The Emergence and Development of the Shi'ite Ḥadīth Canon

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The work presented in this thesis, to the best of my knowledge and belief, is original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, in either full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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<u>Note on Italics/Dates and Transliteration</u>

Italics are used to signify foreign terms and names of books. Names of figures and places are not italicised. The Gregorian calendar is used for historical events. For year of death provided for figures, both Hijri year and Gregorian year are used respectively.

The transliteration style adopted by the text follows the transliteration guide used by the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. In that regard, we have also used their format for commonly used words as published by their guide in 2010. Their commonly used words, at times, slightly diverts from their strict protocol for ease of reading. As such, the 'h' in Muhammad appears without the dot underneath the letter (for example). It should also be noted that the long vowels at the end of words are printed as a short-vowel, except in the case of a Shaddah as per common transliteration styles. At times, when the hamza appears to the beginning of the word the sign for the hamza (') has not been used for readability.

Abstract

The past twenty years have witnessed an upsurge in research centred on critical analysis of the Shi'ite Ḥadīth canon, known as the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. Little research however, has explored the emergence of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. To this end, this thesis aims to detail the emergence of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, and its subsequent usage and development in history. This will enable not only a greater understanding of the canonical texts, but also illuminate the pivotal role played by the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in debates on authority in post-*ghayba* Twelver Shiʿism.

Introduction

This study is focused on the *ʾithnā asharī* or Twelver strand of Shiʿism, the predominant branch of orthodox Shiʿa Islam.[1] Shiʿa Islam emerges as a distinct tradition centred on the understanding of the Prophet Muhammad and particular members of his progeny, known as the *Ahl al-Bayt* (People of the Household), or alternatively, the *Maʿsūmīn* (infallibles).[2] In the Twelver tradition, the *Ahl al-Bayt* are limited to fourteen members: the Prophet Muhammad; Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law Imam ʿAli; Muhammad's daughter Fātima, wife of Imam ʿAli; and select members of their offspring.[3]

The intellectual heritage of Twelver Shiʿism, encompassing the teachings, anecdotes and biographies of the *Ahl al-Bayt* are recorded and preserved in ḥadīth compilations. Many ḥadīth compilations have been collected throughout Shi'i history, encompassing a variety of topics and approaches; all however, have sought to accurately represent the teachings of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Over time, four ḥadīth collections came to be viewed as canonical.[4] These four ḥadīth collections are: *al-Kāfi* of al-Kulayni (d. 329/941); *Man La Yaḥduruhu al-Faqīh* of al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991); and *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār* of al-Ṭūsi (d. 460/1067). These works came to be known as the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* (The Four Books), and collectively, they comprise the Twelver Shi'i ḥadīth canon.

This study aims to explore the formation, emergence and development of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. Although the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* were produced throughout the 10th and 11th century, the designation of these four works as canonical did not occur until the 13th century. Rigorous discussion on their authenticity and functionality as a canon came to the fore in the 17th century, with the rise of the Akhbāri school within

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[1] Farhad Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 1. For the purposes of this study, the term 'Shiʿism' will, unless stated otherwise, denote Twelver Shiʿism. Twelver will also be used interchangeably with the term 'Imāmī', denoting 'proto-Twelver'.

[2] *ibid*, 57.

[3] Ja'far Subhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam: A Compendium of Imāmī Beliefs and Practices* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), pp.113-114. See Appendix for detailed list of *Ahl al-Bayt*.

[4] Robert Gleave, *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shi'i Jurisprudence* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p.34, n.15.

Twelver Shiʿism. A focused study on the changing nature of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, within the broader history of Shi'i ḥadīth, is therefore much needed.

It must be stated at the outset however, that a critical analysis of the contents of the Shi'i Ḥadīth canon is beyond the purview of this thesis. The authenticity, or lack thereof, of the hadiths contained within these collections is not of primary concern. Rather, the aim of the present study is threefold. First, it will examine the historical conditions that gave rise to the formation of the Shiʿa ḥadīth canon. Secondly, this study will identify the emergence of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* and detail the usage of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* throughout Shi'i history. This will shed light on the various ways in which Shiʿa scholarly communities throughout history have understood the nature, value and authenticity of *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. Thirdly, it will illuminate the role of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in scholarly debates centred on religious authority in Twelver Shiʿism.

Overview

The history of Islam is shaped by Muslim engagement with the Qurʾān and the Ḥadīth.[5] The question of interpretation is a significant point because it has led to major divisions in how Muslims understand and experience their religion. In Islam, the Qurʾān is an agreed upon textual form of the revelation of God's message to humankind through the Prophet Muhammad.[6] Yet the experience of a Shiʿa and Sunni reading of the same verses differ greatly. For example, Chapter 33:33 of the Qurʾān makes explicit reference to the *Ahl al-Bayt*, although Sunni and Shi'i exegetes dispute the identification of the members of the *Ahl al-Bayt* intended by this verse.[7] The principle difference in the Shiʿa and Sunni history is one of capturing the Qurʾān as meaning, not just as text; and this is directly linked to the Prophet as the

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[5] We note here the difference between Ḥadīth and ḥadīth, and their usage in this study. Ḥadīth refers to the collective body of reports and narrations, whereas ḥadīth (pl: aḥadīth) or khabar (pl: akhbār) refers to a single report, narration or tradition. The terms ḥadīth, khabar, narration, report and tradition will be used synonymously throughout this study.

[6] Abdullah Saeed, *The Qurʾān: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008), 52.

[7] Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "The Tafsīr of al-Study of al-Hibari (d.286/899): Qur'anic Exegesis and Early Shi'i Esotericism," in *The Study of Shi'i Islam: History, Theology and Law*, ed. Farhad Daftary and Gundofarid Miskinzoda (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 124.

embodiment of the message. The historical dispute between the factions has always been both political and religious, but in particular for the Shiʿa always centred on the meaning and intention of the Prophet's purpose.[8] The Shiʿa effort, therefore, has been to understand the text through the Prophet rather than the Prophet through the text. This means that the Shiʿa understanding of the Qurʾān is in principle based on understanding the Prophet, a knowledge which has been attained through the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Thus, reading the Qurʾān becomes meaningful through this understanding.

Furthermore, this is exactly why the question of the Ḥadīth is of particular importance to Shiʿa history. The involvement with ḥadīth reports is specifically to derive sacred knowledge – which is sourced in the Prophet's revelation – but transmitted through the *ahl al-bayt* (The Household of the Prophet). The Shiʿa preoccupation with the collection of ḥadīth predates the Sunni effort to collate ḥadīth, in that the first written sources were actively circulated within Shiʿa circles before the science of ḥadīth emerged as a formal discipline within Sunni scholarship.[9] Ḥadīth collection within Shiʾi circles functioned not only as a method of preserving knowledge, but served to maintain Shiʿa identity, by preserving and perpetuating key past events, figures, and teachings.[10]

There are distinctive differences in the way that Ḥadīth is understood in Islam. The Shiʿa were the first to engage in the historical activity of producing an earliest form of Muslim historiography as a result of having a vested interest in sorting the past. The Sunni formulation of the Ḥadīth canon placed its focus and emphasis on the Prophet almost exclusively and defined itself - in opposition to the Shiʿa productions - as the normative historical account of early Islam.[11] Furthermore, the Sunni Ḥadīth was positioned as the definitive narrative based on factual evidence about the life of the Prophet, transmitted through several generations to his *ṣaḥāba* (companions).[12]

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[8] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and, Realities of Islam* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 2000), 144.

[9] Maria Massi Dakake, "Writing and Resistance: The Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Early Shiʿism, in *The Study of Shiʾi Islam: History, Theology and Law*, ed. Farhad Daftary and Gundofarid Miskinzoda (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 184.

[10] Mathew Pierce, *Twelve Infallible Men: The Imams and the Making of Shiʿism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 8.

[11] Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qurʾān and the Speaking Qurʾān: Scriptural Sources of Islam Between History and Fervor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 7.

[12] Mustafa Azami, *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature* (Oak Brook, Illinois: America Trust Publications, 1978), 13.

The Sunni/Shiʿa division is generally viewed from a theological and political lens, and while this is historically valid, the nature of the division is more nuanced for the Shiʿa. The Shiʾite interpretation is clandestine, in that it advances a religious understanding about the theological and political nature of past events – pertaining to ḥadīth reports – that is historically implicit.[13] For the Shiʿa, ḥadīth reports function less as a 'weapon' for debate – as they might in Sunni usage – and are more representative of group memory.[14] For the Shiʿa, ḥadīth reports are not just raw material evidence, but also possess intrinsic value. It is significant to grasp this essential point of variance between Sunni and Shiʿa Islam.

Approach/Methodology

This study will engage in critical textual analysis of both primary and secondary sources in Arabic and English respectively, paying particular attention to less heralded works, as will be seen in Chapter 3. This analysis is conducted with the intent purpose of understanding *how* and *why* the Kutub al-Arba'ah were viewed as canonical, and what role they played in intra-school debates, rather than critiquing the contents of the canonical works. There is also a historiographical aspect to this study, as it readdresses current theories regarding the development of the Shiʿa ḥadīth canon. The *Kutub al-Arba'ah* are often assumed an *a priori* status in Shiʿa studies, with little attention devoted to not only the emergence of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, but the ways in which the term has encompassed drastically different interpretations throughout Shiʿa history. Whilst scholars have comprehensively analysed the contents of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, this study is, to the best of my knowledge, the first focused study on the emergence and development of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in the English language.

As part the research for this thesis I have also engaged with the Shiʿa scholarly community in Qum, generally, and in particular, with the eminent Shiʿa scholar of ḥadīth, Sayyid Ahmad Madadi. Sayyid Madadi is regarded as one of the foremost

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[13] Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi and Christian Jambet, *What is Shi'i Islam: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge Persian and Shi'i Studies Series, 2018), 12.
[14] Najam Haider, *Shi'i Islam: An Introduction* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 53.

scholars in the Shiʿa world in the field of ḥadīth sciences, and he is also known internationally among ḥadīth specialists. In the course of our conversations we spoke about the history of Shiʿa ḥadīth, and in particular, the development of Shiʿa ḥadīth canon. The structure of the thesis owes much to his insightful recommendations. I thank him for being so generous with his time, particularly in the busy period of Nowruz (Persian New Year).

It would be pertinent to mention here the limits of this research study. This study encompasses minimal engagement with the field of Canon Studies. The novelty of this work, it being the first on the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in the English language, and the brevity of the study restricts critical engagement with significant works in Canon Studies. It is hoped that this study will lay the platform for future studies on the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* that can incorporate a sustained and critical engagement with the Canon Studies literature.

Structure

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1 will provide a broad overview of formative Shi'i history, with an emphasis on key early events that instigated the recording and collection of ḥadīth. The development of ḥadīth writing in the first three centuries of Shi'i history will also come under scrutiny, namely how and why ḥadīth collections, beginning with *Uṣūl* (principle collections) works that contained few hadiths and lacked organisation, developed into *jami'* (topical compilations) works. The onset of the *ghayba* (Occultation), and its consequences for Shiʿism, and in particular ḥadīth writing will also be assessed. It will be seen that comprehensive ḥadīth collections, such as the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* and other collections compiled during the minor *ghayba*, could only have arisen in the absence of an Imam. The *Kutub al-Arba'ah* function as a source of religious authority for the Shi'i community, occupying the position vacated by the Imam's indefinite absence.

Chapter 2 will explore the compilers of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* within the backdrop of Būyid rule, and the intellectual atmosphere prevalent in 9th-10th century Baghdad. It

will be argued that during this period, Mu'tazilah thought pollinated Twelver Shiʿism more heavily in the preceding century, imbuing Twelver Shiʿism with rationalist thought whilst simultaneously absolving it of its overtly esoteric theology.[15] The contents of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* will be analysed in comparison with the earliest Shi'i ḥadīth collections, demonstrating that there exists, with the exception of *al-Kāfi*, a rupture from the deeply esoteric origins of Imāmī Shiʿism. The contents of the canonical collections will also be compared amongst themselves, so that the development of Shiʿi ḥadīth from al-Kulayni, the compiler of the earliest Shiʿi canonical collection, to al-Ṭūsi, the final compiler of Shiʿi canonical collections, can be made explicit. Over this period, the rise of the *ʿulamaʾ* class in Twelver Shiʿism is also evident, with an increase in authorial interjections in the ḥadīth works. Although comprehensive ḥadīth collections emerged in the absence of the Imam to function as a source of religious authority, we see that by the time of al-Ṭūsi, the final canonical compiler, it becomes clear that the *ʿulamaʾ* have superseded the ḥadīth collections and assumed the mantle of authority vacated by the Imam.

Chapter 3 will identify the emergence of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in the 12th-13th century, and its subsequent usage by scholars in the centuries following its coinage. This chapter will begin by providing a brief historical account from the time of al-Ṭūsi, the final canonical compiler, to Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, likely to be the first to use the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. Some potential reasons for Muhaqqiq to designate these particular works as canonical are addressed, which speak not only to the development of Shiʿi thought from its origin to Muhaqqiq's era, but also to the severe challenges that Shiʿi communities faced. Following this, recorded usages of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in the centuries following Muhaqqiq al-Hilli will be scrutinised to reveal implicit developments in the understanding of the canon.

Chapter 4 centres on the Uṣūli/Akhbāri dispute that played out in the 17th-19th centuries. The disagreement between Uṣūlis and Akhbāris, loosely identified as rationalists and traditionists respectively, came to significantly shape the venture of modern Shiʿism.[16] This chapter however, will focus more extensively on the Akhbāri school, and their relationship with the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. The Akhbāris hold the

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[15] Andrew Newman, "Legal Traditions", in *The Shi'i World: Pathways in Tradition and Modernity*, ed. By Farhad Daftary, Amyn B. Sajoo and Shainool Jiwa (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 83.

[16] Zackery Heern, *The Emergence of Modern Shiʿism: Islamic Reform in Iraq and Iran* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), 13.

position, in contrast with the Uṣūlis, that the contents of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* were unquestionably authentic.

This chapter will begin by briefly outlining the major differences between the Uṣūli and Akhbāri schools, before sketching a brief biography of the 'founder' of the Akhbāri school, Mulla Muhammad Amīn al-Astarabādi. Following this is an analysis of the arguments put forward by al-Astarabādi and subsequent Akhbāri scholars for the authenticity of the canon. The link between Akhbāri hermeneutics and the necessity of the canon's authenticity will be made explicit. The chapter will conclude with a succinct summary of Uṣūli rebuttals to the complete authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*.

Research Questions

Before we delve deeper, it would be pertinent to first outline some of the peculiarities of the Shiʿa ḥadīth canon. The first peculiarity is that the earliest comprehensive ḥadīth collections, namely *al-Mahāsin* and *Basa'ir al-Darajat* are not part of the canon. From a purely historical perspective, it would be reasonable to assume that the earliest extant collections would be deemed a more accurate representation of early Shiʿism. The Shiʿi canon subverts this assumption, with the four canonical works authored decades later (in al-Ṭūsi's case, nearly two centuries) than earlier ḥadīth compilations. This tension will be addressed in Chapters 1 and 2, where it will be argued that the formalisation of the Shiʿi clergy, the rise of jurisprudence and legal theory in Shiʿism and the increasing rationalisation of the faith through Mu'tazilah influence steered Shiʿism away from its esoteric roots that were overtly visible in the earlier comprehensive ḥadīth compilations. There is also the problem of availability of these earlier texts at different periods throughout Shiʿa history, which will be addressed in Chapter 3. As this study will demonstrate however, the presence of *al-Kāfi* - a distinctly Qummī collection that shares esoteric narrations with *al-Mahāsin* and *Basa'ir* – within the canon highlights the inability to divorce esotericism from Shiʿism.

The second peculiarity of the Shiʿi canon is that the majority of Shiʿi scholars throughout history have not regarded the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* as unquestionably authentic.[17] The majority of scholars, who nonetheless respect the sanctity and utility of these works, cast doubt on the authenticity of many narrations contained in the canonical collections.[18] The critical nature of scholarship towards the canon appears to undermine the very fact that these works are sacred, and hold a revered status in the Shiʿi world. This is in direct contrast to Sunni scholarship, who have traditionally held that the contents of the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Sittah* (the Sunni ḥadīth canon) are unquestionably authentic.[19]

It appears unclear then, at first glance, why such compilations would be seen as canonical, or what purpose a canon serves if the authenticity of the contents are open to doubt and critique. The answer to this tension lies in the Uṣūli/Akhbāri dispute, two streams within Twelver Shiʿi thought that held vastly different perspectives on clerical authority and the authenticity of the canonical ḥadīth collections. The Uṣūlis, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, revered the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* for their value in providing *hujjiyah* (probative force), but did not refrain from offering criticism of, or denying the authenticity of narrations within the canonical texts. The Akhbāris however, have generally eschewed the Uṣūli position on ḥadīth criticism, and held the canonical collections to be completely authentic. Chapters 3 and 4 will illustrate the varied positions on *Kutub al-Arba'ah* to understand how the canon functioned in both Uṣūli and Akhbāri thought.

At the crux of both these peculiarities, however, is the issue of authority in Twelver Shiʿism. The tension between the authority of the jurist on one hand, and that of the text on the other, runs through the history of post-*ghayba* Shiʿism. As noted earlier, Shiʿism is built upon Imamology; *Maʿrifah* (gnosis) of the lofty status of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.[20] The landscape of formative Shiʿi Islam is dominated by the successive

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[17] Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shiʿa: Identity, Ritual and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kufa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 36.

[18] Hossein Modaressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shiʿite Islam: Abu Jafar Ibn Qiba Al-Razi and His Contribution to Imāmīte Shiʿite Thought* (Westerham: Darwin Press, 1993), 47.

[19] Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of Al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Hadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 7. Brown notes here that although the *ulema* publicly hailed the unquestioned authority of the Sunni ḥadīth canon, rigorous debate and criticism was held in closed, academic circles.

[20] Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 5.

infallible personalities of the *Ahl al-Bayt,* each with their own indelible influence on Shiʿism.[21] The *ghayba* subverts this concentrated focus on the individual; in the Imam's absence, comprehensive ḥadīth collections are produced, filling the role vacated by the Imam. The subsequent history of Shiʿism - played out in the rise of the jurist, to the emergence of the Akhbāri school – is the story of the tension between the authority of the jurist, on the one hand, and the authority of the text on the other. Within this melodrama, the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* play a central role, illuminating the changing dynamics of authority in post-*ghayba* Twelver Shiʿism.

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[21] Amir-Moezzi, *Shi'i Islam*, 14.

Chapter 1: The Formative Period of Ḥadīth Compilation: History of Ḥadīth Writing until the Ghayba

This chapter examines the formative period of Ḥadīth compilation. It will situate the historical significance of ḥadīth studies in the worldview of Shiʿa Islam within the broader context of Islamic history. It anchors the issues concerning the emergence and development of ḥadīth in Shiʿa Islam in key episodes, which are examined through existing historiography.

Origins

The history of ḥadīth writing and preservation is directly linked with the contentious events that marred early Islamic history in the wake of the Prophet's death.[22] The first of these key contentious events is the clash over the successorship to the Prophet, whereby the Shiʿa argue that the right of Imam ʿAli was usurped by certain companions of the Prophet, namely Abu Bakr (d. 13/634) and 'Umar (d. 23/644).[23] The second key event was the battle of Karbala', in which Imam Husayn and seventy-two of his family members and companions were slaughtered in Karbala' by the army of the Umayyad Caliph Yazīd (d. 64/683).[24] These events are central to the formation of a Shiʿi identity, and serve as pivotal moments in Shiʿi historical memory.[25] In particular, the usurpation of the rights of Imam ʿAli serves as a catalyst for Shiʿi historiography to emerge, operating as a quasi-subterranean history in contradiction to the imperial history promulgated by successive ruling powers.

The aftermath of the Prophet's death saw two rival factions emerge from within his close group of companions, each with a claim to the Khilāfa, or successorship. One group, led by prominent companions Abu Bakr and 'Umar, claimed that the Prophet had not explicitly designated a successor, and that the Muhājirūn and Anṣār had

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[22] Amir-Moezzi, *Silent Qurʾān*, 1.
[23] Haider, *Shi'i Islam*, 53.
[24] Heinz Halm, *Shiʿa Islam: From Religion to Revolution* (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publication, 1996), 16.
[25] Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shiʿism* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1987), 31.

collectively agreed that Abu Bakr was best suited for the role.[26] The rival group, led by ʿAli ibn 'Abi Ṭālib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, argued that ʿAli was explicitly designated as the successor to the Prophet on numerous occasions, most famously at 'Ghadīr Khum only a few months prior to the Prophet's death.[27] This group was known as the Shiʿa of ʿAli, and it counted amongst its adherents members of the Prophet's household, as well as prominent companions such as Salmān al-Fārsi (d. 35/656) and Abu Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 32/652).[28]

In somewhat tenuous circumstances, Abu Bakr was announced as the Caliph, his supporters vehemently demanding that all should pledge their allegiance to him. He was the best candidate, his supporters argued, due to his close companionship with the Prophet, his superiority in age, and the support of both Muhājirūn and Anṣār that was garnered at Saqīfa.[29] ʿAli and his supporters were not present at the meeting held at Saqīfa between prominent members of the Muhājirūn and Anṣār, and were instead occupied with funeral preparations for the Prophet.[30] Following the hastily held election, a group of Abu Bakr's followers approached the house of ʿAli to demand that he, and all those in the house, pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr.[31]

At this juncture, historical accounts diverge on the exact details of what occurs next. The Sunni narrative entails two different scenarios, albeit both portraying a reconciliation between the two parties. In the first scenario, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab informs ʿAli that Abu Bakr has been appointed as the Caliph. Upon hearing this ʿAli immediately rushes to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr, throwing his full support behind the new Caliph.[32] The second scenario paints a more balanced narrative, with 'Umar's demand for ʿAli and his followers to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr coupled with the threat of burning the home down if those within did not comply.[33] Narrations on the matter mention that it was Fāṭima, wife of ʿAli and daughter of the

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[26] Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Case Study of the Early Caliphate* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.
[27] Mohammad Ali Shomali, *Shi'i Islam: Origins, Faith and Practices* (London: ICAS Press, 2003), 22.
[28] Rodrigo Adem, "Classical Nass Doctrines in Imāmī Shīʿism: On the Usage of an Expository Term," *Shi'i Studies Review* 1 (2017): 47, doi:10.1163/24682470-12340002.
[29] Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 686.
[30] Madelung, *Succession*, 27.
[31] *ibid*, 43.
[32] *ibid*, 1.
[33] *ibid*, 43.

Prophet, who answered the door, and was met with the threat of ʿUmar. Fātima was deeply grieved by the actions of Abu Bakr and ʿUmar and did not speak to them for the rest of her life, despite multiple attempts at reconciliation.[34] ʿAli and a select few followers refused ʿUmar's demand, and continued to maintain this stance until the death of Fātima six months later.[35] Upon Fātima's death, ʿAli and his supporters belatedly pledge their allegiance to Abu Bakr.

The Shiʿa narrative however, entails an altogether darker, more tragic sequence of events. Enraged by Imam ʿAli's refusal to accept Abu Bakr's leadership, a group of Abu Bakr's supporters led by ʿUmar attack the house of Imam ʿAli, leaving Fātima gravely injured.[36] Some reports in the Shiʿi ḥadīth corpus provide more details of the altercation between the two parties.[37] Subsequent attempts at reconciliation between senior ṣaḥāba such as Abu Bakr and ʿUmar, and Fātima and members of the *Ahl al-Bayt* are unsuccessful, with a permanent impasse set up between the supporters of Abu Bakr and the followers of ʿAli. Some historical accounts suggest that although ʿAli eventually pledges allegiance to Abu Bakr after the death of Fātima and provides advice to the first three caliphs upon request, he never takes up an official role in their governments, nor participates in any of their conquests.[38]

The second key event in early Islamic history which formed the nascent Shiʿi identity was the tragedy of Karbala' in the year 680. The battle of Karbala' was triggered by the death of Muʿāwiya (d. 60/680), the first Ummayad caliph who ascended to the position following the assassination of Imam ʿAli in the year 661.[39] Muʿāwiya had conducted a treaty with Imam Hassan and Imam Husayn to hand over political authority to them after his death, but reneged on his promise and instead appointed his son Yazīd (d. 64/683) as Caliph.[40] Imam Husayn deemed the appointment of Yazīd a transgression against the sanctity of the Khilāfa, and attempted to initiate a revolution that would restore the Imams to their rightful place

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[34] Rasul Jaʿfar iyan. *The History of the Caliphs* (Qum: Anṣāriyan Publication, 2003), 19.
[35] Madelung, *Succession*, 43.
[36] Amir-Moezzi, *Silent Qurʾān*, 30.
[37] Ibid. Amir-Moezzi writes that early Shiʿi literature, particularly the Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays, details in explicit language, that ʿUmar physically attacked Fātima; the injuries sustained in the attack led to her miscarriage, and untimely death.
[38] Daftary, *History*, p.29
[39] Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Volume 1: The Classical Age of* Islam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 216.
[40] Haider, *Shi'i Islam*, 67.

as heads of the Islamic polity. Historical sources that detail the tragedy of Karbala'
tell us that the Imam was promised by the people of Kufa, the seat of the Caliphate
during his father's reign, that they were ready to revolt to restore Husayn to power.[41]
The Imam, with his family and close companions, departed Hijaz for Kufa. En route
to Kufa, they were halted by a caliphal army led by Hurr ibn Yazīd (d. 61/680), until
further reinforcements arrived. A stalemate ensued, with neither Husayn's party nor
the caliphal army standing down. The stalemate reached its climax on 10th
Muharram, when the two parties engaged in a ferocious battle. Husayn and his party
numbered approximately seventy-two, and were significantly outnumbered by the
opposing army.[42] Historical accounts record that despite the numerical disadvantage,
Husayn and his followers were heroic, fighting courageously until they were
slaughtered.[43] The women and children, as well as the lone surviving male from al-
Husayn's lineage, the fourth Shiʿi Imam ʿAli ibn al-Husayn, were taken captive by
the army and paraded through the Islamic Empire, before they were released and
returned to the city of Madīnah.[44] During their time in captivity, and upon their
return to Madīnah, the family of Husayn sought to spread the news of the tragic
events that had occurred in Karbala'.[45]

The battle of Karbala' stands as one of the most pivotal moments in Islamic history,
and served as an inspiration for future Alid revolutions.[46] For the Imāmī (proto-
Twelver) Shiʿa however, the battle of Karbala' signified the end of the political,
revolutionary stance of the Imams. The Imams who succeeded Imam Husayn
adopted a quietist approach, withholding overt support for any revolution.[47] The
Imams and the Shiʿa directed their efforts towards writing and recording history and
ḥadīth, with a dual focus to propagate the religious teachings and preserve the
memory of the oppression that befell the *Ahl al-Bayt*. One of the earliest ḥadīth
works in Islamic history, attributed to Sulaym ibn Qays (d. 76/695), was written for

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[41] Maria Massi Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam* (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), 71.
[42] Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala': Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 9.
[43] Dakake, *Charismatic Community*, 71.
[44] Momen, *Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 31.
[45] Aghaie, *Martyrs*, 9.
[46] Andrew Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shiʿism: Ḥadīth as Discourse Between Qumm and Baghdad* (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.
[47] Judith Loebenstein, "Miracles in Shi'i Thought: A Case-Study of the Miracles Attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq," *Arabica* 50 (April 2003): 200, doi: 137.154.19.149.

the purpose of documenting the oppression that befell the *Ahl al-Bayt*.[48] *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilali* (The Book of Sulaym Ibn Qays) narrates the tragedy of the attack on the house of ʿAli and Fātima, and includes gruesome details that have long been the subject of dispute amongst historians.[49] For the most part however, these writings were not publicly proclaimed or spread, as official government policy in the first century of Islamic history strictly forbade the writing and recording of ḥadīth.[50] The Shiʿa literary efforts then, were produced at a time when historical writing and ḥadīth preservation was still in its infancy. It is for this reason that the Shiʿa intellectual tradition can legitimately lay claim to being one of, if not the first Islamic group to begin the process of writing and recording ḥadīth.

Uṣūl Arba'ah Mi'ah

The Shiʿi textual tradition continued to develop, particularly in the time of the fifth and sixth Imams, Muhammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq respectively.[51] The majority of traditions contained within the Shiʿi ḥadīth corpus are attributed to these two Imams, who exploited political turmoil between the Umayyads and ʿAbbāsids to propagate their teachings more openly.[52] It was in this way that many great figures, from varying schools of thought studied and benefited from these two Imams.[53] Many students of these particular Imams, as well as the later Imams, transcribed notebooks containing narrations of the Imams. These notebooks, known individually as *aṣl* (principle) works, and collectively as the *Uṣūl Arba'ah Mi'ah* (The Four Hundred Principle Books), form the original Shiʿi ḥadīth corpus.[54] This ḥadīth corpus is highly valued by the Shiʿa, as its immediate transmission to the Imam bypasses the need to study a chain of narrators, simplifying the process of

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[48] Hossein Modaressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shi'ite Literature* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2003), vol. 1, 83.

[49] *ibid*, pp.84-86.

[50] Ali Nasiri, *An Introduction to Ḥadīth: History and Sources* (London: MIU Press, 2013), 99.

[51] Arzina Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muhammad al-Bāqir* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 127.

[52] Haider, *Origins*, pp.3-17.

[53] Daftary, *History*, 51.

[54] Jonathan Brown, *Ḥadīth: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 128.

authentication. Another reason for the high value of this corpus is that many of the *Uṣūl* works were destroyed in Baghdad by both Seljuk and Mongol invasions, as well as sectarian attacks on libraries, with few *Uṣūl* extant today.[55] Although they are known collectively as the Four Hundred Principle Books, their exact number is debated, with scholars arguing it may be more or less than four hundred.[56]

The problem with the *Uṣūl* works however, was that they lack organisation and penetration. The *Uṣūl* works are generally small in nature, and comprise hadiths that pertain to a variety of issues.[57] To alleviate this issue, Shiʿa ʿulamaʾ began to compile *jami'* works (compendia).[58] It is important to note that this occurred at roughly the same time in the Sunni world, as scholars began the process of formalising and crystallising the Islamic faith.

The existence or lack thereof, of ḥadīth collections, was not bothersome for the early Shiʿi communities. The Shiʿa had the option to bypass written collections and make recourse directly to the Imam, or through an appointed representative of the Imam. The Sunni community, who restricted religious authority to the Prophet, were more in need of written documents that could be traced to the Prophet in order to derive religious rulings and adhere to the Prophet's teachings. The situation for the Shiʿa however, would change drastically with the onset of the *ghayba*.

Challenges of the Ghayba

One of the greatest challenges faced by the Shiʿa community, and one that continues until today is the *ghayba* (Occultation). The Shiʿa faith has always sought to differentiate itself from its Sunni counterparts through the principle of *Imamah*. It is this doctrine that marks the key divergence of Shiʿism from Sunni theology.[59] The doctrine of *Imamah* argues that an infallible representative of God, endowed with divine knowledge, must always be present. As noted earlier, the Twelver Shiʿa faith identifies ʿAli ibn ʿAbi Ṭālib as the first Imam, followed by his sons Hasan and

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[55] Etan Kohlberg, *A Medieval Scholar at Work: Ibn Ṭāwūs and His Library* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 88.
[56] Muhammad Ali Mahdivirad, *History of Ḥadīth Compilation* (London: ICAS Press, 2018), 330.
[57] Brown, *Ḥadīth,* 128.
[58] Brown, *Ḥadīth,* 129.
[59] Tabatabai, *Shi'ite Islam*, 12.

Husayn, at which point the *Imamah* transfers to a particular line from the sons of Husayn for nine successive generations.

In the year 874 however, a major incident occurred which required a shift in understanding the concept of Imamah. Twelver Shiʿi sources report that the twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan, went into 'minor occultation', and designated four men to be his representatives in succession.[60] The Shiʿa no longer had direct access to the Imam, and instead had to direct their questions to an appointed representative[61], who would then present the query to the Imam, who was hidden from the public.[62] The sources go on to state that in the year 941, the Imam sent a letter to his final representative, in which he stated that there shall be no direct representative after him, and that the Imam would enter into the 'greater occultation' until the end of times:

> In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. You are going to die in six days, may Allah grant patience to your brothers in faith on your departure. So, be prepared, but appoint no one in your place, because from the day of your death the period of my major occultation (*ghaybatu 'l-kubra*) will begin. Henceforth, no one will see me, unless and until Allah makes me appear. My reappearance will take place after a very long time when people will have grown tired of waiting and those who are weak in their faith will say: 'What! Is he still alive?' When men will become cruel and inconsiderate, and the world will be full of injustice and violence. Very soon some men will claim to have seen me. Beware! Anyone who makes such a claim before the coming out of *Sufyāni* and the sound from heaven announcing my reappearance, is a liar and an imposter. There is no might nor strength except in Allah, the Magnificent. But as for the problems which will occur in the future, you should refer to the narrators of our traditions for their verdicts as they are my proofs to you, and I am Allah's Proof (*Hujjatu 'llah*) to them.[63]

In this final epistle, the Imam designates the narrators of ḥadīth as his general representatives, and asks his followers to direct their religious and spiritual questions

[60] Jassim Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam* (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1982), 83.
[61] There would be four successive representatives, known collectively as the *Sufara.*
[62] *ibid.*
[63] Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Ṭūsi, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Ma'arif al-Islami, 1990), 257.

to them until his return. The twelfth Imam is recognised as the Messiah in Twelver Shiʿism, with his return expected at the end of times.[64] The period of *ghayba* continues until the present day, and continues to impact not only how the Shiʿa define themselves in relation to their faith, but also the internal dynamics of authority within Shiʿism in the absence of an Imam.

Minor Ghayba Collections

Although Shiʿi scholars formulated explanations and responses to queries in relation to the *ghayba*, the period was known as one of great struggle for the Shiʿa, many of whom experienced doubts not only over their faith, but the existence of the twelfth Imam, whose birth, according to Shiʿi lore, was hidden was the public to protect his identity.[65] Many Imāmī Shiʿa abandoned their faith and adopted a different strand of Shiʿism.[66] This period is also the first in which the Shiʿa were forced to produce substantial ḥadīth collections that could adequately stand in place of the Imam, and act as guides for the community.

Two particular collections, produced in the period of the minor *ghayba*, demonstrate the shift from producing notebooks to collecting significant ḥadīth compilations. The first of these is *al-Mahāsin*, compiled by al-Barqī (d. 274/888). Al-Barqī, a resident of the largely Shiʿi city of Qum, sought to produce a work that alleviated the worries of the Shiʿi community, and sought to reassure them that the re-appearance of the Imam was imminent.[67] Al-Barqī also sought to fill the Shiʿa with hope that they would be rewarded for their loyalty to their Imam. Although much of *al-Mahāsin* has not survived, at least one-sixth of it, numbering over one thousand narrations, exists to the present day, providing an insight into how the complete work may have

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[64] Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shiʿism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1981), 59.
[65] Hussain, *Occultation*, 69.
[66] Al-Hasan Al-Nawbakhti, *Shiʿa Sects* (London, ICAS Press, 2007), 153.
[67] Newman, *Formative Period*, 60.

looked like.[68] Two such traditions within *al-Mahāsin* aptly demonstrate the esoteric nature of the text:

> Abu Jaʿfar (the fifth Imam, Muhammad al-Bāqir) said: 'Allah, Blessed and High, took a covenant from our Shiʿa regarding our *Wilāya* for us while they were particles. On that day He took the covenant upon the particles with the acceptance for Him with the Lordship, and for Muhammad with the Prophethood, and presented to Muhammad, his community in the clay, while they were shadows. And He created them from the clay from which He had created Adam, and He created the spirits of our Shiʿa two thousand years before their bodies, and presented to them and introduced them to the Prophet and ʿAli bin 'Abu Tālib. We recognise our Shiʿa from the tone of their speech.[69]

> Abu Abdullah (the sixth Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq) said: 'You Shiʿa are to be included in the Progeny of Muhammad! You Shiʿa are to be included in the Progeny of Muhammad![70]

Both narrations, amongst many similar narrations, serve to empower the Shiʿa. The creation of an existential bond between the Imam and his followers functions as a forceful response to, and an alleviation of the many doubts and misgivings of the Shiʿa prevalent during the minor *ghayba*.

The second significant collection produced in the period of the minor *ghayba* was *Basa'ir al-Darajat*, compiled by Hassan al-Saffār (d. 290/902). Al-Saffār was also a resident of the city of Qum, and his collection also reflects the traditions and understanding of Shiʿism that was prevalent in Qum in the wake of the minor *ghayba*.[71] Unlike *al-Mahāsin*, which was comprised of narrations on a variety of topics, including jurisprudence, *Basa'ir* eschews jurisprudential narrations, instead focusing on theology. Al-Saffār sought to emphasise the supernatural abilities of the Imam, and the special relationship between the Imam and his Shiʿa that persisted

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[68] Roy Vilozny, "A Concise Numerical Guide for the Perplexed Shiite: Al-Barqī's (d. 274/888 or 280/894) Kitāb al-Aškāl wa-l-qarāʾin," *Arabica* 63 (2016), 66. doi:10.1163/15700585-12341384.

[69] Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Al-Barqī, *Al-Mahāsin* (Tehran: n.np, 1950), 132.

[70] *ibid*, 136.

[71] Newman, *Formative Period*, 67.

during the *ghayba*.[72] Two such traditions present in *Basa'ir*, attributed to Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq state:

> Allah made us from *ʿilliyyūn* and he made the spirits of our followers from that from which he made us. Thus, their spirits crave us. Their bodies were made from beneath that. He made our enemies from *sijjīn* and he created the spirits of their followers from that from which he created them. He created their bodies from beneath that. Thus, their spirits desire them.[73]

> Allah kneaded our clay and the clay of our followers, and we became mixed with them and they became mixed with us. Whoever in his creation has something of us in him, he craves for us. You, by Allah, are of us.[74]

As these traditions demonstrate, an intrinsic link is developed between the Shiʿa and their Imam that ranscends temporal and spatial restrictions. The Imam, whether he be present or absent, is of the same nature as his followers. These narrations would serve to reassure the Shiʿa of the Imam's proximity to them at a time when many Twelver Shiʿa were abandoning the faith.

Although subsequent scholars respected the valuable contributions of these works, their contents were criticised for containing narrations that were unreliable in both its *matn* (content) and *isnād* (chain).[75] This may be one reason why, although these two works are the first comprehensive ḥadīth collections produced by Shiʿi scholarship, neither of them would eventually be regarded as canonical.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to locate the history of Shiʿa ḥadīth in key historical developments, and to trace the emergence and development of Shiʿa identity, authority, and textual formation during the formative period of Islamic history. The main points of argument in this chapter are as follows. The early Shiʿa community

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[72] *ibid*, 84.
[73] *ibid*, 79. (trans. by Newman).
[74] *ibid*. (trans. by Newman).
[75] Roy Vilozny, "A Shiʾi Life Cycle according to Al-Al-Barqī's Kitāb Al-Mahāsin," *Arabica* 54, no.3 (2007), 365.

was beset by tragedy and oppression, and as such, the texts that first emerge reflect these origins. As the community grows, the texts that emerge also develop, reflecting these changes. This specifically reflects upon the shifts in understanding the role of the Imam. Following the event of Karbala', the Twelver Imams were more concerned with building the intellectual foundations of the religion, and as such they embraced a quietist approach, aiming to propagate the teachings of the religion. This approach is maintained until the onset of the *ghayba*, which leaves a void of authority within the religion. This void is initially filled by the emergence of the first comprehensive ḥadīth collections, serving as guides for the Shiʿi community. In this light, their works spoke specifically to the concerns of the Shiʿa community, during a time of *hayra* (perplexity). They aimed at resolving concerns and anxieties about the state of affairs during the time of the minor *ghayba* (with the assumption that the Imam's return is imminent). It is important to note that up until this point, although there had been many Twelver scholars, the *ʿulamaʾ* as a distinct class of jursiprudents had not yet emerged to assert their legal authority in the absence of the Imam.

The next chapter will take up the nature and role of the canonical works. An analysis of their contents, from the first canonical compiler, al-Kulayni, to the final compiler, al-Ṭūsi, reveals significant developments in Shiʿi intellectual thought, demonstrating the transition of authority from the Imam to the *ʿulamaʾ*. This development, amongst several other theological and jurisprudential developments will be analysed within the backdrop of Būyid rule, and the pollination of Mu'tazilah thought into Twelver Shiʿism.

Chapter 2: Formation of the Kutub al-Arba'ah

The Būyid Century: The emergence of rationalist Shiʿism in 10ᵗʰ century Baghdad

The 10ᵗʰ century is often characterised by historians of Islam as 'The Shiʿite Century'.[76] During this period, Shiʿa of different persuasions held political power over the Islamic empire. The Ismaili Shiʿa established the Fatimid caliphate in Cairo and extended their power over North Africa; the Zaydī Shiʿa controlled Yemen and surrounding areas; and the Būyids, of either Zaydī or Twelver persuasion, conquered Baghdad, and therefore controlled 'Abbāsid territory.[77] The Būyid era witnessed a flowering of Twelver Shiʿi scholarship in Baghdad, with scholars such as Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), Sharīf al-Murtada (d. 436/1044) and Sharīf al-Radi (d. 406/1015) amongst others, enjoying the patronage of the Būyids.[78] The development of Twelver Shiʿi scholarship in this period however, entailed a divergence from the methodology of previous Shiʿi scholars. This divergence can be seen in the changing nature of ḥadīth compilation in the Shiʿi world, illustrated by the development of scholarly authority from the first canonical compiler, al-Kulayni, to the final canonical compiler, al-Ṭūsi. By al-Ṭūsi's time, the authority of the scholar had begun to override the authority of the text, signalling a break from the methodology of earlier scholars. To understand this development in Shiʿi intellectual thought further, it is necessary to analyse the historical period of the Būyids to identify historical and intellectual trends that influenced Twelver Shiʿism.

The ascension to the seat of power by the Būyids in 945 is a pivotal moment in Shiʿi history. For much of the preceding centuries, the Shiʿa had suffered persecution at the hands of successive ruling powers, and were rarely granted respite.[79] Although it is unclear exactly whether the Būyids (they were of Daylamite origin, a predominantly Zaydī region in Iran) were Zaydī or Twelver, Twelver Shiʿa found

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[76] Said Arjomand, "The Consolation of Theology and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shiʿism*," The Journal of Religion,* Vol. 76, No. 4 (Oct 1996), 553.
[77] Momen, *Introduction*, 76.
[78] Newman, "Legal Traditions," 83.
[79] Etan Kohlberg, "From Imāmīyya to ʾithnā ashariyya," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 39, No. 3 (1976), 533.

favour under their reign and enjoyed newfound freedom and power.[80] Twelvers were also endowed with a sense of purpose and certainty, as the Būyid ascension to the Sultanate occurred in the period known as the *hayra*. In this period, confusion reigned amongst the Shiʿa as to the nature of the *ghayba*, and the role of the laymen in a world with an absent Imam. Būyid power re-oriented the Shiʿa, enabling them to tackle the problem of the *ghayba* in an environment removed from the hostility that they were accustomed to.

The Būyids ruled Baghdad from 945 until 1045, when bitter infighting reduced much of their power, and they were defeated by the Seljūks.[81] Despite their reign lasting little over a century, the cultural and intellectual legacy of the Būyids persisted long after their demise. Their era is characterised as the 'Renaissance of Islam', a time of progress and tolerance, with many notable intellectual figures of the Islamic world enjoying Būyid patronage, regardless of sectarian affiliation or cultural background.[82] This included luminaries of Islamic thought, such as the eminent philosopher and physicist Ibn Sīna (d.428/1037), and the renowned poet of Arabic, al-Mutanabbi' (d. 365/965).[83] These figures not only enjoyed Būyid patronage, but hosted their own discussion circles in which the brightest minds of the time were invited for intellectual discussion.

More significant for our research purposes however, is the treatment of Twelver scholars under Būyid rule. As mentioned earlier, Twelver scholars were treated favourably, and were able to openly preach their beliefs without fear of repression (although sectarian riots were common in Baghdad during Būyid rule).[84] Twelver scholars not only debated with scholars of other schools of thought, but studied under each other, and vice-versa.[85] This was possible due to the open nature of dialogue fostered by the strong presence of Mu'tazilah thought in Būyid Baghdad.

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[80] Daftary *History*, 68.

[81] Momen, *Introduction*, 81.

[82] Muhammad Ismail Marcinkowski, "Rapprochement and Fealty during the Būyids and Early Saljūqs: The Life and Times of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī," *Islamic Studies,* Vol.40, No.2 (2001), 10.

[83] *ibid.*

[84] John J. Donohue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq 334AH. /945 to 403AH. /1012: Shaping Institutions for the Future* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 49.

[85] Devin Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shi'i Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 2007), 96.

The Mu'tazilah rationalism prevalent at the time had a significant influence on Shiʿism. Although Mu'tazilah thought began to enter Shiʿi discourse in previous centuries, particularly in the works of the Nawbakht family, scholars such as Shaykh al-Mufīd, Sharīf al-Murtada and Shaykh al-Ṭūsi engaged much more intensely with Mu'tazilah thought, and viewed Shiʿism through a rationalist lens.[86] This signals a departure from earlier Shiʿi scholars, such as al-Kulayni and al-Ṣadūq, traditionists who were primarily concerned with collecting narrations of *Ahl al-Bayt*. It is important to note here however, that al-Kulayni died five years prior to the onset of Būyid rule, and had lived in Baghad for the final two decades of his life. Whilst al-Ṣadūq lived in Baghdad during the Būyid era, he was raised and educated in Qum, and was entrenched in traditionist thought in much the same way as his predecessor al-Kulayni,[87] Although Shaykh al-Mufīd and Sharīf al-Murtada did not compile any collections that would be later regarded as canonical, their rationalist outlook had a significant impact on their pupil al-Ṭūsi, who was the final compiler of the canon, and in whose methodology and works we witness a significant development from al-Kulayni, the first canonical compiler.

The Kutub al-Arba'ah: The Shiʿa canon

The *Kutub al-Arba'ah* comprise the Twelver Shiʿi ḥadīth canon. The four works are: *Kitāb al-Kāfi* (henceforth *al-Kāfi*) by Shaykh al-Kulayni; *Man La Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh* (henceforth *al-Faqīh*) by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq; *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār* by Shaykh al-Ṭūsi. It is important here to clarify a few points regarding canonisation in the Shiʿa tradition. First, it should be noted that the canonicity of these works was not immediately recognised, as will be made clear in subsequent chapters. Secondly, the meaning of canonisation in the Shiʿi context, according to Gleave, is that these works possess a stronger *hujjiyah* (probative force) than other ḥadīth collections, rather than a complete deference to these works.[88] Thirdly, despite these works all

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[86] Hussain Abdul Sater, *Shi'i Doctrine, Mutazilah Theology: Al-Sharīf al-Murtada and Imāmī Discourse* (Edinburgh: Edinburh University Press, 2017), pp.6-7.

[87] Nasiri, *Intro to Ḥadīth*, 243.

[88] Robert Gleave, "Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh: The "Canonical" Imāmī Collections of Akhbār," Islamic Law and Society, 8, No. 3 (2001): 350.

possessing canonical status, they differ from one another (in some cases much more significantly, particularly in the case of *al-Kāfī*) in content, organisation and purpose. These differences can be gauged through an analysis of the varying contents of the canonical works, and the concurrent emergence and development of other Islamic sciences in the Shiʿi world, particularly the science of *fiqh* (jurisprudence).

Al-Kāfī

We begin our analysis with the first canonical work, the *Kitāb al-Kāfī* for Shaykh al-Kulayni (d.329/941). Shaykh al-Kulayni, whose name was Muhammad ibn Yaʿqūb, was born in the town of Kulayn, approximately 40km from Rayy.[89] Little is known of his family heritage, although it is believed he belonged to a scholarly family.[90] In this way, he was immersed in the distinct Qummī traditionalism of his predecessors al-Barqī and al-Saffār , as evidenced by the large number of narrators with the *nisbah* (title indicating origin or ancestry) 'al-Qummī' in his work.[91] Unlike these two scholars however, al-Kulayni also travelled to Baghdad, where he resided for the last years of his life, until he passed away in the year 941.[92] In this way, al-Kulayni blended Qummī traditionalism with Baghdadi rationalism to compile what would become the most significant Shiʿi ḥadīth collection.[93]

Before delving into the contents of *al-Kāfī*, it is important first to consider the purpose that al-Kulayni intended for his work. In his preface, which contains a reply to an unnamed brother, al-Kulayni writes:

> I have fully comprehended your complaint, O brother…Your main difficulty is that you do not know the truth because of the conflicting versions of traditions coming from different narrators. Further, your problem is that you do not find whether any expert knowledge whom you can approach, talk to and have your problem solved. And for all this you earnestly want to have a

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[89] Amir-Moezzi, *Silent Qurʾān*, 126.
[90] *ibid*.
[91] Newman, *Formative Period*, 114.
[92] Moezzi, *Silent Quran*, 126.
[93] Hossein Abdulsater, "Dynamics of Absence: Twelver Shiʿism during the Minor Occultation," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 161, No.2 (2011): 329.

book with you…inclusive of all the branches of the science of religion, which could wholly satisfy all the students of religion…from which they could derive specific knowledge of religion they intend to[…].[94]

From al-Kulayni's response, we can discern two key factors that influenced his decision to compile *al-Kāfi*. First, laymen were unable to distinguish between correct and incorrect traditions, leading to confusion amongst the masses. Secondly, the traditions had yet to be compiled in an organised manner, leading to the existence of scattered ḥadīth amongst different pockets of the community. This explains the confusion present amongst the masses when confronted with conflicting narrations. Thus, al-Kulayni intended to compile *al-Kāfi* to deal with these two issues.

The contents of *al-Kāfi* differ greatly from its successors in the canon. *Al-Kāfi* contains 16,199 traditions, and comprises eight volumes: hadiths in volumes one and two deal with creed; hadiths in volumes three to seven deal with jurisprudence; hadiths in volume eight deal with miscellaneous narrations. *Al-Kāfi* is the sole work of the canon that deals with traditions from a wide spectrum of subjects. The other three works of the canon deal exclusively with narrations on jurisprudence.

The contents that al-Kulayni relied upon for his compilation are the *Uṣūl Arba'ah Mi'ah*, some of which were located at the library of the 3rd century Shiʿi scholar and exegete ʿAli ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, a noted teacher of al-Kulayni.[95] Al-Kulayni sifted through these narrations, and in the case of conflicting narrations, chose that which he deemed more authentic. Al-Kulayni differs from his successors in that he does not provide any commentary on narrations, believing them to act as legal rulings in and of themselves without scholarly interpretation. It can be argued however, that the mere exercise of selecting certain narrations over others is itself an act of scholarly interpretation.[96]

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[94] Muhammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulayni, *Al-Kāfi* (Tehran: Intisharat-I ʿIlmiyyeh-yi Islamiyyeh, n.d.), vol 1, p.9.
[95] Nasiri *Introduction to Ḥadīth*, 224.
[96] Gleave, "Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh," 356.

Man La Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh

The next work in the canon is *Man La Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, compiled by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d.381/991). Although it is unclear exactly what year he was born, most scholars agree that is was *circa* 918.[97] Like al-Kulayni before him, al-Ṣadūq came from a scholarly family, though admittedly one with more prestige and renown. His father, ʿAli ibn Bābawayh (d. 327/939), was the chief of the *muhaddithun* (compilers of ḥadīth) in Qum, and enjoyed a close relationship with Husayn ibn Rūḥ (d. 326/937), the third designated representative of the twelfth Imam.[98] In Shiʿi lore, al-Ṣadūq's birth is attributed to the prayer of the twelfth Imam, who is requested by al-Ṣadūq's father – via Husayn ibn Rūḥ – to bless him with a son.[99] Al-Ṣadūq himself believed this to be true, as he writes in his work *Kamal al-Dīn* of his teacher's praise; his teacher attributed al-Ṣadūq's thirst for knowledge to the prayer of the twelfth Imam.[100]

Al-Ṣadūq's purpose for compiling *al-Faqīh* is similar to that of al-Kulayni with *al-Kāfi*. Al-Ṣadūq was requested by a Shiʿi named Sharīf al-Dīn al-Ni'mah to compile a book of traditions that could provide jurisprudential guidance for the Shiʿi layman.[101] The full title of the work, *Man La Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh* (For He Who Does Not Have A Jurisconsult Present) is a play on the title of the physician al-Razi's work, *Man La Yahduru al-Ṭabīb* (For He Who Does Not Have A Doctor Present).[102] *Al-Faqīh* contains 5,920 narrations, and is divided into 666 sections. It is interesting to note that from among these traditions, more than 2000 are *mursal* (lacking a chain). Like al-Kulayni before him, al-Ṣadūq relies on the *Uṣūl Arba'ah Mi'ah* as his source material, claiming in his introduction that he has consulted 245 *Uṣūl* works.[103] Due to the purpose of the text demanding brevity, al-Ṣadūq omits all chains of narration,

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[97] Nasiri, *Introduction to Ḥadīth*, 241.
[98] Nasiri, *Introduction to Ḥadīth*, 242.
[99] Abu al-Qāsim al-Khoei, *Mu'jam Rijāl Al-Ḥadīth* (Qum: Madīnat al-Ilm, 1989), vol.17, p.346.
[100] Muhammad ibn ʿAli ibn Bābawayh (al-Saduq), *al-Amali* (Qum: Mu'assasah Bi'that, 1996), 5.
[101] Muhammad ibn ʿAli ibn Bābawayh, *Man La Yahduru al-Faqīh* (Qum: Jami'ah Mudarrisin, 1983), vol 1, p.2.
[102] Nasiri, *Introduction to Ḥadīth*, 249.
[103] al-Saduq, *al-Faqīh*, vol.1, pp.2-3.

preferring to insert them in a chapter at the end of the book to simplify matters for the layman.[104]

The contents of *al-Faqīh* differ from *al-Kāfi*, displaying early signs of the emergence of both jurisprudence as an Islamic science in Twelver Shiʿism, and scholarly commentary of narrations. First, al-Ṣadūq, in line with the request made from him, collects traditions that deal exclusively with jurisprudence, diverging from al-Kulayni's method of collecting ḥadīth pertaining to a variety of Islamic sciences. Secondly, al-Ṣadūq does not confine himself to mere narrating of aḥadīth, but offers commentary (albeit limited) on some narrations; attempts to reconcile conflicting narrations; presents Qur'anic verses to outline or prove jurisprudential opinions; and on occasions presents his own jurisprudential view either before or after the narration.[105] It is also interesting to note that despite al-Ṣadūq and al-Kulayni's closely shared heritage as scholars hailing from Rayy and Qum, al-Ṣadūq rarely makes mention of al-Kulayni in his works. Al-Ṣadūq does not reference *al-Kāfi* in his work, and narrates less than ten narrations from al-Kulayni, instead preferring to narrate from his teacher Ibn al-Walīd (d.343/954).

Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām and al-Istibṣār

The third and fourth collections of the canon, namely *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār* respectively, were both compiled by Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, known as Shaykh al-Ṭūsi. Al-Ṭūsi, who is addressed honorifically as *Shaykh al-Ṭa'ifa* (Shaykh of the Sect) is perhaps the most influential scholar in the history of Shiʿism.[106] Al-Ṭūsi studied in the city of Ṭūs, before being invited by the Būyid ruler to study in Baghdad. It was in Baghdad that he benefited from the successive tutelage of Shaykh al-Mufīd and Sharīf al-Murtada; exceptional Shiʿi scholars who were heavily influenced by the rationalism of the Mu'tazilah.[107] This influence can be seen in their

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[104] Brown, *Ḥadīth*, 130.
[105] Gleave, "Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh," 352.
[106] Charles J. Adams, "The Role of Shaykh al-Tūsī in the Evolution of a Formal Science of Jurisprudence Among the Shīʻah," *Islamic Studies* 10, No.3 (1971): 173.
[107] Ahmed Kasemi Moussavi, "Establishment of the Position of Marja'iyyt-I Taqlid in the Twelver-Shi'i Community," *Iranian Studies* 18, No.1 (1985): 36.

disciple, in which the merger of Shiʿi traditionalism and Baghdadi Muʾtazilah rationalism is complete, laying the platform for what was to become mainstream Twelver Shiʿism. Al-Ṭūsi's influence is not limited to the realm of ḥadīth collection; he authored definitive works in *ilm al-Rijāl* (biographical evaluation), *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis), theology, amongst other fields, that significantly influenced Shiʿi intellectual thought.[108] Political turmoil in the form of Seljuk invasion of the Būyids, coupled with sectarian tensions forced al-Ṭūsi to flee Baghdad, with his library and home burnt in the ensuing carnage. Al-Ṭūsi fled to the city of Najaf, where he established the Hawza (seminary) of Najaf, which remains to this day one of the premier centres of traditional learning in the Shiʿi world.[109]

Al-Ṭūsi's first canonical work is *al-Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*, which is a ḥadīth-based commentary on *al-Muqniʿah*, a *fiqhi* (jurisprudential) work of Shaykh al-Mufīd. Hence, the entire structure of *Tahdhīb* is shaped by al-Mufīd's work, with its arrangement and scope of topics following al-Mufīd's structure. His final work, *al-Istibṣār*, is an attempt to explain apparently contradictory *akhbār* by either reconciliation through interpretation, or through weakening the authenticity of conflicting narrations. *Tahdhīb* contains 15,390 narrations, only slightly less than *al-Kāfi*, and is arranged into 393 chapters based on the *fiqh* work *al-Muqniʿah* of Shaykh al-Mufīd. Al-Ṭūsi chose *al-Muqniʿah* as his platform for *Tahdhīb* due to al-Mufīd's pre-eminence amongst the Shiʿa.[110] Al-Ṭūsi outlines the purpose for compiling *Tahdhīb*, demonstrating a stark difference from that of al-Kulayni three generations earlier:

> One of the friends reminded me that "the narrations of our associates have marked differences, contrasts and contradictions in that it could hardly be found a narration without any contrasting narration and there is no tradition which has no opposing tradition […].[111]

Al-Ṭūsi then, is aiming to explain the differences amongst the abundant narrations, whereas al-Kulayni attempted to provide an organised collection of narrations. The Shiʿa community then, can be seen to have developed rapidly from al-Kulayni's era

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[108] Marcinkowski "Rapproachment," 273.
[109] Marcinkowski "Rapproachment," 285.
[110] Gleave, "Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh," 352.
[111] Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Ṭūsi, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām fi Sharḥ al-Muqniʿah* (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1970), vol. 1, pp.2-3. (trans. by Nasiri).

to that of al-Ṭūsi, demonstrating a greater quantity of traditions in circulation amongst the general Shiʿa populace.

Al-Istibṣār was the final collection of the canon to be compiled, as it was completed upon the request of other scholars that al-Ṭūsi write a summary of *Tahdhīb* that deals exclusively with explaining contradictory narrations. The request of other scholars for al-Ṭūsi to carry out this task is evidence of his reputation amongst the Shiʿa during his own lifetime. *Al-Istibṣār* contains 5,511 narrations and is divided into 925 chapters. As is inferred from the purpose of compiling this work, the narrations in *al-Istibṣār* are almost exclusively found in *Tahdhīb*, and hence the two works are strikingly similar.

Conclusion

The designation of these four books as canonical works of ḥadīth is, in a sense misleading. *Al-Kāfi* is perhaps the sole collection of the canon that can be classified as a ḥadīth collection; *al-Faqīh* operates in a similar manner, although there is a degree of authorial intervention. Al-Ṭūsi however, develops the tradition much further. *Tahdhīb* is a ḥadīth-based commentary on a work of *fiqh*, whereas *al-Istibṣār* is the author's attempt to distinguish between true and false narrations in order to support his jurisprudential opinions. The concurrent development of *fiqh* within Twelver Shiʿism as a bona fide Islamic science from the time of al-Kulayni to al-Ṭūsi can be seen in the changing nature of ḥadīth collections.[112] In al-*Kāfi*, the narrations function as legal rulings in and of themselves; in al-Ṭūsi's collection the narrations function as evidence for legal rulings.[113]

The *akhbār* material cited in these four works also displays signs of a developing tradition. Between *al-Kāfi* and *al-Faqīh*, there are both a significant amount of shared and exclusive narrations.[114] This is to be expected, as they are earlier works, and relied on different sources for their works. Al-Ṭūsi's collections however, use much of the same material as *al-Kāfi* and *al-Faqīh*. In this sense, al-Ṭūsi's work can

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[112] Gleave, "Between Ḥadīth and Fiqh," 353.
[113] *ibid.*
[114] *ibid*, 356.

also be seen as a necessary step for Shiʿi intellectual thought, as it would be superfluous to simply repeat the same narrations already recorded and in circulation amongst the Shiʿa without offering commentary.

The structure of al-Ṭūsi's work hints at the situation for the Shiʿa community during his life. The usage of al-Mufīd's text as a platform for ḥadīth selection without including explanatory notes on acts of worship indicate that al-Ṭūsi is operating at a time when the Shiʿa laymen were knowledgeable about the basic elements of the religion.[115] This indicates not only a more refined Shiʿa community since the time of al-Kulayni, but also a need for development in ḥadīth sciences. The problems faced by the Shiʿa community during al-Kulayni's life, namely the lack of access to organised resources explaining the faith, was not a consideration for al-Ṭūsi. His preoccupation, and that of the wider Shiʿa community, was to differentiate the true and false narrations from the abundant resources that they now possessed.

It is important to keep in mind here three key points. First, the significance of *al-Kāfi*'s presence within the canon cannot be overstated. Whilst *al-Kāfi* comprises five volumes of jurisprudential narrations, the first two volumes pertain to theology; narrations which are similar in nature, and in some cases identical with those of *al-Mahāsin* and *Basa'ir*. These narrations are entrenched in Qummī theology, and are reflective of the esotericism of early Shiʿism. Despite attempts to move beyond their esoteric origins, Shiʿi scholars of a rationalist persuasion must contend with *al-Kāfi*'s presence in the canon.

Secondly, as noted in Chapter 1, the absence of the Imam was initially occupied by ḥadīth collections that sought to offer guidance for the Shiʿa in a time of perplexity. Remnants of this hierarchy can be seen in *al-Kāfi*, and to a lesser extent, *al-Faqīh*, where authorial intervention is minimal. By al-Ṭūsi's time however, the authority of the scholar had gradually come to the fore, to the point where the narrations were no longer functioning independently, but were used as evidences to prove a scholar's jurisprudential view. It is at this point in Shiʿi history that the authority of the jurist begins to override the authority of the text.

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[115] *ibid.*

Finally, it must be highlighted that these works were not viewed as canonical during the lifetime of their compilers. At this juncture in Shiʿi history, they were four ḥadīth compilations amongst a multitude of others authored in this period. The term *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, or the Four Books, elevating these works above other ḥadīth collections, was coined three centuries later by Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, a prominent Shiʿi scholar of 13ᵗʰ century Iraq. The following chapter will provide a brief biography of Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, followed by an analysis of subsequent usage of the term '*Kutub al-Arba'ah*' from the post-Muhaqqiq era until the rise of the Akhbāri school in the early 17ᵗʰ century.

Chapter 3: Muhaqqiq and the Kutub al-Arba'ah: Coinage and Development through 13-16th Century

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the coinage of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* by Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, and the subsequent usage of the term in the centuries following its coinage. Muhaqqiq was a prominent Shiʿa scholar of the 13th century, and the uncle of another influential Shiʿi scholar, 'Allamah al-Hilli (d. 726/1326).[116] Muhaqqiq penned numerous jurisprudential works, such as *Shara'i al-Islam*, which remains a key text in seminary curricula. As noted earlier, Muhaqqiq is also the first scholar to coin the term '*Kutub al-Arba'ah*', and in effect, form the Shiʿi ḥadīth canon.[117] This is unprecedented in Shiʿa history, since it is for the first time that these books are treated by a Shiʿa scholar as a definitive, elevated collection.[118] Muhaqqiq's treatment of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* had a significant impact on subsequent Shiʿa thought by setting the framework for discussion on the value of ḥadīth in the Shiʿa tradition. In an aim to contextualise Muhaqqiq's intellectual milieu, this chapter will first provide a brief historical account covering the period between Būyid rule and the Mongol invasion, which affected Muhaqqiq's access to key Twelver texts. Following this, Muhaqqiq's selection of these four works to form a canon will be analysed, with both his scholarly views and external factors contributing to their selection under consideration. This chapter will then trace the subsequent usages of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in the post-Muhaqqiq era, until the rise of the Akhbāri school in the early 17th century. This chapter will end with a brief inquiry into 'The Five Books'; a term employed by few scholars to designate a canon consisting of the

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[116] Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 72.

[117] Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, p.20, n.86.

[118] Ali Hammoud, *Email Correspondence*, (October 12, 2018). In a response to an email I sent enquiring for his source that Muhaqqiq was the first to coin the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, Amir-Moezzi informed me that the sources that directly mention the term, *Nukat al-Nihaya* and *al-Mutabar*, are lithographic editions located in the Majles Library in Tehran that he came across during his doctoral research, and that he does not currently have direct access to these works. Contemporary editions of these works were checked, but references to *Kutub al-Arba'ah* were not found.

Kutub al-Arba'ah, with the addition of the work *Madīnat al-'Ilm* by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, a work that unfortunately is lost today.

The translations of the post-Muhaqqiq usages of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* within this chapter are, to the best of my knowledge, the first in the English language. Tracing the usage of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* will allow for a greater understanding of how this term was both deployed and developed by Shiʿi scholars across several centuries.

Twelver Shiʿism between the Būyids and Mongols

The Būyid rule, under which the Twelver Shiʿa enjoyed great political power and witnessed significant developments in scholarship, was brought to an abrupt end by the Seljuk invasion of Baghdad in 1055. The Seljūks were Persianised Turks who rose to power in the Eastern lands of the Islamic empire and swept through Persia en route to Baghdad.[119] The Seljūks invaded Baghdad upon the request of the 'Abbāsid caliph, who sought to remove the Būyids from power.[120] The Seljūks were staunch Sunnis, and subsequently sought to promulgate Sunni teachings through the empire. A prime example of this is the establishment of the *Niẓāmiyya* schools, named after Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), the vizier of the Seljuk sultan Malikshah (d. 485/1092). These schools became centres of learning, and more importantly, sought to instil a Sunni orthodoxy across the Islamic polity.[121] The Seljūks were the prime Muslim power during the First and Second Crusades, and fell shortly before the Mongol invasion due to infighting, and a fallout with the 'Abbāsid caliphs, who sought to reinstate caliphal power throughout the Muslim world.

The Seljuk invasion of Baghdad had several immediate effects on the Shiʿa. The first was the destruction of key Shiʿi works belonging to Shaykh al-Ṭūsi. Al-Ṭūsi's home and library were burnt and destroyed in the invasion, forcing him to flee to Najaf to

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[119] Amir-Moezzi, *Shi'i Islam*, 112.

[120] Mohammad Taher Ya'ghoubi and Asghar Montazerolghaem, "The Shiʿa of Baghdad at the time of the ''Abbāsid Caliphs and the Seljuq Sultanate (447-575AH)," *Journal of Shiʿa Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2013), 57.

[121] Brown, *Canonization*, 3.

continue his scholarly endeavours.[122] The second significant effect was the immediate relegation of the Twelver Shiʿa from a major power in the Baghdad political scene to supporting act. Discord between the ʿAbbāsid caliphs and Seljūks sultans was common, and the Shiʿa played upon these tensions, siding with either of them, depending on the situation and potential benefits they could accrue.[123] Some Seljuk rulers instigated firm anti-Shiʿi policies that discriminated and weakened Shiʿi freedom and morale.[124] It is for this reason that the Seljuk reign is often viewed negatively by the Shiʿa.

Despite these negative experiences however, the Shiʿi experience under Seljuk reign was not as bleak as is often portrayed. Some Seljuk sultans, such as Malikshah enjoyed warm relations with the Shiʿa, and funded projects to build shrines of Shiʿi Imams and *walīs*.[125] Malikshah and his vizier are even reported to have performed the *ziyāra* (visitation) of the eighth Shiʿi Imam, ʿAli al-Ridha, in Mashhad.[126] Over time, the Shiʿa began to rise to political power, and powerful families such as the Banu Mazyad became close allies of the Seljūks.

Much like their Būyid predecessors, the Seljūks adopted pragmatism during their reign. This shaped their changing relations with the Shiʿa, who at times were viewed as heretics, and at other times as co-religionists. Their harsh stances towards the Shiʿa in the initial period of their reign may be explained by the Shiʿi support for the Būyids. It is also important to note that Seljuk antipathy towards Shiʿism was mainly directed at Ismaili and Batini Shiʿism, which were viewed as direct political threats.[127] The Twelver Shiʿa had mostly adopted a quietist stance, and did not pose a threat to Seljuk rule, and as time progressed, began to enjoy warm relations with the Seljūks.

Although Shiʿi scholarship in Baghdad was negatively affected by the onset of the Seljūks, other centres of learning began to emerge as hubs of Shiʿi scholarship. Within Iraq, the schools and seminaries of Najaf, Karbala' and particularly Hilla emerge as key primary centres of learning; in the Levant, cities such as Aleppo and

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[122] Andrew Newman, *Twelver Shiʿism: Unity and Diversity in the Life of Islam, 632-1722* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 103.
[123] Ya'ghoubi and Montazerolghaem, "The Shiʿa of Baghdad," 62.
[124] Newman, *Twelver Shiʿism*, 103.
[125] *ibid*.
[126] Ya'ghoubi and Montazerolghaem, "The Shiʿa of Baghdad," 62.
[127] *ibid*, 64.

Tripoli also witnessed growth in Shiʿi scholarship, particularly through the efforts of Ibn Zuhra (d. 585/1189), the patriarch of a powerful Shiʿi clan in Aleppo.[128] In the eastern lands of the empire, Shiʿi communities continued to develop, albeit independently of those in the western Arab lands. Noted scholars of this era include Ibn Shahrshūb (d. 588/1192), a renowned historian and biographer, al-Hasan ibn Muhammad (d. 511/1117), the son of Shaykh al-Ṭūsi and a noted scholar in his own right, and the aforementioned Ibn Zuhra. Despite the contribution of these and other scholars, Shiʿi scholarship did not develop significantly until the era of the Hilla-based scholars, namely Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, ʿAllamah Hilli and Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs (664/1265) in the 13th century.[129] The Hilla-based scholars built upon the foundations of Shaykh al-Ṭūsi and further developed Twelver Shiʿism, in particular, the sciences of *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*.[130] For the purposes of this research, the focus is placed on the figure of Muhaqqiq al-Hilli.

Muhaqqiq al-Hilli and the emergence of the term 'Kutub al-Arba'ah'

According to Amir-Moezzi, the first recorded usage of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* can be traced to Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, an influential 13th century Iraqi jurist.[131] Although it is unclear what Muhaqqiq's exact intentions were by coining this term, it indicates at the very least that these works were accorded a degree of respect and deference above other ḥadīth collections. A cursory glance into the contents of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* reveals a preference for collections of a legalistic nature, as three of the four books (all excluding *al-Kāfi*) contain traditions that deal exclusively with jurisprudential issues. This would correspond neatly with Muhaqqiq's intellectual interests, as he wrote extensively on jurisprudence and legal theory, and may have placed more value of compilations that focused extensively on these Islamic sciences.[132] Whilst this may offer an insight into why Muhaqqiq designated these specific books, it is possible, for reasons pragmatic in nature that he coined the

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[128] Newman, *Twelver Shiʿism*, 106.
[129] Daftary, *History*, 77.
[130] Momen, *Introduction*, 95.
[131] Amir Moezzi, *Shi'i Islam*, 112.
[132] Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 16.

phrase. The factors that were to have influenced Muhaqqiq's choice of these four collections for a proto-canon relate directly to the problem of scarcity of Shiʿa sources in a time of imperial transition and civil unrest.

In the first instance, what was decisive in the composition of the canon, was the scarce lack of resources from the Būyid and pre-Būyid periods. The *Uṣūl Arba'ah Mi'ah* were mostly lost, and many of the earlier comprehensive ḥadīth collections, such as *al-Mahāsin* and *Basa'ir al-Darajat* were rare in number.[133] This predicament was not exclusive to Muhaqqiq, as Shiʿi scholars from across the Islamic world found manuscripts difficult to come by without extensive travel.[134] The paucity of primary sources in this period can be attributed to successive destructive conquests, each of which exacerbated the problem of access to key Twelver resources. Following the Būyid period, the problem of scarcity of Twelver resources was compounded by the Seljuk invasion of Baghdad in 1055. Prior to the Seljuk invasion, the Shiʿa enjoyed the patronage of the Būyids, who themselves were of that persuasion. As discussed earlier, successive generations of scholars, such as al-Mufīd, al-Ṭūsi, Sharīf al-Murtada and Sharīf al-Radi not only benefited from Būyid support, but in some instances - such as al-Murtada - occupied official roles in the Būyid administration.[135] It is no surprise then, that the era of Būyid rule in Baghdad coincided with the flowering of Shiʿi Islamic sciences. Many significant Shiʿi works were written in this period, as the Twelver faith began to develop and mature in the post-*ghayba* period. With the onset of the Seljūks, Shiʿi patronage was dashed, halting the intellectual development of Shiʿism. As mentioned earlier, the development of Shiʿism suffered at the hands of the Seljūks, with many Shiʿi mosques, schools and libraries burnt.[136] Although Seljuk attitudes towards Twelvers improved, the destruction that was initially wrought continued to effect Shiʿi intellectual development.

Not only were Shiʿi scholars repressed, but many key Shiʿi texts outside of al-Ṭūsi's personal collection were destroyed, with scholarly access to these texts severely

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[133] Newman, *Twelver Shiʿism*, pp.104-105.
[134] *ibid*.
[135] Wilferd Madelung, A Treatise of the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā on the Legality of Working for the Government "(Mas'ala fī 'l-'amal ma'a 'l-sulṭān)", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 43, no. 1 (1980): 21.
[136] Newman, *Twelver Shiʿism*, 103.

limited in the following centuries. A fire in 1059 in the al-Karkh district of Baghdad destroyed a library containing almost 10,000 works, with early Shiʿi ḥadīth works amongst the works that were destroyed.[137] This is not to say however, that all of these works were lost forever. It is certain that scholars such as al-Mufīd, al-Ṭūsi and their students would have possessed personal copies of some of these works. An analysis of the *tabaqat* (bibliographical) literature however, reveals that very few copies of pre-1055 texts were reproduced during this time, and that many of these works appear to have been lost forever. Shiʿi scholarship across the Islamic world stagnated, and few copies of key pre-1055 Shiʿi texts were in circulation in the Islamic world.[138] Different pockets of Shiʿi communities be it in the Levant, Iraq or Iran remained isolated from one another. The lack of interaction ensured that each community grew independently of another, with each maintaining their own approaches towards understanding their faith.

In the second instance, a key reason for the continued scarcity of Twelver resources was the Mongol invasion of Baghdad in 1258. The Shiʿa played a prominent role in Baghdad's intellectual landscape, and were beginning to re-emerge as a player in the Baghdad political scene. Seljuk influence was beginning to wane due to successive military defeats, and the ʿAbbāsid caliphs sought to re-assert power by aligning with the Shiʿa and reducing anti-Shiʿi policies of the Seljuks. The Mongol invasion however, put an end to these aspirations, as buildings and resources were destroyed with little regard or hesitation. Although Shiʿi relations with the court improved in the aftermath of the invasion – Muhaqqiq was affiliated and worked closely with officials at the Mongol court such as Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsi – many precious works were again lost forever.[139]

It is therefore, essential that any analysis of Muhaqqiq's usage of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* must grapple with the issue of availability of texts. Newman's analysis of the *tabaqat* literature of al-Tihrani reveals relevant details in relation to the availability of two of the earliest comprehensive ḥadīth collections that pre-date *al-Kāfi*, namely *al-Mahāsin* and *Basa'ir al-Darajat*. There are no new recorded copies of *al-Mahāsin* from the 12th-15 century, whereas there are only two new copies of

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[137] Nasiri, *Introduction*, 112.
[138] Newman, *Twelver Shiʿism*, 105.
[139] *ibid.*

Basair al-Darajat dating from this time period; one belonging to the 12th century, and the other in the 15th century. It should be noted though, that there exists eleven undated copies of *al-Mahāsin*, and five undated copies of *Basa'ir al-Darajat*, as well as any pre-existing personal copies of these texts.[140] It is unlikely though, that Muhaqqiq had access to these undated or personal copies, as his contemporary and associate Ibn Ṭāwūs's library was found to have possessed no copies of these works, although he possessed some earlier, scattered *Uṣūl* works.[141] If we were to assume however, that some of the undated copies of these texts were available in Muhaqqiq's time, the scarce lack of dated sources for these texts, even in subsequent centuries, speaks to a serious existential threat to Shiʿi intellectual heritage. It is certainly plausible however, to explain Muhaqqiq's choice of canonical designation as related to his intellectual inclinations. Muhaqqiq was a competent jurist in the proto-Uṣūli mould, as many of scholars of his milieu were; his nephew and student ʿAllamah al-Hilli actively promoted *ijtihād* and the *mujtahid*/*muqallid* distinction, and was a particular target for Akhbāri scholars. Regardless of this, the issue of availability must be considered in any discussion concerning the formation of the canon.

Kutub al-Arba'ah in the post-Muhaqqiq era

After Muhaqqiq's coinage of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, several scholars throughout the following centuries used the term, each adding another layer to the understanding and perception of the canon. This section of the chapter will focus on three particular scholars who all employed the term '*Kutub al-Arba'ah*, and attempt to uncover some of the implicit assumptions held regarding the canon. The three scholars, from whom extracts from their works will be translated, are: Shahīd al-Thāni (d. 966/1599); Muqaddas Ardibīli (d. 993/1585); and Ṣāḥib al-Maʿālim (d. 1011/1602). These scholars make multiple references to the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* across their works. A short biography of each scholar, and a brief summary of the translated work will be provided, followed by the translated excerpts.

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[140] *ibid*, pp.105-106.
[141] Kohlberg, *Medieval Scholar*, pp.122-127.

Shahīd al-Thāni

Zayn al-Dīn ibn Ahmad al-ʿĀmili, better known by the epithet Shahīd al-Thāni, was a prominent Twelver scholar of the 16th century. He forged a reputation amongst his contemporaries as one of the foremost jurisprudents of his time.[142] His memory has been etched into Shiʿi history for two particular reasons: First, his martyrdom, which earned him the title 'Shahīd al-Thāni'; and secondly, his book *Sharḥ al-Lumʿah*, a commentary on the *fiqh* work *al-Lumʿah* of Shahīd al-Awwal (d. 786/1384), which has remained until the present day a cornerstone of seminary study.[143]

The first book from which we will be extracting excerpts, *Sharḥ al-Bidayah*, was written as a commentary on an earlier work authored by him known as *al-Bidayah fī ʿilm al-Dirāyah*, which is recognised as one of, if not the earliest works written by a Shiʿi scholar on the science of *Dirāyah (*contextual study of ḥadīth).[144] In *Sharḥ al-Bidayah*, Shahīd al-Thāni makes reference to the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* by stating:

> […] And they summarised them in specific books, (including) almost (all) that which was reachable and available. And the best who gathered from them are: *al-Kitāb al-Kāfi* for Muhammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulayni and *al-Tahdhīb* for Shaykh al-Ṭūsi, and one cannot be relied on without the other [one cannot suffice with one without the other], because the first is the most comprehensive in terms of the art of narrations, and the second is the most comprehensive in terms of the narrations relating to Islamic law (the laws of the *Sharīʿa*).
>
> As for *al-Istibṣār*, it is more particular (concise) than *Tahdhīb* and therefore it is possible to suffice with it (*Tahdhīb*) without that (*al-Istibṣār*), although it (this book) focused on joining between the differing (opposing) narrations, although that is beyond (the scope of a book of) narrations (in and of itself).

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[142] Abd al-Hadi al-Fadli, *Introduction to Ḥadīth* (London: ICAS Press, 2011), xii.
[143] *ibid*.
[144] *ibid*, xi

As to the book *Man La Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh* it is good too, except that it generally does not go beyond the two books.

In any case, our narrations are not limited to these, except that what is beyond these is now not (as) sound, and thus the *faqīh* (jurisprudent) is not obliged to (responsible for) researching beyond this.[145]

The second work of Shahīd al-Thāni from which extracts will be provided is his work *Rasa'il*. In this work, Shahīd al-Thāni provides a bibliographical sketch of both his students and teachers. In two particular entries, he directly refers to the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*:

So I endorsed this honourable person and gave him permission (May the Almighty God bestow upon him His expansive grace) to narrate from me all that which is permitted for me and from men to be narrated from amongst all of the sciences of Islamic Law and *Tafsīr* and narrations and language and Arabic and other (sciences), and other (matters) for which narrating applies not least (and in particular) the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* of narrations which are the pillars of faith and the basis of the foundations of religion, and (these (four) books) are: *al-Kāfi* and *al-Faqīh* and *Tahdhīb* and *al-Istibṣār*, which (can be narrated) through the paths available to us (in reaching) the authors of these books, and he (May the Almighty God sustain his grandeur) is encompassed of its details and is my associate in narrating it from his virtuous sanctified father[…].[146]

[…]and in this way I have given him permission to narrate the *Kutub al-Arba'ah,* which are the principles of Ḥadīth and the source of the religion, and they are: *Tahdhīb* and *al-Istibṣār* for Shaykh al-Ṭūsi, and the book *Man*

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[145] Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmili, *Sharḥ al-Bidayah fi ʿilm al-Dirāyah* (Qum: Manshurat Diya al-Fayruz Abadi, 2011) vol.1, p.74.

[146] Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmili, *Rasa'il Shahīd al-Thāni* (Qum: Daftar Tablighat Islami Hawzeye ʿIlmiyye Qum, 2000), vol.1, p.1149.

La Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh for al-Ṣadūq, and the book *al-Kāfi* for Shaykh al-Kulayni, and other (narrations) from the books of Ḥadīth (traditions)[…].[147]

Muqaddas al-Ardibīli

The second scholar whose works will be translated and analysed is Muqaddas al-Ardibīli. Ardibīli was a contemporary of Shahīd al-Thāni, and was recognized as the one of the foremost Shiʿa scholars of his era following the latter's passing. He makes direct reference to the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in two of his works: *Zubdat al-Bayān* and *Majma' al-Fa'idah*.

Zubdat al-Bayān is a work focusing on the Qur'anic verses pertaining to Islamic law. In this work he states:

> Thus, on the apparent (the correct opinion) is the first due to the voluminous reports (narrations) and their reliability along with (their) reputability for, indeed, it was reported in the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, while the second (opinion) is not reputable (famous) because I didn't find it in *Tahdhīb*….[148]

Majma ʿal-Fā'idah is a well-known commentary on *Irshād al-Adhhān* for ʿAllamah al-Hilli. Although the work has been praised, it has not survived in its original form, with the sections on marriage and divorce having been lost. In this work he writes:

> It is true that these two narrations have been reported with an addition (suffixed to the end of them) by Shaykh al-Mufīd in *al-Mukhtalif* ("then he returns and asks the people with his hand") which can be a general indication (for it), however, it (the narration) being reported (with this addition) has not been established, because, indeed, the narration in the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* does

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[147] *ibid*, p.1162.
[148] Muqaddas Ardibīli, *Zubdat al-bayān Fi Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* (Tehran: Al-Maktabat al-Murtadhawiyya, n.d.), 255.

not have this addition (suffixed to it), rather it is (reported) in the manner mentioned by us here.[149]

<center>*Ṣāḥib al-Maʿālim*</center>

The third scholar whose works will be translated is Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Zayn al-Dīn, known as Ṣāḥib al-Maʿālim. He is the son of Shahīd al-Thāni, and a student of Muqaddas Ardibīli. Ṣāḥib al-Maʿālim was a formidable scholar in his own right, and was renowned for his asceticism, and his work *al-Maʿālim*, from which his epithet is derived.

In his work *Muntaqa al-Jamān*, Ṣāḥib al-Maʿālim makes multiple direct references to *Kutub al-Arbaʾah*. When introducing his work, Ṣāḥib al-Maʿālim writes:

> From here we say: this is the book *Muntaqa al-Jamān* which is (a book) on the narrations that are authentic and sound, we asserted to include in it, with the Grace of God the Most High, that which has become apparent to us, methodically placing them (together) on the basis of describing them with one of the two descriptions generally (1); (gathering the narrations) from the reports that refer to Islamic laws that are present in the jurisprudential books which the *Kutub al-Arbaʾah* encompasses, (the *Kutub al-Arbaʾah*) which have been chosen by our scholars of the later generation (*mutaʾakhirīn*) as being a greater point of reliance due to what they found in them in terms of merit/quality, such that today it is accounted for (the most) in terms of its existence and being known amongst the books of narrations, and these are, *al-Kāfi* for the grand Shaykh Muhammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulayni, and the book *Man La Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh* for *Shaykh al-Ṣadūq* and *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār*, for Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Ṭūsi (May God be pleased with them all).[150]

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[149] Muqaddas Ardibīli, *Majmaʿ al-Fāʾida wal Burhan fi Sharḥ Irshad al-Ath'than* (Qum: Muʾasasat al-Nashr al-Islami), vol. 6, p.56.

[150] Hasan ibn Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmili, *Muntaqa al-Juman Fi Aḥadīth Al-Sihah wa al-Hisan* (Qum: Jamʾiyi Muadarrisin Hawziyi ʿIlmiyyi, 1983), vol.1, pp.1-2.

Later, on page 27, he writes:

> […]There are many routes available to us in reaching the Shaykhs (canonical
> compilers) - May God be pleased with them- and (in reaching) the narration
> of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, (these routes) are described in detail in the places
> that are dedicated to this, (however) it is necessary to mention one route (to
> reaching these books) here, with the hope of reaching (connecting to) the
> chain of attribution in that which we mention of the reports (so as to make a
> link) between us and those who narrated from them (peace be upon them),
> not due to acting upon it (these narrations reported) being contingent on this,
> for verily the unanimity of the books mentioned (being) from their authors
> generally, along with the establishment of various present indices/evidences
> that establish the authenticity of its content, has sufficed us from establishing
> the reputability of its narration for practical purposes, (as such) verily the
> benefit of its narration becomes apparent for that which is not unanimous
> (from it).
>
> And this is our reason for restricting (our reliance) to the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*,
> while there exist other books of narrations (other than these), however the
> characteristic mentioned above does not exist in books other than these, as
> we have indicated above. And so we say we narrate these books and others
> from the narrations of its authors from the permission of various (members)
> of our companions[…].[151]

Analysis

The quotations listed above merit a critical analysis so as to flesh out some of the
implicit views held by these scholars regarding the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*.

First, it is important above all to state that none of the above authors explicitly stated
that the contents of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* are unquestionably authentic. Although
they shower the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* with glowering praise and honorific titles, they do

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[151] *ibid*, 27.

not deny that false narrations are found within these texts, and that it is the responsibility of the scholar to critically engage with these texts to filter out the false narrations. Secondly, although the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* are not wholly authentic, they serve as the criterion by which other ḥadīth collections and individual narrations can be assessed for authenticity. How they came to assume this status is unclear, although Ṣāḥib al-Ma'ālim does explain that the established links of transmission, from himself to the respective compilers of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* grants these works a status above and beyond that of other ḥadīth compilations. Thirdly, Ṣāḥib al-Ma'ālim openly admits that the designation of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* as such is only a recent phenomenon. The *muta'akhirīn* (latter scholars; era of Muhaqqiq al-Hilli and 'Allamah al-Hilli onwards) coined this term and attributed it to the designated canonical works because they believed that the merits of these works surpassed that of other ḥadīth collections. This raises a tension between the *mutaqadamin* and the *muta'akhirīn*. If the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* possessed an obvious superiority over other works, then why was this not recognized by scholars from the era immediately following al-Ṭūsi and preceding Muhaqqiq? It stands to reason that scholars who were contemporaneous to al-Ṭūsi – as he was the final compiler of the canon – and those that came in the era immediately following al-Ṭūsi would have recognised the superiority of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* and coined the term earlier. As will be seen in the next chapter, the opinions of the earliest Shiʿi scholars, namely the compilers, forms a key aspect of the Uṣūli/Akhbāri dispute on the authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*.

The Five Books

A less frequent phenomenon in Shiʿi history has been the designation of five books as belonging to the ḥadīth canon. Two scholars, namely Shahīd al-Awwal and Shaykh Wālid al-Bahā'ī (d. 983/1576), identified the work *Madīnat al-'Ilm* of Shaykh al-Ṣadūq as a canonical ḥadīth collection, in addition to the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*.

Muhammad Makkī al-'Āmili, better known by the honorific title Shahīd al-Awwal, meaning the 'First Martyr', was one of the leading Shiʿi jurists of the 14th century.

The specific designation of martyrdom was only conferred upon five scholars in the history of Shiʿi Islam, with Shahīd al-Awwal and Shahīd al-Thāni sharing this distinction.[152] The link between these two scholars was perhaps felt more keenly in the influence of their jurisprudential works, both of which continue to be mainstays of seminary study. Shahīd al-Awwal was the author of *al-Lumʿah al-Dimashqiyya*, a *fiqh* work of immense significance matched, or arguably bettered only by Shahīd al-Thāni's commentary on his work, entitled *Sharḥ al-Lumʿah*. The work from which we have translated an extract is *al-Dhikrā*, a jurisprudential work that focuses exclusively on the topics of *taharah* (ritual purity) and *salah* (prayer). Although he does not explicitly mention the term 'The Five Books' or its Arabic equivalent, his statements imply a superior status for these works.

> […]and whoever denies this then it is as if he denied the unanimous from the traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) and his miracles and the history after him and whoever desires knowing their men (narrators) and referring to their writings, then they should read… the book *al-Kāfi* for al-Kulayni for verily it in and of itself has more (reports) than that which is in the six authentic books of the laity (Sunnis) in terms of text and chain (of narrators), and the book(s) *Madīnat al-ʾIlm* and *Man La Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh* is similar to it and the books of *Tahdhīb* and *al-Istibṣār* are like this and others which will take too long to enumerate here, which have authentic chains[…].[153]

The second reference to the 'Five Books' comes from Shaykh ʿIzz al-Dīn al-ʿĀmili, commonly known as 'Wālid al-Bahāʾī al-ʿĀmili', translated literally as 'the father of al-Bahāʾī al-ʿĀmili'. Despite Shaykh ʿIzz al-Dīn's role in promulgating the Shiʿi faith in Iran, he would be overshadowed by his more famous son, and eventually came to be identified in relation to his son.

In his book *Wusūl al-Akhyār*, a work of *dirayat al-ḥadīth* (contextual study of ḥadīth), Shaykh ʿIzz al-Dīn makes two references to 'The Five Books'. First, he states:

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[152] Momen, *Introduction*, 95.
[153] Muhammad al-Makkī al-ʿĀmili, *Al-Dhikrā, fi Aḥkām al-Shariʾah* (Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islami, 1991), vol.1, p.6.

And most of our authentic narrations and other (narrations) in our *'five Uṣūl'* (principle books) and others, from our Holy Prophet (s) and from our twelve Imams mentioned above (as) and many of them (the narrations) are related (back) to the Prophet (s) through them (the Imams), and it is rare to find an authentic narration for us from the Prophet (s) and it be from other than their (the Imams) route (chain).[154]

In his second, more detailed reference some forty pages later, he writes:

And our five principle (books) [five source books] are *al-Kāfi* and *Madīnat al-'Ilm* and *Man La Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh* and *Tahdhīb* and *al-Istibṣār*, (which) include most of the narrations narrated from the Prophet and our infallible Imams for us and (they include) the most important (narrations), such that only are a few insignificant (number) deviate (turn away) from these (books).

And gathered (in them) are from (amongst) the authentic narrations and others that encompass the theoretical and practical laws and the *Sunan* (Prophetic traditions) and mannerisms and advices and supplications and *Tafsīr* and morals that which cannot be counted and that which does not exist except in these (books).

As for the book *al-Kāfi*, it is authored by Shaykh al-Kulayni, the Shaykh of his age at his time and the face (reputation) of the scholars and noble ones. He was the most reliable of the people in terms of narrations, the most critical of them (the narrations) and the most knowledgeable in them.

He wrote *al-Kāfi*…in it is more than what was included in the 'Ṣaḥīḥ al-Sittah (six authentic books) of the laity (Sunnis) in terms of text and chains (of narrators) and this is not hidden from those that have looked in it and into them.

As for the book *Madīnat al-'Ilm* and *Man La Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, they are both authored by the grand noble (Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, and this grand Shaykh

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[154] Izz ad-Din al-'Āmili, *Wusul al-Akhyar ila Uṣūl al-Akhbār* (Qum: Majma' al-Dhaka'ir al-Islamiyya, n.d.), 44.

(who was) of high station amongst both the Laity (Sunnis) and the elite (Shia) […]

And as for the book *Tahdhīb* and *al-Istibṣār*, they are for the leader of his time and the Shaykh of his age and the head of this *ṭā'ifah* (sect) and its mainstay rather, the head/leader of all the scholars in their entirety at his time, Muhammad ibn al-Hassan al-Ṭūsi.

[…] he was known for excellence and the amplitude of his knowledge and the highness of his station amongst both the Laity and the Elite (Sunni and Shia).[155]

Little research has been conducted on what I have termed the 'Five Books'. A thorough analysis of the Five Books is beyond the purview of this study and would require a more concerted effort. It is however, important to mention it briefly here for the purposes of comparison. Shahīd al-Awwal lived in the 14th century, in the era following Muhaqqiq al-Hilli and 'Allamah Hilli, whereas Shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn was a contemporary of the three scholars listed above who all explicitly mentioned the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in their works. The problem of availability of texts then, is therefore avoided, but another question arises: why did Shahīd al-Awwal and Shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn view *Madīnat al-'Ilm* as being part of the canon, whereas their contemporaries restricted the canon to the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*? This, and other questions pertaining to the Five Books could form the basis for future research into this area.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the emergence of the term '*Kutub al-Arba'ah*' to Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, and followed the trajectory of the term in the three centuries following its emergence. Although the problem of availability of texts plagued Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, his intellectual leanings certainly influenced the choice of works that came to be part of the fledging canon. The term '*Kutub al-Arba'ah*' gained traction amongst

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[155] *ibid*, 85.

scholars, and its usage signifies the various ways in which it was understood and perceived by scholarly communities. Most importantly, these scholars that employed the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* were all proto-Uṣūli; promoting the authority of the jurist over that the text. This would appear paradoxical, since it was Muhaqqiq who coined the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah*; although it appears the designation of these works as canonical was due to their juristic value, rather than a wholesale appraisal of all their contents. This may also explain why the potential availability of *al-Mahāsin* and *Basa'ir* may not have influenced the designation of canonical works, as their overly esoteric contents, and in the case of *Basa'ir*, the lack of any narrations pertaining to jurisprudence, would have conflicted with Muhaqqiq's juristic endeavours. This chapter also highlighted the more infrequently used 'Five Books', which included the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* with the addition of *Madīnat al-'Ilm*. The Five Books however, gained little traction, perhaps due to the loss of *Madīnat al-'ilm*, and the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* became the established canon amongst the Twelver Shiʿa.

The perception of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* does not undergo any major transformation until the rise of the Akhbāri school in the early 17th century. Akhbāri scholars, led by Mulla Muhammad Amīn al-Astarabādi (d. 1036/1626), imbue the canon with a status akin to that of the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Sittah* in Sunni Islam. It is within the Uṣūli/Akhbāri dispute that the understanding of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* undergoes significant development, and its role in the nature of authority in Twelver Shiʿism comes to the fore.

Chapter 4: Akhbārism and the Development of the Kutub al-Arba'ah

Introduction

The emergence of the Akhbāri school within Twelver Shiʿism in the early 17th century sparked robust discussion on the status and authenticity of *Kutub al-Arba'ah* within scholarly communities. This discussion occurred within the wider spectrum of debate between the two primary schools within Twelver Shiʿism: Uṣūlism and Akhbārism. The Uṣūli school is generally defined by its rationalist approach to religion, promotion of *ijtihād,* and recourse to 'aql (intellect) in deriving religious law.[156] The Akhbāri school is noted for its rejection of *ijtihād*, and the strict importance it places on scriptural sources: namely the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth.[157]

This chapter will begin by outlining the tenets of the Akhbāri school of thought. Following this, a sketch of al-Astarabādi's intellectual output, in particular his arguments for the authenticity of *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, as well as the subtle criticisms he offered of the canon, will be provided. The arguments for the authenticity put forward by subsequent Akhbāri scholars will also be listed. The critical role played by the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in Akhbāri hermeneutics will then be explored, before concluding with a brief summary of Uṣūli responses to the Akhbāri belief in the unquestionable authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. This chapter will argue that the rise of the Akhbāri school signalled the re-emergence of the authority of the text over that of the jurist; indeed, it is only within the Akhbāri school that the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* function as a conventional canon à la the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Sittah* in Sunni Islam.

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[156] Andrew Newman, "The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid Iran. Part 1: 'Abdallāh al-Samāhijī's "Munyat al-Mumārisīn," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55, no.1 (1992): 22.
[157] *ibid*.

Tenets of Akhbārism

The Uṣūli/Akhbāri dispute arose in the 17th century, dividing Twelver Shiʿi scholars on key issues of epistemology, methodology and authority. It is difficult to identify discernible traits of Akhbārism, as evaluations of the emergence of the Akhbāri school are coloured by scholarly prejudice, be it favourable or antagonistic to Akhbārism.[158] Uṣūli scholars antithetical to Akhbārism view it as a new school of thought formulated by al-Astarabādi. Akhbāris however, view their school as a continuation of the methodology of the earliest *ʿulamaʾ* of the pre-Būyid era. This depiction of Akhbārism is bolstered by earlier usage of the term '*Akhbāriyyun'* and '*Akhbāriyaa'* in bibliographical literature, signifying the existence of the school prior to al-Astarabādi. [159] Gleave has argued however, that these terms are only loosely affiliated to the Akhbārism of al-Astarabādi, and lacked any rigorous outline of doctrine and methodology.[160] For Gleave, it is al-Astarabādi and his students that formulate a coherent school based upon a clearly articulated methodology, and it is from this period onwards that we can speak of an Akhbāri school.[161] This can be evidenced by the multiple works of Akhbāri scholars that attempt to delineate the key points of difference between themselves and Uṣūlis. Throughout these works, Akhbāri thinking was always situated in relation to Uṣūlism, and constantly sought to define (and redefine) itself in relation to Uṣūlism.

An analysis of the works focused on the Uṣūli/Akhbāri divide reveal three significant differences from which all others stem. These three broad classifications that serve as the framework for the Uṣūli/Akhbāri dispute are: hermeneutics; the status of sources; and the role of the jurist.[162]

Under the umbrella of hermeneutics, the fundamental difference between the two schools is the Akhbāri rejection of *ijtihād*. *Ijtihād* is listed as the primary difference between the two schools by al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmili (d. 1104/1693), a prominent Akhbāri scholar, who argues that Akhbāris rely solely on scriptural sources, whereas Uṣūlis

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[158] Robert Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shīʿī School* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 9.
[159] *ibid*, 8.
[160] *ibid*, 16.
[161] *ibid*, 30.
[162] *ibid*, 181.

depend on human reason to extrapolate religious law.[163] Another point of difference under the umbrella of hermeneutics is the Akhbāri opposition to *al-Istinbāt al-ẓaniyya* (speculative methods of interpretation). Akhbāris believe that one must only follow knowledge which is certain; Uṣūlis are accused of following knowledge which is speculative. Scholars have debated however, whether this difference was semantical, as the Akhbāri definition of 'certain knowledge' bears close resemblance to the Uṣūli conception of speculative knowledge.[164] This discussion, and its related effect on the belief that the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* were authentic, will be dealt with later in this chapter.

The second primary difference between Uṣūlis and Akhbāris was the number of, and authority of legal sources. For Uṣūlis, the legal sources were four: the Qurʾān; Ḥadīth; '*aql* (reason); and *ijma'* (consensus).[165] Akhbāris reject the latter two, and rely solely on scriptural sources to derive legal rulings.[166] Even within this legal framework, the hierarchical relationship between the Qurʾān and the Ḥadīth was unusual. Akhbāri scholars argued that the legal prescriptions within the Qurʾān were insufficient to function independently; they required the ḥadīth for detailed explanation. For example, al-Jazā'iri (d. 1112/1701) writes that:

> As for the Akhbāris—may God sanctify their tombs—they argue that, for us, all the Qurʾān is of unclear reference (*mutashābih*). Hence it is only permitted for us to take rulings from it when there is an indication within the *akhbār* as to its meaning.[167]

Despite the sacred status conferred upon the Qurʾān in Islam, it had little practical value for Akhbāri scholars. This imbalanced relationship between the scriptural sources presented Akhbāri scholars with challenges when a contradiction arose between the Qurʾān and aḥadīth. How they negotiated this tension, as well as the link between the authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* and the legal value of the Qurʾān, will also be explored in this chapter.

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[163] Muhammad ibn Hasan al-'Āmili, *Al-Fawa'id al-Tusiyya* (Qum: al-Matba'a al-'Ilmiyya, 1985), 447.
[164] Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 88.
[165] Ibid, 217.
[166] Halm, *Shi'i Islam*, 112.
[167] Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 199.

The third primary point of dispute is the qualification, role and authority of the jurist. Akhbāris do not believe in division of community into *mujtahid* and *muqallid* (one who imitates a mujtahid in religious rulings).[168] In terms of judicial roles within society, Akhbāris believe that a *muhaddith* (transmitter of ḥadīth) is qualified to carry out this task, whereas Uṣūlis argue that a *mujtahid* is the qualified individual.[169] It is important to note however, that although Akhbāris denied the *mujtahid/muqallid* distinction, they did not dismiss the role of the ʿulamaʾ, but instead reconfigured the definition of an ʿālim (religious scholar) in accordance with the epistemic value they placed upon scriptural sources.

Before moving onto the next section, we will briefly present the Akhbāri perspective on the conflict. Akhbāri scholars wrote several treatises outlining the differences between Uṣūlis and themselves, differing in length and detail, but consistent with the reasons above. Al-Karaki (d.1076/1664) here lists some of the differences between the two schools:

> The reason (*sabab*) which caused the difference (*ikhtilāf*) is the clear opposition of modern scholars to the early scholars on three issues: First, a group of early scholars . . . explicitly stated that it is not permitted to prove legal rulings by *ẓann*…Third, a group of the early scholars explicitly state that the reports they transmit in their books, and upon which they base their action, are all sound . . . the modern scholars say that isolated reports on their own bring only *ẓann*.[170]

Apart from the differences mentioned, careful attention should be paid to the employment of the terms 'early' and 'modern'. Al-Karaki portrays the Akhbāris as faithful to the early Shiʿi scholarly tradition; the Uṣūlis, by contrast, are seen as innovators opposed to Shiʿi scholarly heritage.

Another prominent Akhbāri scholar, al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmili list twenty-three differences between Uṣūlis and Akhbāris, most of which are subsumed by the three primary points explained earlier in this chapter. What is relevant to note however, is that in

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[168] Juan Cole, "Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722-1780: the Akhbāri-Uṣūli conflict reconsidered," *Iranian Studies* 18, no.1 (1985): 13. A *mujtahid* is a practitioner of *ijtihād*, and an authority in the derivation of the law. A *muqallid* is a layman who imitates the rulings of a *mujtahid*.

[169] Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 195.

[170] Al-Husayn ibn Shihab al-Karaki, *Hidayat al-Abrar ila tariq al-A'imma al-Athar* (Baghdad, n.p, n.d.), pp. 6-7. (trans. by Gleave).

al-Ḥurr's view, the essential difference between Uṣūlism and Akhbārism is that the former champions the opinion of the *mujtahid* over the ḥadīth when attempting to understand religious law; in short, Uṣūlism promotes the authority of the scholar over the text, whereas Akhbārism proposes the opposite.

Mulla Muhammad Amīn al-Astarabādi

Although the exact date of birth is not known for al-Astarabādi, it can be surmised from his name that his family traced their roots to Astarabād, in northern Iran.[171] Al-Astarabādi's scholarly endeavours are well known to historians and biographers. He studied under the luminaries of his day, Muhammad Sāḥib al-Madārik and Ṣāḥib al-Maʿālim in the seminary of Najaf, and received *ijazas* (licences) from both in the final decade of the 16th century.[172] Under their tutelage, al-Astarabādi studied all the traditional Islamic sciences taught in the seminaries, which were at this time heavily influenced by Uṣūli thought, and in particular, the legal theories of ʿAllamah al-Hilli.[173] Al-Astarabādi then, was well versed in the legal frameworks that he was to vehemently attack in his most famous work, the *Fawā'id al-Madaniyyah*. In another of his well-known works, the *Danishnamah-yi Shahi*, al-Astarabādi writes that it was his aforementioned teacher, Sāḥib al-Rijāl, who encouraged his pupil to:

> Revive the way of the Akhbāris. Dispel the doubts of those who oppose this way. These ideas may have been lost to their minds, but God has decreed that these ideas flow from your pen![174]

Upon this instruction, al-Astarabādi, by his own account, spent several years meditating in Madīnah, before returning once again to the study of the traditions with a newfound purpose and vigour.[175]

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[171] Gleave *Scripturalist Islam*, 32.
[172] Rula Judi Abisaab, "Shiʿi Jurisprudence, Sunnism, and the Traditionist Thought (akhbārī) of Muhammad Amīn Astarabadi (d. 1626–27)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 47, no.1 (2015): 10, doi:10.1017/S0020743814001421.
[173] *ibid*.
[174] Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "Was Muhammad Amīn Al-Astarabādi (d.1036/1626-7) a Mujtahid?" *Shi'i Studies Review* 2, no.1 (2018): 39, doi:10.1163/24682470-12340018.
[175] *ibid*, 41.

The instruction of Sahib al-Rijāl however, deserves more attention. Scholars have debated what Sahib al-Rijāl intended by the phrase "revive the way of the Akhbāris." Some scholars have deduced that there has always been as Akhbāri school present in Twelver Shiʿism, and that al-Astarabādi is merely the reviver of this school, and not its founder.[176] This position is supported by bibliographical works which highlight the usage of the term *Akhbāriyya* to denote a school of thought in early Shiʿism. Gleave however, disagrees with the assertion. He argues that although there is evidence of the existence of the *Akhbāriyya*, they lacked clearly definable traits, and could not be considered a school of thought.[177] For Gleave, it is al-Astarabādi who is the 'founder' of Akhbārism, as he provided a theological outlook and legal framework with clearly defined traits.[178] The scholars classified as belonging to the *Akhbāriyya* in the pre-Astarabādi era did not explicitly outline a clear methodology, but were instead identifiable by shared traits. What is interesting to note in the discussion surrounding the origins of Akhbārism is that all proponents of Akhbārism project themselves as merely propagators of an old method reaching back to the earliest scholars during the era of the Imams, and the period that immediately followed, particularly Shaykh al-Kulayni and Shaykh al-Ṣadūq. Opponents of Akhbārism, namely the Uṣūlis, portray al-Astarabādi as the founder of Akhbārism, and instead trace back Uṣūli thought to the scholars in both the pre and post *ghayba* periods. What can be seen here is a concerted effort from both Uṣūlis and Akhbāris to trace their origins to the times of the Imams, and the earliest scholars of the *ghayba* period. Despite their stark differences in legal thought, both recognise the same sources of authority, and attempt to link their own theories and methodologies to these sources of authority; namely the Imams and the earliest scholars.

Al-Astarabādi and the Kutub al-Arba'ah

Al-Astarabādi's view of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* is directly linked to his rejection of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, (legal theory), prominent amongst Uṣūli Twelvers and Sunni scholars.

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[176] Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 48.
[177] *ibid*, 173.
[178] *ibid*.

Uṣūl al-Fiqh is a science utilised by scholars to formulate legal principles that assist in deriving jurisprudential rulings from the four sources of law: the scriptural sources (Qurʾān and Ḥadīth), as well as ʿ*aql* (for Twelvers, Sunnis use *qiyās*) and *ijma'* (consensus).[179] Akhbāris reject *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and instead rely on the *akhbār* to navigate their religious obligations. Akhbāris also reject *ijtihād*, and do not recognise that any *mujtahid* possesses the ability, or more accurately the right, to derive religious laws from his own understanding of the sacred texts. The rejection of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *ijtihād* necessitate that the *akhbār* function as both legal maxims and rulings, eliminating the need for *mujtahids* and the science of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. To establish the authority and scope of the *akhbār* would necessitate that the majority of the *aḥadīth*, if not all of them, be deemed authentic. For the Akhbāris, the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* function as the supreme religious authority, displacing the position of the *mujtahid* in Uṣūli Twelver Shiʿism.

In his most famous work *al-Fawā'id al-Madaniyyah*, Al-Astarabādi lists twelve reasons as to why the narrations within the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* are unquestionably authentic. These twelve reasons are:

1. We have customary certainty that a group of the Imams' companions for a period of 300 years or more asked the Imams their opinions and then wrote them down.

2. We have customary certainty that these sources formed the basis of belief and action during the time before the collection of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*.

3. Such is the wisdom of God and the kindness of the Prophet and the Imams to the Shiʿa, that they would not allow the *aḥadīth* to be lost, and the Shiʿa to be without a source on which to base their action.

4. There are numerous reports that the Imams told their companions to write and publicise the Imams' legal decisions so that they might become the basis for the action of the Shiʿa.

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[179] Muhammad Bāqir al-Sadr, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence,* trans. Arif Abdul Hussain (London: ICAS, 2003), 41.

5. We know also from the earliest works of transmitters (*rijāl*), such as *Rijāl al-Kashshi*, that whole cohorts of companions were declared sound by the Imams themselves, and by the early transmitters of *aḥadīth*.

6. The authors of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* all declare that they only record reports of declared authenticity.

7. If the *aḥadīth* in the collections did not come from the *Uṣūl Arba'ah Mi'ah*, then this would mean our *aḥadīth* are not sound, and hence any action based on them would be invalid.

8. Most of the reports which al-Ṭūsi rejects would be considered *ṣaḥīḥ* (of sound isnād) by modern scholars, and most of what he acts on would be considered *da'if* (weak). Therefore, he must have known something about their authenticity we do not.

9. Similarly al-Ṭūsi relies on a report with a weak *isnād*, when a "sounder" *isnād* (according to the categorisation of modern scholars) was available. Therefore, he must have known something about their authenticity we do not.

10. We know that al-Ṭūsi does not normally lie, and he says that he took his reports from the *Uṣūl Arba'ah Mi'ah*.

11. Al-Ṣadūq and al-Kulayni say this also, and we know that they do not lie.

12. We are certain in a customary way that most of the transmitters of our hadiths are reliable. We know this because reports have reached us which describe how unhappy they are with fabrications in *aḥadīth*.[180]

Notwithstanding any methodological critiques of al-Astarabādi's proofs for the authenticity of *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, a few remarks are needed. First, there is the underlying assumption that the companions of the Imams recorded their narrations truthfully and did not insert any of their own opinions or writings into the *Uṣūl* works. This trust in the veracity of the companions of the Imams in composing written works demonstrates an uncritically positive appraisal of the companions of

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[180] Muhammad Amīn al-Astarabādi, *Fawa'id al-Madaniyyah* (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islami, 2003), pp.371-377. (trans. by Gleave).

the Imams. Secondly, in point number three, al-Astarabādi neatly inserts a theological argument, the principle of grace espoused by the Mu'tazilah and adopted by the rationalist scholars of formative Shiʿism. [181] This contradicts the general Akhbāri trend of bemoaning Mu'tazilah influence on Twelver Shiʿism, and appears out of place in an argument attempting to prove the authenticity of *aḥadīth*. These two points demonstrate that Akhbārism – despite its self-portrayal as the reviver of a pristine form of Shiʿa Islam - shares similarities with Sunni methodology; a criticism that Akhbāris often level at Uṣūli scholars. Thirdly, there is a trust placed not only in the companions of the Imams, but the early scholars of the Shiʿa; namely al-Kulayni, al-Ṣadūq and al-Ṭūsi. This serves to elevate these scholars to a status almost above criticism, further reinforcing the authenticity of their works. Finally, points eight and nine reveal a salient point in al-Astarabādi's thought; namely, that the opinions of the early scholars take precedence over contemporary scholars, and in the event that there is a discrepancy or disagreement between a contemporary scholar and a 'canonical' scholar, the opinion of the canonical scholar takes precedence. This is in contrast with the views of the Uṣūli scholars outlined in the preceding chapter, namely Ṣāḥib al-Maʿālim, who argued that the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* were designated as such by the *muta'akhirīn (*later era scholars, namely from the Hillah period onwards), as they judged their merits and qualities and deemed them canonical. There exists here a tension between relying on the opinions of the earliest scholars, as opposed to the judgements of the latter scholars.

Akhbāri Criticisms of the Canon

An interesting phenomenon to note however, is that although al-Astarabādi views the canonical works as authentic beyond doubt, he offers subtle criticisms of either the compiler, or more infrequently, the content of the narration. In *al-Faqīh* for Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, a particular narration concerns the prayer to be recited on Friday, in which it is stated: "Oh God, purify me, and purify my heart. Accept my purification, and make [expressions of] love for you proceed from my tongue."[182]

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[181] Abdulsater, *Shi'i Doctrine*, 98.
[182] Saduq, *al-Faqīh*, vol.1, p.111.

Al-Astarabādi holds some reservations about the narration, preferring another version of this narration: "In some ḥadīth on this topic [it is recorded]: "make adoration of you and praise for you proceed from my tongue." This is better."[183]Al-Astarabādi proceeds further in his criticism of some narrations. One particular narration in al-Ṣadūq's collection states: "The first to place the sermon before the Friday Prayer was Uthman."[184] Al-Astarabādi appears puzzled by this narration, claiming that it: "is a unique opinion [of Shaykh Ṣadūq— gharib] which we do not know of from anyone other than this author."[185]

Two relevant conclusions can be drawn here. First, despite al-Astarabādi's criticisms of these narrations, he does not directly address the weaknesses, and instead vaguely terms these narrations 'unusual'. Secondly, it also offers a glimpse into the flawed mechanism of Akhbārī hermeneutics. For Akhbāris, narrations function as legal precepts in and of themselves and require no external elucidation; it is they that are used to explain the Qurʾān. Despite however, the apparent clarity of the narrations, al-Astarabādi feels compelled to add explanatory notes to some narrations, suggesting a disharmony between Akhbāri theory and practice.

Akhbāri position on Kutub al-Arba'ah in the post-Astarabadi era

The Akhbārī position on the status of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* remained consistent in the post-Astarabādi era, and remained a distinctive hallmark of the fledgling school. What did change however, in the post-Astarabadi period of Akhbārism, was the manner in which they presented their arguments for the authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. Although some Akhbāri scholars followed al-Astarabādi's line of reasoning, other Akhbāri scholars put forth novel arguments to prove the absolute veracity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. This section will outline the gradual evolution of Akhbāri arguments for the authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, demonstrating a developing sophistication in the articulation of their arguments.

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[183] Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 92.
[184] Saduq, *al-Faqīh*, vol.1, pp.432-433. (trans. by Gleave).
[185] Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 93.

 Akhbārī scholars of the generation immediately following al-Astarabādi predominantly followed his line of reasoning in relation to the authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. This argument, sourced from the conventional Shiʿi historical viewpoint, traces the narrations of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* to the Imams through the *Uṣūl Arba'ah Miʾah*.[186] From the Akhbārī perspective, to deny this transmission would be akin to denying the majority of extant reports, and represents an acceptance of the loss of Shiʿa intellectual heritage. Special deference is also conferred upon the canonical compilers, who have screened the material in their work. Their scrupulousness and honesty attest to the fact that all the reports contained within their works are authentic. We will present the arguments of two scholars, al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmili and al-Karaki, who followed this line of reasoning.

Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmili presented the aforementioned narrative of Shiʿa ḥadīth literature (*Kutub al-Arba'ah* sourced from the *Uṣūl Arba'ah Miah*) and vouched for the truthfulness of the compilers vis-à-vis the contents of their works, rendering *isnād* criticism superfluous.[187] He utilised this narrative to put forward a counterfactual argument for the authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. If the compilers of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* had collected weak narrations, then they would be responsible for any subsequent misguidance on account of their lax approach to screening hadiths; the Shiʿa would have been in error for centuries, unable to differentiate truth from falsehood.[188] For al-ʿĀmili, no scholar, whether Uṣūli or Akhbārī, could admit to this situation, hence rendering the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* authentic.

He also devised a clever argument to combat *isnād* criticism of perceived weak traditions in the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. For Hurr al-ʿĀmili, the compilers of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* did not attach *isnads* for the purpose of veracity, or to ward off potential criticism over perceived weakness. The *isnād* was attached to the narration for the purpose of adornment; the *isnād* chosen was not necessarily the strongest by the compiler's standard, but served as an embellishment to the narration whilst simultaneously fending off criticism from Sunni scholars that Shiʿa ḥadīth were lacking in chains of transmission.[189] In this manner, potential criticisms of weak

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[186] *ibid*, 246.
[187] Muhammad ibn Hasan al-ʿĀmili, *Wasa'il al-Shiʿa* (Qum: Mihr, 1993), vol.30, pp.258-260.
[188] Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 248.
[189] *ibid*.

traditions are futile, for the chain is not intended to stand up to scrutiny. Through this framework, isnād criticism as a critical methodology is rendered obsolete.

Another prominent Akhbāri scholar, al-Karaki, reformulates the definition and purpose of an *isnād* to strengthen the Akhbāri case. The *isnād*, according to al-Karaki, was not the chain of narrators from the compiler to the Imam, or original narrator, as understood by Uṣūli *ʿulamaʾ*. Rather, the *isnād* is the chain from the compiler to the *asl*, or 'principle work' from which the compiler has sourced the narration.[190] As these *Uṣūl* works were written by the companions of the Imams and directly verified by them, there could be no doubt as to their authenticity. In an unorthodox Akhbāri move, al-Karaki concedes that there were weak narrations and books in circulation during the era of the Imams; their identification and subsequent absence from the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, however, proves that what remained was authentic.[191]

The second argument put forward by Akhbāri scholars to prove the veracity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* revolves around the adoption and reformulation of Uṣūli terminology to reinforce the Akhbāri narrative. One of the first Akhbāri scholars to employ this argument was Muhammad Taqi al-Majlisi (d. 1070/1660), known as al-Majlisi I. Al-Majlisi I redefined the meaning of the term '*mutawātir*'. In ḥadīth sciences, '*mutawātir*' designated a narration that had been consecutively narrated so many times that its veracity was proven beyond doubt.[192] '*Mutawātir*' stand opposed to '*khabar al- wāhid*', in which the number of chains is considered insufficient to prove its authenticity beyond doubt.[193] These classifications had been in use for centuries by Uṣūli scholars to grade *aḥadīth*. Al-Majlisi reformulates the definition of '*mutawātir*', stating:

> A *mutawātir* report is one which at least three persons have transmitted, and
> these reports give us knowledge. Sometimes *ʿilm* is not obtained from 1000
> individuals—such as the testimony of peasants concerning the ownership of
> land or water. Sometimes it is the case that the word of a single, pious man,

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[190] Al-Karaki, *Hidaya*, 88.
[191] Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 250.
[192] Fadli, *Introduction to Ḥadīth*, 79.
[193] *ibid*, 91.

who reports that he saw so-and-so, gives knowledge. The central point here is knowledge, not number.[194]

Through al-Majlisi's reconfiguration, a narration that is viewed by Uṣūli scholars as weak is elevated to *mutawātir* status, hence bolstering the number of traditions that can be deemed authentic beyond doubt. Al-Majlisi's innovative approach to ḥadīth sciences is also utilised to prove the authenticity of narrations beyond the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. In this manner, he writes:

> If each of the three authors of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* transmit a report from Husayn b. Sa'ad, and each of them agree in the transmission, then we have obtained knowledge (*'ilm*) that they do not attribute lies to Husayn b. Sa'd. Following on from this, it is now possible that the presence of *mutawātir* reports in the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* will, praise be to God, enable other reports in other books to be confirmed, such as the *Mahāsin* of al-Barqī, the *Qurb al-isnād* of Himyar, the *Basa'ir al-Darajat* of al-Saffār and other books.[195]

Al-Jazā'iri offers a different reformulation of the purpose and function of an *isnād*. For al-Jazai'ri, the *isnād* chosen by the compiler is that chain which reaches to the earliest Imam, and may not necessarily be the strongest in terms of the narrators in the chain.[196] Evidently, the *isnād* functions in his view as an instrument of prestige, rather than an attempt to offer a critical examination of the narration's *isnād*. For this reason, al-Jazā'iri believes that the presence of weak narrations in the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* has minimal bearing, as the *isnād* chosen is not reflective of the strongest chain for a narration.[197] For every apparent 'weak' chain chosen for an *isnād*, there could be several others that are stronger that were ignored by the compiler. Through this method, an apparent fault in the authenticity of the traditions is avoided, allaying doubts regarding the authenticity of narrations.

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[194] Muhammad Taqi Majlisi, *Lawami Sahibqirani al-Mushtahar bi-Sharḥ al-Faqīh* (Tehran: Maktabat Isma'iliyyin, 1993), vol. 1, p.99. (trans. by Gleave).
[195] *ibid*, 103. (trans. by Gleave).
[196] Ni'matullah Jaza'iri, *Kashf al-Asrar fi Sharḥ al-Istibṣār* (Qum: Mu'assasat Dar al-Kutub, 1987), vol 2, p.44.
[197] Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 258.

Kutub al-Arba'ah and Akhbāri Hermeneutics

The doctrine of the authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* is inextricably linked to the hermeneutical framework of al-Astarabādi. Al-Astarabādi outlines the Akhbāri methodology in his magnum opus, *Fawā'id al-Madaniyyah*. Although the *Fawā'id al-Madaniyyah* was technically a work of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, al-Astarabādi was aiming to subvert the sciences of *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* as understood by Uṣūli scholars. Hence, the *Fawā'id* reads more as a critique of Uṣūli legal principles than an exhaustive exposition of Akhbāri methodology.[198]

Key to al-Astarabādi's hermeneutical framework is his definition of *'ilm*. For al-Astarabādi, *'ilm* takes on a new meaning as compared to its usage by Uṣūli scholars. Uṣūli scholars view *'ilm* as knowledge which is known with certainty, leaving no room for error.[199] Al-Astarabādi repudiates this idea, arguing that there is a clear distinction between God's knowledge of the *Sharī'a* (Islamic law), and human understanding of God's knowledge. God would not impose an impossible task upon humanity; hence, their duty is not to attain certainty of the law, but to identify their religious duties and obligations.[200] Here, al-Astarabādi alters the benchmark for certainty, arguing that customary knowledge (*'ilm al-'ādi*) suffices for the believer in attaining requisite religious knowledge.[201]

The reports, or narrations that have reached us, form the basis of knowledge in al-Astarabādi's framework. Al-Astarabādi provides further detail of how an approximate understanding of God's law can be attained, when he writes:

> Wise persons (in particular those who are so wise one might call them sinless) say what they mean, and when they mean something other than what they say, they provide indicators that their intended meaning is other than the clear (or perhaps "literal") meaning of their words. The indicators of a meaning other than the literal are known to the addressee of the speech. In the case of God's revelation (both Qurʾān and Sunna), the addressee of the

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[198] Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 65.
[199] Ibid, xviii.
[200] Ibid, 68.
[201] Astarabadi, *Fawa'id*, pp.106-107.

speech is not the people generally, but the Imams specifically. Hence only the Imams know whether the intended meaning of the authors (in this case, God and his Prophet) are the literal meaning of the words, or a diverted meaning. Just as one might misunderstand an overheard conversation between two strangers, so one might misunderstand the Qurʾān. The Imams, on the other hand, know the meaning of these texts because they have access to the possible indicators which might divert the meaning. The ordinary folk have no such access, and hence are unable to determine the meaning of God's revelation directly. They must rely on the Imams' words which are "not liable to be abrogated, and which are verbalised in a manner the ordinary people can understand. They are the ones addressed by [the Imams' speech].[202]

It can be seen then, that al-Astarabādi's hermeneutical framework relies heavily on the narrations to attain customary certainty of God's law, and to interpret the Qurʾān. Customary certainty can only be derived from the narrations; hence, it followed that as many narrations as possible should be deemed authentic. Any criticism of the authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* would severely weaken the key hermeneutical tool in al-Astarabādi's legal framework, and undermine Akhbāri methodology.

The Akhbāri view of the legal significance of the Qurʾān also drove the need for the *akhbār* to be authentic. Akhbārism is noted for its rejection of *'aql* and *'ijma* as sources of law, and sole reliance on the scriptural sources, namely the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth. The Qurʾān however, is incapable of providing legal rulings in and of itself, and requires the *akhbār* to elucidate the meaning of its verses. For al-Astarabādi, verses that are abrogated/abrogating, general/specific, restricted/unrestricted render the Qurʾān almost impenetrable.[203]

This position is demonstrated by al-Karaki, who writes:

It can be understood from the *akhbār* that the *tafsīr* of the Quran is not permitted, as is the derivation of speculative rulings from its *ẓāhir* (apparent) meanings. Unless they are referred to the words of the Imams to find out their status, [Quranic verses] are of only probable indicative value (*ẓann al-*

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[202] Ibid, pp.178-179. (trans. by Gleave).
[203] Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 219.

dalāla): whether they are abrogated or not, whether they are general or unrestricted or not, whether they are to be interpreted or not. One who does this has erred, for the Imams are explicit in saying that the Qurʾān is only understood by the one to whom it is addressed…the knowledge of what is an abrogator and what is abrogated, and what remains as having a *ẓāhir* meaning, and what does not, is particular to [the Imams].[204]

This argument demonstrates the interconnected nature of the revelatory sources and their interpretation for Akhbāri legal theory. Although the Qurʾān is a sacred document treated as the word of God, it requires the *aḥadīth* in order to make sense of it. Although the Akhbāri position on the legal value of the Qurʾān develops, the status and necessity of the *akhbār* however, is a constant fixture in the evolution of Akhbāri thought. The Qurʾān lack of probative force to derive legal rulings also requires that as many *akhbār* as possible be deemed authentic to compensate for the Qurʾān's lack of legal authority.

Uṣūli Treatment of Kutub al-Arba'ah

As, discussed earlier, the discussion regarding the authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* arose during the time of al-Astarabādi, who listed twelve arguments in his *Fawā'id al-Madaniyyah* that attest to the authenticity of the narrations contained within the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. Following al-Astarabādi's lead, many *ʿulamaʾ* concurred with his assessment of *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, including prominent scholars such as Shaykh Hurr al-ʿĀmili, compiler of *Wasa'il al-Shiʿa* . In addition to the twelve arguments of al-Astarabādi, Hurr al-ʿĀmili provides ten further arguments to prove the authenticity of *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. The Akhbāri argument rests on the premise that there was a smooth transition from *asl* to *Kutub* i.e., from principle work to comprehensive ḥadīth collection. Scholars opposed to the Akhbāri viewpoint, namely the Uṣūli scholars, point to the significant changes that occurred within Imāmī Shiʿa ḥadīth literature that demanded a thorough examination of their contents and sources. The passing of time, destruction of resources and the mixing

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[204] Karaki, *Hidaya*, 162. (trans. by Gleave).

up of the reliable and unreliable necessitated a more critical appraisal of ḥadīth collections in order to ascertain which traditions were authentic. This section will briefly cover some of the Uṣūli responses to the Akhbāri doctrine of the authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. The arguments against the Akhbāri doctrine that will be analysed below were put forward by contemporary scholars Sayyid Abul-Qāsim al-Khu'i (d. 1413/1992), and expounded upon by Shaykh 'Abd al-Hādi al-Faḍli (d. 1434/2013). They are not novel arguments, as numerous Uṣūli scholars of the 17-19th century proposed rebuttals to the Akhbāri doctrine. They are positioned here however, to illustrate the contemporary discourse surrounding the authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in traditional centres of learning.

One of the most significant Uṣūli Twelver scholars of the 20th century was Sayyid Abul-Qāsim al- Khu'i. Al-Khu'i was renowned for his voluminous works on jurisprudence, legal theory and ḥadīth sciences. Al- Khu'i, as per Uṣūli standard, rejected the belief in the authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*. His arguments rest both on the contents of their works, and the admissions of the compilers that their works contained flaws. In his refutation of *al-Kāfi's* unconditional authenticity, al-Khu'i points to the request of al-Kulayni from his co-religionist. In his preface, al-Kulayni stated that he was asked to include all the authentic traditions of the Imam; there is however, no restriction from including traditions that were not reliable.[205] Al-Kulayni also disrupts the definition of a ḥadīth, by including narrations of non-infallibles, such as Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam (d.179/795), the companion of the sixth Imam, and Usayd ibn Ṣafwān (d. unknown), a companion of the Prophet.[206] Although these companions are revered in Shiʿism, their statements carry no *hujjiya* (probative force) for the laymen.

The second argument against *al-Kāfi*'s complete authenticity is that al-Kulayni's testification that the contents of *al-Kāfi* are authentic is his own judgement, based on proofs that we do not have currently have access to.[207] Upon closer inspection of the preface of *al-Kāfi*, it appears that even al-Kulayni expresses doubt as to the veracity of its contents. Towards the conclusion of the preface to *al-Kāfi*, al-Kulayni makes the assertion that he hopes that this work will be of use to his interlocutor, and that

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[205] Al-Khoei, *Mu'jam*, vol 1, pp.89-92.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Al- Sayyid al-Hasani, *Dirasat fi al-Ḥadīth wa al-Muhaddithun* (Beirut: Dat al-Ta'aruf, n.d.), vol 2, p.138.

the deficiencies in the work be attributed to him (al-Kulayni).[208] The third point, made by al-Khu'i, is that al-Kulayni's most prominent contemporaries and successors, such as Ibn al-Walīd and al-Ṣadūq did not believe *al-Kāfi* to be completely authentic.[209] Although al-Ṣadūq and al-Kulayni share a Qummī heritage, al-Ṣadūq makes infrequent reference to him throughout his works, instead deferring to his teacher Ibn al-Walīd. There is something to be said for al-Ṣadūq's frequent reference to his teacher Ibn al-Walīd, as compared to the minimal references he makes to al-Kulayni.

In his rebuttal of *al-Faqīh*, al-Khu'i simply states that al-Ṣadūq's personal testification that its contents were wholly authentic possesses probative force for himself, and not for the wider Shiʿi community.[210] His methodology was also questioned, as it appeared to be a wholesale imitation of Ibn al-Walīd's opinions.[211] As for al-Ṭūsi's works, al-Khu'i argues that nowhere in the preface does al-Ṭūsi explicitly state that the contents of his works are completely authentic; to the contrary, it appears that he affirms the opposite.[212]

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the significant development of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in concurrence with the rise of the Akhbārī school. Prior to the emergence of Akhbārism, the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* were a collection of works that were deemed superior to other ḥadīth collections in authenticity, and most useful in assisting the jurist to derive religious law. Akhbārī scholars, beginning with al-Astarabādi, elevated the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* to sacred status, deeming them unquestionably authentic, notwithstanding minor criticisms made by al-Astarabādi. They supported this belief through a number of arguments, most of which centred on the veracity of the canonical compilers, demonstrating a deference to early Shiʿi scholars. Uṣūli scholars from the era of Akhbārī dominance (16-18th century) until today have

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[208] Fadli, *Introduction to Ḥadīth*, 213.
[209] Ibid, 216.
[210] Ibid, 218
[211] Ibid.
[212] Al-Ṭūsi, *Tahthib*, 2.

attempted to rebut their arguments. Whether due to the success of the arguments proposed by Akhbāris, or external factors such as bloody battles in holy cities, Akhbārism began to wane in the twilight years of the 18th century, and today is scarcely visible in the vast spectrum of Twelver Shiʿism.

Although Akhbārism is only a minor movement in contemporary Shiʿism, Akhbāri elevation of the status of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* renewed interest in the study of ḥadīth, which experienced a renaissance of sorts during the period of Akhbāri dominance. More importantly though, the Akhbāri treatment of *Kutub al-Arba'ah* demonstrates two key points. First, it does not appear that any Akhbāri scholar directly acknowledges the origin of the term '*Kutub al-Arba'ah'*. It is afforded canonical status without a proper understanding of its origins. We have then, the irony that the canon was coined by a proto-Uṣūli scholar as an honorific title, but was appropriated by Akhbāri scholars to function as a conventional canon. In this sense, the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, either knowingly or unknowingly, demonstrates the cross-pollination between Uṣūlism and Akhbārism. This cross-pollination can also be seen in the lax attitude towards philosophy and mysticism held by Akhbāris. Akhbāri disdain for the use of the intellect is restricted to its application in deriving law. Their appraisal for the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* for its capacity to provide religious rulings mirrors the Uṣūli focus on these particular works due to their greater level of *hujjiyah*. Both Uṣūli and Akhbāri scholars revere the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* due to their legal value.

Secondly, the rise of Akhbārism saw the re-emergence of the text as supreme authority in matters of religion. Since the Būyid era, the authority of the text had been superseded by the authority of the scholar. The rise of *fiqh*, and concurrently that of the *faqīh* in the post-*ghayba* period signalled a changing of the guard, with the promotion of *ijtihād* from the 13th century reinforcing scholarly authority. This push for authority was halted by Akhbāri scholars, who viewed themselves as heirs to al-Kulayni and al-Ṣadūq; faithful carriers of the teachings of the Imams. The *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, under Akhbāri dominance, functioned as a conventional canon, until Uṣūlism re-established its grip on Shiʿi scholarship and again altered the status quo. Although the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* no longer enjoy the same status they did during the heyday of the Akhbāris, their historical significance ensure their constant

presence in scholarly debates surrounding the nature of authority in post-*ghayba* Twelver Shiʿism.

Conclusion

From its inception, the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* has been an integral, distinctive element of Twelver Shiʿism. It is not only a focal point of reference for ʿulamaʾ seeking evidence for their rulings, but also a contentious area of robust debate amongst scholars of different schools within Twelver Shiʿism. Its impact upon the Shiʿi community, which persists until today merits an analysis of not only its significance in Islamic history, but the peculiarities of the Shiʿa Ḥadīth canon.

Chapter 1 traced the origins of ḥadīth writing to the early years of Islam. For the Shiʿa, ḥadīth writing and collecting aimed to preserve the historical memory of early Shiʿism, and transmit the teachings of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Over time, ḥadīth works began to develop, morphing from simple *Uṣūl* works to more detailed, *jami'* works. The onset of the *ghayba*, whilst posing a significant challenge to the Shiʿa of that time, also resulted in the emergence of the comprehensive ḥadīth collections. These ḥadīth collections served to re-orient the Shiʿa, offering guidance in a time of confusion for the Twelver Shiʿa. It is at this juncture, with the absence of an Imam, that the authority of the text begins to emerge in Twelver Shiʿism.

Chapter 2 provided a brief overview of the formation of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* and concise biographies of the canonical compilers, amidst the backdrop of Būyid rule and its effects on Shiʿism. We saw that the early compilers, namely al-Kulayni and al-Ṣadūq, offered minimal authorial interjection in their works, instead allowing the narrations to speak for themselves, reinforcing the authority of the text in the period immediately following the *ghayba*. Of course, the selection of the material for their works is evidence of some degree of authorial intervention. Al-Ṭūsi's works, and their respective methodologies demonstrates an evolution in scholarly authority, signalling the emergence of the authority of the jurist in the absence of an Imam. The evolution of the ʿulamaʾ in the Būyid period can be linked to Sunni, and more specifically, Mu'tazilah pollination in Twelver Shiʿism. It is important to note as well, that the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* were not recognised as such at this point in time, so there can be no discussion of a canon in this period. Although the void left by the Imam's *ghayba* is initially filled by ḥadīth works, by the time of al-Ṭūsi the authority

of the individual over that of the text is reinstated; the difference here though, is that the individual is not an Imam, but the jurist.

Chapter 3 detailed the coinage of the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah* in the 13th century by Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, and its subsequent deployment by Shiʿi scholars in the centuries that followed. Honorific titles were bestowed upon the canon, primarily for their value in assisting jurists to derive religious law. It is crucial to note that Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, and the scholars who followed him is using the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, are all classified retrospectively as Uṣūli scholars. We have then, the irony that the Shiʿa ḥadīth canon was, in effect, created by an Uṣūli scholar, when it was the Akhbāris who treated the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* as a conventional canon. This chapter also analysed the little regarded 'Five Books', an alternative canon proposed by Shahīd al-Awwal and Shaykh 'Izz al-Dīn. Why the fifth canonical text, *Madīnat al-'Ilm*, was ignored by their contemporaries, who instead limited the canon to the *Kutub al-Arba'ah,* is an area of research that merits further attention.

It is also important to note that it is Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, and the Uṣūli scholars that followed him who argued forcefully for *ijtihād*, promoting the *mujtahid/muqallid* hierarchy in Shiʿism. In this light, these scholars perpetuated the authority of the jurist over the text, despite their glowering praise and reverence for the *Kutub al-Arba'ah*.

Chapter 4 delved into the Uṣūli/Akhbāri conflict, in which the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* played a central role. The rise of the Akhbāri school, and its differences with the Uṣūli school were detailed. The arguments put forward by al-Astarabādi and subsequent Akhbāri scholars were outlined, and the link between Akhbāri hermeneutics and the canonicity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* was made explicit. The canonicity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* however, did not prevent minor criticisms of their contents, or the interjections of their compilers. Finally, a brief summary of Uṣūli responses to the complete authenticity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* were listed. The tension between the authority of the jurist as opposed to that of the text is manifested most clearly in the Uṣūli/Akhbāri dispute. Akhbāris vigorously argue for the authority of the text to function independently of fallible human judgement, whereas the Uṣūlis propose that the texts be used in conjunction with reason as evidence to support jurisprudential rulings. Akhbāris arguments for the authenticity

of the canon, however, hinge on the trustworthiness and veracity of the canonical compilers, who exercised their own judgement in selecting material for their works. There can be no escape from some degree of individual interpolation into the canonical texts. The Akhbāri hierarchical structure, which at first glance appears to replace the *mujtahid* with the text at the apex, maintains the supremacy of the scholar over the text; the sole difference is that the scholar is not a *mujtahid*, but a *muhhadith*. It appears then, that the Akhbāri position, which posits the authority of the text over the jurist through the unquestionable authenticity of the canon and the rejection of *ijtihād*, is not as straightforward as initially thought. The authority of the scholar and text overlap, indicating their inability to function in the absence of the other.

As outlined throughout this study, the Shiʿi ḥadīth canon presents some peculiar characteristics that brings to light debates central to the formation and structure of Twelver Shiʿism.

First, the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* disrupts well-worn narratives of the rationalisation of the Shiʿi faith following the rise of the Būyid era scholars: namely al-Mufīd, Sharīf al-Murtada and Shaykh al-Ṭūsi. The narrative of the rationalisation of the Shiʿa faith, expanded upon in Chapter 2, rang the death-knell of non-rational esotericism as the crux of the Shiʿi faith after the demise of al-Kulayni and al-Ṣadūq, in particular the former. Following their death, the school of Baghdad rose to prominence, with Twelver scholars gradually shedding esotericism in favour of rationalist thought, imbuing Shiʿi doctrine with Mu'tazilah theology. Concurrent with the theological developments were the emergence of the sciences of *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, hitherto minor or non-existent sciences in Shiʿism; further evidence of the Sunni pollination in Shiʿism during the Būyid period.

Although the rise to prominence of rationalist thought in Shiʿi Islam cannot be denied, the presence of *al-Kāfi* within the canon serves to undermine the strength of this narrative. Although three of the four canonical collections contain narrations that deal exclusively with law and corroborate the rationalisation narrative, the contents of *al-Kāfi*, contain many narrations that represent the non-rational esoteric trend of nascent Shiʿism. These traditions are sourced from the rich heritage of the Qummī school, reflective of ancient beliefs and practices located at the kernel of Shiʿism.

Whether advertently or not, the canon serves a dual purpose: it functions as both a preservation of the esotericism of early Shiʿism, whilst simultaneously blending it with the rationalism of Mu'tazilah influenced Shiʿism.

Al-Kāfi then, functions as the persistent representative of the esoteric origins of Shiʿism in the wake of the gradual rationalisation of the faith. It stands as a stark reminder that it is impossible to divorce esotericism from Shiʿism; indeed, there can be no Shiʿism without its esotericism. Despite continued efforts to rationalise the faith, even scholars of rationalist persuasion are unable to strip away esotericism from Shiʿism, or renounce *al-Kāfi* as a work of inferior integrity or value; its early dating and wide variety of narrations make it an indispensable work for the scholar. The lasting significance of *al-Kāfi* for Twelver Shiʿi scholars of all persuasions serves as a demonstration of the vast intellectual heritage of Shiʿism, present both within *al-Kāfi*, and works pre-dating *al-Kāfi*; a lack of attention to this rich heritage does a disservice to both the academic study, and public understanding of Shiʿism.

The second peculiarity of the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* is that it represents a drastic overhaul of authority in Shiʿism. Shiʿism revolves around the figure of the Imam; at once both the means and ends of religious knowledge. The Imam is the fountainhead of wisdom and source of all knowledge, be it of esotericism, doctrine and law, amongst other fields of knowledge. The *ghayba* presented a challenge to the centrality of the Imam to the faith, and necessitated a hierarchical reconstruction of authority.

As outlined above, we witness the rise of the authority of the text in the immediate absence of the Imam. Comprehensive ḥadīth compilations with a clear and systematic structure were collected, serving as reference guides for the Shiʿi community. We also see that, with the final canonical compiler, the *ʿulamaʾ* class had evolved drastically from their earlier counterparts; they were more inclined to scholarly interpretation, and less inclined to follow textual evidence without critique. This position was perpetuated by Muhaqqiq, the scholar who coined the term *Kutub al-Arba'ah*, and by scholars that followed him until the rise of Akhbārism. Akhbāri scholars attempted to offset the power of the *mujtahid*, by elevating the status of the canonical texts. Following this, debates ensued regarding the authenticity of the canon, and its function within the religion. The discussion surrounding *al-Kutub al-*

Arba'ah is, in essence, a discussion of authority in post-*ghayba* Twelver Shiʿism. Amir-Moezzi concisely articulates the ever-present problem of authority in Twelver Shiʿism when he states:

> "At the end of the third/ninth century, the mysterious fate of the putative son of imam al-Hasan al-Askari (the twelfth Imam) threw the Imāmī community into disarray. The absence of the Imam's authority in a religion governed completely by the figure of the Imam plunged the faithful into what is traditionally called *al-hayra* – confusion, perplexity. Yet even after the Occultation theology was established, the problem of the absence of legitimate authority – in temporal matters of course, but perhaps even more in spiritual ones – remained intact. This is why, for more than a millennium, the history of Imāmī doctrine consists essentially in the devising of different solutions to this problem, solutions which vary according to the different religious movements but which are all various ways of filling the void created by this absence. Viewed from this angle, the history of post-*ghayba* Imāmīsm may be perceived as a great attempt, rich in options, of coping with the absence of a legitimate spiritual authority."[213]

In the history of post-*ghayba* Twelver Shiʿism, amidst the backdrop of rigorous argument surrounding the nature and scope of authority in Twelver Shiʿism, the *Kutub al-Arba'ah* played a vital role for scholars of all persuasions, demonstrating its centrality to any claim of authority, and more importantly, any serious engagement with Twelver Shiʿism.

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[213] Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 485.

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Appendix

Diagram illustrating the Imams of different Shiʿa sects. The Twelver line of Imams descends from the third Imam, Husayn ibn ʿAli.