

The Origins and Evaluations of *Hadith* Transmitters in Shi'i Biographical Literature

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ʿIlm al-rijal is a discipline that examines the status of the transmitters of traditions who figure in the *isnad* (chain of transmission) that is usually prefixed to a *hadith* (tradition) report. The study of the biographical works is important as it provides information on the transmitters of traditions, who are evaluated to assess their character, reliability in transmitting traditions, moral probity, and religious affiliations. It is on the basis of such information, derived from the biographical works, that a tradition can be classified as authentic, reliable, or weak.¹ The evaluation of a reporter that is provided by the biographical literature directly affects the authenticity of a tradition he transmits since his status is the single most important factor in determining how a *hadith* is classified.² It is due to its influence on the *hadith* literature that *ʿilm al-rijal* is one of the disciplines that a jurist is required to study.

In this paper, I intend to examine the provenance of the Shi'i biographical lexica on the disciples of the imams (the *rijal*) and to propose possible reasons for the composition of these works in the eighth and ninth centuries. I will then consider the authentications (*tawthiqat*) of those who report traditions from the imams and compare and contrast the methods of authentication in both the early and later biographical works. I will also suggest possible reasons for the development of subsequent modes of authentications.

¹ See Agha Buzurg Tihirani, *al-Dhari'a ila Tasanif al-Shi'a* (Beirut: Dar al-Adwa, 1983), 29 vols., 10:80.

² Other considerations such as *qara'in* (concomitant factors) and the text of the tradition can also determine the acceptability of a tradition. See the discussion in Liyakatali Takim, "The *Rijal* of the

To understand the importance of the biographical texts and the indispensable role they play in helping a jurist to reach a juridical decision, it is essential to briefly mention the role of *hadith* as a source from which legal precepts are derived.³ In Shi'ism, as in Sunnism, most *shari'a* rulings are derived from the *sunna* which, in Shi'i legal theory, comprises the sayings, acts, and periods of acquiescence of the Prophet and the imams. Since the *sunna* is transmitted primarily in the form of *hadith* reports, those who narrate traditions from the Prophet and the imams play a decisive role in determining which *hadith* reports are accepted in the juridical manuals. Provided the transmitters have been authenticated in the biographical works, a jurist can cite the traditions they transmit as sound proof in support of his legal judgment. It is in this context that the significance attached to the biographical texts can be comprehended. Besides furnishing information on the veracity or otherwise of the disciples of the imams, Shi'i biographical texts influence which legal traditions are deemed by a jurist to be authentic, determining, in the final analysis, the community's religious practices.

The Provenance of the Shi'i Biographical Works

An inquiry into the genesis of Shi'i biographical works entails a close study of Muhammad b. al-Hasan Tusi's (d. 1067) *Kitab al-Fihrist*⁴ and Ahmad b. 'Ali Najashi's (d. 1058-9) *Kitab al-Rijal*. These two works are indispensable for constructing a coherent picture of the pre-*ghayba* (occultation) Shi'i biographical works. A study of

Shi'i Imams as Depicted in Imami Biographical Literature," (Ph.D. diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, 1990, chapter six.

³ For a more detailed discussion on the importance of *hadith* as a source of law see Abu'l-Qasim al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith* (Beirut: Dar al-Zahra, 1980), 23 vols., vol. 1.

⁴ The term *Fihrist* is applied to a bibliographical work that cites names of authors and the titles of their works. Occasionally, historical details of the author and his reliability are also cited.

these texts indicates that the incipience of Shi‘i *rijal* works can be traced to ‘Abd Allah b. Jabala al-Kinani (d. 834) who is reported to have written a *rijal* work.⁵ He was a contemporary of al-Hasan b. ‘Ali al-Faddal (d. 838), who is also credited with a book on the same topic.⁶ Shi‘i sources credit another contemporaneous disciple of the imams, al-Hasan b. Mahbub (d. 838), with a *rijal* work entitled *Kitab al-Mashyakha*. Strictly speaking, a *mashyakha* work is a list of the *shuyukh* (teachers) of the author rather than an enumeration of the companions of the imams. Shi‘i *rijal* works also indicate that al-Hasan al-Faddal’s son ‘Ali (n.d.), and another Shi‘i, Ahmad b. ‘Ali al-‘Aqiqi (d. 893) had both composed biographical works in the ninth century.⁷

Another Shi‘i, ‘Ali b. al-Hakam al-Zubayr (floruit in the early ninth century), is also reported to have been an author of a *rijal* work. Although neither Tusi nor Najashi mention this text, Ibn Hajar (d. 1449) occasionally quotes from it. Thus, in the case of Jabir b. Sumayra, Ibn Hajar cites the appraisal of Ibn al-Hakam of him.⁸

After the times of al-Kinani and al-Faddal, many other Shi‘i *rijal* works were compiled. Around the same time, a new genre of *rijal* literature called *tabaqat* came to be recognized. In these works, the names of the transmitters were classified according to

⁵ Ahmad b. ‘Ali Najashi, *Kitab al-Rijal* (Qum: Maktaba al-Dawari, 1976); Scarcia Amoretti, “‘Ilm al-Ridjal,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1151. According to al-Barqi, al-Kinani was also a companion of al-Kazim. Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Khalid al-Barqi, *Kitab al-Rijal* (Tehran: 1963), 49. Tusi cites a profile of al-Kinani but does not mention his *rijal* work. See Muhammad b. al-Hasan Tusi, *Kitab al-Fihrist* (Qum: 1983), 104.

⁶ Najashi, *Rijal*, 26. On al-Faddal's work, see Tihrani, *al-Dhari'a*, 10:89-90.

⁷ On ‘Ali b. al-Hasan al-Faddal see Najashi, *Rijal*, 181-82. On al-‘Aqiqi see *ibid.*, 59; Tusi, *Fihrist*, 24-25. According to Tihrani, Yusuf b. Mutahhar (‘Allama) al-Hilli depends on al-‘Aqiqi's work in his *Khulasa al-Aqwal*. See *al-Dhari'a*, 10:131.

⁸ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Lisan al-Mizan* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1988), 2:112. On ‘Ali b. al-Hakam see Abu'l-Qasim al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal*, 11:394.

their generations. Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Khalid al-Barqi (d. 887) composed a *tabaqat* work that is extant. Al-Barqi's *tabaqat* work enumerates and identifies the companions of each imam but does not provide a substantive analysis of the lives or status of the *rijal*. Since al-Barqi does not evaluate the veracity of the associates of the imams, the value of his work is limited. Due to this factor, some Shi'i scholars have not regarded this text as being among the principal sources on the *rijal*.⁹ Other biographical works composed at this time, like those of Ibn Dawud al-Qummi (d. 978) and Ahmad b. 'Ammar al-Kufi (d. 957) enumerated and detailed the praiseworthy (*mamduhin*) or blameworthy (*madhmumin*) *hadith* transmitters.¹⁰

According to a prominent scholar of Shi'i biographical literature of the last century, Ayatullah Abu'l-Qasim al-Khu'i (d. 1992), over one hundred *rijal* works were composed between the times of al-Hasan b. Mahbub and Tusi. Although Muhsini, a contemporary scholar of the *rijal*, says that this figure is exaggerated, a perusal of the biographical texts of Najashi and Tusi indicates that many works on the *rijal* had been composed before their time. These works also indicate that the science of *al-jarh wa'l-ta'dil* (the wounding and authentication) was well developed among the Shi'is.¹¹ The development of this science by Tusi's time can be discerned from several statements

⁹ Muhammad al-Din al-Ghurayfi, *Qawa'id al-Hadith* (Najaf: n.d.), 159. Al-Barqi was a prolific author who was expelled from Qum as he reportedly transmitted *hadith* from weak sources. See Abu'l-Qasim al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal*, 2:264; Etan Kohlberg, "Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period," in *Authority and Political Culture*, ed. Sa'id Arjomand (Albany: SUNY, 1988), 39.

¹⁰ Ayatullah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei, "Two Principal Works of 'Ilm al-Rijal: The Rijal of Kashshi and Tusi's Fihrist," *Tawhid*, 12 (1993):1, 150-2. On the list of *rijal* works before the times of Tusi and Najashi see *ibid.*

¹¹ See *ibid.*, 1:42; Asaf Muhsini, *Buhuth fi 'Ilm al-Rijal* (Qum: 1983), 130-31. For a list of early Shi'i *rijal* works see Tihrani, *al-Dhari'a*, 10:81 ff.

made in the *rijal* works of both Tusi and Najashi. For example, Tusi states in his work on *usul al-fiqh*,¹²

“We have encountered a community which has differentiated between the [different] *rijal* reporting these traditions; they have authenticated those who are reliable (*al-thiqat*) among them and have considered weak the unreliable ones (*al-du‘afa*). And they have distinguished between those whose traditions and reports can be relied upon and those whose transmissions cannot be relied upon; they have [also] commended those [who are] worthy of praise (*al-mamduh*) among them and have criticized those who deserve to be censured (*al-madhmum*). And they have said: ‘So and so is suspect (*muttahaam*) in his traditions, so and so is a liar; so and so is confused (*mukhallat*) [in his traditions]; so and so is an adversary (*mukhalif*) in his school and beliefs; so and so is a Waqifi; so and so is a Fathi,’ and other accusations which they have mentioned.”¹³

Tusi stresses that the processes of identification of and discrimination between the various transmitters had developed before his time. Najashi also attests to the development of this discipline among the Shi‘is by his frequent statements, “...The *ashab* (experts of) *al-rijal* have mentioned [his status to be] so.”¹⁴ At one point in his biographical text, he profiles Ahmad b. Muhammad b. ‘Ubaydallah al-Jawhari. Even though Ahmad was his friend, Najashi states, “I have seen that our teachers have considered him to be weak so I did not narrate anything from him and I avoided him.”¹⁵

Another important scholar of Shi‘i biography, Muhammad b. ‘Umar Kashshi (d. 978), also had access to erstwhile *rijal* scholars. For example, he quotes the views of ‘Ali b. al-Hasan al-Faddal and Fadl b. Shadhan (d. 873) on several occasions. At one

¹² Muhammad al-Baqir Sadr (d. 1980), a modern jurist, defines *usul* as “the study of the collective principles [established] in the extrapolation of a juridical ruling.” *Durus fi ‘Ilm al-Usul* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1978), 1:38-39. Besides establishing the collective principles, *usul al-fiqh* sets forth the theory of juristic practice to deduce further laws that cannot be directly derived from the revealed sources.

¹³ Tusi, *‘Uddat al-Usul* (Tehran: Sayyid al-Shuhada’, 1983), 366.

¹⁴ See for example Najashi, *Rijal*, 90, 118.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 62-3.

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.¹⁶ Kashshi also states that he had earlier biographical texts at his disposal. At another 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.¹⁷

It should be noted that despite the presence of biographical works at this point, the science of *hadith* criticism had yet to be fully developed amongst the Shi‘is. Infact, most Shi‘i jurists before the time of Tusi did not accept the validity of singular traditions (*khavar al-wahid*) as a source of law. For example, Tusi’s teacher, Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Nu‘man al-Mufid (d. 1022) argued that such traditions could only be accepted if they agreed with reason, the Qur’an, or another well-authenticated tradition.¹⁸

Al-Mufid’s student, Sharif al-Murtada (d. 1044) was even more critical of *khavar al-wahid*. He said that practice based on this genre of traditions was invalid since it led only to preponderant possibility (*zann*). Legal decisions, he insisted, must be based on certainty (*qat‘*). Al-Murtada also claimed that earlier Shi‘i scholars had agreed on prohibiting the usage of single traditions in deducing the law.¹⁹ For *khavar al-wahid* to be valid, al-Murtada maintained that they must be accompanied by other forms of corroboration.²⁰ Thus, instead of discussing the character and trustworthiness of a

¹⁶ Kashshi, Muhammad b. ‘Umar. *Ikhtiyar Ma‘rifa al-Rijal*. Edited by al-Mustafawi. Mashad: Danishgahe Mashad, 1969, 451-52.

¹⁷ Ibid., 604. At times, Kashshi also states “I have found [a book] in the handwriting of Jibril b. Ahmad.....” See 300, 393. On the *rijal* works before Kashshi’s time see Ja‘far al-Subhani, *Kulliyat fi ‘Ilm al-Rijal* (Qum: Markaz Mudiriyat, 1987), 38-39.

¹⁸ Wilferd Madelung, “Authority in Twelver Shi‘ism in the Absence of the Imam,” in George Makdisi et al., *La Nation D’authorite au Moyen Age* (Byzance: Occidental Paris, 1982), 168.

¹⁹ Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shi‘ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 71-2.

transmitter, al-Murtada stresses the *qara'in* (concomitant factors) that would have to accompany a tradition for it to be accepted as reliable.

Tusi engages in a lengthy discourse to prove the validity of *khavar al-wahid* and to refute the arguments of his opponents. He agrees that *khavar al-wahid* did not give rise to certainty but nonetheless accepted it based on certain qualifications, i.e., the traditions should be narrated by a member of the righteous sect (*firqa muhiqqa*) who reported from the Prophet or an imam, that the transmitter be reliable in his reporting, or if the tradition is accompanied by a *qarina*.²¹ Tusi sought justification for his stance by claiming that this was a practice of the Shi'is from the time of the Prophet onwards. In essence, he was claiming an *ijma'* (consensus) of *firqa muhiqqa* on this.²² By accepting the validity of *khavar al-wahid*, Tusi was expanding the corpus of Shi'i sacred law.

It was Jamal al-Din Ahmad b. Musa Tawus (d. 1274-5) who first classified Shi'i traditions based on the reliability of their transmitters. He also coined new terminologies to differentiate between different genres of traditions and laid the basis for the principles of *hadith* criticism, principles which were used by later Shi'i scholars of *hadith*.²³ Ibn Tawus' student, 'Allama Yusuf b. Mutahhar al-Hilli (d. 1325) developed and implemented *hadith* classification in his legal works. Not only did 'Allama accommodate singular traditions, he also drew subtle distinctions between them. He argued that although *khavar al-wahid* provided only *zann*, it was

²⁰ 'Ali b. al-Husayn (Sharif) al-Murtada, *Al-Dhari'a ila Usul al-Shari'a* (Tehran: Daneshgah Tehran, 1983), 2nd ed. 2 vols., 2/554-5.

²¹ In Tusi's view, the righteous sect are the Shi'is. See Tusi, *'Udda*, 290, 337. Norman Calder, "The Structure of Authority in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence," unpublished thesis (School of Oriental and African Studies, 1979), 211.

²² Tusi, *'Udda*, 337-8.

acceptable because the lawgiver had allowed it.²⁴ Thus, like the Sunnis, the Shi'is were now working on preponderant possibility rather than certitude.²⁵

Reasons for the Compilation of Shi'i Biographical Works

The obvious question that arises is this: Why did the Shi'is find it necessary to compose biographical works in the ninth century? It is impossible to ascertain the form that these early Shi'i *rijal* works took or the information they provided since, apart from al-Barqi's text, none of them are extant. In addition, it is impossible to know why these works were compiled at this point in Shi'i history. It is possible to surmise, however, that as the disciples of the imams came to play pivotal roles in different parts of the Islamic world, the Shi'is may have found it essential to identify and acknowledge those who claimed to function on behalf of the imams.²⁶

Furthermore, the emerging legal/doctrinal works and concomitant religious practices at about the same time may have precipitated the study of the *rijal* who, according to the Shi'i sources, were largely responsible for disseminating the imams' teachings. The Shi'is probably felt the need to identify those from whom authoritative guidance could be sought. Stated differently, the transmission of the imams' teachings by their disciples and the latter's diverse functions in the community may have generated the biographical dictionaries, which had to establish the reliability of those who transmitted Shi'i theological and jurisprudential pronouncements. In addition, the

²³ Asma Afsaruddin, "An Insight into the Hadith Methodology of Jamal al-Din Ahmad b. Tawus," *Der Islam*, 72 (1995), 26-7.

²⁴ 'Allama al-Hilli, *Mabadi al-Wusul ila 'Ilm al-Usul* (Najaf: Matba'a al-Adab, 1970), 203-5.

²⁵ Madelung, "Authority in Twelver Shi'ism," 168-9.

collection of *hadith* of the imams necessitated the need to distinguish between the faithful transmitters of imams' *hadith* from those whose reliability was not established.

Moreover, the reported proliferation of spurious *hadiths* and the rise of extremist factions within the Shi'i community, like the *ghulat* and other sects that emerged after the death of an imam, may have given rise to the biographical works. The term *ghulat* is used to apply to a myriad of different groups who held extremist views regarding various figures.²⁷ The Shi'is had to distance themselves from the extremist beliefs espoused by the *ghulat* since these could endanger their lives and reputation. Shi'i concern at repudiating *ghulat* beliefs can be seen from the fact that the authors of all seventeen books that refute the *ghulat* (*al-Radd 'ala al-Ghulat*), were Shi'is.²⁸

With the appearance of various factions and the spread of fabricated traditions, there may have been an identity crisis within Shi'ism. By composing biographical works that identified the companions of a particular imam, it was hoped to expose extremist elements within the Shi'i community. This explanation may have been particularly germane to the companions of al-Kazim, many of whom had accepted the Waqifi doctrine of the messianism of al-Kazim. Thus, the formation of diverse sects within and fragmentation of the Shi'i community may have necessitated works which would identify the contemporary and past leaders of the Shi'i community. It is possibly because of this reason that Shi'i biographers cite titles of works on the virtues of some *rijal* (*Kitab Manaqib al-Rijal*), delineating these associates from those espousing heretical

²⁶ On the diverse activities of the disciples of the imams see Liyakat Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam* (Albany: SUNY, 2006), chapter four.

²⁷ Wadad al-Qadi, "The Development of the Term *Ghulat* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysaniyya," in Kohlberg (ed.) *The Formation of the Classical Islamic World: Shi'ism* (Ashgate: Burlington, 2003), 178-179.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

beliefs.²⁹ This view is corroborated by remarks in the biographical dictionaries, which identify various figures as belonging to extremist groups. The foregoing discussion suggests that eighth-century Shi'is laid the foundation of the biographical literature and that some of their statements were reproduced in later *rijal* works.

Shi'i Biographical Works of the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries

Most of our information regarding the status of the disciples of the imams and their functions in the Shi'i community is based on biographical works that were compiled in the tenth and eleventh centuries. As I have discussed elsewhere, the compositions of Kashshi, Tusi, and Najashi, the primary Shi'i biographers of the tenth and eleventh centuries, are indispensable for assessing the characteristics and structural framework of the biographical literature on the *rijal*.³⁰ These texts are 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.

Although Kashshi's seminal work on the *rijal* is not extant, Tusi's abridged version of the original text is available.³¹ A distinctive feature of Kashshi's work is the presence of contradictory reports on a disciple, sometimes from the same imam. His work also includes many 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 also cites both laudatory and pejorative remarks, which reportedly were

²⁹ See, for example, Tusi, *Fihrist*, 144.

³⁰ Takim, *The Heirs*, chapter five.

³¹ Tusi's abridged version of his text is called *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifa al-Rijal*. For a discussion of Kashshi's work and the notion of authority that emerges from it see Abdulaziz Sachedina, "The Significance of Kashshi's *Rijal* in Understanding the Early Role of the Shi'ite Fuqaha," in *Studia Islamica in Honorem of Georgii Michaelis Wickens*,

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. Rarely does Kashshi directly authenticate a person. It was probably due to the inclusion of the contradictory and disparaging remarks against some disciples that Najashi considered Kashshi’s work to be full of errors caused by his reporting from “weak” transmitters.³² 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.

Ahmad b. ‘Ali Najashi’s work is arguably the most important Shi‘i work on the *rijal*. Najashi mentions in the introduction to his work that he composed his book in response to the criticisms leveled by the adversaries of the Shi‘is who taunted them for lacking reliable compositions or renowned scholars. In his work, Najashi mentions 1,240 *rijal* out of whom 640 have been either praised or considered to be trustworthy by him. One hundred transmitters have been labeled as *da‘if* (weak). Apart from examining the lives of more *rijal*, he also describes each transmitter in greater detail, citing his ancestry, tribe, and place of residence, and often quotes previous opinions on him. He also lists the books composed by each disciple and, where relevant, the imams from whom he reported *hadiths*. Due to the depth of information contained on the lives of the *rijal* and

ed. R.M.Savory & D.A.Agius, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984, (Papers in Medieval Studies, 6): 183-206.

³² Najashi, *Rijal*, 263.

clearer enunciations of their veracity or mendacity, Najashi's work has been deemed to be particularly valuable on the status of the *rijal*.

Tusi's wrote two books on the *rijal* (*Fihrist* and *Rijal*). His *Kitab al-Rijal* is in the form of a *tabaqat* work in which he chronologically links the *rijal* with the imams from whom they related traditions. He divides his work into two parts: those who lived during the times of the Prophet and imams and reported from them, and those who lived during their times but did not narrate from them. Occasionally, he cites a person in both groups, a point which has provoked much debate in subsequent *rijal* works. Besides indicating the era in which a person lived, Tusi occasionally indicates his factional affiliations and reliability in *hadith* transmission. However, as he authenticates only a few of the transmitters in this work, the value of Tusi's *Kitab al-Rijal* has been limited.

In his *Fihrist*, Tusi surveys the lives of many *rijal* and cites their literary contributions. The motivating force behind his compilation of this work can be discerned from his initial remarks. Tusi states that although indices of various Shi'i works had been compiled, he did not find any index which had made a detailed study of the Shi'i works in various fields. Tusi's aim was merely to fill the lacuna.

Although Tusi mentions 888 *rijal* in this book, less than twenty are considered to be *da'if* and twenty are counted as *thiqa* (reliable) or are directly praised by Tusi. In most cases, he merely cites the titles of the works composed without commenting on their reliability or mendacity. It is surprising, therefore, that Tusi states in the introduction to his *Fihrist*,

"When I mention every author of a composition, I will also indicate what has been said about his reliability (*ta'dil*) and unreliability (*tarjih*) and whether his narrations can be relied upon."³³

³³ Tusi, *Fihrist*, Introduction.

Having expressed his intentions to scrutinize and assess the *rijal* mentioned in his work, Tusi then appraises only a small portion of them. Due to these limitations, the value of Tusi's works, as far as evaluating the reliability of the *hadith* transmitters is concerned, has been diminished.

Tusi and Najashi outlined the various literary compositions and other functions of the *rijal*. These biographers based their profiles on discrete components, which they found in various genres of literature. The texts they used in defining the *rijal*, depicting their functions in the Shi'i community, and evaluating their reliability ranged from previous Shi'i autobiographical fragments and doctrinal works to polemical discourses and juridical compilations. They 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.

Several other biographical works were composed by the Shi'is around this time. A distinctive feature of Muhammad b. Ishaq al-Nadim's (d. 990-1) *Fihrist* is that it deals with all branches of knowledge, arts, schools of jurisprudence and traditions prevalent among Muslims. He does not restrict himself to citing the works of Muslims. On the contrary, his text lists the compositions of both Muslims and non-Muslims in different fields. However, Ibn al-Nadim's treatment of the disciples of the imams is very brief, amounting to less than ten pages. He mentions only a few of the thousands of disciples that the imams reportedly had. Since Ibn al-Nadim evaluates very few *rijal* the value of his biographical work has been limited.³⁴

³⁴ See Muhammad b. Ishaq b. Nadim, *Kitab al-Fihrist*, trans. Bayard Dodge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 2 vols., 1:436-45.

Shi'i view of Ibn al-Nadim's work can be discerned from the following account. According to Muhammad Taqi al-Shustari, Tusi committed many errors in his *Fihrist* as he followed the accounts of Ibn al-Nadim, at times quoting his statements *ad verbatim*. Shustari continues that when there is a difference of opinion between Tusi and Najashi, the views of Najashi should be preferred since the later did not depend on Ibn Nadim's text.³⁵ It was this factor, according to al-Shustari, that made Tusi's text less dependable than that of Najashi.

Abu'l-Hasan Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Ghada'iri (d 1020), was a senior contemporary of Tusi and Najashi. Tusi mentions that al-Ghada'iri had written two books, one of which was a study of Shi'i authors, and a book that enumerated weak and untrustworthy narrators, titled *al-Du'afa'*. Both of his works, Tusi says, were destroyed.³⁶

Why did these tenth and eleventh century biographers compose their works? As noted, Najashi's work was compiled in response to the critics who had taunted the Shi'is for not having past compositions which they could rely upon. The *Fihrist* of Tusi was concerned with enumerating previous Shi'i literary works. However, both Tusi and Najashi also mention the *rijal's* other contributions, such as the narration of traditions, polemical disputes, and close association to the imams. The purpose of the compilation of the biographical works in the tenth and eleventh centuries was evidently to compile a list of early Shi'i scholars and their works, and to respond to the critics who taunted the Shi'is for lacking a scholarly tradition.

Furthermore, it has to be remembered that many Shi'i juridical tracts had been composed just before or during the times of Tusi and Najashi. These included the works

³⁵ Khamenei, "Two Principal Works of 'Ilm al-Rijal," 169-70.

³⁶ Tusi, *Fihrist*, 1-2.

of scholars like al-Kulayni (d. 939-40), Ibn Babuya (d. 991), al-Mufid, and al-Murtada. The systematization and canonization of the Shi'i *fiqh* works in the time of Tusi and Najashi necessitated a close scrutiny of the *isnads* which often accompanied the legal traditions. This was an additional factor that prompted them to compose their biographical works, where they not only enumerated the *hadith* transmitters but also indicated their factional affiliations, thus distinguishing the reliable *rijal* from those whose traditions were suspect.

The Forms of Authentications in the Biographical Literature

A salient feature of Shi'i biographical texts is that a transmitter can be authenticated in two distinct ways. *Al-tawthiqat al-khassa* (specified authentication) refers to the authentication of one disciple as opposed to *al-tawthiqat al-'amma* (generalized authentication) in which a number of people are authenticated at a time. Most cases of *al-tawthiqat al-khassa* appear in the earlier biographical works. This mode of authentication occurs when a disciple is praised by an imam or other disciples and/or laudatory remarks concerning him are mentioned. The clearest case of *al-tawthiqat al-khassa* arises when an imam directly authenticates a person. However, such a report must also be based on a sound *isnad* (chain of transmission) and be seen as reliable (*riwaya mu'tabara*). A typical example of such an authentication is the following case cited by Kashshi. 'Ali b. al-Musayyab (n.d.) had asked 'Ali b. Musa al-Rida (d. 813), the eighth imam,

“I live far away and cannot reach you at all times. From whom can I obtain religious guidance?” Al-Rida is reported to have replied, “From Zakariyya b. Adam, the Qummi, who is well-trusted on issues that pertain to this and the next world.”³⁷

³⁷ Kashshi, *Ikhtiyar*, 595.

Besides such authenticating reports from the imams, the problem of a disciple's reliability was resolved by authenticating statements provided by Kashshi, Najashi, and Tusi. Their appraisals were also seen as embodying the correct evaluations on a reporter. Due to the sources at their disposal, it was claimed by *rijal* scholars like al-Khu'i and al-Subhani that these biographers could 'feel' or 'sense' (*hiss*) the reliability (*withaqa*) of a transmitter.³⁸

The question of 'feeling' the *withaqa* of the *rijal* is also relevant to *al-tawthiqat al-'amma* whereby a number of transmitters are authenticated by a biographer provided he clearly pronounces the reliability of the *rijal*. An example of such an evaluation is the following. Najashi states at one point in his work, "The family of Abu Shu'ba have a house in Kufa and all of them are *thiqa*."³⁹ At another point, when he considers the veracity of Muhammad b. al-Hasan b. Abi Sara, Najashi states, "The people of al-Rawasi (which Muhammad belonged to) are all *thiqa*."⁴⁰

It is difficult to assess the criteria employed by Tusi and Najashi in their evaluations since they do not cite their sources of or reasons for their appraisals. They may have based their authentications on erstwhile reports which were transmitted in the aforementioned texts. Apart from the books, they further relied on other concomitant factors (*qara'in*) through which they could sense the status of the *rijal*.

Different types of *qar'ain* were possibly available to them:

³⁸ *Hiss* connotes the idea of perception by the senses. See Edward Lane, *Lexicon*, 2:563. In biographical literature, *hiss* refers to the ability of a biographer to sense the status of a person based on accessible sources.

³⁹ Najashi, *Rijal*, 160.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

1. The biographers obtained some of their information from their *hadith* teachers which was transmitted through direct hearing (*sama'*) of the *tawthiqat*.

2. Details concerning the reliability of the associates could have been derived from information prevalent among the *rijal* experts of the times. An appeal is made to the concept of *istishar* (an opinion which is commonly acknowledged) which may not have been documented.

3. The authors of the biographical works may have deduced their assessments of certain figures from reports like those transmitted by Kashshi. As will be seen, their subjective inferences from such reports may have engendered differences among the biographers.

4. The *qara'in* available to the 'early' scholars also included other factors such as the number of traditions a person reports, whether he belonged to the *ashab al-ijma'*,⁴¹ reports from his teachers and students, his retentive powers, etc.⁴²

It is important to comprehend the significance of the *qara'in* and their connection to the authentications in Shi'i biographical literature. To be seen as binding, an appraisal had to be based on *qat'* (certitude). Any authentication which was based on *zann* (probability) was bound to be dismissed since *zann* could not indicate, with absolute certainty, that the correct appraisal of a transmitter had been established. Since

⁴¹ When he examines the associates of the imams, on three separate occasions, Kashshi cites the eminent jurists of the time under the title, "Designating the *fuqaha'* [of the imams]." Kashshi states in each citation that the community had accorded them with [the status of] *fiqh* (*wa inqadu* [or sometimes *inqarru*] *lahum bi'l-fiqh*). He clearly implies an acknowledgement or a consensus, reached by the Shi'i community, regarding the status of the eminent jurists. According to Ja'far al-Subhani, without these illustrious figures, Shi'i *fiqh* would have no foundation to rest upon. See Subhani, *Kulliyat*, 177.

⁴² On the possible types of *qara'in* that were available to the earlier scholars see Muhsini, *Buhuth*, 100 ff; Subhani, *Kulliyat*, 42; Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Hurr al-'Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shi'a ila Tahsil Masa'il al-Shari'a* (Beirut: Dar Ihya Turath al-'Arabi, 1965), 20:93.

subsequent scholars could not precisely locate the basis of the earlier authentications, by appealing to the concept of *qarina*, they presumed that the earlier appraisals were not based on conjecture. Thus, even if the reports reaching the *mutaqaddimun* ('early' scholars) did not satisfy the requirements of *qat'*, by claiming that the earlier scholars had access to indicators through which they could sense the reliability of the *rijal*, the Shi'is were removing any possible elements of *zann* in these evaluations.⁴³ Shi'i scholars on the *rijal* had to resolve the tension between not knowing the basis of the early authentications on the one hand, and the need to prove that these were *hujja* (binding) on the other. This conflict was resolved by appealing to the concept of *qarina* since it has the indispensable function of removing doubts surrounding a report. Since the earlier scholars purportedly had access to *qara'in*, their statements regarding and authentications of the *rijal* were viewed as binding on posterity.

Contradiction in the *Tarajim* (Biographical Profiles)

The discussion on the authentications by the likes of Tusi and Najashi raises the question of differences in their evaluations and the possibility that the authenticating process may have included some of their own conjecture. Despite the sources and *qara'in* at their disposal, there are many instances where these biographers contradicted themselves in their profile of a *rajul*. There are also cases of differences between Tusi and Najashi in their evaluations of a reporter. For example, in his *Rijal* work, Tusi states

⁴³ The history of Shi'i law is usually divided into two periods, that of the ancient or early scholars (*qudama'* or *mutaqaddimun*) and that of the modern or later scholars (*muta'akhhirun*). However, the demarcating line between the ancient and modern scholars has not been uniformly applied. At times, the term 'ancients' is applied to Tusi and his predecessors and those after him are considered 'moderns'. In some later sources the term 'ancients' refers to those who lived before al-Muhaqqiq or al-'Allama, and the term 'moderns' is applied to those who lived after them. See Hossein Modarresi, *An Introduction to Shi'i Law: a Bibliographical Study* (London: Ithaca Press, 1984), 23-24.

that Salim b. Mukrim (n.d.) is *da'if*, but on another occasion, he states that he is *thiqa*.⁴⁴ Najashi calls the same figure "*thiqa, thiqa*."⁴⁵ Similarly, Tusi contradicts himself in his appraisal of Sahl b. Ziyad (n.d.), an important source for Kulayni's traditions. He considers him to be *da'if* in his *Fihrist* but *thiqa* in his *Kitab al-Rijal*.⁴⁶ Al-Mufid also contradicts himself on Muhammad b. Sinan (d. 835), considering him reliable in one book, *da'if* in another.⁴⁷

The differences between the authentications may have arisen as a result of the subjective evaluations of a biographer and his interpretations of reports on a person. Assessing the reliability of a person based on, say, Kashshi's work could create differences between biographers. Not only does Kashshi cite contradictory narrations on a transmitter, but some reports are open to diverse interpretations. Such factors were bound to produce differences in the profiles of some *rijal*, especially when no clear reports regarding his reliability had emerged.

Subsequent scholars like Zayn al-Din b. 'Ali al-Shami (Shahid II - d. 1558) and Muhammad al-Mahdi Bahr al-'Ulum (d. 1797) have claimed that whenever Tusi and Najashi differ on the evaluation of a transmitter, the appraisals of Najashi should be preferred.⁴⁸ This is because unlike Tusi, Najashi pronounces clear judgments on the *rijal*. One possible reason for the difference in Najashi's evaluation is that he was a specialist in this field whereas Tusi made major contributions in other disciplines, too. This may

⁴⁴ 'Allama al-Hilli, *Khulasa al-Aqwal fi 'Ilm al-Rijal* (Najaf: Matba'a al-Haydariyya, 1961 *Khulasa*), 227.

⁴⁵ Najashi, *Rijal*, 134.

⁴⁶ Tusi, *Fihrist*, 80, *Rijal*, 416.

⁴⁷ Muhammad al-Mahdi Bahr al-'Ulum, *al-Fawa'id al-Rijaliyya* (Najaf: 1965), 3:253.

⁴⁸ See the discussion on this in Muhammad Jawad al-Na'ini, *Rijal al-Najashi* (Beirut: Dar al-Adwa, 1988), 1:16.

have contributed to Najashi being more thorough in his work. Other scholars, on the other hand, have stated that when Tusi and Najashi differ, both appraisals negate each other and should therefore be considered as invalid (*tasaqut*).⁴⁹

Contradictions in the *tarajim* (biographical profiles) provided by Tusi and Najashi raise considerable doubts about the reliability of their sources and their basis of authentications. The sources and principles of their authentications have not been explained, a point which, combined with the contradictions in the *tarajim* of some *rijal*, has led contemporary *rijal* scholars like Muhsini and al-Ghurayfi to question the validity of the evaluations of Tusi and Najashi. Muhsini, for example, asks, “How can we be sure that the bases of their authentications (*usul tawthiqatihim*) are acceptable to us or not? How can we ascertain that Tusi did not depend on *hads* (conjecture based on interpretation of sources) in his appraisals? Is it possible that these authentications were based on *zann*?”⁵⁰ According to Muhsini, he had repeatedly posed such questions to al-Khu’i and other *rijal* scholars but had never received a satisfactory response.⁵¹

The possibility that the authentications were based on a mixture of *hiss* and *hads* (certainty in some cases, conjecture in others) cannot be ruled out. The discussion on *hiss* and *hads* in the early authentications underlines a major problem in Shi’i biographical literature - that of ascertaining that the assessments were based on certainty since without this factor, no authentication could be admitted as authoritatively binding. If based on *zann*, the appraisals would raise serious questions about the reliability of the *rijal* and would exclude traditions reported by them from being incorporated in juridical

⁴⁹ al-Ghurayfi, *Qawa'id al-Hadith*, 178.

⁵⁰ Muhsini, *Buhuth*, 50-52.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

manuals since no reliable link between the imams and the jurists could have been established.⁵²

In all probability, since it was impossible to delineate between *hiss* and *hads* in the earlier texts, all authentications have been assumed to have arisen from *hiss* unless there was a contradiction in the authentications when various hermeneutics were employed to resolve the tension and to idealize the *rijal*. If the possibility of *hads* in the earlier *tawthiqat* is admitted, it would inevitably cast doubt on the reliability of many *rijal*, engendering discord in the legal works.⁵³

The Authentications in the 'Later' Biographical Lexica

Authentications by the ancient scholars had reached their pinnacle under Tusi. In fact, post-Tusi *rijal* works are more systematized reproductions of the biographical details collected by the *mutaqaddimun*.⁵⁴ After Tusi, the *tawthiqat* could also be provided by slightly later scholars like Muntajab al-Din ‘Ali al-Qummi (d. 1188) and Muhammad b. ‘Ali known as Ibn al-Shahrashub (d. 1192). For their evaluations to be considered binding, they had to have access to the *qara’in* and other sources which

⁵² The concepts of *hiss* and *hads*, although not directly stated are, for the first time, alluded to in Hurr al-‘Amili’s work. In his *Wasa’il al-Shi’a*, he insists that the early Shi’is had access to *qara’in* which raised their authentications to the level of *qat’*. Moreover, even if they did not have direct reports concerning a person’s reliability, they could discern his status from his books and vestiges which were transmitted in the form of narrations from his students and friends. These could all indicate the reliability of a person who has not been explicitly authenticated. Such indicators, which reflect the reliability of the transmitters, were restricted to the earlier times.

⁵³ See the discussion pursued by Muhsini, *Buhuth*, 50-3, who questions the validity of the *tawthiqat* of the earlier scholars. On the questions of *hiss* and *hads* see *ibid.*, 21-2, 11-12; al-Ghurayfi, *Qawa’id*, 189; Subhani, *Kulliyat*, 160; al-Khu’i, *Mu’jam*, 43-45.

⁵⁴ For a list of post-Tusi *rijal* works, see Subhani, *Kulliyat*, 125.

earlier scholars had.⁵⁵ As for the evaluations by subsequent *rijal* scholars like Ibn Tawus, Ibn Dawud al-Hilli, (d. 1249-50) and ‘Allama al-Hilli, their evaluations are seen as arising from *hads* and *ijtihad* (independent judgment of a jurist to infer precepts from revelatory sources) and are therefore not binding upon other jurists.⁵⁶

The *muta’akhhirun* have been forced to rely on the remarks uttered by the *mutaqaddimun* because of their inability to have access to the earlier sources and the *qara’in* referred to by the ancient scholars. Due to the sources at their disposal, the *muta’akhhirun* argue that the earlier scholars could ‘feel’ the *withaqa* of the *rijal*, thereby making their authentications binding for later scholars. The critical factor is access to the earlier indicators and sources through which the reliability of the transmitters could be perceived. Thus, later scholars have not been able to significantly ameliorate the assessments of the *mutaqaddimun*.

Due to the inability of the ‘later’ scholars to attain *hiss*, the *tawthiqat* in the ancient biographical works assume additional importance as representing the standard source of reference on the status of the *rijal*. Henceforth, any authentication of a disciple by the *muta’akhhirun* had to be traced to the earlier works. This fact further supports the view that Tusi marks the culmination of the normative appraisal of the *rijal*. In fact, Tusi can be said to have played a major role in forming a ‘link’ between the ‘later’ scholars and the information contained in the early sources, for his works are frequently referred to by the ‘later’ scholars. Al-Khu’i argues that the chain (*silsila*) [of

⁵⁵ Ibid., 160.

⁵⁶ This view is rejected by Muhammad al-Abtahi a contemporary scholar of the *rijal*. He claims that the *mutaqaddimun* were also prone to error. Al-Abtahi maintains that provided the later scholars also had access to sources like those of al-‘Aqiqi and Fadl b. Shadhan, their authentications were binding too. See Muhammad ‘Ali al-Muwahhidi al-Abtahi, *Tahdhib al-Maqal fi Tanqih Kitab al-Rijal* (Najaf: 1971), 1:102.

authentication] is shorn after Tusi and that most scholars have come to follow (*taqlid*) him in his authentications.⁵⁷

The Rise of Akhbarism and the Compilation of *Hadith*

To understand why later scholars had to authenticate more *hadith* transmitters it is essential to discuss, albeit briefly, the rise and challenge of the Akhbari school of thought. From the times of the imams, the Shi'is had rejected *ijtihad* which they equated with arbitrary reasoning. This was because *ijtihad* led to conjecture rather than certitude. Similarly, as I stated earlier, most Shi'i scholars rejected singly transmitted traditions since this genre of information could not lead to certitude.⁵⁸

However, subsequent scholars could not insist on attaining certitude in every legal case that arose, especially as the source of certitude, the twelfth imam, was in occultation. By the thirteenth century, a prominent Shi'i jurist, al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli (d. 1277) had proposed the adoption of *ijtihad* as an important source of law.⁵⁹ By advocating *ijtihad*, Muhaqqiq was sacrificing certitude and accepting an element of probability in the Shi'i juridical system.

His nephew, 'Allama al-Hilli incorporated newer rational principles into Shi'i jurisprudence. He saw *ijtihad* as an effort to establish the best probability of truth through the use of *usuli* rationalist tools and methodology. 'Allama legitimized *ijtihad* as a potent source of law and argued that the actions of the Shi'i populace was to be based on the *zann* of the mujtahid. In the process, he divided the community into the

⁵⁷ Al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam*, 1:43-4.

⁵⁸ Madelung, "Authority in Twelver Shi'ism, 164-5.

⁵⁹ Al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, *Ma'arij al-Usul* (Qum: Al al-Bayt, 1983), 179-194; Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi, *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam: From the Office of the Mufti to the Institution of Marja'* (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996), 29.

mujtahids and their followers.⁶⁰ The rationalist trend was then adopted by the Shi‘i scholars of Jabal ‘Amil.⁶¹

The Shi‘i rationalist movement and the reliance on *usul al-fiqh* was challenged in the seventeenth century by the resurgence of the Akhbari movement. The chief proponent of Akhbari ideas, Muhammad Amin al-Astarabadi (d. 1626), attacked the *usulis* for their dependence on *ijtihad* and the application of reason in Shi‘i jurisprudence. *Usul al-fiqh*, Astarabadi claimed, relies on probability sacrificing, in the process, certitude. Astarabadi also claimed that *usul* methodology was responsible for the issuance of conflicting legal opinions, which could not lead to an understanding of the divine intent.⁶² He further argued that the rationalists’ dependence on reason had led them to issue rulings and hold positions that went against the traditions from the imams on many points of theology and jurisprudence.

It has to be remembered that tension between the rationalist and traditional schools in Shi‘ism was not new. Debate over the fundamentalism of *usul* or *akhbar* in the derivation of juridical decisions had its roots in the theological debate about the priority of reason over revelation. Even during the times of the imams, there were discussions between the close associates of the imams about the roles of *al-‘aql*, the authority of human reasoning, and *al-akhbar* the authority of revelation, in the derivation of juridical rulings.⁶³ After the occultation of the twelfth imam the eminent

⁶⁰ Ibid., 84. A discussion on the principles of *ijtihad* as practiced by ‘Allama Hilli and other Shi‘i scholars is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁶¹ Ibid., 30-31.

⁶² See Devin Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shi‘ite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), 186.

⁶³ Takim, *The Heirs*, 94-103.

Shi'i jurist-theologian al-Mufid was very critical of the traditionalists, especially of his own teacher, Shaykh al-Saduq in his tract, *Tashih al-I'tiqadat*.⁶⁴ Al-Mufid's student, Sharif al-Murtada, even labeled the scholars of traditions in Qum as deviants.⁶⁵

Astarabadi's search for certitude in the derivation of Shi'i law led him to believe that the truth was rooted in the traditions of the imams, which, he claimed, provide customary certitude (*yaqin al-'adi*), a form of certitude that the masses rely upon in their daily lives. Anyone with sufficient knowledge of Arabic and an understanding of the terminology of the imams' statements could have access to the teachings of the imams. In essence, this eliminated the reliance on mujtahids who based their legal system on probability. Even the proper understanding of the Qur'an, Astarabadi argued, was to be based on *hadith* reports from the imams.⁶⁶ By their repudiation of the *usuli* methodology, the Akhbaris were rejecting the juridical system of the Sunnis and the conception of religious authority on which it was based.⁶⁷

The spread of Akhbarism in the seventeenth century meant that the lives and sayings of the imams became extremely important for the Shi'i populace. The imams became figures of intense devotional attachment and their statements were seen as reflecting the divine intent. Subsequently, there was a renewed interest in both the lives of the imams and the sayings attributed to them. Promulgation of Akhbari ideas also led to the accumulation of massive *hadith* collections by the likes of Hurr al-'Amili (d. 1688), Mulla Muhsin al-Fayd al-Kashani (d. 1680), and Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi (d. 1699). It was this emphasis on *hadith* reports from the imams that led to a renewed interest into

⁶⁴ Modarresi, *An Introduction*, 40-41.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁶ Moussavi, *Religious Authority*, 93. See also al-'Amili, *Wasa'il*, 18:129.

⁶⁷ Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 184.

the status of the *hadith* reporters. It also led to the need to authenticate more *hadith* transmitters.

Further authentication of *hadith* transmitters was contingent upon inferences deduced from statements made by the preceding *rijal* scholars. As direct authentication was ruled out, 'later' scholars sensed the possibility of indirect *tawthiqat*, giving them a say in the status of the *rijal* and increasing the scope of traditions that could be incorporated in Shi'i juridical tracts.

The *muta'akhhirun* felt the need for further authentication because of the limited efficacy of the earlier *tawthiqat*. This is because Tusi authenticates only a small portion of the *rijal* mentioned in his *Fihrist*, whereas al-Barqi does not evaluate his transmitters at all. The possibility of authenticating transmitters from Kashshi's work was also circumscribed. Although containing many reports on the *rijal*, his work suffers from the contradictory reports on some eminent *rijal*. Moreover, his *tawthiqat* generally take the form of reports on the *rijal*. The *isnads* in many of these reports are not sound. It was only on Najashi's work that most of the early authentications could be based. Given these constraints, later scholars undertook their own form of *al-jarh wa'l-ta'dil*.

The *muta'akhhirun* traced general statements made by the *mutaqaddimun* and cited these as proofs for the veracity of even thousands of transmitters. This further substantiates my observation that the 'later' scholars have concentrated more on the possible implications of the *tawthiqat* undertaken by the 'earlier' scholars than independently contributing to the assessments of the *rijal*, reflecting thus, their inability to attain *hiss*. From the following discussion, it will become clear that the inferences of the *muta'akhhirun* from statements made by the *mutaqaddimun* had the effect of considerably increasing the ambit of the reliable transmitters.

The Concept of ‘Mass Authentication’

The time of Hurr al-‘Amili marks the beginning of discussions about the possible significations of various statements made by the earlier scholars. Through various forms of interpretation, thousands of *rijal* are authenticated, these being further examples of the later form of authentication of the *rijal*. An example of later ‘mass authentication’ is what has been inferred from remarks made by Ja‘far b. Muhammad al-Qawlawayh (d. 978) at the beginning of his work entitled *Kamil al-Ziyarat*. The work pertains to the salutations to be recited when visiting (*ziyarat*) the shrines of the imams. In his preface, Ibn Qawlawayh states,

“We realize we cannot cover all that which has been transmitted from the imams on this subject [the salutations at the shrines], nor on any other issue except that which has been related to us by reliable [transmitters] from our companions. I have not cited a tradition in it [the book] which has been transmitted by reporters who are rarely mentioned (*shudhdhadh*)....”⁶⁸

According to al-‘Amili, Ibn Qawlawayh’s statement means that all the transmitters in this work are *thiqa*,⁶⁹ a view that is endorsed by al-Khu’i.⁷⁰ In all, 388 transmitters appear in Ibn Qawlawayh’s work.⁷¹ By this inference, all of them are authenticated. Others like Mirza al-Husayn Nuri (d. 1898) construe Ibn Qawlawayh’s statement as

⁶⁸ Ibn Qawlawayh, *Kamil al-Ziyarat* (Najaf, 1938), 4.

⁶⁹ Al-‘Amili, *Wasa'il*, 20:68.

⁷⁰ Al-Khu’i, *Mu'jam*, 1:50.

⁷¹ See Subhani, *Kulliyat*, 298.

suggesting that only his teachers are reliable, a point which reduces the number of those authenticated by his statement to thirty two.⁷²

Such inferences from statements made by the earlier scholars evince the desire to authenticate more transmitters. By claiming that all persons who feature in Ibn Qawlawayh's works are reliable, a tradition reported by any of these figures could be admitted into the juridical corpus with the justification that the transmitter has been pronounced reliable by his being cited in this work. This may be construed as a radical form of the authentication of the *rijal* since, by such deductions, hundreds of *rijal* are authenticated and their traditions admitted as binding. Behind this form of 'mass *tawthiqat*' lies the desire to admit more traditions to the juridical corpus even though such interpretations are conspicuously absent in the biographical texts before al-'Amili's time.

The consequences of authenticating all those who appear in Ibn Qawlawayh's work can be demonstrated in the case of 'Abd Allah b. al-Qasim al-Harithi. Najashi states that he was *da'if* and a *ghali* (extremist).⁷³ However, al-Khu'i states that Najashi's remark refers to al-Harithi's beliefs, not to his reliability as a *hadith* transmitter. Moreover, he continues, as al-Harithi appears in Ibn Qawlawayh's work, he is reliable.⁷⁴ 'Abd Allah al-Harithi's appearance in Ibn Qawlawayh's work negates Najashi's pejorative remarks. Instead of ruling for *tasaqut* (canceling out due to the contradiction), al-Khu'i rules in 'Abd Allah's favor. Thus, a transmitter who has been unequivocally

⁷² Mirza al-Husayn Nuri, *Mustadrak al-Wasa'il* (Tehran: al-Maktaba al-Islamiyya, 1964), 3 vols. , 3:777.

⁷³ Najashi, *Rijal*, 156.

⁷⁴ Al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam*, 10:284.

deemed ‘weak’ and extremist by Najashi is, due to his appearance in Ibn Qawlawayh’s work, authenticated.

Similarly, Isma‘il b. Murar has not been authenticated in the biographical works. However, he has been cited by ‘Ali b. Ibrahim al-Qummi (d. 919) in his *tafsir* work. Al-Qummi is believed to have cited traditions from reliable reporters only. Due to Isma‘il’s inclusion in one of al-Qummi’s *isnad*, al-Khu‘i maintains that he is authenticated and a reliable transmitter of traditions.⁷⁵ In a reversal of his earlier statement, al-Khu‘i subsequently issued a rescript in which, after quoting Ibn Qawlawayh’s statement, he states,

“After examining the traditions of the book and investigating its *isnads*, it appears that it [the book] contains many traditions - maybe more than a half [of the traditions in the book] - which do not accord with his [Ibn Qawlawayh’s] description in his introduction [that the work contains reliable transmitters only]. Moreover, the book contains many traditions whose *isnads* are not complete or which do not culminate in a *ma’sum* (the infallible one). Persons who are not from our companions also occur in the *isnads*. Some figures who are not cited in our biographical works at all are also mentioned, others who are known to be weak like Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Mihran are also cited. Therefore, there is no alternative but to alter [our stated position] and to maintain that only his [Ibn Qawlawayh’s] *mashayikh* (teachers) from whom he reports directly (*bila wasita*), are reliable.”⁷⁶

The ramifications of such a revision in the status of the transmitters are felt in the juridical and theological tracts. As indicated above, there are instances where al-Khu‘i authenticates an extremist as he appears in one of Ibn Qawlawayh’s traditions. An evaluation such as this would therefore have to be re-examined in the light of the above

⁷⁵ See al-Khu‘i, *Mu‘jam*, 3:183. See also Muhsini, *Buhuth*, 65–66 on the controversy surrounding this principle.

⁷⁶ I am grateful to Ayatullah al-Sayyid Ahmad al-Madadi for sharing this rescript with me.

rescript. The above case is further proof that inferential deduction of the *withaqa* of hundreds of figures, if not verified, could lead to the authentication of many liars and figures unknown in Shi'i *hadith* literature.

In the later works, the earlier assessments are reproduced, and the principles of authentication evolve so that more *rijal* are added within the ambit of reliable transmitters. The claim that the traditions of numerous *rijal* are reliable is a later biographical innovation, designed, as many of the later authentications are, to authenticate more disciples and to justify the inclusion of their traditions in the juridical manuals.

The key concern in the *tawthiqat*, whether it is in the earlier or later forms, is to raise a person to the level of *thiqa*, a *topos* in the authentication processes. As later *rijal* scholars could not authenticate the *rijal* directly (since they did not have *hiss*), they authenticated them inferentially. By their interpretations of earlier statements, they verified hundreds of figures. The authenticated *rijal* performed a critical function insofar as the *isnads* in which they appeared linked a jurist to the authentic source of all knowledge, the imams. Stated differently, the authentications linked a jurist, through an authenticated chain, to the original source, the imam. The important *rijal* therefore had to be shown as being reliable, if not in the earlier biographical literature, then at least in the later one. In a sense, the later 'mass authentication' of the *rijal* is further proof of the later 'idealization' of the *rijal*.⁷⁷ As I have discussed elsewhere, the idealization took different forms, either by resolving contradictions in the profiles, or by portraying the

⁷⁷ On the idealization of the *rijal* see Liyakatali Takim, "Evolution in the Biographical Profiles of Two *Hadith* Transmitters," in *Shi'ite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions*, ed. Lynda Clarke (Binghamton: Global, 2001).

rijal as members of the Prophet's family (hence as a saved sect), or by authenticating many figures who had not previously been considered reliable.⁷⁸

This idealization did not meet with universal approval. The claims of al-'Amili and Nuri were often contested by contemporary scholars like Muhsini, Subhani, and al-Khu'i. The post-Tusi era shows difference in, rather than agreement on, the *withaqa* of the *rijal*, especially when these were deduced from statements made by the *mutaqaddimun*.

Conclusion

Biographical narratives and the authentications they provide are important because they construct and identify a normative reading of the historical lives of the *rijal*. The authority of the disciples in Shi'i biographical literature is premised on their characterization as the bearers of Islamic canonical tradition and the embodiment of correct juridical praxis. By citing the disciples' functions and providing an appraisal of their veracity or mendacity, Shi'i biographers construct a sense of "orthodoxy" and express a normative evaluation of the *rijal* so as to insert them in the body of tradition that is utilized by the biographical culture.

The preceding discussion indicates that the appraisals provided by earlier Shi'i biographers lay claim to an exclusivist hermeneutic, which became sufficiently entrenched to impose an authoritarian construction on the history of those profiled. In selecting and evaluating the *rijal*, tenth and eleventh-century Shi'i biographers engaged in hermeneutical activity and an interpretive enterprise that became cumulative and evolved into a canonical representation of the disciples. The normative and 'standardized' reading of the lives of

⁷⁸ Takim, *The Heirs*, chapter five.

the *rijal* was a construction that would be impossible for later scholars to ignore. It has to be remembered that the imams also conferred authority to the *rijal* by appointing them as their deputies in the Shi'i community.⁷⁹

The preceding discussion also indicates that post-Tusi Shi'i *rijal* scholars had to deal with various issues. The first was to justify the authentications of 'earlier' scholars. This was done by appealing to the concepts of *qarina* and *hiss*. Later scholars also had to tackle the vexing question of contradictions in the *tarajim*. These were never satisfactorily explained, especially as the eighth and ninth-century texts were not extant. Although the authentications culminated with Tusi, later sources either deduced authentications from their predecessors or introduced new features on the *rijal*, enriching, in the process, the Shi'i biographical literature. The later 'mass authentication' of the *rijal* reasserts the canonical and often idealized profiles of the disciples. The reason for such idealization of the *rijal* is obvious - they report the traditions upon which the Shi'i legal edifice rests.

⁷⁹ Ibid., chapter three.