

Three Sources of Shi‘i Knowledge and Authority: Texts, Reason, and Mysticism in Islamic Intellectual History

Zackery M. Heern

Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho, USA

Introduction

Throughout Shi‘i history, scholars (*‘ulamā*) have been trying to answer the following question: in the absence of the Prophet and the Imams, how is sure knowledge (*‘ilm*) derived? As the duty of producing an answer to this question became the responsibility of scholars, the limits of their authority also came into question. This paper argues that the Shi‘i tradition of producing knowledge and justifying clerical authority consists of a tripartite system rooted in the texts, reason, and mysticism. In other words, Shi‘i socio-intellectual activity was built on the foundational texts (Qur’an and hadith), rational thought, and mystical experience (including intuition and dreams). These three sources have caused inter-scholastic divisions since most scholars have categorically rejected one or more of these sources. Some scholars, however, have accepted a synthesis of the three sources. The following illustrates that appeals to these three sources of knowledge and authority have been made in each major period of Shi‘i thought. As a result of a broad reading of Shi‘i intellectual activity, this paper suggests that scholarly appeals to the three sources are historically consistent.

The fourteenth-century Baghdadi scholar, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, was one of the first to synthesize the three sources in his

theoretical approach to knowledge. He argues that the way of the philosophers (*'aql*), the tradition of the theologians (*naql*), and the intuition of the mystical theosophists (*kashf*) are the three parts of metaphysics.¹ Moreover, in his *Risālah fī Ma'rifāt al-Wujūd*, Āmulī claims that these sources are the methods of attaining knowledge, but only *kashf* leads to divine reality.² In other words, Āmulī accepted all three sources, but favoured *kashf*.

Historically, mainstream scholars were often defined by their approach to textualism, rationalism, and mysticism. Akhbārīs emphasized a textualist approach, while Uṣūlīs have become synonymous with those who accept reason. Scholars who emphasized mysticism as a source of knowledge and authority are generally known as theosophists (*ḥikmat al-ilāhiyyah*) or illuminationists (*ishrāqiyyah*). During the critical post-Safavid period, three schools of thought competed as representatives of each knowledge source: Akhbārīs, Uṣūlīs, and Shaykhīs (who preferred to be called Kashfiyyah (Intuitionists)). Although these schools developed into competing socio-intellectual movements, the divisions between them may not be as rigid as is often assumed. The following, therefore, will emphasize both the convergences and divergences that connect and disconnect the three sources of knowledge and authority. Since scholars in one school often borrow from the other schools, we should be wary of imposing rigid divisions between the three trends in Shi'ī thought.

The basis for authority in Shi'ism is the Imamate, an institution whose foundation rests on the Imams' infallible knowledge. According to Louis Massignon, the Imam is humanity rendered divine.³ As Mohammad Amir-Moezzi has pointed out, the Imam has also been considered the 'manifestation of a primordial Light proceeding from divine Light, a theophanic entity.'⁴ Traditions attributed to the Imams suggest that the Prophet Muḥammad and Imam 'Alī were created together from the same light some two thousand years before the creation of the world.⁵ Additionally, the Imams have been referred to as the 'exoteric facet of God', which makes God, whose essence is unknowable, accessible to mankind. Therefore, according to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, 'it is thanks

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to us [the Imams] that God is known.⁶ In the Shi‘i tradition, therefore, knowledge and authority are intimately associated with the Imams.

During the occultation of the twelfth Imam, authority has been delegated to Shi‘i scholars, who have justified their authority on the basis of their knowledge of the texts, their rationalist methodologies, and their mystical experiences. Of course, not all scholars claim authority on the basis of all three methods. In fact, it is rare for a scholar to utilize each source in this tripartite system. Most scholars place emphasis on one of the three sources. However, if we take Shi‘ism as a whole, these three trends form the bases on which Shi‘i scholars make claims to knowledge and authority.

Periodizations of Shi‘i thought often emphasize the tension between textualism and rationalism, which reflects the primacy that Shi‘i scholars generally assign to legalism. But this focus on legalism can lead to the false dichotomy that frames Shi‘i history as a competition between rationalists and traditionists. Likewise, mystical trends should not be overemphasized at the expense of Islamic law.

Indeed, much of the scholarship on Shi‘i law, especially in the modern period, emphasizes the Uṣūlī-Akhhbārī dispute.⁷ The main disagreements between Akhhbārīs and Uṣūlīs, which Khwānsarī summarizes from *‘Abd Allāh al-Samāhijī’s* famous list are as follows:

1. Uṣūlīs accept *ijtihād*, while Akhhbārīs rely on the texts;
2. Uṣūlīs accept four sources of law, while Akhhbārīs accept the first two;
3. Uṣūlīs divide the community into *mujtahids* and *muqallids* (emulators), while Akhhbārīs believe that all Shi‘īs are *muqallids* to the Imams; and
4. Uṣūlīs issue legal rulings based on *ijtihād*, while Akhhbārīs issue judgments on the basis of texts.

Scholars who work on Shi‘i legalism include Hossein Modarressi,⁸ Robert Gleave,⁹ Devon Stewart,¹⁰ Norman Calder,¹¹ and Etan Kohlberg.¹² Those who highlight mystical trends in Shi‘ism include Seyyed Hossein Nasr,¹³ Mangol Bayat,¹⁴ Mohammad Amir-Moezzi,¹⁵ Abdulaziz Sachedina,¹⁶ and Henry Corbin.¹⁷ While Modarressi and others primarily view Shi‘ism through the lens of jurisprudence, Henry Corbin concludes that ‘Shiism is, in essence, the esotericism of Islam.’¹⁸ Whereas Modarressi divides Shi‘i law into eight periods, which he defines almost exclusively in terms of rationalism and traditionism,¹⁹ Corbin divides Shi‘ism into ‘four great periods,’ two of which he defines solely in terms of theosophical thinkers.²⁰

Building on the periodizations of Modarressi, Corbin, Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi,²¹ and others, the remainder of this paper outlines a brief history of Shi‘i textualism, rationalism, and mysticism during the following four broad periods:

1. Formation of law, mysticism, and hadith collection (c. 700–1000)
2. Rationalism and illuminationism (c. 1000–1600)
3. Akhbārī School and School of Isfahan (c. 1600–1800)
4. Uṣūlī School and Shaykhī School (c. 1800–Present).²²

1. Formation of law, mysticism, and hadith collection (c. 700–1000)

The formative period of Shi‘i thought was primarily associated with the succession of Shi‘i Imams. According to Shi‘i teachings, the world cannot exist without a proof (*ḥujjah*), which indicates knowledge (‘ilm) in both its exoteric (*zāhir*) and esoteric (*bātin*) forms. The Imams inherited perfect knowledge from the Prophet Muḥammad, which they passed on to the community through their infallible (*ma’sūm*) guidance. In fact, possession of infallible knowledge and divine inspiration are defining characteristics of the Shi‘i conception of the Imamate.²³ According to Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 735), the family of the Prophet (*ahl*

al-bayt) was the only source of knowledge. More specifically, only the designated living Imam possessed such perfect knowledge. The Imam’s brothers, for example, did not necessarily possess it. The Imams received their knowledge in various ways, including the voice of angels, a column of light, and a ‘scratching in the heart.’²⁴ Knowledge attributed to the Imams encompasses, but is not limited to, the following: all of the sciences, law, the unseen, interpretation of the Qur’an, the past and the future, thoughts of others, and all languages (including that of animals).²⁵ Unlike prophets, however, Imams do not receive revelation (*wahy*) in the form of a distinct book, or a separate legal system. Additional distinctions of the Imams include that they do not cast a shadow, they are always in a state of ritual purity, they can see what is behind them, their urine and faeces are invisible, and their prayers are always answered.²⁶

Imāmī Shi‘i law is often referred to as the Ja‘farī School after Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765), whose “statements form the major source of imami jurisprudence,” according to Robert Gleave.²⁷ Following Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s lead, early Shi‘i scholars generally accepted the consensus (*ijmā‘*) of the companions of the Imams, but rejected analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) and personal judgment (*ra‘y*), since they only produce probable or conjectural knowledge (*ẓann*). Shi‘i scholars often used *ra‘y* and *ijtihād* interchangeably, and the rejection of *ra‘y*, therefore, was generally interpreted as a prohibition of *ijtihād*.²⁸ Norman Calder argues that Shi‘i scholars rejected *qiyās* and *ijtihād* as part of the polemical debate with Sunnis.²⁹ (Uṣūlī acceptance of *ijtihād* later became a critical issue that divided Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs.) Departing from the conventional idea that ninth- and tenth-century Shi‘i scholars were traditionists, Christopher Melchert suggests that, like Shāfi‘īs, they were a ‘semi-rationalist middle party – traditionalist, perhaps by self-definition and intention, but willing to argue for their position in a rationalist style.’³⁰ Modarressi argues that the Imams employed an exemplary method of reasoning and consistently encouraged their followers to utilize rational thought.³¹

One of the initial roles of scholars was the collection of traditions attributed to the Imams. They also debated theological questions, such as whether the Imams possessed infallibility, or if they were simply pious scholars with a comprehensive knowledge of the Qur'an and Prophetic hadith. At times, disagreements became so heated that they would result in one scholarly circle declaring infidelity (*takfīr*) on another – a practice utilized by modern Uṣūlīs who declared that Akhbārīs, Sufis, Shaykhīs, and others were infidels.³² Rifts also occurred between hadith collectors and theologians. Some collectors of hadith fabricated hadith reports to defeat their rivals.³³ Clearly, texts and reason played a fundamental role in the formation of Shi'ī law and theology.

Shi'is also embraced the mystical tradition that developed in this period and acknowledged that the Imams possessed supreme esoteric knowledge just as their exoteric knowledge was perfect. The Imams are said to have possessed the red lambskin (*al-jafr al-aḥmar*), which includes the Prophet's sword, and the white lambskin (*al-jafr al-abyaḍ*), containing divinely revealed books, including the Torah, Gospel, Psalms, and Abraham's Scrolls. These texts were handed down from the Prophet through the Imams starting with Imam 'Alī and are thought to have empowered the Imams with prophetic vision.³⁴ Among other secret sources of knowledge, the Imams possessed 'Fāṭimah's Book,' which was a revelation from God that is three times longer than the Qur'an, and was presented by an angel or Imam 'Alī to Fāṭimah in her sleep in order to help her cope with the death of Muḥammad, her father.³⁵ Imam 'Alī clearly stated that the Imams 'see what others cannot see and they hear what others do not hear. They have access to divine secrets.'³⁶ In fact, this is a primary characteristic that differentiated Imams from others. Therefore, the primary source of knowledge and authority during this period was inspiration obtained by the Imams.

During the Umayyad period (661–750), Muslim scholars began challenging the religious authority of the caliph and claimed to be the heirs of Muḥammad. This sentiment is summed up by the founder of neo-Uṣūlism, Wahīd Bihbihānī (d. 1792), who argues

that *mujtabids* ‘are successors of the Chosen Messenger, guardians of the Chaste Ones’ orphans, cut off from them by occultation and concealment, treasures of the precious faith after the Prophet and the Imams, and custodians of the way of the saved sect among the Muslim community.’³⁷ Additional Shi‘i scholars, including al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī (d. 1277) and Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḥasan al-Karakī (d. 1592) referred to jurists as heirs of the prophets.³⁸

By the Abbasid period (750–1258), Muslim scholars emerged as an influential group. During the pre-occultation period, the primary role of Shi‘i scholars was the transmission of legal traditions. Additionally, the Imams often taught esoteric secrets to their disciples and bestowed some of their charismatic authority on them, allowing them to perform miracles. Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq said that his disciples ‘are the repositories of my secrets and through them all innovations are nullified.’³⁹ At this stage, practical authority of the ‘ulamā’ primarily rested on their knowledge of the texts, not the performance of miracles. However, esoteric knowledge continued to be associated with them.

There is no shortage of accounts in biographical literature depicting hadith transmitters as recipients of the miraculous powers of the Imams. For example, Imam al-Bāqir extracted gold from the ground with his foot after Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju‘fī (d. 745) complained of being poor. The Imam is also reported to have shown Jābir al-Ju‘fī the kingdom of heavens and the earth in a similar manner that God had shown Abraham.⁴⁰ Taking an additional step down the path of esoteric knowledge, disciples claimed to perform their own miracles. With knowledge from the Imams, Maytham al-Tammār and Muḥammad ibn Sinān (d. 835) were able to predict the future. Salmān al-Fārisī (d. 644–647) possessed even greater spiritual powers. After Imam ‘Alī taught him the greatest name of God (*al-ism al-a‘zam*), he could foretell the future and communicate with angels.⁴¹ Amir-Moezzi argues that ‘there is thus an “organic” link between the imam and his initiate,’ who ‘participates in the divine Being’ and ‘possesses the ontological and initiatory qualities required for performing miracles.’⁴² As the claims to miraculous phenomenon grew in the

early Shi‘i community, heresiographers started identifying some figures as exaggerators (*ghulāt*), who were not to be confused with moderate Shi‘is. Amir-Moezzi contends that this ‘distinction between “moderate” and “extremist” Shi‘ism appears to be artificial...unless one considers the imams themselves to be “extremist”.’⁴³

When the Twelfth Imam disappeared in 874, Shi‘i scholars argued that it was impossible for him to be dead because the world cannot exist without a proof (*hujjah*). Therefore, they maintained that he was still alive, but entered the state of occultation (*ghaybah*). He would continue to provide guidance to four successive deputies, who were granted the spiritual power to access the Imam’s perfect knowledge. The deputies became intermediaries between the Hidden Imam and the Shi‘i community by seeing and communicating mystically with the Imam.⁴⁴ In fact, these deputies were not known for their own learning but for their spiritual connection to the Imam. Like many hadith transmitters, the deputies were famous for possessing supernatural powers, such as divination, innate understanding of different languages, and clairvoyance.⁴⁵ The miracles that they performed provided proof of their claims of communication with the Imam. In other words, they established their authority on the basis of intuitive knowledge.

Once the last deputy died in 941 without appointing a successor, the Major Occultation of the Hidden Imam began. The Shi‘i community was now faced with the crisis of not having direct access to an Imam. Who, if anybody, would fill the void of the Imam during the Major Occultation, which was supposed to end when the Hidden Imam reveals himself at some future date? For Shi‘is this was a crisis not unlike the death of Muḥammad. In practice, leadership and guidance of the Shi‘i community was now placed squarely on the scholars. Although lacking infallibility, scholars were left to fill the void of the Imams, which led to debates over the nature and limits of their authority and knowledge. During the pre-occultation period, scholars had already served the Shi‘i community as doctors of law and transmitters of traditions. Neo-Uṣūlīs eventually argued that it was their prerogative

to inherit the leadership that was once the sole responsibility of the Imams. In practice this authority translated to the following: enacting legal norms, imposing legal punishments, leading jihad, dividing booty, leading Friday prayer, collecting and distributing *zakat* and *khums*, and upholding legal norms.⁴⁶ Many non-Uṣūlī scholars argued, however, that these functions could not be carried out until the Hidden Imam returns from occultation.

The legacy of the position filled by the ‘*ulamā*’, then, is based on their traditional roles as hadith transmitters, deputies of the Hidden Imam, and successors of the Prophet. Akhbārīs understood the role of ‘*ulamā*’ more as transmitters and collectors of hadith, while Uṣūlīs eventually saw themselves as deputies of the Hidden Imam and successors of Muḥammad. Although most Akhbārīs emphasize the fact that early scholars transmitted the knowledge of the Imams to lay Shi‘is, some also point out that hadith transmitters possessed some measure of the charisma of the Imams through access to intuition. Significantly, the Imams taught some of the transmitters more esoteric secrets than others, and some scholars claim to have reached a higher level of esotericism than others.

According to Amir-Moezzi, ‘from the second half of the fourth/tenth century, the “theologico-legal-rational” movement, which continues to this day, began to dominate, thus marginalizing the original “esoteric non-rational” current.’ For Amir-Moezzi, this means that knowledge was now limited primarily to rational theology and law, and that power now meant temporal authority instead of thaumaturgical ability.⁴⁷ However, hagiographical works, especially Tunikābunī’s *Qīṣaṣ al-‘Ulamā*’, contain numerous accounts of Shi‘i clerics performing such supernatural feats.⁴⁸ The importance of the miracles that Tunikābunī and others attribute to Shi‘i scholars lies in the development of Shi‘i thought and leadership, not in the historical veracity of Tunikābunī’s stories. Because early scholars were said to have performed miracles, it became necessary for later scholars, especially those advocating change, to possess the ability to perform them as well. If they could not, on what other basis could it be

proven that they were authorized to initiate changes in the Shi‘i establishment? Mysticism of the Imam, therefore, is evident in the rationalist tradition – especially after Shaykh al-Mufīd and Shaykh al-Ṭūsī.⁴⁹

2. Rationalism and illuminationism (c. 1000–1600)

Shaykh al-Mufīd and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā promoted a rationalist approach to Shi‘i thought. Shi‘i law entered a new phase when Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022) adopted rational argumentation in his *al-Muqni‘ah*,⁵⁰ which clearly moved beyond the transmission of the textual sources of the Qur’an and hadith. Shaykh al-Mufīd maintained the superiority of the foundational texts by arguing that reason needed the help of the texts, not the opposite. In practice, however, he does seem to use textual sources to back up his reasoning instead of using reason to expound on revelation. Prior to Shaykh al-Mufīd, the task of scholars was to collect traditions, not give their opinions on them. Shaykh al-Mufīd harshly attacked scripturalists and accused them of being too liberal in their collection of traditions, without investigating or even thinking about what they were reporting.⁵¹ He rejected their use of traditions transmitted by only one source (*akhbār al-āḥād*) and instead relied on the Qur’an, widespread (*mutawātir*) traditions, and consensus (*ijmā‘*) of Shi‘is as the first three sources of law.

Additionally, Shaykh al-Mufīd argued that reason (which included an understanding of language and textual criticism) was a source of Shi‘i law that would help jurists make sense of the textual sources. It was Shaykh al-Mufīd, therefore, who was the first to adopt the four sources of the Uṣūlī system – the Qur’an, hadith, consensus, and reason. He put these ideas forward in his *al-Tadhkīrah bi-Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, the first known Shi‘i work on the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). To this day, Uṣūlī scholars accept the four sources of *uṣūl al-fiqh* advocated in this text. In practice, this rationalist approach allowed for greater pliability of the law for the newly established Buyid dynasty (945–1055) in Baghdad, which sponsored Twelver Shi‘ism. In fact, this rationalist

approach would often be preferred by state-sponsored Shi‘ism.

A student of al-Mufīd, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 1044), further developed the rationalist approach to jurisprudence and argued for an even more prominent role for reason. He claimed that knowledge could be established by reason alone.⁵² His treatises on the legality of working for the government, for example, are based more on rational argument, than on textual references from the Imams.⁵³ Like al-Mufīd, al-Murtaḍā suggested that only traditions that are widely transmitted (*mutawātir*) are sure to produce perfect knowledge, whereas isolated reports (*akhbār al-āḥād*) could not because they were probably the result of fabrication.

The third important rationalist of this period was Shaykh al-Ṭāʾifah al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), who applied the rational arguments of al-Mufīd and al-Murtaḍā to the traditions. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī’s rationalist-traditionist compromise transformed Shi‘i law and was considered authoritative for a full century after him, a period that is often described as a period of emulation (*taqlīd*) because of the overwhelming acceptance of his work and the lack of intellectual output, which resulted from the Seljuq invasion of Baghdad.⁵⁴ Unlike his rationalist predecessors, he retained the authority of isolated hadith reports and developed a method to reconcile contradictory traditions. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī also compiled hadith collections (*Tabdhīb al-Aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār*, which are considered as two of the ‘four books’) and relied more on texts and less on reason than had al-Murtaḍā.⁵⁵ He concluded that most traditions are isolated reports (*al-akhbār al-āḥād*), but they are valid because previous generations of Shi‘is had accepted them. Rejecting any recourse to doubt (*shakk*), Shaykh al-Ṭūsī employed caution (*iḥtiyāt*) in order to proceed when certainty cannot be determined.

The capital city of the Mazyadid dynasty (961–1150) that ruled central Iraq was Ḥillah, which became an important Shi‘i centre of learning for a full three centuries. Scholars in Jabal ‘Āmil also played a central role in Shi‘i thought during this period.⁵⁶ Ibn Idrīs al-Ḥillī (d. 1202) was the first major scholar of the Ḥillah School and is credited for ending what is often described as a period of

emulation (*taqlīd*) of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī. Ibn Idrīs criticized al-Ṭūsī for introducing innovations into Shi‘i thought. Rejecting the validity of isolated hadith reports, he and additional scholars of his time revived the rationalist methodology of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā.⁵⁷

Al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī’s (d. 1277) conception of law moved even closer to that of Sunnis and further from Shaykh al-Ṭūsī’s reliance on the practice of early Shi‘is. Al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī used his knowledge of Sunni law to justify the use of *ijtihād* and *qiyās* (which were previously vehemently opposed by Shi‘is) as long as they were formed in the presence of an Imam. Thus, he became the first Shi‘i scholar to adopt *ijtihād* into his theoretical approach, which he legitimized on the basis of probability (*ẓann*), a principle later accepted by Wahīd Bihbihānī and the neo-Uṣūlī School. Acceptance of probable knowledge was a ground-breaking development as it was an admission that certitude in law is not always accessible. Because of the importance that al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī placed on *ijtihād*, he increased the authority of *mujtahids* and reinforced the claim that Shi‘i scholars are the deputies of the Hidden Imam during the occultation. He insisted that the ruling of a judge is the same as knowledge from God and that the issuance of a fatwa is like ‘talking with the tongue of [God’s] law.’⁵⁸ Given that the endeavours of a *mujtahid* may only result in probable knowledge, al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī’s theory, therefore, is somewhat paradoxical.

Al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī’s nephew, al-‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī (d. 1327), elevated the position of rational proofs to a new height. He claimed that reason was on par with revelatory texts and that only scholars who were skilled in applying rational proofs could interpret theological and judicial questions. Therefore, he carved out an even larger niche for Shi‘i clerics. Al-‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī was the first to suggest that the Shi‘i community is divided into *mujtahids* and *muqallids*.⁵⁹ He further suggested that if a *muqallid* failed to comply with the rulings of a *mujtahid*, he was a sinner. This is the general framework later accepted by Uṣūlīs.⁶⁰ Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1626–7) accused al-‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī of claiming that most Shi‘i traditions were not sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*), and

in fact, al-‘Allāmah thought that most traditions were isolated (*al-akhbār al-āḥād*), which did not produce certainty.⁶¹

The school at Ḥillah was destroyed by the Shi‘i Musha‘sha‘ dynasty in 1449, but rationalist influence continued under the guidance of scholars in Jabal ‘Āmil, who played a prominent role in Iran during the Safavid period. Initially, however, Sufi shaykhs had more charismatic authority than jurists. It was in this context that al-Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī (d. 1534) and al-Shahīd al-Thānī (d. 1559), a follower of the school of al-Shahīd al-Awwal (d. 1384), addressed problems that arose as a result of the adoption of Shi‘ism as a state religion. At the heart of these matters were the limits of the power of religious scholars.

It was al-Shahīd al-Thānī who formulated the theory of general vicegerency (*al-niyābah al-‘āmmah*), which claims that the ‘*ulamā*’ are vicegerents of the Hidden Imam. Building on al-‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī, he suggested that all the latent duties of the Imams are the responsibility of the ‘*ulamā*’.⁶² Significantly, al-Shahīd al-Thānī, like previous jurists, was primarily concerned with the duties of the Imam that had practical implications for the state. These pragmatic rationalists did not include esoteric dimensions of the Imam’s authority in their theoretical conceptions. In other words, they replaced the intuitive methods that the Imams had used to obtain knowledge with reason.

As Shi‘i rationalism was developing in the eleventh century, Sufism also flourished as a popular form of religious expression. Sufism initially remained closely connected to Sunni Islam. As such, it was rejected by many early Shi‘is, especially during the Seljuq period. Shi‘i scholars, then, were in a position of competing with Sufis for claims on esoteric forms of Islam. Therefore, claims to intuition (*kashf*) and inner knowledge (*bāṭin*) were prominent during this era. Shaykh al-Mufīd, for example, supported the designation of gates (sing. *bāb*) to describe the special companions of the Imams, including the above-mentioned Jābir al-Ju‘fī. Shaykh al-Mufīd explains that because of their close connection with the Imams, *bābs* were able to perform miracles. However, by the end of this period, rationalists began to reject the term

bāb precisely because of its widespread usage by self-proclaimed *bābs*. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, for example, even used the word *bāb* negatively, indicating that the term had lost its meaning because of its widespread usage.⁶³

Arguably the most important thinker of this period was Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274), who applied philosophical ideas from Avicenna and others to Shi‘i theology after having spent considerable time with Ismā‘īlīs in the famous Alamūt fortress of the Nizārīs.⁶⁴ Initially Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī received patronage from Ismā‘īlīs and later became prominent in the government of the Mongol emperor Hulagu Khan (d. 1265). Al-Ṭūsī wrote on a variety of subjects, including mathematics, theology, astronomy, and philosophy, and is often referred to as ‘the third teacher’ (*al-mu‘allim al-thālith*), after Aristotle and al-Fārābī. Immersed in Shi‘i theology and Sufi mysticism, al-Ṭūsī came to the conclusion that the distance between philosophy and mysticism was not great.⁶⁵ In his autobiography, *Sayr wa Sulūk*, al-Ṭūsī explains that he rejected exoteric *kalām* and came to support Ismā‘īlī esoteric philosophy.⁶⁶ He also wrote a treatise called *Rawḍāt al-Taslīm*, which is a guide for travelling from the physical plane to the spiritual world and includes a description of Shi‘i cosmology. He explains that religious duties must be followed outwardly, but perfect knowledge only emanates from the esoteric path.⁶⁷

Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, mentioned above, is one of the most cogent theosophical Shi‘i thinkers, who claimed that the Imams were his spiritual mentors. Among his most important works is a commentary on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s (d. 1240) *Fuṣūṣ* under the grand title ‘The Compendium of Esoteric Doctrines and the Source of Light’ (*Jamī‘ al-Asrār wa Manba‘ al-Anwār*). An underlying theme in this text is that the real Shi‘is are those who employ the inner reality (*bāṭin*) of things transmitted from the Imams. Therefore, those who are concerned with religious doctrines and law are only probing the external realities of Shi‘ism. More importantly for our discussion, he claims that Ibn al-‘Arabī’s book, *Fuṣūṣ*, was an ‘inspired book’ since it was transmitted to Ibn al-‘Arabī by the Prophet after the Prophet had received it in the hereafter.⁶⁸ Āmulī

also explains that his own texts ‘form two categories: there are those that can be considered as effusions from above, and those that emanate from within us. As to the effusions from above, these are the spiritual exegesis (*ta’wīlāt*) from the Holy Quran.’⁶⁹ He confirms that his commentary on *Fuṣūṣ* is in fact one of those that was ‘effused upon him from above’ and was therefore the result of divine inspiration (*kashf*). Āmulī argues that although the period of revelation is closed, the path of *kashf* is open through Shi‘i gnosiology, the science of attaining intuitive knowledge.⁷⁰ In sum, Āmulī claimed that his knowledge was not the result of prolonged research, but divine inspiration.

Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 1463) also combined rationalist Shi‘i thought with Sufi mysticism. After having studied in the Shi‘i school of Ḥillah, he claimed absolute authority of the Mahdī, both mystically and judicially. According to al-Khwānsarī, rationalist scholars were alarmed at Nūrbakhsh’s proclamation, but did not consider him an infidel because of his orthodox approach to both Sufism and shari‘ah.⁷¹ A Sufi order named after Nūrbakhsh has survived until the present in Baltistān, located in the mountains of northern Pakistan.⁷²

3. Akhbārī School and the School of Isfahan (c. 1600–1800)

Traditionist scholars rejected Uṣūlī rationalism, charged them with adopting Sunni methods of jurisprudence, and maintained a reliance on the texts. After Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1626–7) articulated an attack on rationalist methodology in his *al-Fawā’id al-Madaniyyah*, the scripturalist trend grew into what has become known as the Akhbārī School.⁷³ Al-Astarābādī rejected *ijtihād* as a tool of Sunnis and because it did not produce perfect knowledge, but resulted in probability (*ẓann*) at best. Since al-Astarābādī did not think that the Qur’an could be understood directly by scholars, he argued that traditions are the real source of authority for Shi‘is during the occultation of the twelfth Imam. He replaced *ẓann* and *ijtihād* with ordinary certainty (*al-yaqīn al-‘ādī*) and sensible reasoning (*al-‘aql al-ḥissī*).

Underlying al-Astarābādī's approach was the idea that a reliance on traditions will result in a more unified community than the acceptance of probable rulings arrived at by fallible scholars. This is not to be confused with a rejection of juristic authority. Al-Astarābādī was more concerned with how the jurist acquires authoritative rulings than the limits of the jurist's authority. In practice al-Astarābādī's approach did, in fact, place limits on the role of *mujtahids*. Whereas Uṣūlīs eventually argued that the *mujtahids* themselves are the authoritative sources of emulation (sing. *marja' al-taqlīd*) for the Shi'ī community, al-Astarābādī explained that the hadiths are the *marja'* of the Shi'ī community during the occultation. He insisted that only the hadith reports, which are the key source of knowledge and authority, should be emulated in the absence of the Imam.⁷⁴

Al-Astarābādī's challenge to rationalists spread through scholarly networks and his ideas were adopted in many Shi'ī centres of learning, including Bahrain and Karbalā'.⁷⁵ The Safavid scholar Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī I (d. 1659) suggests that the majority of students in the centres of Shi'ī learning accepted al-Astarābādī's views. Although al-Majlisī I further explains that he chose a moderate position between Uṣūlīs and Akhbārīs, he admitted that most of what al-Astarābādī said was true.⁷⁶ Al-Majlisī I rejected analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) and personal judgment (*ra'y*) and only used *ijtihād* to reconcile contradictory hadith reports. The focus on traditions during this period brought new hadith reports to light. In fact, al-Majlisī I's son and successor, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī II, compiled the most important hadith collection during this period in his *Bihār al-Anwār*. Similar to his father, al-Majlisī II is often said to have taken a moderate path, adopting an Akhbārī approach judicially, but a more Uṣūlī stance in terms of clerical authority. The Akhbārī School placed the emphasis back on the texts to the point that Bihbihānī's Uṣūlī School eventually accepted the primacy of revealed sources over reason, similar to Shaykh al-Mufīd.

Another development that occurred during the late Safavid period was the rise of the School of Isfahan,⁷⁷ which stressed the

role of intuitive and inner knowledge. The school’s founder was Muḥammad Bāqir al-Astarābādī, better known as Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631), whose disciple recounts his visions of the Imams, from which he learned the prayer for protection from Imam ‘Alī.⁷⁸ The School of Isfahan was a continuation of the illuminationist philosophy that originated with Shahāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191), who promoted the idea that true knowledge was the result of both rational and intuitive emanations from the mind.⁷⁹ Suhrawardī promoted Neo-Platonism after he dreamed of Aristotle, who told him of Plato’s superiority.⁸⁰ For Suhrawardī, intuitive knowledge comes from mystical experiences, which include different stages of intuition, such as mystical perception (*dhawq*), mystical vision or unveiling (*kashf*), and mystical revelations (*mukāshafāt*). It is only experiential knowledge that leads to certainty. Supreme authority in the community and deputyship of God, according to Suhrawardī, rest on the one who reaches perfection in philosophical knowledge and mystical experience.⁸¹ Suhrawardī was eventually executed by the great Saladin on charges of claiming that prophecy after Muḥammad was possible.

The main proponent of this school of thought during the Safavid period was Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1640),⁸² who promoted a cosmology that included rationalism and visionary experience, and required purification of the soul through asceticism, mysticism, and gnosis. He conceived of knowledge as an interaction and unveiling of existence and therefore ‘makes epistemology an exercise in ontology.’⁸³ For Mullā Ṣadrā, existence must be known and experienced intuitively. Knowledge, which is ultimately the same as existence, is the result of a process that is ‘obtained through unveiling (*mukāshafah*), confirmed by revelation (*wahy*), and proved through demonstrative arguments (*burhān*).’⁸⁴ Although Uṣūlī jurists have challenged his thought, aspects of Mullā Ṣadrā’s metaphysics are accepted in mainstream Shi‘ism, and many Shi‘i scholars consider Mullā Ṣadrā’s work to be the most advanced mystical philosophy ever written.⁸⁵

Shi‘i mystical thought continued to grow towards the end of the Safavid period, especially after the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I. The

School of Isfahan became so prominent that many government officials and mainstream Shi‘i ‘*ulamā*’ embraced it, including Mullā Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī I (d. 1070/1659) and Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir Sabziwārī (d. 1090/1679), who was the *shaykh al-islām* of Isfahan. Additionally, Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1680), a student of Mullā Ṣadrā, developed his ideas, including transcendent wisdom (*al-ḥikmah al-muta‘āliyyah*). Unlike Ṣadrā, Kāshānī was an avowed Akhbārī, even if his Akhbārī credentials were questioned by Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī in *Lu‘lu‘āt al-Baḥrayn* because of Kāshānī’s affiliation with mysticism.⁸⁶ Kāshānī enjoyed a high position at the Safavid court after Shah ‘Abbās II (1642–66) summoned him to live in the capital, where he advised the Shah on religious matters and led the Friday prayer.

Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī II was a significant figure of this period, in part because he supported a synthesis of rationalist, scripturalist, and illuminationist trends. As already noted, his *Bihār al-Anwār* is one of the most important modern Shi‘i collections of hadith. However, he also promoted Uṣūlī rationalism and the necessity of *mujtahids*. Additionally, al-Majlisī II promoted the esoteric dimension of Shi‘ism, and in *Bihār al-Anwār* he says that the goal of the life of every Shi‘i is to emulate the Prophet and the Imams in order to reach their inner state. He further suggests that the elite (*khawāṣṣ*) are fully capable of accessing esoteric knowledge.⁸⁷

4. Neo-Uṣūlism and Shaykhism (c. 1800-Present)

The prominence of the Akhbārī School dwindled with Wahid Bihbihānī’s establishment of the neo-Uṣūlī School in the late eighteenth century. Bihbihānī’s approach to Islamic law was taken directly from rationalists before him and has remained the dominant approach to Shi‘i thought for the past two centuries. Even though Bihbihānī was the founder of neo-Uṣūlism, claims to intuitive knowledge have been attributed to Bihbihānī and his successors. Since the rationalist approach has been discussed at length above and I have discussed the emergence of modern

Uṣūlism elsewhere, this discussion of the rationalist Uṣūlī revival will focus on mysticism in the Uṣūlī movement.⁸⁸ Like Uṣūlīs before them, intuitive knowledge has been attributed to Bihbihānī and his successors. Ḥusayn Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī's *Jannat al-Ma'wā*, which is a compilation of mystical encounters with the Imam, includes many Uṣūlīs, such as 'Allāmah al-Ḥillī (d. 1325), al-Shahīd al-Awwal (d. 1380), Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Najafī (d. 1850), and Baḥr al-'Ulūm (d. 1797), who was especially known for his mystical experiences and miracles.

Bihbihānī was credited with several intuitive experiences. In the most important, Imam Ḥusayn appeared to him in a dream and gave him a scroll.⁸⁹ Bihbihānī's *Sharḥ al-Mafātīḥ* is supposed to be the same as the contents of the scroll. This experience differs drastically from his others because it transcends personal guidance from the Imam. In effect, the knowledge in *Sharḥ al-Mafātīḥ* was not the result of textual research, or reason, but inspiration from a dream. If all lay Shi'īs must follow the pronouncements of a *mujtabid* and Bihbihānī was the *mujtabid* of the age as Uṣūlīs have claimed, then Bihbihānī's followers were bound to follow his *Sharḥ al-Mafātīḥ*, which was received in a dream. In other words, the Imam was using Bihbihānī as an intermediary to pass on knowledge to members of the Shi'ī community, who were expected to emulate Bihbihānī's intuitive knowledge.

This is certainly not the first example of intuitive revelation producing a text. At a time of Portuguese influence during the reign of Shah 'Abbās I, Aḥmad al-'Alawī wrote a refutation of Christianity. He claimed that the Mahdī had appeared to him in a vision and commanded him to write *Miṣqāl-i Ṣafā* in order to prove the superiority of Islam over Christianity.⁹⁰ As mentioned above, Ḥaydar Āmulī claimed that Ibn al-'Arabī received *Fuṣūṣ* in a dream of the Prophet and some of his own works were also the result of intuition. Al-Shahīd al-Thānī also had a dream that al-Kulaynī, the compiler of an early collection of hadith (*al-Kāfī*), complained to al-Shahīd al-Thānī that the surviving copies of his work were poorly written and full of copyist errors. In the dream,

al-Kulaynī gave his original copy to al-Shahīd al-Thānī, who was able to fix the errors.⁹¹

These examples illustrate that stories attributing intuition to scholars like Bihbihānī, al-Shahīd al-Thānī, and others are a common feature of Shi‘i hagiography. However, none of Bihbihānī’s extant writings make references to his mystical experiences. The records of his encounters with the Imams are from his successors and Shi‘i hagiographers. The above-mentioned experience of Bihbihānī’s receipt of a scroll from the Imam Ḥusayn was recounted by a student of Bihbihānī. It seems, then, that Bihbihānī’s mystical experiences were projected back on him by his successors for the purpose of bolstering his authority and his status as an agent of God sent to save the Shi‘i community from Akhbārīs and establish Uṣūlī clerics as the rightful intermediaries of the Hidden Imam.

How then does intuition fit into Bihbihānī’s conception of knowledge and authority? In light of Bihbihānī’s *uṣūl al-fiqh*, his mystical experiences may seem like an anomaly. His conception of jurisprudence is firmly rooted in the rationalist tradition and his extant works say little about mysticism. However, this does not rule out the possibility that he promoted his own charismatic authority among his followers by claiming to communicate with the Imams. In other words, either Bihbihānī or his successors recounted intuitive experiences as a method of strengthening his authority, but not as part of his methodology for deriving perfect knowledge.

Bihbihānī’s life was almost wholly devoted to overthrowing the Akhbārī establishment and therefore his most important works are directed toward the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī debate. His successors saw him as the renewer (*mujaddid*) of the century and champion of the Uṣūlī School.⁹² Therefore, he only included textual and rational sources in his theoretical approach to obtaining knowledge. However, claims to mystical experiences did not immediately decrease after Bihbihānī’s death. His disciples were well known for their spiritual adeptness, performance of miracles, and for their claims to divine knowledge. In fact, the Shaykhī movement,

which attempted to incorporate intuition (*kashf*) into the theoretical framework of Uṣūlī thought, can partially be understood as a culmination of the charismatic claims made by Bihbihānī’s disciples. After the Uṣūlī victory over Akhbārīs, the last frontier for scholars on the path of gradually claiming the authority of the Imams was the ability to derive knowledge intuitively.

The Shaykhī School of thought, also known as Kashfiyyah, grew directly out of the Uṣūlī circle of Wahīd Bihbihānī and his disciples.⁹³ The school’s founder, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā’ī (d. 1241/1826), attended the classes of the most important Uṣūlī scholars, including Bihbihānī. Most of the *ijāzabs* that al-Aḥsā’ī received were from students of Bihbihānī (including Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī ‘Baḥr al-‘Ulūm,’ Mīrzā Mahdī Shahrīstānī, Shaykh Ja‘far al-Najafī ‘Kāshif al-Ghitā,’ Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Kalbāsī, and Sayyid ‘Alī al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī), indicating that his formal training was firmly in the Uṣūlī School. Baḥr al-‘Ulūm, apparently impressed with al-Aḥsā’ī’s abilities, says ‘it would be more appropriate for you to give an *ijāza* to me.’⁹⁴ Al-Aḥsā’ī had also received *ijāzabs* from several Akhbārīs, including students of Yusuf al-Baḥrānī.

Although these *ijāzabs* certainly enhanced al-Aḥsā’ī’s influence and social standing, he was dissatisfied with his Uṣūlī education and he does not mention any of these teachers in his autobiography.⁹⁵ Challenging the Shi‘i establishment, he was convinced that the ‘ulamā’ were not exponents of authentic knowledge and authority, which should only be derived from divine sources instead of rooted in human interpretation. Corbin suggests, therefore, that ‘it is as though he had no teacher other than the *ustadh-i ghaybī* – that inner teacher...’⁹⁶ Al-Aḥsā’ī, perhaps, is best understood as a synthesizer of scripturalist, rationalist, and mystical trends in Shi‘ism. Tunikābunī argues that his attempt to blur the lines between law and mystical philosophy and synthesize rational thought with the tradition was precisely the reason that Uṣūlīs declared *takfīr* against his movement.⁹⁷

Shaykhī thought was also built on the foundations laid by the School of Isfahan, even though he was a critic of its architects,

including Mullā Ṣadrā and Fayḍ Kāshānī.⁹⁸ Todd Lawson has pointed out that ‘the world of images functions as a bridge between reason and revelation’ for both Shaykhīs and adherents of Mullā Ṣadrā. For both al-Aḥsā’ī and Kāshānī, the imaginal realm was the world in which the Hidden Imam and Fourteen Pure Ones could be accessed, the place where ‘spirits are embodied and bodies are spiritualised,’ the location where Resurrection occurs.⁹⁹ While the imaginal realm was more of a place for Kāshānī, it was part of a process and for al-Aḥsā’ī. Through devotion, the believer can gain access to this world of the Imam (*Hūrqalyā*) with the eye of the heart, which is capable of seeing the Imam. Absolute existence is static for Kāshānī, whereas it is dynamic for al-Aḥsā’ī.¹⁰⁰ According to Lawson, al-Aḥsā’ī’s critique of Kāshānī and Mullā Ṣadrā was primarily related to the latter’s acceptance of existential monism (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).¹⁰¹ For al-Aḥsā’ī, *waḥdat al-wujūd* violates the transcendence of God, whose essence is fundamentally different than creation.

In his search for perfect knowledge, al-Aḥsā’ī’s meditations on the Qur’an and long periods of fasting led him to have dreams of all the Imams as well as Muḥammad. Al-Aḥsā’ī explains that the Imams taught him the esoteric meaning of the Qur’an and the hadith.¹⁰² He recalls that his first dream of an Imam featured Imam Ḥasan when he was a child, and he says that he drank the Imam’s saliva in the dream and was able to ask the Imam questions.¹⁰³ Since he had additional dreams of the other Imams and the Prophet in which he could also ask them questions, he maintained that his knowledge was perfect and that the Imams were his only source of knowledge. He also claimed that each of the Imams gave him an *ijāzah*, which surely superseded the *ijāzahs* granted to him by living scholars.¹⁰⁴ It was his access to the imaginal realm, then, that gave al-Aḥsā’ī confidence that his knowledge was certain. Therefore, al-Aḥsā’ī’s ultimate source of knowledge was experiential rather than textual or rational.¹⁰⁵ Al-Aḥsā’ī explains that ‘the super-sense perceptible encounter with the Imams provides the believer with a ‘spiritual initiation (lit. “savour” *dhawq*) due to which he can immediately perceive

the authenticity or otherwise of a tradition.¹⁰⁶ As an affront to Uṣūlī scholars, he asserted that their arguments were based on human reasoning and were therefore faulty since they did not always produce sure knowledge (*qaṭʿ*). This issue would later be central for Uṣūlī scholars who declared infidelity (*takfīr*) on al-Aḥsāʾī’s followers. Al-Aḥsāʾī asserts, ‘The *ulama* derive their knowledge one from the other, but I have never followed in their way. I have derived what I know from the Imams of guidance, and error cannot find its way into my words...’¹⁰⁷ Further, he explains ‘Whenever any explanation was given to me in sleep, after I awoke the question would appear clear to me along with the proofs related to it...And, if a thousand criticisms were levelled against me, the defence against them and the answers would be shown to me without any effort on my part.’¹⁰⁸ Al-Aḥsāʾī usually referred to his dreams with reference to *kashf*, which implies the unveiling of hidden meanings.

Even though he claimed that the ultimate source of his knowledge was derived from mystical experiences, al-Aḥsāʾī continuously based his arguments on textual sources and reason in order to stay within the Uṣūlī framework in which he had been formally trained. Al-Aḥsāʾī claimed that his ideas were identical with the Qur’an and hadith, especially the traditions of the Imams.¹⁰⁹ He says, ‘I found that all traditions were in agreement with what I had seen in sleep...I say nothing unless by virtue of a proof which is derived from them [the Imams].’¹¹⁰ Similarly, al-Aḥsāʾī’s disciple, Sayyid Kāẓim al-Rashtī (d. 1843), argues that al-Aḥsāʾī ‘did not receive these sciences and inner teachings so much in sleep, but rather, when he awoke, he discovered manifest proofs and evidences from the book of God and from the path of the explanations and instructions of the Imams of guidance.’¹¹¹

In his *Risālat al-Uṣūl*, al-Rashtī explains that the Shaykhī method is to consider the Qur’an, Sunna, consensus, and reason, which are the four sources of *uṣūl al-fiqh* accepted by Uṣūlīs. This *Risālah* was surely meant for an Uṣūlī audience and supports many Uṣūlī principles, save for several major exceptions. Al-Rashtī even praises the great Uṣūlī scholars, including Shaykh al-Mufīd,

Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, ‘Allāmah al-Hillī, Shahīd al-Thānī, and Muqaddas al-Ardabilī. In another work, al-Rashtī clearly moves further from the Uṣūlī tradition by identifying a fifth source of law, which he calls the law of the universe, rooted in the Qur’anic verse: ‘We will show them Our signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own souls, until they clearly see that this is the truth.’¹¹² It is not exactly clear how this source is used in practice, but it is possibly a claim to intuition (*kashf*) as a direct source of knowledge, especially since al-Rashtī explains that al-Aḥsā’ī used both external reasoning and internal meaning.¹¹³ This departure from the Uṣūlī School places Shaykhīs within the illuminationist tradition. Although Uṣūlīs claimed authority on the basis of *kashf*, they did not include it as a source of law.

The difference between Shaykhīs and Uṣūlīs, therefore, can be understood in terms of emphasis. The foundation of the Shaykhī system is rooted in Suhrawardī’s illuminationist system of hierarchical worlds and interworlds, which are related to worlds of being. Al-Aḥsā’ī referred to the interworld as *Hūrqalyā*, which can be perceived by spiritually enlightened people. Al-Rashtī explained that followers of al-Aḥsā’ī were known as *Kashfiyyah* because God removed (*kashf*) the veil of ignorance from their hearts and minds and illumined their hearts with the light of knowledge.¹¹⁴ Although al-Aḥsā’ī criticized Mullā Ṣadrā for his reliance on philosophy and Sufism, the two operated in the same illuminationist system. Corbin argues that they were part of the same family of Shi’i gnosis¹¹⁵ and concluded that Shaykhīs were not innovators, but instead revivers of the ‘fundamental teachings of the holy Imams.’¹¹⁶ Additionally, Vahid Rafati argues that al-Aḥsā’ī was the ‘leading nineteenth century religious commentator’ on Mullā Ṣadrā’s works.¹¹⁷

The most fundamental shift in the neo-Uṣūlī establishment after its formative period was the establishment of Uṣūlīs in power following the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As Ayatollah Khomeini was on the verge of initiating changes within Shi’i establishment, he revived claims to intuitive knowledge and even criticized Uṣūlīs for diminishing its importance. Soon

after Khomeini became a student in Qum in his younger years, he began studying philosophy and mysticism. In 1937 he wrote a commentary on *Sharḥ al-Fuṣūṣ*, which is a commentary on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ* by Sharaf al-Dīn Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 1350). Khomeini came to the conclusion that there is no contradiction between Islamic mysticism and law. Like many illuminationists, Khomeini publicly conformed to mainstream legalistic Shi‘ism, while privately leaning towards mysticism. He considered himself a follower of Mullā Ṣadrā’s illuminationist philosophy and became interested in the idea of the Perfect Man, first spoken of by Ibn al-‘Arabī as the pupil of God’s eye.¹¹⁸ In his commentary, he claims that the Perfect Man ‘is the beginning and the end... [and] whoever knows the Perfect Man has known God.’¹¹⁹ He also accepted the idea of cosmic guardianship, believing that guardians inherit Muḥammad’s mystical nature. These mystic saints are the Prophet’s personal representatives and carry out his invisible governance, without which the world would fall into decay. Khomeini may have considered himself to be a Perfect Man and one of Muḥammad’s guardians, who had reached the highest stage of mystical experience in which the mystic claims to be the truth.¹²⁰ Because Khomeini was the most transformational figure since Bihbihānī, it is no wonder that he made an appeal to mystical knowledge and authority, a perennial tool of Shi‘i reformers.

Conclusion

Shi‘i scholars created their own theoretical syntheses on how to derive knowledge, which included some measure of textualism, rationalism, and mysticism. Therefore, these three sources form a tripartite system for determining Shi‘i knowledge and authority. Akhbārīs promoted the textual sources of the Qur’an and hadith as the only means for arriving at perfect knowledge. Yet as Yusuf al-Baḥrānī pointed out, Akhbārīs cannot avoid using reason in practice even if they may not admit it. And some Akhbārīs, like Fayḍ Kāshānī, accepted *kashf*. While the majority of Uṣūlīs

accepted revelatory texts as the surest source of knowledge, they promoted the use of reason for cases not addressed in textual sources as well as for the interpretation of texts. Many Uṣūlīs have also made appeals to intuition. illuminationists, including Mullā Ṣadrā and al-Aḥṣā'ī, situated mystical experience at the top of their hierarchy of sources, but they also accepted that sure knowledge could be derived from the texts and reason, albeit to a lesser degree than intuition. It was precisely the Shaykhī acceptance of *kashf* that was unacceptable to Uṣūlīs. Had they accepted it, they would have also had to identify and accept a living Perfect Shi'ī, whose authority would not only rest on a deep knowledge of the texts and sound rational ability, but on intuitive powers. From Bihbihānī's time until the present, *mujtabids* have been chosen primarily on the basis of their outward knowledge and ability to interpret the sources based on reason. In this way, a rationalist Uṣūlī approach to knowledge and authority has come to dominate Shi'ī thought and leadership.

Endnotes

- 1 Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); see also Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Hamid Dabashi, and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr (eds.), *Shi‘ism: Doctrines, Thought, and Spirituality* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 191.
- 2 See Henry Corbin, *La Philosophie Shiite* (Tehran: Departement d’iranologie de l’Institut franco-iranien de recherche, 1969), p. 623.
- 3 L. Massignon, ‘L’Homme Parfait en Islam’, in *Opera Minora* I, pp. 109–110; see also Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), p. 105.
- 4 M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality*, p. 107; see also Etan Kohlberg, ‘Some Imāmī Shi‘i Views on *Ṣaḥāba*’, in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* V (1984), p. 145.
- 5 M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality*, p. 135.
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