concept referred to in the tradition as *nafaqa*. She is not forced to work; it is her choice.

a wife after the death of her husband). However, the Prophet (s.a.w.) encouraged her, telling her that it might help her in giving charity; see *ibid.*, 85; Muḥsin Sa'īdzādi, "Mashāghil-i Zanān dar Aṣr-i Risālat-ī," *Tibyān*. Accessed 8th December 2023, <https://library.tebyan.net/fa/Viewer/Text/78198/1>. Similarly, Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh—the wife of the Prophet (s.a.w.)—would treat animal skin and make leather to sew products such as water bags; selling these, she would give her income to charity; see Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, trans. Maḥmūd Maḥdawī Damghānī (Farhang Wa Andīsha: 1995), 8:111. 'Ā'isha would spin thread and weave cloth. She believed, "A spindle in a woman's hand is better than a spear in a warrior's hand." (Sa'īdzādi, "Mashāghil-i Zanān.") Zamīda was talented in surgery and took care of Sa'd Ma'ādh—great companion of the Prophet (s.a.w.)—who was shot by an arrow; see Ja'far Subhānī, *Furūgh-i Abadiyyat*. Būstān-i Kitāb: 1929. Ku'ayba bt. Sa'd was a doctor and had set up a tent in the Prophet's mosque to cure the sick. (Ṭayyibī, *Gūneshināsi*, 84.) Shifā was a learned teacher who taught the Prophet's wife writing and medicine at his request; the Prophet (s.a.w.) would respect her and visit her, an indication of her approval; see *ibid.*, 83; Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, 8:280. Umm Ra'la was a hairdresser and would help women beautify themselves for their husbands. She asked Prophet (s.a.w.) about her work, and he encouraged her to continue it. (*Ibid.*). Women who had migrated to Ethiopia learnt carpentering and medicine there; Asmā' made a coffin for Fāṭima (a.s.); see 'Abbās al-Qummī, *House of Sorrows* (Islamic Publishing House: 2010), 204; Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 8:293.

However, if she does decide to do so, she must make sure that it is done so within the framework of Islam. Her first priority is her family; her husband and her children, and this should not be sacrificed. If the balance between family and work can be maintained, Islam has no objection. There are also three other conditions to be borne in mind:

1. She should not be isolated with non-*maḥram*³⁸ at work.
2. She should not mingle and be intimate with a non-*maḥram*.
3. A capable man should not be sitting idle at home while she is out working.³⁹

Similarly, Safūra (a.s.) was not isolated and was with her sister; they were not mingling nor intimate with men. Both the sisters were standing aside. They were simply out because their father was old and was not capable of taking care of the sheep.

Additionally, sometimes a woman may not “need” to work but society may need her. There are plenty of jobs that are more suitable for women than men. For example, society needs gynaecologists, proctologists, colorectal surgeons, nurses, mammogram technicians, midwives etc. A Muslim woman who observes *ḥijāb* (the Islamic dress code) will feel more comfortable seeing a female doctor than a male.⁴⁰ Thus,

³⁸ A man that is legal to marry according to Islamic law.

³⁹ Muḥsin Qarā’atī, *Tafsīr-i Nūr* (Markaz-i Farhangī-yi Dars-hāyī az Qur’ān: 2004), 9:37.

⁴⁰ It is true that nowadays, pursuing a career is different from the era of the Prophet (s.a.w.), and working women face some issues that were not prevalent in his time. In the era of the Prophet (s.a.w.), many people were self-employed and fixed their work schedule according to their needs. They were not under a large employer system, pressured to fulfil its demands. They could work without stress and at their own leisure. At the time of the Prophet (s.a.w.), women could make their products at home, or they could work in an environment that did not require much interaction with men. In contrast, nowadays men and women work side by side,

it is clear that a Muslim woman is free to work as long as she maintains her modesty, and it does not interfere with her family affairs.

4. Misconception 3: "Bashful gait"

According to Shī'ī and Sunnī *tafāsīr*, the story continues as follows: After he waters their flock, Mūsā (a.s.) relaxes under the shade of a tree⁴¹ or a wall⁴² as it is a very hot⁴³ and sunny day.⁴⁴ He is tired from the long journey.⁴⁵ He is hungry⁴⁶ and has not had a proper meal for seven days⁴⁷; to survive the journey, he has filled his stomach with the herbs and leaves of trees on the way.⁴⁸ As he retires under the shade of the tree, he makes a silent prayer, saying, "My Lord! I am indeed in need of any good You may send down to me."⁴⁹ Allāh—the Listener of prayers—answers his prayer in a beautiful manner in the events that follow.

Meanwhile, Safūra (a.s.) and Liya return home to their father,

and it is almost impossible to earn a degree without associating with the opposite gender.

⁴¹ Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Jāmi' Tafāsīr Noor: n.d.), 20:37; Ismā'īl b. 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿaẓīm*, (Jāmi' Tafāsīr Noor: n.d.), 6:204; Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān*, 18:182.

⁴² Al-Ālusī, *Rūh al-ma'ānī*, 10:273.

⁴³ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Tafsīr al-mizān*, 16:34.

⁴⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ*, 24:589.

⁴⁵ Muḥammad Muḥammadi Ishtihārdī, *Qiṣṣa-hāyi Qur'ān bi Qalam-i Ravān* (Mu'assisa-yi Inteshārāt-i Nabawī: 1999), 247; Rizwan Arastu, *God's Emissaries: Adam to Jesus* (I.M.A.M.: 2014), 350.

⁴⁶ Al-Ālusī, *Rūh al-ma'ānī*, 10:273; Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān*, 18:182; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:138.

⁴⁷ Al-Ālusī, *Rūh al-Ma'ānī*, 10:273.

⁴⁸ Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān*, 18:182; Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Bunyād-i Be'that: n.d.), 4:262.

⁴⁹ Q 28:24.

whom the majority of commentators believe to be Shu‘ayb (a.s.).⁵⁰ Shu‘ayb (a.s.) is surprised to see his daughters earlier than usual.⁵¹ The girls begin to narrate what has happened, perhaps even before he asks. After they relay their experience, Shu‘ayb asks his older⁵² daughter Safūra to invite Mūsā to his house.⁵³ He believes the young man to be deserving of thanks and reward⁵⁴; moreover, he is a stranger in their land, and it is mandatory on them to make him feel welcome in their city.

While Mūsā (a.s.) rests under the tree he notices that one of the girls is walking towards him. Her modest walk⁵⁵ tells him that she belongs to a decent⁵⁶ family: she was taking little steps bashfully⁵⁷ towards him.

Here, Stowasser raises observations that she gleans from this “bashful walk.” She suggests that Safūra (a.s.) walked like a true female and did not behave like a man, which in turn separates her both from behaving as a slave and from her more modern sister who tries to behave like a man. She writes:

Greater emphasis is placed on the “bashful gait” ([Q] 28:25) of the Madyanite girl who returned to Moses still sitting at the well. “She walked in the manner that free [not slave] women walk,” to invite him to her father’s house ... Contemporary conservative teaching continues to find a second paradigm in this story

⁵⁰ Ṭabarsī, *Majma‘ al-bayān*, 18:182

⁵¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-‘aẓīm*, 6:205.

⁵² Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Ḥayāt al-qulūb*, trans. Athar Husain S.H. Rizvi (Ansariyan: 2003), 1:303.

⁵³ Ishtehārdī, *Qiṣṣa-hāyi Qur‘ān*, 248; Ṭabarsī, *Jawami‘ al-jāmi‘*, Persian translation (Jāmi‘ Tafāsīr Noor: n.d.), 4:521.

⁵⁴ Al-‘Arūsī, *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn*, 4:122; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:138.

⁵⁵ Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *Tafsīr al-mizān*, 16:35.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Q 28:25.

in the old shepherd's daughter's "bashful gait" when it emphasises that this young woman "walked like a true female, not trying to behave like a man ... Therein lies another lesson for the contemporary Muslim woman."⁵⁸ In the medieval model, the "bashful gait" separated the free-born (respectable) Muslim woman from the (not-so respectable) slave; at present, the "bashful gait" separates the traditional Muslim woman from her modernist sister who "tries to behave like a man."⁵⁹

She describes Safūra's walk in her footnotes stating:

"She walked in the manner that free [not slave] women walk" ... meant are the modest stride and downcast eyes of the paradigmatic⁶⁰ "free" (and by definition "respectable") Muslim woman as opposed to the expansive stride and roving eyes of the paradigmatic "slave woman."⁶¹

According to Stowasser, Safūra's bashful walk is the walk of:

- a. A free woman
- b. A true female
- c. A respectable woman.

Upon analysis of the related Qur'ānic verses, it can be found that none of these claims are true. The Qur'ān mentions "walking bashfully" without adding any details to it like "a true female" or "a free woman" or "a respectable woman."

The related verse is as follows:

﴿فَجَاءَتْهُ إِحْدَاهُمَا تَمْشِي عَلَى اسْتِحْيَاءٍ قَالَتْ إِنَّ أَبِي يَدْعُوكَ لِيَجْزِيَكَ أَجْرَ

⁵⁸ Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rawī, *Qaḍāyā al-mar'at al-muslima* (Dar al-Muslim: 1982), 22, cited in Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 61.

⁵⁹ Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 61.

⁶⁰ Model, typical, exemplary.

⁶¹ Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 61.

مَا سَقَيْتَ لَنَا ﴿٦٢﴾

Then one of the two women approached him, walking bashfully. She said, “Indeed my father invites you to pay you the wages for watering [our flock] for us.”⁶²

Here, the verse is highlighting Safūra’s modesty in a praiseworthy and admiring tone. Stowasser on the other hand, relying on Sunni sources, appears to criticise her walk saying: “a second paradigm in this story in the old sheepherder’s daughter’s ‘bashful gait’ when it emphasises that this young woman ‘walked like a true female, not trying to behave like a man ...’”⁶³

In addition, upon perusal of the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Kathir, it can be seen that he writes:

“Then one of the two women approached him, walking bashfully” meaning, she was walking like a free woman, as it was narrated from the Commander of the faithful, ‘Umar: “She was covering herself from them with the folds of her garment.” Ibn Abī Hatim recorded that “Amr b. Maymūn said, ‘Umar said: “She came walking shyly, putting her garment over her face. She was not one of those audacious women who come and go as they please.” This chain of narrators is *ṣaḥīḥ*.⁶⁴

Comparison of the above passage with Stowasser’s observations seems to indicate that Stowasser has based her analysis on the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr, and took the phrase “free woman” from it. Based on a *ḥadīth* narrated from the second caliph, ‘Umar—which is not narrated from the Prophet (s.a.w.)—Stowasser comes to the conclusion that a slave woman is not respectable; as she writes: the “bashful gait” sepa-

⁶² Q 28:25.

⁶³ Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an*, 61.

⁶⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*, 6:205.

rated the free-born (respectable) Muslim woman from the (not-so respectable) slave. This claim is not found in the Qur'ān. There were many slaves who accepted Islam and were held in great esteem, and many Imams were the offspring of slave women who were married to the Imams; for example, Hamīda, the wife of Imam al-Ṣādiq (a.s.). Some prophets were also the children of slave women: for example, Hājar (a.s.) was the slave of Sāra (a.s.), who was gifted to Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.), and she gave birth to Prophet Ismail (a.s.).

As for Stowasser's phrase, *walked like a true female, not trying to behave like a man*,⁶⁵ similar phrasing can be seen in al-Sha'rawī's *Qaḍāyā*, which discusses Islamic laws regarding women. If Stowasser wanted to introduce women in the Qur'ān it would have been more pertinent to look into the exegesis of the Qur'ān, rather than a book of laws in which a scholar can give his personal opinion.

After comparing the free woman to a slave woman, Stowasser writes *at present, the "bashful gait" separates the traditional Muslim woman from her modernist sister who "tries to behave like a man."*⁶⁶ This claim is not found in the Qur'ān. It is apparent that she weaved around the phrase that is taken from al-Sha'rawī's book: *walked like a true female, not trying to behave like a man*. However, al-Sha'rawī did not claim that the modernist sister behaves like a man. Stowasser comes to this conclusion as it was based on invalid comparison; she compares the *free-born respectable woman* to a *not-so respectable slave woman*⁶⁷, then she compared a *true female*⁶⁸ to a *true male and not trying to behave like a man*⁶⁹ to *trying to behave like a man*. The comparison is illogical but has led Stowasser to the conclusion that a modernist Muslim woman tries to behave like a man.

⁶⁵ Al-Sha'rawī, *Qaḍāyā*, 22.

⁶⁶ Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 61.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Al-Sha'rawī, *Qaḍāyā*.22.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

5. Conclusion

Stowasser wished to introduce the women in the Qur'ān but has based her discussion mostly on *qiṣaṣ* instead of *tafāsīr*; the latter of which is regarded as more authentic and primary source.⁷⁰ She mostly uses *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, the named author of whom is more historian than *mufasssīr* (commentator).⁷¹ Ibn Kathīr has based his *Tafsīr* mostly on *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*. Moreover, Stowasser bases her discussion on some unauthentic traditions such as the narration from the second caliph, which is mostly found in Sunnī *tafāsīr*. Furthermore, she relies only on Sunnī literature and totally ignores Shī'ī books, which results in incorrect comparisons and conclusions.

A reader with little or no knowledge of Islam may take Stowasser's conclusions and perceive Islam as a biased religion which does not allow women to work, or a religion that has a class system of free and slave women; this may lead them to assume that women are weak and subordinate creatures compared to men.

It is hoped that the present article may serve as a stepping stone for which to study other women who have been discussed in Stowasser's work.

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⁷⁰ In fact, the *qiṣaṣ* are extracted from and are based on *tafāsīr*, not vice versa.

⁷¹ A *mufasssīr* (commentator) is a scholar who is an expert in Arabic grammar, the Qur'ānic science, the science of *hadith* (traditions), theology, jurisprudence, logic, history, background of revelations, philosophy, geography, sociology, and the different tools that are needed for a *mufasssīr*.

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