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The Influence of Early Shi'i Hadith Collections on the Formulation of the Doctrine of Imāma and its Eventual Crystallisation by the 5th/11th century

The theology of a particular religious group is intricately linked to its sources and the lives and careers of those responsible for compiling, writing and interpreting these sources. In the Shi'i tradition, this connection is especially evident in the articulation of the central position of an omniscient Imām, his station (*martaba*), his mystical and spiritual teachings and his prerogatives. Despite this, there has been a noticeable lack of significant studies on Shi'i Hadith, the history of the very process of the compilation of Shi'i hadith, the examination of authorities and the role of key transmitters of hadith in shaping important doctrinal matters. Moreover, it is also clear that there has been a dearth of substantial research exploring the interplay between the history of the hadith collections and the development of the doctrines within various Shi'i communities.

In this paper, I propose to examine the use of hadith in formulating the Shi'i doctrine of Imāma focusing on examples from Imāmī sources, namely, 'the Four Books' (*al-kutub al-arba'a*): *Uṣūl min al-kāfī* by al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-ḥaḍīth* by Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991) and *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār* by al-Ṭūsī (d. 460-1067). Through an examination of some of the fundamental elements of the doctrine of Imāma such as *ilm* (knowledge), *naṣṣ* (divine designation) and *walāya* (special sanctity of the Imām or the ontological status of the Imām), as well as a study of key prerogatives of the Imām (e.g. collecting *khums* and *zakāt* and leading the congregational prayer) in 'the Four Books', I aim to illustrate the pivotal role of compiling hadith collections in articulating the classical doctrine of Imāma. The objective is to understand the influence of 'the Four Books' in shaping the eventual articulation of the Imāmī doctrine of Imāma in the post-*ghayba* period.

In my analysis, I will not only examine the contents of hadiths directly related to the key aspects of the doctrine of Imāma but also pay attention to the style, structure (including the organisation of works and sections in which they appear) and the chain of transmission. This approach is not to assess the reliability of the chain but to explore the nature of each chain in relation to the information it purports to transmit. I intend to combine a historical approach with literary criticism to analyse the methods of selection, articulation and organisation of hadiths. It is hoped that this analysis will provide a deeper understanding of the significant role of early Shi'i hadith collections and their authors/compilers in articulating key doctrinal aspects within the Shi'i tradition.



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