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Scripting Hadiths: From Memorization to Writing in the Early Shi'i Hadith Tradition

While an ample amount of scholarly attention had been directed towards the narrations pertaining to the writing of hadith within the Sunni tradition of Islam, the same cannot be said for the Shi'i tradition, where such a scholarship remains comparatively limited. Upon examining the Shi'i hadiths on the very act of writing the hadiths within the Shi'i tradition, two aspects particularly pique the reader's interest. First, the terminology employed in the semantic field of writing or *kitābah*, such as "*taqyīd*," (writing down) "*kitābah*," (writing) "*karārīs*," (quires) "*alwāḥ*," (books) "*aṭrāf*" (notes), and others, which present avenues for investigation on what writing actually signifies and how was it administered. Second, an intriguing phenomenon surfaces: While several Shi'i hadiths, attributed to the fifth Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114 H./733 CE), advise against the writing of the hadiths in favor of memorization, a notable methodological and epistemic shift emerges with Imām Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 148 AH/765). In a paradigmatic instance, al-Šādiq advises one of his students, Abū Bašīr al-Asadī (d. 150 AH/767), to actually embrace writing as he may eventually forget the hadiths he has memorized. Hence, this paper is set out to address the following key questions: 1. What were the social and intellectual circumstances or reasons behind the refusal of writing the hadith in the time of al-Bāqir? 2. What instigated the methodological shift from memorization to writing in the era of al-Šādiq? 3. What type of hadiths did the Imāms advise their disciples to write and conversely not write? 4. What insights can be gleaned from the isnāds (chains of transmission) of these hadiths regarding their places of transmission? This paper explores these questions in an attempt to attain a deeper understanding of the evolution of hadith transmission practices within the Shi'i tradition and the associated implications for the preservation and dissemination of religious knowledge in the formative period of the Imāmī literature.



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Fatima M. Zaraket is a third-year Ph.D. student in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. She is also a translator and her work has been featured in several scholarly publications. Notably, she co-translated Rainer Brunner's "Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century" [*at-Taqrīb bayn al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah fī al-Qarn al-Ishrīn*, Beirut, 2016] and S. H. Nasr's "Knowledge and the Sacred" [*al-Ma'rifah wa-l-Muqaddas*, Beirut, (in press)], both into Arabic. Fatima's research interests lie in Islamic Intellectual History, with a particular emphasis on Twelver Shi'ism, Qur'anic Studies, and Arabic literature. Her dissertation will delve into the vernacularization of works on *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *fiqh* in the early Safavid Empire. She aims to explore how the imagination of the urban space has led to the development of new reading techniques among both the elites and the populace alike at the time.