

Sources of Religious Knowledge in Twelver Shiism

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Abstract

The intellectual quest commences by engaging with sources that bestow knowledge. Thus, it becomes imperative to assess the validity and reliability of these sources. When contemplating a divine religion, where the researcher associates specific perspectives or doctrines with a particular faith, the task becomes doubly challenging. In such attributions, one must ensure the acknowledgment of both intellectual and ethical legitimacy, while also upholding reverence for attributions to the divine legislator. The question of the sources of Islamic doctrines has been a longstanding and contentious matter within the Islamic world. However, this article aims to delve beyond the quest for reliable sources of religious knowledge within Shiite thought. It seeks to demonstrate that Twelver Shiism, in general, aligns with the broader Muslim community regarding the sources of religious knowledge. This highlights an additional point of consensus among Muslims concerning the foundational sources of religious knowledge, which serve as the basis for religious contemplation and deduction. Regarding the specifics of these sources, there are occasionally notable disagreements between Shiite and Sunni Muslims. However, such disagreements should not undermine the shared fundamental basis between them, as similar disputes can also be found within each individual Islamic denomination. Both Shiism and Sunnism concur that the primary four sources for deducing jurisprudential rulings and theological doctrines encompass the Quran, the Sunna (the Prophetic tradition), consensus, and reason (or analogy). However, differences arise when it comes to issues such as the authoritative nature of the apparent meanings of Quranic verses, the ultimate authority of the Quran versus the Sunna, or the evaluation of single-transmitter hadiths (*khabar al-wāḥid*), and consensus. These nuances are explored within the scope of this article. The root of these disputes can often be attributed to the approach embraced by religious scholars: whether it leans towards rationalism or scripturalism, and within scripturalism, whether it relies heavily on hadith or not.

Keywords: religious knowledge, Twelver Shiism, Quran, Sunna, reason, consensus

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1. Introduction

One. Undoubtedly, once an individual commits to their religion or denomination, their primary concern becomes understanding the sources of knowledge within that religion. It is crucial for them to identify reliable references that can help in comprehending the religious doctrines and obligations associated with their faith. Naturally, individuals who hold positions of authority in scholarship and teaching within a particular religion are more keenly aware of the need for such pursuits and are therefore more dedicated to them. When referring to "sources of religious thinking, knowledge, or deduction," I am alluding to the reliable methods and references that can establish a religion's stance on various issues and problems. These sources may be explicit enough for both laypeople and experts to directly consult and understand the religious position. At other times, they may be more ambiguous or general, requiring religious scholars to draw upon them to deduce appropriate rulings or doctrines.

Two. There is a widespread consensus among the Muslims over the following sources: the Quran, the Sunna (the Prophetic tradition), consensus (*ijmā'*), and reason (*'aql*) or analogy (*qiyās*). It is widely recognized that the individual credited with initially mentioning all four sources together was Wāsil ibn 'Aṭā', a prominent figure in the development of Mu'tazilism (d. 131 AH).¹ Within the Twelver Shia tradition, there is a widespread belief that Ibn Idrīs (d. 598 AH) specifically mentioned all four sources together in his *al-Sarā'ir*.² However, it is worth noting that a century prior to Ibn Idrīs, Abū l-Fatḥ al-Karājakī (d. 444 AH) made mention of the four sources in his work *Kanz al-fawā'id*:

The doctrines of the religion need to be derived during the period of occultation [of the Imam] from the evidence of reason, the book of Allah, the Glorified and Magnificent, frequently transmitted hadiths from the Apostle of Allah and from the Imams, and that which the Imami denomination has reached a consensus upon. (Karājakī 1985, 251)

We can trace the origins of recognizing the four sources of jurisprudence further back to al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā (d. 436 AH). In his *Jawābāt al-masā'il al-Mūṣiliyyāt al-thālitha*, when he talks about the means of acquiring knowledge of the jurisprudential rulings, he mentions reliable textual evidence (the Quran and frequently transmitted hadiths), consensus of the Imami denomination, and reason when religious evidence is absent (1405 AH, 1:204-10). Preceding al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, his teacher al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413 AH) in his work *al-Tadhkira* outlines the sources or "principles" of jurisprudential rulings as the Quran, the Prophetic tradition, and the teachings of the Shiite Imams. These sources, according to al-Mufīd, can be derived through the use of reasoning, language, and reports (1993, 29). It is noteworthy that al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413 AH) did not

regard reason as an independent source, but rather as a means of comprehending the primary sources. Additionally, he did not explicitly mention consensus as a source of jurisprudential rulings. However, for religious doctrines and beliefs, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd relied heavily on both reason and the consensus of humanity, Muslims, and Shias as reliable sources. In fact, he frequently refers to these sources in his work *Awā'il al-maqālāt* (Mufīd 1413a AH). Regarding jurisprudential rulings, he appears to reject reason as a source and seems to incorporate consensus within the Sunna.

Before these prominent Shiite figures, there were no explicit remarks by Shiite scholars or hadiths that mentioned all four sources together, except for a hadith attributed to Imam al-Kāẓim (a). This hadith had a *mursal* (omitted) chain of transmission and was cited in the book *al-Ikhtisāṣ*, which is attributed to al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, as well as in al-Ḥarrānī's *Tuḥaf al-'uqūl*. Subsequently, this hadith was cited in later sources such as *Wasā'il al-Shī'a* and *Biḥār al-anwār* (see Mufīd 1414 AH, 58; Ḥarrānī 1404 AH, 408; Majlisī 1403 AH, 48:123, quoting *al-Ikhtisāṣ* with reference to a quote by *Kitāb al-istidrāk*, written by an anonymous author, from Hārūn ibn Mūsā al-Talla'ukbarī; Ḥurr al-'Āmilī 1412 AH, 18:73). On these accounts, a detailed conversation took place between Hārūn al-Rashīd, the Abbasid Caliph, and Imam al-Kāẓim (a) within the former's royal court. Towards the conclusion of their exchange, the Caliph requested the Imam to provide a concise and comprehensive remark that encompasses the fundamental principles and ancillaries derived from the teachings of Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). In response, the Imam penned the following words: "In the name of Allah, the all-compassionate, the all-merciful. The entirety of worldly affairs can be distilled to two (as noted in the quote from *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*, it reads 'the affairs of religions are four') ..." According to *al-Ikhtisāṣ*, the Imam articulates a distinction: There are certain matters that evoke unanimous agreement, born out of the consensus of the nation and the convergence of reliable traditions. On the other hand, there are matters that give rise to doubts. In such cases, it is imperative to seek clarification from those in positions of authority, as their explanations are irrefutable and must be accepted. These explanations are rooted in the Quran, where there exists a consensus on its interpretation, or in Prophetic traditions that are universally accepted, or in analogies that are rationally just. When this is not the case, both experts and laypeople have the freedom to doubt or question these matters. This principle encompasses a wide spectrum, ranging from the doctrine of monotheism to the assessment of compensation for minor injuries, such as scratches (*arsh al-khadsh*).

Three. While there is a broad consensus regarding the sources of religious knowledge in Islam, there are notable disputes among Islamic denominations and the scholars affiliated with them concerning the interpretation and finer details of

these sources. Moreover, varying perspectives exist regarding the identification and authentic status of each of these four sources. For example, within the perspective of hadith-oriented Sunni scholars, the sources are primarily limited to the Quran, the Sunna, and consensus, with the Sunna holding a position of priority over the Quran. In this view, reason is not regarded as a prominent source. Within the Shiite community, a comparable viewpoint can be observed among Akhbarists, who hold a stance that is often seen as stricter and more constrained. According to al-Shaykh Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī, Akhbarists primarily believe in only one of these four sources, or more precisely speaking, only one part of one of them: the hadiths narrated from Shiite Imams.³

Four. When discussing the sources used to deduce and infer religious views, we should focus on the issues that are pertinent to their status as sources. For instance, although there may be numerous issues and areas of study related to the Quran, only some of them are relevant when considering it as a source of religious knowledge. Regarding the Quran as a source, there are three crucial issues to consider: the absence of distortions in the Quran,⁴ the authoritativeness of its apparent meanings (*ḥujjiyyat al-ẓawāhir*), and the overall (all-things-considered) authority of the Quran in relation to hadiths. When it comes to the Sunna or tradition, several issues are relevant, including the authoritativeness of the Prophetic tradition, as well as the traditions of the Infallible Imams within the Shiite perspective and that of the Prophet's companions or Ṣaḥāba within the Sunni viewpoint. Other significant issues include the demarcation of multiple-transmitter (*mutawātir*) hadiths, the authoritative status of single-transmitter hadiths (*khabar al-wāḥid*), the reliable types of single-transmitter hadiths, and the authoritative status of the books of hadiths. With regard to reason, several issues are pertinent, including a semantic analysis of reason in both its general and specialized uses, particularly in religious texts. Other important areas of consideration include the possible and plausible uses of reason, as well as the relationship between reason and religious textual evidence. As for consensus, there are several critical issues to consider, including its definition, the origin of its authoritativeness, and the methods used to discover and verify the existence of consensus on a particular issue. These issues are commonly explored within Islamic theology (*kalām*), the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and Quranic and hadith sciences.

Five. The objective of this research is twofold. Firstly, it aims to examine the Twelver Shiite perspective on the origin and status of sources of religious knowledge. Secondly, it aims to highlight the shared consensus between Shiite and Sunni Muslims regarding these sources. While some Shias and Sunnis may have attempted to exaggerate the denominational differences and unique aspects of

Shiism, it is my belief that Muslims share common ground not only in terms of their doctrinal and practical tenets and pillars (*athāfī*, as in some hadiths) of their faith but also with regards to the sources of their religious knowledge. If there are divergences in details or applications, they do not undermine the strong shared foundation. Moreover, individuals who are well-versed in the history of Islamic diversity and the evolution of Islamic thought recognize that disagreements exist within each denomination. If these differences, even those pertaining to methodology and fundamental issues, were to jeopardize religious solidarity, it would have a comparable impact on the cohesion of every denomination.

1. The Quran

Shiite Muslims hold the belief that God sent multiple prophets, along with various scriptures, to provide guidance to humanity. The Quran is considered the final scripture in this series. Without these prophets and scriptures, individuals would be at risk of straying from the path towards happiness as well as knowledge and worship of God. Islamic faith encompasses the belief in all scriptures: “All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers” (Q 2:285). The Quran serves as evidence of Muhammad's prophethood, providing a blueprint for leading a fulfilling human life and guiding individuals towards the best path: “guides to that which is most suitable” (Q 17:9). It elucidates all that leads to guidance and happiness: “We have sent down to you the Book as clarification for all things” (Q 16:89). As humans have a fundamental goal in life, which is to attain happiness, it is imperative to strive towards this objective. However, this is unfeasible without a blueprint that aligns with both the book of existence (i.e., innate nature and creation) and the compiled book (i.e., the scriptures). The Quran provides a blueprint for human guidance, in which knowledge of God, resurrection, and prophets plays a pivotal role. It further highlights praiseworthy moral conducts that align with this knowledge, followed by practical laws that safeguard true human happiness (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1353 SH, 17). Transcendent good beliefs reach a pinnacle when coupled with righteous actions: “To Him ascends good speech, and righteous work raises it” (Q 35:10). According to Imam 'Alī, the first Shiite Imam, the Quran is a speaker who never falters and a house whose pillars never crumble (*Nahj al-Balagha*, sermon 133). Moreover, he describes the Quran as a book through which one sees, speaks, and hears. One part of it speaks and testifies for the other. It does not create differences about Allah nor does it mislead its own follower from God (*Nahj al-Balagha*, sermon 133). He further characterizes the Quran as advisor who never deceives, a leader who never misguides, and a speaker who never lies. By taking the Quran as a companion, individuals will have more guidance and less misguidance. The Quran is all-

encompassing, and nothing else is needed to supplement it. Conversely, without the Quran, nothing will satisfy (*Nahj al-Balagha*, sermon 176). In another sermon (198), Imam ‘Alī enumerates forty-two characteristics of the Quran.

Imam ‘Alī urges his followers not to lag behind in acting upon the Quran (*Nahj al-Balagha*, letter 47) and to seek guidance from it, respecting what it permits and forbids (letter 69). Although he believes that the Quran is the ultimate arbiter, he acknowledges that it requires an interpreter since it is mute (*Nahj al-Balagha*, sermon 125). Imam ‘Alī prohibits the use of the Quran in specific debates, instead calling to the Prophetic tradition (letter 77, addressed to Ibn ‘Abbās in his encounter with Kharijites). However, he does acknowledge that the Quran can serve as evidence when invoked in a debate (sermon 198). Imam ‘Alī considers the Quran as a comprehensive book that comprises information from the past and present, and can act as an arbitrator in settling disputes between people (*Nahj al-Balagha*, hadith no. 313). Additionally, he believes that the Quran encompasses all virtues and rulings (sermon 1).

The Quran is a book of monotheism that rejects any notion of God's resemblance to creatures or corporealism about Him (“There is nothing like unto Him” [Q 42:11], “Exalted is Allah above what they describe” [Q 37:159], “to Him belong the best names. Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting Him. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise” [Q 59:24]). That said, the Quran does not advocate total negation of ascribing attributes to God, as there are many verses in which God is described with attributes that are not distinct from His essence. Further, the Quran underscores the rejection of predetermination of human acts (*jabr*) and affirms human free will (“There has come to you enlightenment from your Lord. So whoever will see does so for [the benefit of] his soul, and whoever is blind [does harm] against it. And I am not a guardian over you” [Q 6:104], “Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned” [Q 2:286], “Whoever does a good deed - it is for himself; and whoever does evil - it is against the self” [Q 45:15], “Indeed, this is a reminder, so he who wills may take to his Lord a way” [Q 76:29]). Still, it underlines God’s absolute power and providence (“And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is over all things competent” [Q 3:109], “And if Allah should touch you with adversity, there is no remover of it except Him; and if He intends for you good, then there is no repeller of His bounty. He causes it to reach whom He wills of His servants. And He is the Forgiving, the Merciful” [Q 10:107]).

Shiite hadiths recapitulate these Quranic verses as a middle way between predetermination and total delegation (*tafwīd*) of everything to humans, or “the

thing between two things” (Kulaynī 1389 AH, 1:160). Regarding divine attributes: “people adopt three approaches to monotheism: that of establishing [the attributes] with anthropomorphism, that of total negation, and that of establishing [the attributes] without anthropomorphism, and the last is the right path” (‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Ḥasanī in the presence of Imam al-Hādī) (Ṣadūq 1357 SH, 101).

Overall, the Quran is a universal book that addresses all people, regardless of their religion, endeavoring to unite them around the message of monotheism. The Quran is a comprehensive roadmap that leads to the truth, encompassing the laws of previous prophets. It is an independent and enlightening guide that addresses everyone, urging individuals to reflect on its verses. However, it refers people to the Prophet and Infallible Imams to gain knowledge of the details of the laws, but its general principles can be comprehended by everyone. The Quran has an interior and an exterior, foundational (*muḥkamāt*) and unspecific (*mutashābihāt*) verses, an interpretation and a revelation, as well as abrogating (*nāsikh*) and abrogated (*mansūkh*) verses. Moreover, it always calls people to learn and think (for more, see Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1353 SH).

1.1. Distortion of the Quran

There are various ways in which the distortion of the Quran can be perceived. One such way is semantic distortion, which involves interpreting and acting upon Quranic verses against their true intentions or against the interpretations that have been definitively transmitted from Shiite Imams. A significant example of this is altering priorities and downplaying certain Quranic values. Such distortions are often the least costly tactics employed by cunning opponents of a religion who find themselves unsuccessful in eradicating it altogether. This phenomenon is not unique to Islam but is present in all religious traditions.⁵

The other type of distortion is verbal, which involves altering the combinations and orders of words in the scripture, or the *i‘rāb* (inflections and grammatical roles) of its individual terms, along with the structures of some of its words, or even omission of some of its letters and words. However, these modifications do not significantly alter the meanings of the Quran. According to Shiite Imams, in such cases, the Quran should continue to be recited using the established and renowned recitations, and the consensus of Muslims over its recitations should not be broken.⁶ In some cases, modifications are made to the Quran to the extent of omitting or adding a verse or a phrase, which significantly distorts the meanings of the Quran. It is crucial to take a clear stance on this issue. However, no recognized figure in the Islamic world maintains the view that anything was added to the Quran.⁷ When it comes to distortion by omission of phrases or verses from the Quran, there are a few Shiite scholars who believe in such distortion. However,

among Sunni Muslims, there is no known figure who believes in such distortion. Nevertheless, some hadiths in Sunni sources mention instances of allegedly omitted Quranic verses, the like of which is not found in Shiite hadiths.⁸ Fortunately, today and even throughout history, the prevailing and well-established view among all Islamic denominations is, and has been, the rejection of Quranic distortion and the defense of the authenticity of the current text of the Quran. In recent decades, both senior and younger Shiite scholars have produced valuable scholarly works to demonstrate that Shias do not endorse the notion of Quranic distortion.⁹

There is an abundance of evidence from the Quran and Hadiths (as well as reason and consensus) that refute Quranic distortion. This evidence is so compelling that senior scholars, such as Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Khomeini, have labeled the idea of Quranic distortion as a myth.¹⁰ The Quran refers to itself as *muhaymin*, meaning dominant or protecting, and reminds believers of God's promise to safeguard the Quran. It also describes itself as a revelation free from doubts and prolixity, and as a book that cannot be tampered with. There is a wealth of evidence from Hadiths that supports the authenticity of the Quran and disproves the notion of Quranic distortion. Such evidence includes Hadith al-Thaqalayn (the two weighty things), those that emphasize the necessity of evaluating hadiths by the Quran, numerous hadiths that highlight the elevated status of the Quran and the importance of memorizing, reciting, inscribing, listening to, and seeking healing from it. There are other rebuttals against Quranic distortion. For instance, Shiite Imams often referenced the Quran and encouraged their companions to consult it. Furthermore, the Quran's esteemed status as a miraculous book and its role as a comprehensive guide, combined with the conclusive finality of the Islamic faith, fundamentally contradict any notions of Quranic distortion. One of the most significant reasons that refute the notion of Quranic distortion is the frequent transmission of the Quran throughout history. As al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā puts it, our knowledge of the authenticity of the Quran is similar to our knowledge of the existence of major cities and historical events, which is acquired through frequent transmissions and reports (1411 AH, 361).

1.2. Authoritativeness of apparent meanings of the Quran

It is undeniable that people rely on and appeal to the apparent or surface-level meanings of words, both in the case of primary appearances and in the case of secondary appearances based on reliable external evidence. This applies to the words of God in the Quran, which were expressed using conventions of communication that align with common sense understanding. That being said, Akhbarist Shias dismiss reliance on apparent meanings in all situations or in non-

definitive theoretical debates. They believe it is necessary to refer to hadiths from the Shiite Imams for guidance. If there is no applicable hadith available to interpret a Quranic verse, it is advised to refrain from making any interpretations (see Astarābādī 1426 AH, 90; Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī 1423 AH, 176, 139, 147; Samāhījī 1419 AH, 203). In their view, the Quran was revealed as an ambiguous text, and its main audience consists in the Prophet's Household or Ahl al-Bayt. They cite several reasons for this claim, including: references to hadiths indicating that only the Shiite Imams can truly comprehend the Quran; the prohibition of acting upon unspecified (*mutashābihāt*) verses of the Quran without knowing which ones they are; the assumptive or speculative (*ẓannī*) nature of meanings and the prohibition of relying on mere assumptions; the prohibition of arbitrary interpretations of the Quran according to hadiths; and the widespread understanding that many general and unqualified statements in the Quran are not to be taken at face value.

In contrast, mainstream Shiite scholars have highlighted that hadiths referring to the Shiite Imams as the intended audience of the Quran primarily pertain to comprehending the deeper meanings of its verses. They argue that if the Quran were inaccessible to the wider public, it would be challenging for people to recognize its miraculous nature and for the Quran to serve as the foundation for the authenticity of the Sunna. Moreover, it would raise questions about its relevance as a primary source of religious guidance. In regards to the second point, if the presence of unspecified verses in the Quran were to render the reliance on apparent meanings of all verses impermissible, then the recourse to hadiths from the Imams would also be problematic, as they themselves have acknowledged the existence of unspecified and vague statements in their own hadiths. In fact, given the presumed apparent meanings of Quranic verses, the concept of unspecified verses becomes nonsensical. Moreover, if assumptive or speculative denotation of verses were deemed problematic, then the same issue would extend to hadiths as well. It is inevitable to rely on certain assumptions, particularly if they are supported by ensuring evidence. In addition, interpretations of Quranic verses based on their apparent or surface-level meanings are not an instance of an arbitrary interpretation. The latter is to interpret by relying on analogies, personal discretions (*istiḥsān*), and the like. The ordinary way of an understanding such verses does not count as an arbitrary interpretation. Finally, a survey of Quranic verses dissolves the indeterminate knowledge that many of its general and unqualified states are not to be taken at face value.

On the other hand, there are reasons why it is permissible for everyone to rely on the apparent meanings of the Quran, including: Hadith al-Thaqalayn, which establishes both the Quran and the Prophet's Household as sources of religious knowledge; frequently transmitted hadiths that assert the Quran as the criterion

for the validity of other hadiths; hadiths that suggest the Quran should be consulted to resolve conflicts between different hadiths; hadiths that advocate for turning to the Quran during times of sedition; examples of Shiite Imams citing the Quran in debates; and the Quran's status as a book of reflection and clarification, as well as its miraculous nature.

1.3. The ultimate authority of the Quran

Due to the frequent narratives about referring hadiths to the Quran and dismissing those that are incompatible with it as false and worthless, Shiite scholars have long emphasized the ultimate authority of the Quran. Despite any methodological differences, prominent scholars such as al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, al-Shaykh al-Kulaynī, and al-Shaykh al-Mufīd have all agreed that the Quran serves as the criterion for the validity of hadiths. Therefore, any hadiths that conflict with the Quran should not be attributed to Shiite Imams.¹¹ Akhbarist Shias hold a different view compared to the mainstream Shia scholars. They give more weight to the hadiths from the Prophet's Household. As a result, they oppose the idea of the Quran being the ultimate authority on religious matters, which puts them in a similar position as the Sunni People of Hadith.¹²

2. Sunna

2.1. Definition and origin of authority

The term "Sunna" or tradition refers to the words, actions, and approvals of an infallible individual, namely the Prophet in the Sunni perspective, and both the Prophet and Shiite Imams in the Shia perspective. However, much of the discussion surrounding Sunna pertains to its transmission. While the term "Sunna" is sometimes used more broadly to refer to its transmission, the latter is more accurately referred to as the "transmitted Sunna."

There is no disagreement among Muslims as to the authoritativeness of the Prophetic tradition, although there was a dispute over the permissibility of writing or transcribing the Prophet's words even during his lifetime, as reflected in Abū Muḥammad al-Dārimī's *Sunan* (see its section on those who did not permit the writing of hadiths [Dārimī 1978, 119] and the section on those who allowed the writing of knowledge [Dārimī 1978, 125]). Conversely, there is no consensus on the authoritative status of the tradition of Shiite Imams, either as an independent source of religious knowledge alongside the Prophetic tradition or as transmitters of the Prophetic tradition whose transmission must be accepted. Similarly, there is debate over the reliability of the words and actions of the Prophet's companions or *Ṣaḥāba*. Shias maintain the authority of their Infallible Imams in interpreting both

the Quran and the Sunna and in defining the religious doctrines, jurisprudential obligations, and moral requirements. They regard others, including the *Ṣaḥāba*, their subsequent generation called the *Tābi‘ūn*, and later generations, as mere transmitters of the Prophetic tradition, whose reliability is contingent on meeting certain conditions.¹³

The theory that all *Ṣaḥāba* are righteous and authoritative, such that all of their words carry weight, is not endorsed by the Imami Shias (see Ḥārithī 1382 SH, 37, 459).

Some individuals hold the view that the authenticity of a tradition attributed to the Prophet can be established through evidence, and therefore, they accept hadiths transmitted by members of other denominations if they are supported by such evidence. However, later scholars who emphasize the conditions of the transmitter and the categorization of hadiths into four categories (*ṣaḥīḥ*, *muwaththaq*, *ḥasan*, and *ḍa‘īf*) do not necessarily agree on the authenticity of hadiths transmitted by members of other denominations, even if they are classified as *muwaththaq*.¹⁴

However, some Sunni scholars subscribe to the notion that the words of the *Ṣaḥāba* carry authority, often as a means of revealing the Prophetic tradition, and sometimes as a component of the Sunna. This is supported by the theory that all *Ṣaḥāba* are righteous, as well as hadiths from the Prophet emphasizing the necessity of following the tradition of the *Ṣaḥāba*. However, according to reports, most Ash‘arites, Mu‘tazilites, Shāfi‘īs, and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal do not agree with this view (for further information, see Hobballah 2011, 351-68).

The foundation of the authoritative status of the Prophetic tradition can be traced back to certain verses in the Quran. There are eight groups of Quranic verses that are considered relevant to this issue. Some argue that the infallibility of the Prophet serves as evidence for the reliability of his tradition. However, this argument would only be valid if the Prophet's infallibility is established by means other than the Prophetic tradition. If his infallibility can be established, the authoritative status of the Prophetic tradition would have a stronger foundation, and its scope would be considerably wider. Moreover, establishing the authoritativeness of the Sunna based on the infallibility of the Prophet would also expand the scope of the Sunna to encompass the tradition of the Infallible Shiite Imams. However, Imami Shias resort to alternative methods for establishing the authoritative status of the Prophetic tradition, such as hadiths from the Prophet, consensus, and the religious practices of Muslims (for more on this see Hobballah 2011, 57-124).

Currently, there are individuals who subscribe to the belief that the Quran alone is sufficient and that the Prophetic tradition is dispensable, or even unreliable,

based on historical notions or evidence from the Prophetic tradition (for more, see Hobballah 2011, 229-320).

Shias have attempted to use evidence from the Quran to establish the authoritative status of the tradition of their Infallible Imams. However, since there is no explicit Quranic verse on the matter, they have had to rely on interpretative or exegetical hadiths. Such hadiths can only serve as evidence if they are transmitted from the Prophet; therefore, the primary evidence will be hadiths rather than the Quran. The main basis for the authoritative status of the tradition of Shiite Imams is formed by these hadiths, as well as other hadiths from the Prophet, including Hadith al-Thaqalayn. Additionally, the proof of infallibility, which depends on reason, the al-Tathīr Verse (Q 33:33), and similar factors, also supports the authoritative status of this tradition.

There are individuals who use hadiths from Shiite Imams to demonstrate that their words carry authority not as an independent tradition, but rather as reliable transmissions of the Prophetic tradition. Therefore, whatever they say, even if it is not explicitly attributed to the Prophet, is considered a reliable transmission (with or without a transmission chain) from the Prophet. This account needs to be supplemented by the doctrine of the infallibility of the Imams in order to be able to explain their exclusive authority for religious knowledge, since otherwise there is no reason to accept all of their hadiths, both with and without transmission chains, and to prefer their transmissions to those of others, including *Ṣaḥāba* and *Tābi‘ūn*. Nevertheless, it seems that if the infallibility of the Imams is acknowledged, there will be no need for explaining the authoritative of their hadiths as reliable transmissions of the Prophet's tradition. Furthermore, there is another issue with this account: it cannot account for hadiths that cannot be considered transmissions of the Prophet's tradition due to their context. If we accept this account, we must either discredit these hadiths or consider them as infallible instances of *ijtihād*, which must be followed. In this case, we would need to resort to the doctrine of infallibility once again.

2.2. Multiple-transmitter hadiths

Al-Shahīd al-Thānī categorizes hadiths into those that are known to be true, those that are known to be false, and those that are unknown as to their truth or falsity. He further divides knowledge of the truth of a hadith into two types: necessary knowledge and theoretical knowledge. In some cases, we can attain certainty through theories and arguments, which may include the words of God, the Prophet, or the Imams (in the case of the Shiite view), as well as the consensus of the nation or frequency by import (i.e., *al-tawātur al-ma‘nawī*)—that is, a hadith surrounded

by evidence. In other cases, we can immediately attain certainty when there is verbal frequency (*al-tawātur al-lafzī*) of reports.¹⁵

In addition to the consensus that multiple-transmitter hadiths confer knowledge, there is general agreement on the definition of such hadiths. For a hadith to be considered multiple-transmitter, its transmitters must be so numerous that the possibility of collusion (and according to later scholars, their identical error) over a false report is ruled out. It should be noted that just like other self-evident certainties, being trapped in radical skepticism or biased imitations may prevent frequent transmissions from yielding certainty, but this does not necessarily undermine the reliability of multiple-transmitter hadiths. However, when frequent transmission of a report is based on imitation or speculation, it cannot be considered a reliable source of knowledge. Furthermore, it is believed that frequent transmission must be proven across all generations of transmitters,¹⁶ which makes it all the more challenging to achieve frequent transmissions of a tradition that dates back to centuries ago. Al-Shahīd al-Thānī believes that such verbal frequency is abundant in the tenets of religion such as the obligation of daily prayers and Hajj, but holds that there are few cases of such frequency when it comes to the details of religious ancillaries (1382 SH, 160).¹⁷

2.3. Single-transmitter hadiths

Khabar al-wāḥid (plural form: *akhbār al-āḥād*) and *al-khabar al-wāḥid* (plural form: *al-akhbār al-āḥād*) are types of hadiths that we refer to as "single-transmitter hadiths/reports." These are hadiths that have a number of transmitters that are lower than the degree of frequency (*tawātur*). It is generally agreed that such hadiths cannot confer knowledge by themselves.¹⁸ However, regarding its authoritativeness, some Shiite scholars such as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd and al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā believe that "single-narrator hadiths do not yield knowledge, nor action." Accordingly, they cannot be relied on neither with respect to religious doctrines and beliefs, nor with respect to jurisprudential and practical rulings. In his *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra* (which is summary of his *al-Uyūn wa-l-maḥāsīn* by al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā), al-Shaykh al-Mufīd clarifies that single-narrator hadiths are not authoritative for religious beliefs and actions against rational necessities and sensory observations, even if they are transmitted or reported by thousands of people (1413a AH, 307). In his *al-Jumal*, however, he permits appealing to single-transmitter hadiths that are not denied by opponents (1371 SH, 83). In his *Awā'il al-maqālāt*, he reiterates the idea that such hadiths should be dismissed as unreliable for knowledge and action, but asserts that most Shias believe that such hadiths could confer certainty if accompanied by evidence (1413 AH, 57).

Al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā emphasizes that single-transmitter hadiths do not confer knowledge nor do they serve as grounds of action, clarifying that at most they yield a speculation or assumption (1376 SH, 2:517). When it comes to speculations or assumptions (*ẓunūn*), we need a religious permission to rely on them, but we have not found it in this case. He attributes this position to all Imami Shias (see 1405 AH, 203; also see 1405 AH, 309 [the essay on “Ibtāl al-‘amal bi-akhbār al-āḥād”]). There have been those (such as Ibn Qiba) who believed that acting upon single-transmitter reports is rationally impossible (see Sayyid al-Murtaḍā 1405 AH). Like his teacher al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā held that such hadiths could be acted on if there is corroborating evidence in their favor, which is the case when Shiite scholars acted on such hadiths (1405 AH, 21, in the essay “al-Tabāniyyāt”).¹⁹ On the one hand, al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā believes that many jurisprudential rulings rely on single-transmitter hadiths transmitted by unacceptable transmitters,²⁰ and on the other hand, he believes that the Shiite practice is unproblematic because most of their jurisprudential rulings are based on frequently transmitted hadiths or consensus (1405 AH, 312).²¹ So far, it turns out that al-Shaykh al-Mufīd and al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā maintained that it is permissible to act upon single-transmitter hadiths if there is further evidence (except the transmitter’s reliability or its citation in valid sources); otherwise, it is not a valid source of knowledge (Sayyid al-Murtaḍā 1405 AH, 2:17, 30).

Shortly after, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī opened a space for reliance on single-transmitter hadiths in jurisprudence (not beliefs) even if they are not corroborated by external evidence.²² This paved the path for jurisprudential reliance on single-transmitter hadiths that are not surrounded by corroborating evidence provided that certain conditions are met. Nonetheless, Shiite scholars in the Levant, Rey, and Hillah whose academic pedigree went back to al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā still tended to dismiss single-transmitter hadiths that are not corroborated by external evidence. This position was later called the position of earlier scholars. Later scholars adopted a more lenient approach to single-transmitter hadiths because of the “closure of the doors of knowledge” (as noted in Naṣīrābādī Naqawī Hindī 1382 SH, 2:394), because of certain Quranic and hadith-based evidence, or because of the practice of much earlier scholars who preceded the scholars of Baghdad in maintaining and compiling single-transmitter hadiths. However, before the advent of Akhbarism, use of such hadiths was confined to jurisprudence and practical issues, rather than religious doctrines. In his *al-Wajīza*, al-Shaykh al-Bahāī acknowledges that such hadiths merely yield assumptions, rather than knowledge, but he adds:

Later scholars have acted upon these hadiths, but al-Murtaḍā, Ibn Zuhra, Ibn al-Barrāj, Ibn Idrīs, and most early scholars have dismissed them. The debate is

open on both sides, and upon reflection it may turn out that later scholars are closer to the truth. (Bahā'ī 1382 SH, 541)

He goes on to mention al-Ṭūsī's view of the matter and objections raised to it by some of the later scholars (perhaps he refers to Shahīd al-Thānī 1382 SH, 172). The objection is that in his *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, al-Ṭūsī sometimes relies on a single-transmitter hadith and sometimes dismisses it, but al-Shaykh al-Bahā'ī rejects this objection in terms of al-Ṭūsī's methodology.

2.4. Types of single-transmitter hadiths

It is widely known that early Shiite and Sunni scholars divided single-transmitter hadiths into reliable and unreliable. The division was not merely grounded in transmitters' characteristics, but also in the overall evidence that could establish the authoritativeness or non-authoritativeness of hadiths.²³ According to the majority view, the first person who introduced the four-type classification was al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī. He divided single-transmitter hadiths into *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound), *ḥasan* (good), *muwaththaq* (authenticated) or *qawī* (strong), and *ḍa'īf* (weak or unreliable). Prior to him, Sunni scholars of hadiths had introduced a new classification. The first Sunni scholar who introduced the four kinds of hadiths was al-Tirmidhī in his hadith collection. However, they *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, and *ḍa'īf*.²⁴

2.5. Authoritative status of hadith books

Despite the split over the permissibility of writing the Prophet's exegetical hadiths since his own lifetime (see Dārimī 1978, 118, 125), Muslims always recorded and transmitted hadiths. In his *Tārīkh al-turāth al-'Arabī*, Fuat Sezgin has recorded more than sixty books of hadiths, which were written in the first Islamic century (1991, 1:153).²⁵ Among the Shias, both Imams and their companions were dedicated to hadith writing.²⁶

Mālik (d. 179 AH) wrote the first hadith collection known as *Muwatta'*, but the trend of hadith writing and compilation of hadith collections began in the third Islamic century. This resulted in the creation of the six famous hadith collections of Sunni Muslims. Among the Shias, however, compilation and writing of hadiths began in the second and third centuries, initially by the so-called *uṣūl* (sources) and then by primitive hadith collections, particularly al-Barqī's *al-Maḥāsin* and Ṣaffār's *al-Baṣā'ir*. It was established in the fourth century by al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī* (d. 329 AH) and al-Ṣadūq's (d. 381 AH) *Man la-yaḥḍuruh al-faqīh* and *Madīnat al-'ilm* (the latter, which was larger than the former, was available until the time of al-Shaykh al-Bahā'ī's father who spoke of "our five books" but it then disappeared). These were followed by al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's (d. 460 AH) *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār*.

Since the beginning, there were controversies over how to treat these hadith sources and compilations. Shiite scholars of Baghdad accused those of Qom of blindly following these books and their transmitters (see Mufid 1414c AH, 49). Al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā reproached the Shiite people of hadith as follows:

Some of them are misled by certain single-transmitter hadiths into predetermination [of human actions] (*jabr*) or anthropomorphism about God. These ignorant people make recourse to hadiths that they did not transmit themselves, nor have they heard them from their transmitters to know about their righteousness and other characteristics. Even when they are told why they maintain such and such a ruling, they say because we have found it in the books attributed to such and such a person. (Murtaḍā 1405 AH, 212)

In his view, it is impermissible to act upon Shiite hadith collections without examining their hadiths one by one:

We do not know any Shiite scholar who acts on these books without further corroboration by other evidence. Everyone who does this is a layperson who follows others about the religious doctrines as well. He follows these books not only with regard to jurisprudential rulings but also with regard to monotheism, divine justice, prophethood, and Imamate. (Murtaḍā 1405 AH, 333)

An independent study is required to appraise this view of Shiite people of hadith, particularly the scholars of Qom, but it should be noted that al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (a prominent scholar of Qom) did not believe in unquestionable reliability of the hadiths he or his fellows had compiled. Ayatollah Khomeini has conducted a helpful study of the issue in the introduction of his *Muʿjam rijāl al-ḥadīth* (1413 AH, 1:27).

Among the Shias, the only scholars who believe that all hadiths cited in the four hundred *uṣūl* (sources), the Four Books, and even dozens of other hadith collections are unquestionably reliable are Akhbarist scholars. In his *al-Fawāʾid al-madaniyya*, al-Astarābādī presents four arguments for the indubitable reliability of all Shiite books of hadiths (1426 AH, 371). Al-Shaykh al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī devoted a section of the eighteenth volume of his *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa* to the necessity of acting upon the hadiths of the Prophet and Imams as cited in the reliable books as well as their transmission and soundness (1412 AH, 18:52). In the same book, he says that all hadiths in the sources he used for this book (which amount to more than one hundred) are sound and reliable, and then presents eighteen arguments for this claim (1412 AH, 20:36, 96).²⁷ Usulist Shiite scholars, both in the early version and in the later anti-Akhbarist version, never believe in the reliability and soundness of all hadiths cited in valid Shiite books of hadiths. They hold that each hadith should be individually evaluated in terms of their chains of transmission, implications, and their compatibility with reason and the Quran.

2.6. Contradictory hadiths

A main concern of the guardians of the Shiite thought in Baghdad was to deal with apparently contradictory hadiths. In the opening of his *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī says, “there is no hadith that does not have a contradictory hadith ... and our opponents have used this to deride our denomination.” He goes on to quote his teacher al-Shaykh al-Mufīd that Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Hārūnī (Mu’ayyad bi-Allāh al-Hārūnī the Imam of Zaydis) was an Imami scholar, but due to such contradictory hadiths, he became confused and then departed Imami Shiism. However, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd believed that this was a result of his non-inquisitive non-insightful faith, stating that disputes over secondary rulings does not legitimize the abandonment of the well-established principles of belief (Ṭūsī 1364 SH, 1:2-3). Later, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī wrote his book *al-Istibṣār* as a summary of *Tahdhīb*, with the aim of resolving contradictory hadiths. According to his approach, in cases of contradiction, the hadith with more righteous transmitters and a greater number of transmitters should be given preference. If these factors are equal, then the two hadiths should be reconciled by interpreting one of them away. If both could be interpreted, then the one with a narrative piece of evidence should be relied upon. Otherwise, it would be up to individuals to determine which hadith to act upon (see Ṭūsī 1363 SH, 1:4). Prior to him, his teacher al-Shaykh al-Mufīd devoted a section of his *Taṣḥīḥ al-i’tiqād* to contradictory hadiths, referring to the practice of Shias, citation by senior scholars of hadith, and compatibility with the Quran and reason as grounds of preferring one hadith to another (1414c, 147).²⁸ Al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā criticizes the use of contrasting the position of the opponents of the Shia denomination as a criterion for preferring a hadith (1405 AH, 213).²⁹ Later scholars were more dedicated to identify reconciliations between contradictory hadiths and how to prefer one hadith to another under the title “balances and preferences.” When no reconciliation or preference is possible, then they dismiss both contradictory hadiths (see Muẓaffar 1405 AH, 198).³⁰

3. Reason

3.1. Semantics

The word *‘aql* (reason or intellect) is not used in the Quran, but other Arabic synonyms of the word are used, including *nuhā*, *ḥijr*, *lubb*, and *qalb* (where it is used in the sense of reason, rather than heart). Moreover, cognates of *‘aql* (e.g., its verb forms) were frequently used in the Quran. ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī speaks of more than three hundred Quranic verses about reasoning (1971, 5:254). In hadiths, particularly those from Shiite Imams, reason is widely discussed. In all of these texts, reason is used to mean both a cognitive power that reflects and does

reasoning and an acting (sometimes inhibiting) power, which counts as a personality character associated with experience. To use the terminology of Muslim philosophers, both theoretical reason and especially practical reason occur in Islamic texts. Al-ʿAllāma al-Majlisī refers to the six notions of reason (which seems to derive from the work of his teacher al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī in *al-Wāfī*, who was in turn influenced by Mullā Ṣadrā's *Sharḥ ahādīth al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl*), and then states that reason is used to refer to two notions in hadiths, although they could ultimately boil down to one notion: the cognitive power or faculty for discerning good and evil and knowledge of causes and effects, which is the criterion of religious obligations, and an inner character that calls to the choice of the good and avoidance of evils, giving the person a power of continence against sexual and other desires (1403 AH, 1:101). Sometimes, reason refers to intelligibles (rather than the cognitive or inhibitive power) and an autonomous spiritual source of knowledge, which is distinct from humans (referred to by Muslim philosophers as the Active Intellect, which is not acceptable for al-Majlisī). In Islamic texts, reason is associated with knowledge, learning, shame, patience, light, religion, obligation, worship, morality, and refinement of moral characters.

3.2. Possible applications of reason in religion

Broadly speaking there are two general approaches in every religion: rationalism and scripturalism (exemplified in Islam by hadithism and Zahirīyya). The extent of rationalism or scripturalism adopted by an individual or a denomination or movement can be measured by its view of the scope of reason and religious texts when understanding religious propositions. We should therefore identify the maximum capacity of reason in scripturalist religions: reason as an origin of the authoritativeness and legitimacy of a religion; reason as a source of religious knowledge; reason an instrument for deducing or proving a religious proposition; reason as evidence (for accepting or preferring one of the two contradictory hadiths or favoring a non-apparent meaning of a text to its apparent meaning, or the so-called theological interpretation) (see Shariatmadari 1393 SH).³¹ Within Shiism, rationalism reaches a pinnacle in the School of Baghdad, particularly al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā who maintained that reason is a source of religious knowledge independently of transmitted textual evidence. Moreover, he believed that religious obligation begins with reason, rather than prophethood.³²

Both rationalist and scripturalist movements had predecessors in the age of the presence of Shiite Imams. During the time of Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq, and in part of the period of Imām al-Kāzīm and Imām al-Riḍā, rationalists or theologians had the upper hand, while in the third and partly fourth centuries AH, Shiite people of hadiths in Qom had the upper hand. From the time of al-Shaykh al-

Mufid and al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā in the fourth century AH until the middle of the fifth century AH, rationalists prevailed among the Shias. This continued with some ups and downs in the fifth and sixth centuries AH in the Levant and Rey, and from the seventh to the ninth centuries AH in Hillah. During the interval until the advent of Akhbarism in the eleventh century AH, mystically oriented philosophy replaced the theological rationalism, which since Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's period had acquired a philosophical tone. Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī founded the Akhbarist approach, which burgeoned fifty years after his death. This period was the heyday of Shiite scripturalism. It established itself as the most radical scripturalist and hadithist movement within Shiism and perhaps the Islamic world by its total dismissal of reason and consensus as sources of religious knowledge, by undermining and rejecting rational fields of study such as theology (*kalām*), principles of Islamic jurisprudence, logic (to some extent), and philosophy; by rejecting the authoritativeness of apparent meanings of the Quran and the Prophetic tradition unless they were supported by hadiths from Shiite Imams; and by practically confining the sources of knowledge to hadiths from the Prophet's Household while believing in the unquestionable reliability of all known books of Shiite hadiths without a need for a scrutiny of each hadith in those sources (see Astarābādī 1426 AH, and Baḥrānī, n.d., 3:290).

3.3. The place of reason within Shiism and its relation to the Imam

Despite their dedication to the Imam and Imamate, Shias have a rich legacy of reason and rationalism. Al-Kulaynī began his book of hadith, *al-Kāfī*, with the book of reason and ignorance, and in introduction, he explains this as follows: "reason is the pole around which everything moves, and is that with which arguments are made, and is the source of divine rewards as well as punishments." Later, even after the advent of Akhbarism, other compilers of hadiths, including al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī in *al-Wāfī*, al-ʿAllāma al-Majlisī in *Biḥār al-anwār*, and Mullā ʿAbd Allāh al-Baḥrānī in *ʿAwālim al-ʿulūm*, adopted the same method.³³

Perhaps the most significant challenge before scholars in this field is to reconcile the two hadith heritages of Shiism about Imamate and rationality. Six hypotheses have been put forth here:

1. With the existence or knowledge of the Imam, we should not assign any knowledge production role to reason.³⁴ This is the ultimate conclusion of the belief that learning religious doctrines by any means but the Prophet's Household is a denial of the Prophet's Household. It is also implied by Taʿlimi Ismailis who, based on a widely accepted interpretation, maintain that even knowledge of God should be learned from the Prophet and Imams (see the

Arabic translation of Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ's "Four Chapters" in Shahristānī 1364 SH).

2. Distinction between the circumstances of the presence and occultation of Shiite Imams, between availability and unavailability of textual evidence, or between transmitted textual evidence and rational evidence, where in the first horns of these distinctions reason plays no role, but it does in the second horns.³⁵
3. The Imam is a light, while reason is merely a capacity or power that can have the ability to see and know in light of the Imam.³⁶
4. The Imam supports and awakens the buried treasures of reason. On this picture, reason is the main ruler and discoverer, and the Prophet and Imams contribute to activate it. This may be held by those like al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā who believe that religious obligation begins with reason, and reason is both fulfilling and excusing. If a person believes that the main mission of Imams is to provide a full-fledged model of religious values or enforcing them in the society by governance and the like, rather than presenting knowledge or aiding reason, then he thereby gives authority to reason.
5. Reason is the ultimate authority, but it needs to be aided by the Imam as its guide through all the stages. Deprived of such guidance, the functions of reason will be disrupted. Perhaps this is implied by mottos such as "reason is from God" or "from God people reason." This assumption could be reconciled with the admonishing role of the Imam in some cases or the defining function in the case of textual evidence.
6. Since the Infallible figure has the strongest faculty of reasoning, he can flourish the minds of his followers. This is implied by al-Mufīd's words: "reason requires textual evidence in its knowledge and conclusions, and it is not separable from a transmitted text that admonishes the rational person to the manner of reasoning" (1413a AH, 8). This can also be implied by a passage from al-Karājākī quoted before.

4. Consensus

Use of consensus (*ijmāʿ*) in Imami fatwas can be traced back to the early period of Major Occultation of the last Shiite Imam. Perhaps the first person who seriously deployed consensus in the case of religious beliefs was al-Shaykh al-Mufīd. The book, *Awāʿil al-maqālāt*, is a prime example of using all sorts of consensus, including Imam Consensus. Later, al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā frequently used consensus as the main source of peculiar jurisprudential rulings of Imami Shias in his *al-Intiṣār* and *Nāṣiriyyāt*. Imami hadiths do not explicitly confirm the authoritativeness of consensus, except a *mursal* hadith (that is, a discontinuous

hadith in its chain of transmission) from Imam al-Kāzīm, which was mentioned above when we discussed the four sources of deducing religious knowledge.

Consensus was introduced as a source of religious knowledge among Sunni scholars.³⁷ This was theorized by Mu‘tazilites. Due to interactions between Zaydis and Mu‘tazilites, it found its way into Shiism as well, albeit in terms of consensus by the Prophet’s Household. Probably like the principle of divine grace (*lutf*), which was invented by Mu‘tazilites, it infiltrated the Imami literature through Mu‘tazilites and Zaydis. Imami scholars also theorized about consensus by returning it to the tradition of Imams, introducing more than ten ways of establishing the authoritativeness of consensus and its return to the tradition.³⁸

Consensus is sometimes divided into acquired (*muḥaṣṣal*) and reported (*manqūl*), and sometimes into documented (*madrakī*) and non-documented. Al-Tustarī mentions silence-based (*sukūti*) consensus as well (1316 SH, 54). It is also divided in terms of the thing on which there is a consensus (such as an opinion about the principles of beliefs, a fatwa on jurisprudential rulings, and acting upon a hadith). Here we do not delve into explications of these terms and the extend of the reliability of these varieties. What merits discussion here are the origin of contradictory consensuses as well as the origin of consensuses claimed by prominent figures like al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, despite their knowledge of there being few or many opponents. Al-Tustarī accounts for this problem in two ways: unawareness of some Shiite scholars about the views of other scholars in other regions, and what holds true of al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā, downplaying the significance of opposition by people of hadith (like scholars in Qom) or those who relied on analogies (like Ibn Junayad and Yūnus ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān before him, who were accused of deploying analogy in their jurisprudential deductions): “Al-Murtaḍā’s approach was to ... ignore the views of the people of hadith in a consensus” (Tustarī 1316 SH, 58).

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Notes

1. Ibn al-Hilāl al-'Askarī (1408 AH) says in his *al-Awā'il*: "he [i.e. Wāṣil] was the first individual who said: the truth can be known from four directions: the telling book [the Quran], a consensual hadith, the authority of reason, and consensus." Al-Mutawallī al-Barājilī says in *Maṣādir al-tashrī'*: "the sources agreed upon among Sunni Muslims are the Quran, the Sunna, consensus, and analogy" (Barājilī 2010, 37).
2. "The truth does not go beyond these four paths: the book of Allah, the Exalted, or the frequently transmitted and consensual tradition of His apostle, or consensus, or the evidence of reason" (Ibn Idrīs 1411 AH, 1:47).
3. "The strongest distinction ... is that the sources of jurisprudential rulings for mujtahids are four ... but for Akhbarists, they are just the Book and the Sunna. Even some of them have rested content with the Sunna given that the Book may not be interpreted and acted upon unless there is an interpretation of it from Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's Household), peace be upon them" (Baḥrānī, n.d., 3:290).
4. There are those who argue that the belief in the distortion of the Quran does not necessarily undermine its status as a source, in light of the fact that the Shiite Imams have recommended the consultation of the present copy of the Quran (see, for example, Jazā'irī 1401 AH, 68). However, it seems unlikely that one can fully accept the authority and reliability of the Quran while also believing in its distortion. This is especially problematic if we try to establishing this by appealing to hadiths from Shiite Imams, which derive their validity from the Quran itself directly or indirectly (i.e., through Prophetic hadiths).
5. Imam al-Bāqir wrote in a letter to Sa'd al-Khayr: "When a nation abandons its scripture, God deprives it of knowledge of the scripture, and then let them be conquered by their enemies when they succumb to their rule. An instance of their abandonment of the scripture was that they left its words intact but distorted its boundaries ... See the like of them [i.e., People of the Book] in this nation [Muslims] who have left the words intact but distorted the boundaries" (Kulaynī 1389 AH, 8:53).
6. According to a hadith from Imam al-Ṣādiq, "recite the Quran as people do" (Kulaynī 1389 AH, 1:633).
7. The only known exception is a statement by Sayyid Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī, which implies his belief in verses being added to the Quran, but that seems to be a slip of the pen (see 1401 AH, 66).
8. For more, see 'Askari 1374 Sh and Milānī 1394 Sh.
9. For instance, see Khoei 1430 AH, Marefat 2007, Najjarzadegan 1382 Sh, 'Āmili 1410 AH, and Jafarian 1413 AH.

10. Ayatollah Khomeini argues that "from what we have said, it becomes evident for the reader that the notion of Quranic distortion is a myth and fictitious. Only those with weak minds or those who have not sufficiently reflected the issue or those blinded by their love for the idea continue to support it. A rational, fair, and reflective person would not doubt its falsehood" (Khomeini 1430 AH, 259). Imam Khomeini says, "One who is aware of how Muslims cared for the compilation, protection, record, recitation, and inscription of the Quran is aware of the falsity of this claim" (Khomeini 1367 Sh, 2:166).

11. See *al-Kāfi*'s opening (Kulaynī 1389 AH, 1:16, and 1:149 the section on referring to the Book and the Sunna). Also see Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, 1432 AH, 42 (every hadith that is incompatible with the Book of Allah is false, and if it is found in the books by our scholars, then it is fabricated). Moreover, see Shaykh al-Mufid 1414 AH, 44 (the Book of Allah is prior to hadiths, and it is through it that accurate hadiths are identified).

12. See Dārimī 1978, 49 (the Sunna trumps the Quran); 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Mahdī, as quoted by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr in *Jāmi' bayān al-'ilm* (1994, 2:233), which believes that hadiths about the Quran as the criterion of the validity of hadiths were fabricated by Zindiqs and Kharijites; Bayhaqī 1988, 1:26, which dismisses such hadiths.

13. By and large, Shias tend to place their trust in hadiths transmitted by non-Shias only if they are found in Shiite sources and if their transmitters are considered reliable by Shiite scholars. See Shahīd al-Thānī 1382 Sh, 169.

14. See Shahīd al-Thānī 1382 Sh, 173. He cites the Quranic verse of "Naba'" (Q 49:6: "If a vicious character brings you some news, verify it") to argue that the only thing that prevents the acceptability of a hadith is the vicious character of its transmitter. The same thing is held by Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī (1407 AH, 1:29) and Shahīd al-Awwal (1419 AH, 1:49).

15. See Shahīd al-Thānī (1382 Sh, 156-57). He notes at this point that some people such as Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī and al-Ghazālī believe that even knowledge arising from verbal frequency of reports is also theoretical.

16. Some people believe that testimony by later generations as to the frequent transmission of a tradition suffices for the establishment of such transmission in all generations. Rejecting this view, al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā solves the problem as follows: "if frequent transmission does not exist in all generation or the hadith became more common or stronger only later, then such a change could be identified by reference to the transmitters. In their transmission, we could find evidence of when the frequency took place" (1405 AH, 2:339).

17. He believes that many alleged cases of frequent transmission, such as the frequency of transmitted textual evidence for the Imamate of 'Alī are cases of frequency by import. Moreover, he holds that hadiths like "indeed actions are evaluated in terms of their intentions" are not frequently transmitted, and their frequency is something more recent. Moreover, al-Ḥārithī says, "scholars of hadith do not recognize this in hadiths because of its scarcity ... Yes, there are many cases of frequency by import" (1382 Sh, 394). However, he believes that Hadith al-Ghadīr is frequency transmitted among the Shia (1382 Sh, 395).

18. It is claimed that a group of Zahiris and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal considered single-transmitter hadiths as absolutely knowledge-conferring. Ibn Taymiyya says that no rational person can take such hadiths to be knowledge-conferring. Jurists and most theologians tend to believe that such hadiths yield knowledge only if they are accompanied by evidence. See Sulaymān ibn Ṣāliḥ (1396, 165-80). Some others, like al-Bāqilānī, al-Baghdādī, al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazālī, Ghāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, and many other Mu'tazilites, Ḥanafis, Shāfi'īs, and Mālikis maintain that single-transmitter hadiths yield assumptions at most, even if they are accompanied by evidence (Sulaymān ibn Ṣāliḥ 1396, 167).

19. After saying that Shiite scholars “never acted just because of the hadith but because of evidence,” al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā enumerates other reasons why they sometimes acted upon single-transmitter hadiths. Of course, he openly criticizes some Shiite scholars (including those from Qom) because of their reliance on such hadiths: “there is no religious evidence to necessitate acting upon single-transmitter hadiths, and so such action is not excusable ... we criticize those of our fellow Shias who oppose us on what is established by accurate evidence.” In general, his statements imply that reliance on single-transmitter hadiths was common among the Shias, particularly those from Qom.

20. In his view, a hadith transmitter is acceptable only if he is reliable, avoids vicious actions, holds the rights religious doctrines and practical beliefs, does not imitate (other transmitters) in his beliefs, and does not rely on analogies (1405 AH, 310, the essay “Fī ibṭāl al-‘amal bi-khabar al-wāḥid”).

21. In his “Nāṣiriyyāt” and “al-Istīnṣār,” al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā relies heavily on consensus. See Shariatmadari (1392 Sh, 127).

22. See 1364 Sh, 1:2, where he talks about the reliability of hadiths surrounded by evidence. Moreover, he says, “single-transmitter hadiths do not yield knowledge or action in our view” (1364 Sh, 1:6). Elsewhere he says (1363 Sh, 3): “what is not frequently transmitted is of two types: one type yields knowledge as well, which is the hadith surrounded by knowledge-conferring evidence. What goes like this must be acted upon. It belongs to the first type. The pertinent evidence can be many things, including compatibility with apparent meanings of the Quran in terms of its appearance, generality, reason for its addresses, or implications. All this evidence leads to knowledge, in which case the hadith will no longer be single-transmitter and will become an instance of knowledge. The other type is a hadith that is not frequently transmitted and is void of such evidence. This is a single-transmitter hadith, which can be acted upon provided that it is not contradicted by any other hadiths, in which case it will be necessary to act upon it.” Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī goes on to discuss treatments of contradictory single-transmitter hadiths. In the opening of his *al-Istibṣār*, he expressly says that he wrote the book to solve contradictions between hadiths (1363 Sh, 2).

23. See Khoei 1413 AH, 1:14. Shaykh Ḥasan ibn Zayn al-Dīn (1362 Sh, 1:4) says: “some of our later scholars have divided hadiths in terms of the conditions of their transmitters into the well-known four types.” Muḥaddhab al-Dīn al-Baṣrī (1382 Sh, 27) says in his *al-Muqni‘at al-anīsa*: “It was common among the earlier scholars to refer to every hadith corroborated by what must be trusted or accompanied by what necessitates its reliability and acting upon its denotation as ‘sound’ (*ṣaḥīḥ*) even if it was weak; and a weak (*da‘īf*) hadith is the opposite even if it was sound.” Obviously, earlier scholars conceived sound hadiths as those that are authoritative (which could be cited as evidence), not those that were definitely issued from the Prophet or Imams, as conceived by Akhbarists. For more, see Khoei 1413 AH, 1:22-36. For instance, he cited al-Ṣadūq’s opening remarks in his *Man lā-yahḍuruh al-faqīh*: “here I do not mean to collect everything that was transmitted. Instead, I mean to collect what I issue fatwas about and judge as sound, believing that it is authoritative between me and My Lord.” In his *Mashriq al-shamsayn*, al-Shaykh al-Bahā’ī says (1387 Sh), “our later scholars have agreed on a categorization of reliable hadiths ... this terminology was not known among the earlier scholars ... instead, what was common among them was to rely on any hadiths corroborated by what must be trusted ... What led the later scholars to diverge from the position commonly held by the earlier scholars and to introduce a new terminology was that the period between them and the earlier scholars was long ... and the first person who adopted this approach was our master al-‘Allāma.”

24. Mullā ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ḥā’irī al-Iṣfahānī (1382 Sh, 532) accounts for the reasons why later scholars modified the earlier classification of hadiths as well as the relation between *ṣaḥīḥ* in the view of later scholars and *ṣaḥīḥ* in the view of earlier scholars. Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī has more elaborately discussed the divergence between earlier and later scholars, attacking al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī for his acquiescence to the four-type classification: “*ṣaḥīḥ* according to the earlier scholars is distinct from what our later scholars have agreed on, the first of whom was al-‘Allāma” (Astarābādī 1426 AH, 109).
25. Also see Pakatchi (1384 Sh), which elaborates the story of hadith writing and the formation of books and movements of hadith.
26. See Kulaynī 1389 AH, the book of the virtue of knowledge, the section on hadith writing and the virtue of writing and appealing to book. Also see Najāshī (1365 Sh, 4ff), which mentions Abū Rāfi‘ and his two sons who were Imam ‘Alī’s companions, among others, as the first writers of Imam ‘Alī’s hadiths.
27. Details of this issue can be pursued in another work of his titled *al-Fawā’id al-Ṭūsiyya* (see Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, 1423 AH). Ayatollah Khomeini believes that al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī’s arguments are very weak (1413 AH, 1:33).
28. Al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq also addressed the issue, although al-Shaykh al-Mufīd believed that his approach was not adequate.
29. Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd believes that the hadiths concerning the contrast with Sunni Muslims are restricted to issues of caliphate and the rights of the Prophet’s Household.
30. Unlike cases of conflict (*tazāḥum*), in cases of contradiction (*ta‘āruḍ*) he prefers dismissal of both hadiths to optional reliance on one of them.
31. In addition to the above criteria, we can propose other signs, such as theoretical principles or positions, which can to some extent (not in all cases) indicate rationalist tendencies: belief in essential and rational goodness and badness of actions and their mutual association with religious rulings; application of reason in cases where religion is silent; initiation of religious obligation with reason; independence of reason from transmitted texts; rejection of anthropomorphism, corporealism, and visibility of God; endorsement of consensus about fatwas; division of hadiths into four types (underscoring the characteristics of transmitters, as well as dedication to the field of *rijāl* and *dirāyat al-ḥadīth*); the view that books of hadiths are not unquestionably reliable; rejection of definitive denotations of transmitted texts; rejection of the distortion of the Quran; the belief in the authoritativeness of apparent meanings of the Quran; ultimate authority of the Quran over the Sunna; prohibition or restriction of acting upon single-transmitter hadiths; assumption of true certitude of jurisprudential rulings; and discrediting the transmitters who follow others in such rulings.
32. However, his teacher, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, who founded the rationalist School of Baghdad, believed that reason depends on transmitted textual evidence and religious obligation begins with prophethood. Furthermore, in jurisprudence, he considered reason not as an independent source but only as a means of understanding the Quran and the Sunna. See Mufīd 1413a AH, 10 and 1993, 28.
33. However, the Sunni scholar Ibn Taymiyya claims that there is no reliable Prophetic hadith about reason. Centuries before him, Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī (d. 354 AH) said the same thing: “I do not have in my mind any sound hadith from the Prophet about reason, as hadiths by Abān ibn Abī ‘Ayyāsh and ... are not relied on, so their hadiths on reason will be excluded” (1433 AH, 16).
34. Al-‘Allāma al-Majlisī says, “they closed the door of reason after having known the Imam and commanded that everything should be learned from them, forbidding reliance on imperfect reason on any issue” (1403 AH, 2:314). Al-Majlisī himself accepts reasoning and intellection concerning

religious matters and application of demonstrative rational syllogisms to the principles of religion insofar as it is not an essential element of religion (see Majlisī 1403 AH, 238 and Majlisī, n.d., 11, 16. 35. For instance, see Abū l-Faḥ al-Karājakī's remarks in his *Kanz al-fawā'id*: "In the period of occultation [of Imams], religious doctrines must be taken from rational arguments and the Book of Allah, the esteemed and the glorified... When the Imam is present, he will relieve the problems, admonish about the rational matters, and introduces textual evidence, as did the Prophet. In the case of textual evidence, it is not permissible to derive rulings through analogies and ijtihad. However, analogies and ijtihad apply to rational matters, and the rational person must not follow others in his beliefs and must instead adopt a reflective approach... It is therefore necessary to believe only the accurate and true in the case of rational matters, and to accept that the truth of which is established in the case of textual evidence" (1985, 114).

36. This Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn's formulation of the "ta'lim" (teaching) view of Ismailis. After citing Fakhr al-Rāzī's statement in *al-Muḥaṣṣal* that "in contrast to pagans, there is no need for a teacher in knowledge of God" (1411 AH, 40), Khwāja says, "those who maintain that knowledge is acquired from the Imam's words do not deny opinions, but liken opinions to seeing, taking the Imam to be like an external light ... and the world 'teaching' [*ta'lim*] denotes both of them" (1405 AH, 56).

37. This is why Akhbarist Shias dismiss consensus as a residue of Sunni doctrines within Shiism: "on the doors opened by Sunni Muslims for speculative discretionary deductions ... Appeal to consensus, which Sunni Muslims deem reliable. This is the agreement of contemporary mujtahids on an opinion about a problem, but it is unreliable for a number of reasons..." (Astarābādī 1426 AH, 265). It should be noted that al-Astarābādī accepts two other notions of consensus: "first, agreement of all earlier hadith-oriented scholars on issuing a fatwa based on a hadith and refraining from issuing a fatwa based on a contradictory hadith ... Second, all hadith-oriented scholars, like Ṣadūqayn [al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq and his father] issuing a fatwa ... about a ruling, for, or against, which we cannot find textual evidence" (1426 AH, 268).

38. Asad Allāh al-Kāzīmī al-Tustarī (d. 1220) says in his *Kashf al-qinā' fī wujūh al-ijmā'*: "there is abundant rational and textual evidence for the authoritativeness of consensus about sharia rulings and religious doctrines ... the only known and remarkable disagreement being over its grounds" (1316 Sh, 4). He then mentions textual evidence deployed by Sunni scholars for the authoritativeness of consensus (including the Prophetic hadith "my nation does not agree on an error," which was endorsed by al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī as well and is cited in some Imami books of hadith without a discontinuous chain of transmission), but then rejects them in light of their own framework. He then asserts that the only way to establish the authoritativeness of consensus is to return it to the Infallible figure: "it consists in an agreement that contains or entails the words and opinions of the Imam" (1316 Sh, 26). He goes on to outline twelve ways in which consensus can reveal the agreement of the Infallible figure (1316 Sh, 28ff).

