

Kashshi, Abu 'Amr Mohammad (d. 978)

An important figure in Shi'i biographical (*rijal*) literature, Kashshi lived in the first half of the 4th/10th century. Though his place of origin is not mentioned, he was probably born in Kishsh, Transoxania since most of the informants from whom he transmitted were from towns in Transoxania and the neighboring regions.

His *nisba* thus should be read as al-Kishshi, though traditionally it was later read al-Kashshi based on an incorrect reading of the town's name as Kashsh. He studied in Samarkand under Muhammad b. Mas'ud al-'Ayyashi (n.d.), an important Shi'i scholar and disseminator of Shi'i traditions in Transoxania in the early tenth century. Kashshi probably visited and met Shi'i transmitters in Iraq, since he related directly from some Iraqi transmitters. In addition, some Shi'i scholars in Bagdad transmitted his book directly from him.

Although his seminal work on the disciples of the Imams titled *Kitab Ma'rifat al-Naqilin an al-A'imma al-Sadiqin* is not extant, Tusi's (d. 1067) abridged version (called *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifa al-Rijal*) of his original text has survived. Along with the *Kitab al-Rijal* and the *Kitab Fihrist Kutub al-Shi'a* of Shaykh Tusi and the *Kitab al-Rijal* of al-Najashi, Kashshi's work is considered one of the four main Shi'i biographical works.

Kashshi's literary depiction of the disciples of the Imams (also called the *rijal*) stands in contrast to the works of Tusi and Najashi. The significance of Kashshi's work lies in the fact that, unlike Tusi and Najashi, he did not provide a standard appraisal of some of the closest companions of the Imams. Rather than restricting his work to enumerating the literary compositions and assessing the reliability or otherwise of the *rijal* that he considers, Kashshi re-constructs the social and religious milieu of the associates of the Imams. Beginning with

the companions of ‘Ali b. Abu Talib, Kashshi cites reports on them, most of which are in the form of comments allegedly uttered by an Imam or a contemporary figure. He sometimes includes reports on the disciples’ alleged supernatural abilities, their literary and other activities, and the views that they espoused. Rarely does he directly authenticate a person. It is in these anecdotes that Kashshi gives concrete forms to ideals like loyalty, commitment to faith, and the proper understanding and transmission of the Imams’ teachings.

Within Shi’i circles, his work is considered controversial as it includes reports that link some of the major companions of the Imams like Salman al-Farisi (d. 644-7), Jabir al-Ju’fi (d. 745), and Mufaddal. B. ‘Umar (d. 796) with extremist groups. Kashshi is also considered controversial as he cites both laudatory and pejorative remarks, which reportedly were uttered by the Imams, concerning some of their most eminent disciples, such as Zurara b. A‘yan (d. 767), Muhammad b. Muslim al-Thaqafi (d. 767), Yunus b. ‘Abd al-Rahman (d. 823), and others. These reports are juxtaposed with the social reality of the disciples’ often-strained relationship with the Imams and the latter’s attempts at limiting the authority and restricting the activities of their disciples.

Kashshi based his biographical profiles on discrete components, which he found in various genres of literature. The texts he used in defining the *rijal* and depicting their functions in the Shi’i community ranged from erstwhile Shi’i autobiographical fragments and doctrinal works to polemical discourses and juridical compilations. He also used reports contained in various Sunni polemical, biographical, and heresiographical tracts. These accounts were supplemented with oral narratives transmitted by the Shi’i community.

It was probably due to the inclusion of the contradictory and disparaging remarks against some prominent disciples that Najashi, a prominent scholar in Shi’i biographical

literature, considered Kashshi's work to be full of errors caused by his reporting from "weak" transmitters. The details contained in his text make Kashshi's work indispensable for comprehending the construction of and struggle for authority within the Shi'i community. It is also an invaluable source for comprehending the relationship between the Imams and the *rijal*, and the struggle to legitimize the disciples' claim to authority.

Another distinctive feature of his work is that Kashshi had access to books composed by *rijal* scholars who lived during the times of the tenth and eleventh Shi'i Imams. For example, he quotes the views of 'Ali b. al-Hasan al-Faddal and Fadl b. Shadhan (d. 873) on several occasions. At one point, Kashshi states that Muhammad b. Mas'ud al-'Ayyashi (n.d.), his teacher, had asked Ibn al-Faddal about the status of 'Ali b. Hassan. Kashshi also states that he had earlier biographical texts at his disposal. At one point in his work, he quotes the book of Muhammad b. al-Hasan b. Bandar al-Qummi (n.d.) in a profile of a disciple. He says in another profile, "I have found [a book] in the handwriting of Jibril b. Ahmad....."

Kashshi's work is indispensable for assessing the characteristics and structural framework of the biographical literature on the *rijal*. His text is also important for constructing a coherent picture of the authority that the *rijal* wielded in the Shi'i community during the times of the Imams.

Liyakat Takim

McMaster University

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