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Early Compilers of Shi'i Hadith: The Career of al-Ḥusayn b. Sa'īd al-Ahwāzī

Al-Ḥusayn b. Sa'īd al-Ahwāzī (d. after 254/868) was a renowned jurist and transmitter of Imāmī hadith in the early third/ninth century. With his brother al-Ḥasan, he was accredited with a widespread knowledge of the transmissions of the Imāms. The two are reported to have compiled numerous detailed, trustworthy hadith works. Al-Ḥusayn's career was more recognized in the sources, although his brother was a prolific transmitter, too. Appearing in almost 5,600 chains of transmission, al-Ḥusayn's impact on early Imāmī hadith is hardly overstated. Yet, beyond bio-bibliographical information preserved in *rijāl*-works on his life and whereabouts, little is known of the significance of his work in the early formation of Imāmī hadith tradition.

This paper provides a systematic analysis of al-Ḥusayn b. Sa'īd's career as a hadith scholar and compiler. Advised by a historical-critical methodology, the research contextualized the significance of al-Ḥusayn's efforts in collecting, compiling, and transmitting hadith material. It argues that beyond specific features related to his own time, the work of al-Ḥusayn reflects the efforts of a Shi'i generation of scholars that was, as early as the third/ninth century, involved in what seems to be a deliberate and well-planned project of systematic collection of earlier hadith transmission, the classification of reports received through secure chains of transmission, the refinement of Shi'i teachings, and the production of accessible works of legal and theological relevance. This is more critical given that al-Ḥusayn and his contemporary fellows were companions of later Imāms. In practical and concrete terms, this envisaged project of establishing the boundaries of Shi'i tradition was arguably achieved under the supervision, or for that matter, in conformity with the intentions of the Imāms. From a communal perspective, it is also suggested that this intellectual project in which al-Ḥusayn took an active part aimed at demarcating Shi'i hadith as a distinctive tradition separated, in terms of content and transmission, from other Muslim traditions.



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Ali Rida Rizek (Ph.D., Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Göttingen 2021) is a scholar of the social and intellectual history of Islam, with a particular focus on Twelver Shi'ism. He received his BA and MA in Arabic Language and Literature from the American University of Beirut (AUB) in Lebanon. He has taught at the American University of Beirut (AUB), the Lebanese American University (LAU), the University of Leiden, the University of Göttingen, and the University of Bayreuth in Germany. His research focuses on the history of Islamic law, Qur'anic studies, Arabic literature, and classical Islamic education. He has published studies on hadith, legal history, and the classical Islamic ethical discourse. His upcoming book examines, for the first time in a monograph, the life, work, and impact of two early Imāmī legal scholars, namely Ibn Abī 'Aqīl al-'Umānī and Ibn al-Junayd al-Iskāfī (both flourishing in the 4th/10th century). He is currently a Visiting Research Fellow at Al-Mahdi Institute.