

From Ithnā-‘Ashariyya to Western Academia: Twelver Reactions to Historical Studies of the Formation of Twelver Doctrine

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ABSTRACT

Etan Kohlberg’s paper—“From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya”—was seen by the Twelver tradition to pose a challenge to the belief that the chain of Imams would end with the twelfth Imam. Building upon Kohlberg’s observations, Hossein Modarressi’s *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shī‘ite Islam* emphasised that hitherto overlooked Sunnī traditions supporting the doctrine of twelve Imams came to a timely rescue of a community in crisis, and since its publication (and subsequent translation in Persian), critiques still appear in print in Persian and Arabic. The critiques in the present paper concentrate on the responses offered in defense of the belief in Imams being twelve in number, and make three central arguments. First: the *aḥādīth* affirming the number of Imams as twelve were in circulation much before the occultation. Second: the doctrine was not considered important for the generation of Shī‘as living prior to the occultation. Third: the socio-political conditions necessitated the practicing of *taqiyya* which led to a cautious dissemination of this doctrine. This

paper also discusses the efforts made to publish works offering alternative historical models of Shī‘ī intellectual history. These efforts—coupled with the novel questions brought to the fore during debates surrounding *Crisis and Consolidation*—shaped the emergence of a rich discourse in Iranian scholarly circles. The paper’s final section outlines the emerging discourse on the relationship between history and theology, demonstrating how modern intellectual history intersects with the development of a religious intellectual tradition.

KEYWORDS: Twelve Imams, Twelver Doctrine, Occultation, Hossein Modarressi, theology, intellectual history.

Introduction

Modern historiography is infamous for its propensity to challenge historical narratives that religious communities hold with regards to their own origins and what they believe to be sacred. One of the earliest instances of this conflict can be traced back to the historical criticism of the Bible initiated by Baruch Spinoza in the 17th century. Another set of studies, later translated and titled as *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*¹, resulted in a destabilisation of faith in the Church’s depiction of Jesus. Islam was not exempt from this scrutiny: the revisionist school questioned the traditional beliefs about the origins of Islam. A most radical instance, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*², attributed the origins of Islam to Jewish messianic sects. Recent historical studies on the formation of Twelver Shī‘ism primarily undertaken in Western academia, challenged the traditional Twelver historical narrative of

¹ Albert Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, trans. William Montgomery, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (A. and C. Black: 1910).

² Patricia Cook and Michael Crone, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge University Press: 1977).

some of its tenets concerning the doctrine of Imamate.³

The Twelver Shī‘ī community is characterised by a unique belief in a divine scheme of guidance that transcends the era of the Prophet (s) and continues through a lineage of Imams. These Imams, who are explicitly appointed by divine command, undertake leadership roles predicated on their exceptional attributes. These attributes include infallibility (*iṣma*), divinely decreed boundless knowledge, the capacity to manipulate natural phenomena, and the ability to intercede on a believer’s behalf. The lineage begins with ‘Alī (a) and culminates in the twelfth Imam, the Mahdī (a), who entered a state of occultation at the tender age of five and is prophesied to re-emerge to usher in an era of global justice at the end of times.

Historical studies conducted within Western academia dedicated

³This is not to undermine the Islamic tradition’s engagement with its own history, or the fervent debates sparked by historical studies within the tradition. Intellectual history, as a modern discipline, finds its closest counterpart in Islamic civilisation within the heresiographical or *firaq* literature. Books belonging to this genre can be traced back to the earliest centuries of Islamic intellectual production. The Shī‘īs have also participated in historical debates, frequently invoking history to substantiate that ‘Alī (a) was indeed appointed by the Prophet (s) and that ‘Alī (a) himself believed it was his right to rule. The discourse and subsequent conflict following the publication of Shahīd Jāwīd in the latter half of the 20th century in Iran underscores the significance of the history of Karbala for Shī‘ism and its propensity to provoke a theological debate and popular controversy. See Evan Siegel, “The Politics of Shahīd-e Jāwīd,” in Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende (eds.), *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture and Political History* (Brill: 2001), 150–177.

What distinguishes the current challenge is the application of secular academic intellectual history and philology to construct comprehensive models of early Shī‘ī development. These models are perceived to question the originality of presently held religious beliefs. The studies in question are authored by researchers who claim neutrality and aloofness from siding with any of the theological positions under examination. Furthermore, the methodologies and concepts, often initially articulated in a foreign language, are believed to be influenced by Orientalism, thereby adding to the sensitivity of the issue. See Mohammad Taqī Sobhani et. al, *Naqd wa barrasī-yi nazārī-yi taṭawwūr-i tārikhī-yi tashayyū‘* (Majma‘ ‘ālī ḥikmat: 1388 Sh./2009), 7–8.

to writing an intellectual history of Shī‘ism have scrutinised the conception of the Imams held by Twelver orthodoxy. Dr. Hossein Modarressi, an alumnus of the Islamic seminary and a professor at Princeton University, delved into this issue, arguing that the political frustrations and theological challenges gradually led to an increasingly superhuman image of the Imams. The *mufawwiḍa* faction, rather than moderate Imāmīs, emphasised the Imams’ impeccable nature and extraordinary qualities, including knowledge of the unknown and divine-like attributes. Fabricated *aḥādīth* allowed the *mufawwiḍa* to infiltrate the Imāmī mainstream during the period of the later Imams, contrasting with the earlier cautious approach that considered such views as *ghuluww* (exaggeration). The moderate companions of Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), represented by ‘Abdullāh b. Abī Ya‘fūr simply regarded the Imams as pious learned men (*‘ulamā’ abrār atqiyā’*).⁴

The Twelver sect also distinguishes itself from other Shī‘ī factions by adhering to the belief in a predetermined count of twelve Imams, with the twelfth Imam leading an extraordinarily prolonged existence in a state of occultation. In contrast, different branches of Ismailis and Zaydis historically maintained a continuous chain of living Imams even if the chain was believed to be concealed at some point in history. Historical research in Western academic settings suggests that the initial adherents of what eventually evolved into Twelver Shī‘ism were originally followers of Imāmī doctrine. These early Imāmīs upheld a lineage of Imams, the number of which was not predetermined, extending until the Day of Judgment. A critical juncture in this belief system occurred when it became necessary to justify the prolonged concealment, or *‘ghayba,* of the twelfth Imam. William Montgomery Watt was among the first scholars within Western academia to hint at this doctrinal shift.⁵ Kohlberg further illuminates the transition between

⁴ Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi‘ite Islam: Abū Ja‘far ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and his Contribution to Imāmīte Shi‘ite Thought* (Darwin Press: 1993), 30, 47–51.

⁵ William Montgomery Watt, “Sidelights on Early Imamite Doctrine,” *Studia*

distinct doctrines and their resulting social identities,⁶ contending that prophetic traditions, initially used to justify the twelve Imams, were borrowed from Sunnī sources after the *ghayba*, aligning with the emerging Twelver doctrine.⁷ Modarressi notes how previously ignored Sunnī traditions were collected post-*ghayba* by Twelver traditionists, providing essential support during a time of existential crisis for the community.⁸

Historical research on the development of fundamental religious doctrines has elicited a range of reactions among believers and religious intellectuals. The Twelver Shīʿī reactions to these studies have been equally diverse. In relation to the characteristics of the Imams, Kadivar posits that a prevalent interpretation of Imamate among Shīʿīs until the 5th Islamic century depicted the Imams as pious learned individuals. Kadivar asserts that the Imams themselves dismissed an alternative interpretation. Kadivar cites Hossein Modarressi's *Crisis and Consolidation* as supporting his views of normatively authentic Shīʿism.⁹ There have also been attempts to employ the findings of the book for political activism.¹⁰

Islamica 31 (1970): 287–298.

⁶ Etan Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿAshariyya," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39, no. 3 (1976): 521-534.; Etan Kohlberg, "Early Attestations of the Term "Ithnā' Ashariyya," *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 24 (2000), 343–357.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 99–102.

⁹ Mohsen Kadivar, "Qirāʾat-i farāmūsh shudi az dīn," *Madrasi* no.3 (2006): 92–102.

¹⁰ In an article titled, "*Barsākhtihā-yi tārikhī*", Akbar Ganji, an Iranian dissident activist opposing the Islamic government of Iran and currently residing in the United States, endeavored to challenge, amongst other doctrines, the existence of the twelfth Imam, suggesting it was a later fabrication. He posited that Hossein Modarressi has historically demonstrated that the figure of the twelfth Imam was constructed due to a dispute over the legacy of the eleventh Imam. This stance potentially aids him in scrutinising the legitimacy of the

Nevertheless, Hossein Modarressi has consistently distanced himself from such assertions in multiple rebuttals to his detractors. He underscores that the book was written within a Western context,¹¹ and that his work is fundamentally an intellectual history of early Shī‘ism, written in line with the prevalent standards of Islamic Studies in Western academia. Thus, he highlights that his approach to scrutinising historical and religious reports diverges from the conventional norms

Guardianship of the Jurist, who governs as a representative of the twelfth Imam. Akbar Ganjī, “*Barsākhtehā-yi tārikhi*”, *Rādiyo Zamaaneh*, https://zamaaneh.com/idea/2008/08/post_365.html.

¹¹This implies multiple considerations for the author. Primarily, it underscores the fact that the Shī‘is represent a “minority within a minority”. Consequently, the emphasis is on preserving unity with other Islamic sects, necessitating the presentation of a minimalist Shī‘i doctrinal position. In addition, terminologies that carry negative connotations in western context should be avoided. Therefore, the author believes that the concept of infallibility (‘iṣma) of the Imams, which draws parallels with widely criticised doctrine of papal infallibility should be dropped in favor of the concept of purity (ṭahāra) supported by the wording of the Qur’an 33:33. This verse is traditionally invoked to prove the infallibility of the Ahl al-bayt. Otherwise, he does not see a fundamental difference between himself and one of the clerics propounding “maximalist” positions in Qom. See the email Modarressi wrote to his confidant Rasūl Ja‘fariyān in response to Ayatollah Milani’s foreword on *Maktab dar Imtidād-i Hidāyat*, made available by Jafarian on his Telegram channel at <https://t.me/jafarian1964/12880>. These may be seen as invalid excuses by religious scholars in Iran who believe the work in fact puts Shī‘ism in a negative light by positing that contemporary doctrinal understanding is inauthentic. For more details, see Ghulām Ḥasan Muḥarramī’s interview, which mentions the aforementioned letter. The interview is accessible at Muḥammad Jawād Ḥussaynzādi, “*Iddi‘āyi āghā-yi Modarresi Tabataba’i dāstān ast*,” *Mobahethāt*, <https://mobahehat.ir/24062>.

Ayatollah Milani also questions whether the Western context of the text justified an uncritical verbatim translation into Persian, devoid of any “corrections”. Ghulām Ḥasan Muḥarramī and Sayyid ‘Alī Ḥusaynī Milani, *Maktab dar Imtidād-e Hidāyat* (al-Ḥaqāyiq: 1401 Sh. /2022): 15. This discourse illustrates how present day concerns may affect intellectual historiography of Shī‘ism.

within the Islamic tradition.^{12 13}

However, several Shī'ī scholars, including those affiliated with traditional seminaries and those possessing pertinent university education in Iran and Iraq, and even one within Western academia, have expressed potent criticisms of the findings presented by Watt, Kohlberg, and Modarressi. These critiques, disseminated through academic journals, scholarly books, and academic conferences, have unfolded in stages, upholding a stringent level of academic rigor whilst generally eschewing personal attacks or the questioning of motives. Some of these critics have adopted a forthright approach, penning books with titles that unambiguously articulate their critique of specific works. Conversely, others have endeavored to critically evaluate only a singular claim or piece of evidence presented in the aforementioned

¹² Modarressi, "Jawābiyyi-yi Hossein Mudarresi Tabataba'i bi naqd-i Hasan Tarumi," *Kitāb-i Māh-i Dīn* 142 (1388 Sh. /2009): 20–29. Despite his own objections to the book, this point has found sympathy with Hassan Ansari. Ansari, "Kitāb maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul wa tadhakkur-i du nukti," *Kātebān*. Accessed 25th May 2024, <https://ansari.kateban.com/post/2918>, and "Naqdhā-yi Hassan Ansari bar kitāb-i maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul ta'lif-i Hossein Modarressi," *Kātebān*, Accessed 25th May 2024, <https://ansari.kateban.com/post/3993>.

¹³ Intriguingly, in a correspondence to his confidant, the historian Rasul Jafarian, the author concedes his personal disagreement with the portrayal presented in the book. There was even a moment when he considered the publication of a counterargument under an assumed name. Rasul Jafarian, *Mukātibāt-i dūstāni-ye ustād duktur Hossein Modarresi Tabataba'i va Rasul Jafarian* (Muwarrikh: 1394 Sh./2015): 169. The subsequent disapproval of the scholarly work, presuming sincerity, exemplifies the tension which a believer encounters within the academic sphere. It underscores the formidable endeavor of authoring for an academic milieu that possesses its own historical trajectory of distinct secular research methodology and that has exhibited a persistent skepticism towards early Islamic sources. The academic milieu of the time, with the Revisionist School of Islamic Studies still influential when the book was published in 1993, should also be factored in. One of its leading proponents, Michael Cook is based at Princeton University since 1986. Hossein Modarressi has been a faculty member at the same university.

works.

The critiques, spanning approximately 70 books, articles and dissertations,¹⁴ employ a variety of strategies and follow several lines of argumentation.¹⁵ To mention a few, some scholars demonstrate that the Twelver doctrine, as understood today—including the number of Imams and their attributes—has historical antecedents during the era of the Imams, even if not universally comprehended by the entire Shī‘ī community. A number of critiques affirm the authenticity of the Shī‘ī *ḥādīth* corpus, asserting that the *ghulāt* could not have tampered with the *aḥādīth*, given the rigorous culture of *ḥādīth* transmission and authentication employed by the Imams and their companions when the *ḥādīth* books were being written.¹⁶ Some scholars have also endeavored

¹⁴Listed in the appendix.

¹⁵In addition to the strategies outlined in the text, Alviri has categorised the shortcomings identified in the critiques of *Crisis and Consolidation*. Each specific critique discusses some or either of these:

1. Confusion between intellectual history and theological critique based on intellectual history.
2. Epistemic fallacy.
3. Neglect of *taqiyya*.
4. Not accounting for a lack of societal preparedness for a minority ideology.
5. Ambiguous language usage.
6. Incorrect referencing.
7. Cherry-picking.
8. Incomplete quotation of reports.
9. Omission of references supporting important claims.
10. Lack of engagement with counter evidence.

Mohsen Alviri, “Gūneshenāsī-yi intiqādī-yi dīdgāhhā darbāri-yi tāriḵh wa chigūnigī-yi piydāyish-i tashayyu’,” *Tāriḵhi farhang wa tamaddun-i Islāmī* 3, no. 8 (1391 Sh./2012): 33–34. These titles also generally hold true for criticisms levelled at Kohlberg.

¹⁶Sayyed Alireza Hosseini Shirazi and Ṭāhir ‘Azīz Wakīlī, “Bāzkhānī Guzārish Dass wa Taḥrīf-i Ghāliyān dar Partow-i Kārkard-i Farhangī-yi Nahād-i Imāmat, *Imāmat Puzhūhī* 15 (1393 Sh./2014): 31–70; Muḥammad Mahdi Kassamali, A critical analysis of the views of Sayyed Hossein Modarressi Tabataba’i regarding

to demonstrate that elements of belief attributed to the so-called *ghulāt* (exaggerators) were also shared by the members of the group identified as moderate Shī'īs, thus undermining the dichotomy.¹⁷

Critics have, however, unanimously recognised the gap left by tradition in its own intellectual history and the necessity to independently revisit its past using an academic methodology akin to that used by scholars in Western academia. This methodology should not be theological or rational, but rather one that examines intellectual ideas historically. Some critics have thus attempted to propose alternative interpretations and models of early Shī'ī intellectual history while generally acknowledging a historical progression of ideas amongst the members of the early Shī'ī community. Works written on these models are considered less challenging to faith and more faithful to historical data.¹⁸

The discussions pertaining to Western studies on the formation of Shī'ī doctrine and the ensuing critiques have led to the emergence of more profound questions. A discourse is gradually taking shape around these questions within Iranian academic circles. What is the precise definition of intellectual history, and how should an academic intellectual history of Shī'ism be composed? To what degree are history

the influence of the *ghulāt* on Imāmī theology, Masters Thesis, Department of Islamic History *Sīrah* and Civilization, Al-Mustafa International University, Qom, 2023.

¹⁷ For instance, Mohammad Baqer Malekian and Zoheyr Bolandghamatpoor, "Mi'yār-i ghuluww dar andīshī-yi Shaykh-i Ṣadūq," *Ma'rifat-i kalāmī* 1 (1391 Sh./2012): 47–62.

¹⁸ See Hadi Gerami, *Nukhustīn munāsibāt-i fikrī-yi tashayyū'ī: Bāzkhānī-yi mafhūm-i ghuluww dar jaryānhā-yi mutaqaḍdim-i Imāmī* (Dāneshgāh-i Imam Ṣādiq: 1391 Sh./2012); Muḥarramī, *Barrasī-yi tārikhī-yi tafakkur-i Shī'ī-yi Ithnā 'Ashariyya* (Pazhūhishgāh-i farhang wa andīshī-yi Islāmī: 1393 Sh./2014); Mahdi Farmanian, Mustafa Sadeqi Kashani, *Nigāhī bi tārikh-i tafakkur-i Imāmiyya: az āghāz tā zuhūr-i Ṣafawiyya* (Pazhūhishgāh-i 'ulūm wa farhang-i Islāmī: 1394 Sh./2015); Muatafa Motahhari, *Naqsh-i 'anāṣir-i tārikhī dar tabyīn-i 'aqāyid-i Ahl-i Bayt* (Dār al-ḥadīth: 1394 Sh./2015).

and theology mutually dependent, and is it possible to authenticate or refute theological assertions through historical analysis, or vice versa? Does the gradual historical evolution of a doctrine necessarily invalidate its theological basis?

While Western academia continues its investigation into the genesis of nascent Shī‘ism, maintaining a critical perspective on its own assumptions about sources and methodologies,¹⁹ the reactions and criticisms from Shī‘ī scholars, particularly those expressed in non-European languages, often receive insufficient attention.

This study aims to elucidate the responses provided by Twelver Shī‘ī scholars to studies concerning the formation of Twelver doctrine. We particularly focus on responses from researchers who disseminate their ideas in Persian and Arabic languages. Amongst the number of topics addressed by the critics—as a case study—we only concentrate on the specific doctrine stipulating the count of Imams as twelve. We further aim to outline the emergence of a discourse developing among Shī‘ī intellectuals regarding Shī‘ī intellectual history and the interplay of history and theology as academic disciplines.

We have examined a comprehensive range of resources. These include published books and articles, transcripts of conferences, book reviews, online books, blog posts, and interviews by Shī‘ī intellectuals.

Our study period ranges from 1976, the year of publication of Kohlberg’s “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya” up to the preparation of this manuscript in 2024. An appendix at the end of this paper lists and provides the details of academic works in print, works available online, conferences and blog posts written by Shī‘ī scholars that critically engage with Modarressi in general.

¹⁹ Edmund Hayes, *Agents of the Hidden Imam: Forging Twelver Shī‘ism, 850–950 CE* (Cambridge University Press: 2022), 23; Sajjad Rizvi, “Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi: The Spirituality of Shī‘ī Islam,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies* 75, no. 2 (2012): 379–80; Robert Gleave, “Recent Research into the History of Early Shī‘ism,” *History Compass* 7 (2009), 1593–1605.

An exposition of the shift from Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya

In this section, we aim to accurately explicate the narrative presented by Kohlberg and Modarressi. Kohlberg’s article, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya”, was published in 1976 whilst Modarressi’s book, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi‘ite Islam*, was published in 1993. Whilst many of their arguments are identical, Modarressi’s work does contain some significant differences that shall be highlighted.

According to Kohlberg, the earliest evidence for the belief in a line of twelve Imams is to be found in heresiographical literature. Al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, in *Kitāb firaq al-Shī‘a*²⁰, and Sa‘d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Qummī, in *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-l-firaq*²¹, (both completed around 287/900) describe the state of the Shī‘ī community after the death of the eleventh Imam who was poisoned by the caliph al-Mu‘tamid in the year 260/874. The most important sect, the Imāmiyya, believed that Imam al-‘Askarī had died leaving an heir who had gone into hiding. There is no explicit mention of how long his occultation would last nor is there any mention of the possibility of two occultations. More significantly, there is no mention of the number of Imams having reached twelve or any significance of this number.²² Further evidence of the absence of a ‘specifically Twelver Shī‘ī doctrine’ is provided by the lack of mention of any narration that mentions the idea of twelve Imams in Imāmī sources contemporaneous to the death of the eleventh Imam (a) or the idea of a *ghayba* (occultation) of the final Imam. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/903) in *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*²³ has many narrations regarding the virtues of the Imams but does not mention any

²⁰ Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī‘a* (Dār al-aḍwā’: 1983).

²¹ Sa‘d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Ash‘arī, *al-Maqālāt wa-l-Firaq*, ed. Muḥammad Jawād Mashkur (Markaz-i intishārāt-i ‘ilmī wa farhangī: 1981)

²² Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 521-522.

²³ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt fī faḍāili āli Muḥammad* (Maktab Ayatollah al-Mara‘shī al-Najafī: 1983).

narration that implies that Imamate would be limited to twelve. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893) similarly does not mention any such narration in *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin*²⁴, even though the first section of his book, *Kitāb al-ashkāl wa-l-qarā’in*, is dedicated to traditions dealing with the significance of various numbers, from 3 to 10, clearly deeming it not necessary to proceed up to the number twelve.²⁵ Furthermore, al-Barqī cites a famous narration in which al-Khiḍr meets Imam ‘Alī (a) and reveals the names of the Imams. As compared to other later renderings of this narration that has the name of all twelve Imams, in the version reported by al-Barqī, al-Khiḍr only mentions the names of ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and the reporter adds ‘and he counted every last one of them’ without specifying the names or number of Imams after al-Ḥusayn.²⁶ According to Kohlberg, since both the abovementioned works, were compiled either before or shortly after the beginning of the minor occultation (*al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*), the belief in twelve Imams had thus not yet been formulated as part of the Imāmi creed until that time.²⁷

It is only towards the middle of the fourth/tenth century where the belief in twelve Imams can be seen in Shī‘ī works. In the *Tafsīr* of ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 307/919), the al-Khiḍr tradition referred to above appears with the names of all twelve Imams.²⁸ Similar narrations are found in Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941)’s *al-Kāfi*. More than 150 narrations alluding to the same can also be found in al-Khazzāz al-Rāzi al-Qummī (d. 381/991)’s magnum opus *Kifāyat al-athar fī l-nuṣūṣ ‘alā l-a’immat al-ithnay ‘ashar*. Al-Nu‘mānī (d. 360/971) also gathered

²⁴ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥaddith (Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1992).

²⁵ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 521-522.

²⁶ Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, 332.

²⁷ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 523.

²⁸ ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, ed. Ṭayyib al-Mūsawī al-Jazā’irī, (Najaf:1967), 2:44.

narrations that explicitly mention twelve Imams in his *Kitāb al-ghayba* (completed in 342/953) as did al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) in his *Kamāl al-dīn*.

Kohlberg further adds that belief in the occultation of the last Imam was elucidated as a direct corollary of the belief in twelve Imams. From the proposition that there are only twelve Imams, it follows that the last Imam must be alive (since mankind cannot remain without a guide), and in order to protect himself, must remain in occultation. The narrations that discuss this occultation are therefore directly related to our study of the formation of the Twelver creed. Apparently, there are some contradictions within these narrations. Al-Nu‘mānī, who wrote his book *al-Ghayba* thirteen years after the beginning of the major occultation, quotes a narration from the sixth Imam (a) in which the Imam (a) implies that there will be two occultations, the first of which is the longer one. However, this contradicts other narrations as well as orthodox beliefs. Kohlberg comments:

The impression gained from the discrepancy between the description of the respective lengths of the first and second *ghaybas* is that initially it was not quite clear which of the two would last longer; only later was it established that the second concealment (also known as *al-ghayba al-tāmma* ‘the complete concealment’) would also be the longer one.²⁹

Having succinctly gone through the stages of growth in the Twelver doctrine, Kohlberg then turns his attention to the pivotal question: “to what extent can the traditions on which that doctrine is based be traced back to the period preceding the disappearance of the twelfth Imam?”³⁰ His answer is that both the number twelve and the idea of the occultation are very early motifs in Islamic history and traditions discussing twelve successors can be found circulating in Sunnī *ḥādīth* literature long before the beginning of the minor occultation.

²⁹ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 528.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 529.

As for the narrations discussing the *ghayba*, this was a belief commonly found amongst earlier Shī‘ī sects including the Wāqifis, the *ghulāt*, as well as the *qaṭ‘iyya* (who were the forerunners of the Twelvers). “Clearly, then, the sources on which Twelver Shī‘ism drew had been extant long before the ‘lesser’ *ghayba*. These sources merely had to be brought into line with the nascent Ithnā-‘asharī dogma. This was achieved mainly through a process of reinterpretation of existing material.”³¹

Kohlberg maintains that Twelver Shī‘ī theologians “could not be content with such a view of the origins of their faith; by projecting their doctrine backwards they sought to prove that specifically Ithnā-‘asharī beliefs had been held by the Imāmiyya prior to the ‘period of confusion (*ḥayra*)’ (which is the term used to describe the time following the disappearance of the twelfth Imam).”³² They therefore claimed that narrations discussing the twelve Imams can be found in the four hundred primary *uṣūl* that were written down by the companions of the sixth Imam (a). Al-Nu‘mānī went further and stated that such narrations can even be found in the book *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, which was supposedly written by a companion of Imam ‘Alī (a). According to Kohlberg, the problem with such an argument is that:

While such claims are nominally correct, it must be remembered that the names of the twelve Imāms do not appear in these sources. *Al-Uṣūl al-arba‘u mi‘a* contain a tradition about eleven (!) unnamed Imāms, the last of whom would be the Qā‘im, and a saying by Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq to the effect that after the Prophet there will be seven Imāms, the last of whom will be the Qā‘im. As for the *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, serious doubts as to its authenticity persist among Shī‘īs and non-Shī‘īs alike. Furthermore, the possibility of later additions cannot

³¹ Ibid, 532.

³² Ibid, 532.

be entirely ruled out.³³

Based on the above depiction, it appears that the belief in twelve Imams as well as the occultation of the final Imam were doctrines adapted from other groups. The former was taken from the Sunnīs and the latter from earlier Shī‘ī sects. In another article written by Kohlberg in 2000, “Early attestations of the term *‘ithnā ‘ashariyya*,” Kohlberg concludes that there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that the term *Ithnā-‘ashariyya* was in use during the minor occultation. The earliest firmly datable attestation is in al-Mas‘ūdī’s *al-Tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf* written in 344-345/955-956.³⁴

Modarressi makes similar arguments in the third chapter of his book, *Crisis and Consolidation*. According to him, when the minor occultation began, no one, except for ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī and his close associates, expected the occultation to last for such a long period of time. A contemporaneous rumor suggested that the Imam (a) would remain in hiding for either six days, six months or a maximum of six years. In his footnote, Modarressi references this rumor in a narration quoted by al-Nu‘mānī who quotes a narration from al-Kulaynī. However, the latter’s rendition mentions “six days, six months or six years” whilst the former’s rendition changes this phrase to “a period of time.” The same report is mentioned by al-Ṭūsī in his *al-Ghayba* but he completely omits the part of the report that discusses the length of the occultation!³⁵

It did not take long for the Shī‘ī community to realise that this was the occultation that was mentioned in their narrations that were circulating about a century ago. Like Kohlberg, Modarressi also claims that the narrations regarding the two occultations are conflicting regarding which of the two occultations would be the shorter one and which would be the longer one.³⁶ These narrations were previously used

³³ Ibid, 532-533.

³⁴ Kohlberg, “Early Attestations of the Term *Ithnā-‘Ashariyya*,” 165.

³⁵ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 87.

³⁶ Ibid, 87.

by the Wāqifis in order to bolster their claim that Imam al-Kāẓim was the Qā'im. Like Kohlberg, Modarressi also concedes that the idea of occultation was one that was previously well-established in the Shī'ite mentality.³⁷

As the occultation prolonged, the Shī'ī faith began to weaken and a state of extreme doubt crept into the minds of the believers. However, it was due to the continuous efforts of the Imāmī transmitters of *ḥādīth* that the situation reversed at the turn of the third/ninth century. There was a well-known statement attributed to the Prophet by the Sunnī transmitters of *ḥādīth* according to which he predicted that there would be twelve caliphs after him, all from his tribe, the Quraysh. The different renditions of this narration were present in several Sunnī books much before the occultation and thus no one can claim that the statement was in any way authored by the Imāmīs in the post-occultation period. Modarressi further adds that

There is no evidence in any work written before the last decades of the third/ninth century that suggests that this statement had ever attracted the attention of the Shī'ite traditionists or that anyone in the Shī'ite community had ever thought it might concern them.³⁸

Referencing Kohlberg, Modarressi also repeats the claim that the likes of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār (d. 290/903) does not refer to such a statement in his *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* and neither do Sa'd b. 'Abdullāh al-Ash'arī or Ibn Qiba, all from the latter part of the third/ninth century.³⁹ Interestingly, in the Persian translation of his book, Modarressi claims that there are two narrations in *Baṣā'ir* that explicitly mention the idea of twelve Imams but these seem to be later interpolations.⁴⁰ The

³⁷ Ibid, 87-88.

³⁸ Ibid, 100.

³⁹ Ibid, 100.

⁴⁰ Modarressi, *Maktab dar farāyandi takāmūl: Naẓarī bar taṭawwuri mabāniyi fikrīyi tashayyu' dar si qarni nakhustīn*, (Intishārāti kavīr: 1386 Sh./2007), 191-

narration in the book of Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays is also dismissed as being a later addition.

Two similar reports that quoted the Prophet as predicting twelve noble chiefs “from among his descendants,” the last of them being the *qā'im* who would fill the earth with equity and justice, appeared in a collection of *ḥadīths* ascribed to the Kūfan Zaydite transmitter of *ḥadīth*, ‘Abbād b. Ya‘qūb al-Rawājini (d. ca. 250/864) (al-Kulaynī, 1:534).⁴¹

According to Modarressi, the reason why the Imāmīs were never attracted to such a prophecy was because

The Imāmite community in the first decades of the Occultation still expected that the order of the Imāms would continue its normal path in the descendants of Ḥasan al-‘Askarī until the end of time.⁴²

The idea of the Imams being restricted to twelve was an idea first put forward by Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī and ‘Alī b. Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 329/941), from amongst those authors whose works have survived. The former has a chapter in his *Kitāb al-Kāfi* where he gathered twenty such reports. However, according to Modarressi, the chapter seems to be a later supplement, possibly added by the author himself later in his life. But what evidence do we have to doubt the authenticity of the reports collected by al-Kulaynī?

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nu‘mānī was a pupil and close associate of al-Kulaynī and personally copied his above-mentioned work [referring to *al-Kāfi*] (see Maḥfūz: 19). In the chapter of his *Kitāb al-Ghayba* that deals with the question of the exact number of

192.

⁴¹ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 101.

⁴² *Ibid*, 101.

the Imāms (pp. 57-111), al-Nu‘mānī tried his best to collect all reports he could find on that matter. After the completion of the book he found yet two more reports and added them to the chapter (pp. 97-101) as attested by a note that the principal transmitter of the book, Abū l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Shujā‘ī (Najāshī: 383), added before those two reports (p. 97). The work, as noted, was compiled some ten years after the death of al-Kulaynī. al-Nu‘mānī, however, failed to quote sixteen of the total twenty reports included in that chapter of the *Kāfi*, though he quoted some of those reports from other Shī‘ite authorities of *ḥadīth*. This clearly indicates that in his copy of the *Kāfi* those sixteen reports, especially those that he quoted on other authorities, did not exist, particularly if one notes that al-Nu‘mānī’s special preference for what is reported by al-Kulaynī. This is well attested by the fact that in one case in which he received one of those reports recorded in the *Kāfi* through a different source too, he quoted that on the authority of al-Kulaynī and merely referred to some additional words in a different transmission of it that was narrated by “some others” (pp. 94-95). Apart from four reports that al-Nu‘mānī quoted from the above-mentioned chapter of the *Kāfi*, he quoted also a fifth report on the authority of al-Kulaynī that he quoted from ‘Alī in the chapter of the Occultation of the *Kāfi*, but major differences exist between al-Nu‘mānī’s quotation from al-Kulaynī and what is in the present version of the *Kāfi*. In the *Kāfi*, 1:338, the duration of the Occultation is, as noted before, given as “six days, six months or six years.” In al-Nu‘mānī:61 this phrase is

recorded as “a period of time.”⁴³

To summarise, both Kohlberg and Modarressi believe that the belief in twelve Imams was a later addition to the Imāmī creed. Kohlberg suggests that this belief was adopted towards the middle of the fourth/tenth century whilst Modarressi holds that this amendment took place during the end of the minor occultation (260/874 – 329/941) and the beginning of the major occultation. Some scholars have suggested that perhaps Modarressi worked in tandem with Kohlberg to reach such a conclusion⁴⁴ whilst others exclude such a possibility as Kohlberg’s article was published in 1976 at which time Modarressi was still in Iran.⁴⁵

Twelver responses

Kohlberg has been praised for his meticulous research and extolled for his efforts in citing original Shī‘ī sources, something that is less often seen in Western academia. Some scholars have even considered Kohlberg to be unique in terms of the vast number of Shī‘ī textual references that can be seen in his works.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, a plethora of responses have been given to his arguments, that are usually mentioned alongside a critique of Modarressi’s work. Due to the vast number of critiques levelled against the abovementioned narrative, in this section we shall divide the responses based on each assertion.

⁴³ Ibid, 102-103.

⁴⁴ Alireza Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāhi naqd: Silsiliyi nishasthāyi ‘ilmī-yi anjumani tārikhpazhūhān naqd-i kitāb wa naqd-i nazariyyi* (Mu’assisi-yi intishārāt-i khākriž: 1388 Sh./2009), 160.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 202.

⁴⁶ Seyed Abdul-Rahim Hoseini et al., “Barrasī wa naqd-i ravish-i Etan Kohlberg dar bahrigīrī az manābi‘ imāmī dar muṭālī‘āt-i shī‘ī-yi imāmī”, *Faṣlnāmi-yi taḥqīqāt-i kalāmī*, 7(26), (1398 Sh./ 2020), 80.

Lack of mention of the idea of twelve Imams in pre-occultation sources

Before delving into specific sub-arguments, some general critiques that can be seen in the literature shall be presented.

The argument that the Shī‘ī community borrowed some aspect of their tenets from other groups or that the Twelver sect was a later formation not found in the early days of Islam is not a new claim at all. In fact, similar claims can be traced back to the first centuries of the Islamic civilisation.⁴⁷ Even amongst Orientalists, such a claim is not new and has been put forward by others before Kohlberg.⁴⁸

The belief in the number of Imams being limited to twelve was never a necessary credal tenet during the time of the Imams. At the time of each Imam, it was necessary for each believer to recognise the Imam of his age, know that he was divinely appointed (*manṣūb min Allāh*) and must be fully obeyed (*muftaraḍ al-ṭā‘a*).⁴⁹ In order to ascertain the

⁴⁷ Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni‘ma*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1975), 1:67; See also, Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāh-i naqd*, 169, 183; For a detailed study and critique of differing opinions about the origins of Shī‘ism, see Alviri, “Gūnishināsī-yi intiḳādī-yi dīdgāhhā,” 7-52.

⁴⁸ For example, see Montgomery W. Watt, “Sidelights on Early Imāmite Doctrine”, *Studia Islamica* (1970): 287-298; Alviri, “Naqd-i nazārī-yi dar piydāyish-i Shī‘i-yi ithnā ‘asharī”, *Faṣlnāmi-yi pazhūheshhā-yi dāneshgāh-i Imam Sadiq*, 2, (1374 Sh./1995), 53; Ahmad Akbari, “Examining Etan Kohlberg’s works and opinions on Mahdism” (Masters Diss., Al-Mustafa International University, 2021), 129-130.

⁴⁹ The famous report of the Prophet alludes to this, “Whoever dies and does not recognise the Imām of his age dies a death of ignorance” (Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar Ghaffārī, (Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1986), 2:21). This narration has mass transmission (*tawāṭur*) amongst both Sunnīs and Shī‘īs (See Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Taqi al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-anwār al-jāmi‘at li durari l-akhbār al-a‘immat al-aṭhār*, ed. Muḥammad Bāqir Mahmudi (Dār iḥyā’ al-turāth al-‘Arabī: 1983), 8:368). In another report of Imam al-Ṣādiq, the reward for those who visit the grave of Imam Ḥusayn is conditioned upon knowing that his imamate was by divine appointment and

divine appointment of the current Imam, it was necessary to know the previous Imams until the Prophet (as the Prophet made an explicit designation (*naṣṣ*) of the Imamate of Imam ‘Alī who in turn did the same for Imam Ḥasan and so forth). In such a setting, it was not necessary to know the next Imam nor was it fundamental to believe how many Imams were going to come in total. What supports this observation is that in several reports, companions would come to Imam al-Ṣādiq presenting their beliefs to him for verification. In many of these reports, the companions would list their belief in the Imams from Imam ‘Alī to Imam al-Ṣādiq, and the Imam would commend their belief without pointing out to them that a central tenet of their belief that they needed to attest to was that there would be twelve Imams in total, or who the next Imams were.⁵⁰ Of course, some Shī‘as were still eager to know who the next Imam would be and would thus attempt to ask the Imam about this matter at a time when it was possible for the Imam to reveal such information.⁵¹

It was only after the beginning of the Imamate of the twelfth Imam and the commencement of the minor occultation that it became necessary to know all twelve Imams.⁵² In the later parts of the occultation

the obligation of obeying him (see al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī* (Mu’assisat al-bi’tḥat: 1996), 684). Similarly, in the famous narration in which Imam al-Riḍā says, “*Lā ilāha illā l-Allāh* is the divine fortress,” the Imam concludes by stating that he himself is one of the conditions for entering the fortress; here, al-Ṣadūq notes that the meaning of this condition is attesting that Imam al-Riḍā is the divinely appointed Imam upon the people and his obedience is obligatory (al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Syed Hashim Husseini (Jāmi‘i-yi mudarrisīn), 25).

⁵⁰ See al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:188; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥassan al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār ma’rifat al-rijāl*, ed. Mehdi Rajā‘ī (Mu’assisat āl al-bayt: 1983), 2:717, 718; Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Nu’mān al-Mufīd, *al-Amālī*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Dār al-Mufīd: 1993), 32.

⁵¹ Hamed Montazeri Moghaddam, “Raḥyāftī no bi tārikh-i piydāyish-i tashayy‘-i ithnā ‘asharī: Shikl gīrī bi hingām”, *Tārikh-i Islām dar āyeni-ye pazhūhish*, 16 (2), 47 (1398 Sh./2020), 88-90.

⁵² Majid Khayrabadi, “Barrasī-yi mas’ali-yi “Ithnā ‘Ashariyya” dar nezām-i

such a tenet became necessary to differentiate the mainstream Imāmī community from those who believed that there would be an infinite chain of Imams until the Day of Judgement.⁵³ This does not negate the fact that some of the early Imāmīs were aware of such narrations, just that it was not a fundamental tenet that stood out as a unique feature of Imāmī beliefs. It is important to differentiate between having the title or label of Ithnā ‘ashariyya, and the belief in twelve imams. The former is something that emerged later in order to differentiate the mainstream Imāmiyya from other fringe sects but the latter was a belief that always existed, even prior to the occultation.⁵⁴

Another significant point to bear in mind in this discussion is that the crux of both Kohlberg and Modarressi’s argument is that works written before the minor occultation do not mention the concept of twelve Imams, and it is only later scholars like al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941) who mention this. Aside from the fact that there are indeed reports of the twelve Imams in extant works written before the occultation, as will be shown, it is erroneous to establish whether a certain tenet existed in the Imāmī creed on the basis of whether that tenet existed in written works from a certain time period. The compilers of these *ḥadīth* collections were known for their reliability and character and would transcribe what they had orally heard from their teachers and other narrators, who were also known for their veracity and trustworthiness. As such, if someone like al-Kulaynī narrates from a chain of reliable narrators, that reaches the Imams or their direct companions, then it hardly seems accurate to suggest that the purport of the said narration first appeared during the time of al-Kulaynī. Due to the oral tradition,

imāmat-i Shī‘a wa naqd-i barkhī shubuhāt wāred bar ān” (Masters Diss., Dāneshkadi-yi ‘Ulūm-i Ḥadīth, 1390 Sh./2011), 247; Moghaddam, “Rahyāftī no”, 83-102.

⁵³ Moghaddam, “Bāzkhāni wa naqd-i didgāhhā-yi Kohlberg wa Modarresi Ṭabataba‘i darbāri-yi piydāyish-i tashayy‘-i dawāzdah Imāmī”, *Tārīkh-i Islām dar āyini-ye pazhūhish* 17, no. 48 (1399 Sh./2021), 111

⁵⁴ Khayrabadi, “Barrasi-yi mas‘ali-yi “Ithnā ‘Ashariyyah””, 227

an idea would have been in circulation much earlier than the period it was first recorded, not to mention the socio-political circumstances of the early centuries, in which there was a governmental ban on recording *ḥadīth*.⁵⁵ What is noteworthy is that in many of these narrations, there are explicit references to the year in which one narrator heard the narration from the other narrator.⁵⁶ Furthermore, people like Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī are explicitly mentioned as part of the chain of narrators in later works like *al-Kāfi*, and there is no evidence to indicate that these later works were fabricating narrations and anachronistically ascribing them to earlier scholars.⁵⁷

A further methodological flaw is that these studies fail to take into consideration that a vast number of the earliest Shī'ī writings are no longer extant. Those writings were consolidated into later compendiums, and thus, even if one were to accept the premise that the birth of an idea is directly linked to when it was first transcribed, because the earliest works are not available to us, we cannot exclude the possibility that those ideas existed previously.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Alviri, "Naqd-i nazāriyi," 58; Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāhe naqd*, 164, 175, 196.

⁵⁶ See for example Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, ed. 'Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Maktabat al-Ṣadūq; 1977), 57 and 67; For a more comprehensive list see Moghaddam, "Rahyāfti-ye nu," 91-92.

⁵⁷ Alviri, "Naqd-i nazāriyi," 58; Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāhe naqd*, 164. For example, al-Kulaynī narrates the famous al-Khiḍr narration (that shall be discussed later in depth) which contains the names of the twelve Imams and then adds, "And it was reported to me by Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā from Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār [the author of *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*] from Aḥmad b. Abī 'Abdillāh [i.e., Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd, the author of *al-Maḥāsin*] from Abī Hāshim, the same [al-Khiḍr narration]. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā says, 'I told Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan [al-Ṣaffār], 'O Abā Ja'far, I wish this narration had come from other than Aḥmad b. Abī 'Abdillāh.' He replied, 'He narrated this narration to me 10 years before the ḥayrah.'" (*al-Kāfi*, 1:526-527).

⁵⁸ Alviri, "Naqd-i nazāriyi," 62.

Furthermore, even if, hypothetically, one was to accept the argument of Kohlberg and Modarressi that the Imāmīs incorporated the belief in twelve Imams and the occultation of the Mahdī from Sunnī literature, how are we to explain the plethora of narrations that speak about the other qualities of the Mahdī such as the signs of his reappearance? For what purpose were these narrations fabricated, or assimilated from Sunnī books? Furthermore, given the profound differences in the narrations related to Mahdism between the Shī‘ī and Sunnī ḥādīth corpus, under what motive did the Shī‘as alter the wordings of their narrations? What explanation can be given for the *tawqī‘āt* (rescripts issued by the twelfth Imam to his representatives during the minor occultation)? Were they also adoptions from other sects? Or were they fabrications? And if so, for what purpose were they fabricated?⁵⁹

It seems that the socio-political context in which the early Imāmīs were living has not been considered in the above portrayal. It is a well-attested historical fact that the Shī‘a were under constant persecution and harassment which necessitated that both the Imams and their followers practice *taqiyya* (dissimulation). Is it reasonable to expect that in such conditions, narrations about sensitive topics such as the names of the Imams, designation of the next Imam, and perhaps even the number of the Imams, would be widespread and extensively relayed? The same can also be seen in the narrations that discuss the Mahdī, who was clearly perceived as a threat to the ruling authorities.⁶⁰

Consider the following examples that illustrate the sensitivities of that era. In a report in *al-Maḥāsīn*, Mu‘ādh b. Muslim brings his brother ‘Umar to Imam al-Ṣādiq (a). In response to the question of what constitutes the necessities of faith, which nothing other than shall be

⁵⁹ Ibid, 64.

⁶⁰ To the extent that even during the era of Imam al-Bāqir (a), the Imam refuses to divulge the name of the twelfth Imam, citing that even from the progeny of Fāṭima some would wish to kill him if they were to identify him. See al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 288-289; Alviri, “Naqd-i nazāriyi,” 65; Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāhi naqd*, 166.

accepted by God, the Imam mentions attestation to the oneness of God, the prophethood of Muḥammad and the Imamate of the true Imams from the progeny of Muḥammad. ‘Umar responds by asking for the names of these Imams to which the Imam responds by mentioning by name Imam ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn and Muḥammad b. ‘Alī and then says “and Allah gives goodness to whoever He wills.” ‘Umar, perplexed as to why the Imam did not mention his own name, questions the Imam as to whether he is from amongst the Imams? The Imam cryptically responds by saying, “this affair flows for the last of us just as it flows for the first of us and Muḥammad and ‘Alī have a virtue over both.” ‘Umar is not satisfied and proceeds to repeat his question three more times and each time he gets a similar cryptic response.⁶¹ In another report, Imam al-Kaẓim informs Yazīd b. Salīṭ of his martyrdom in that year and that the Imam after him would be his son ‘Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā, who would not be able to speak freely except four years after the demise of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.⁶²

Thus, in such a socio-political context, it is unreasonable to think that narrations detailing the names and identities of the twelve Imams would be in wide circulation. Rather, only the innermost circle of companions closest to the Imams were privy to such matters, which later on became widespread. In what seems contrary to the central idea of his book, Modarressi attests to this fact in a footnote where he says, “This is, of course, the chronological order of how the community came to know the fact. This certainly does not exclude that the fact was already revealed by God to the Prophet and via him to the Imams and that they had already informed their reliable associates, as verified by many Imamite and even non-Imamite reports.”⁶³ Taking a more definite stance in the Farsi translation of his work, Modarressi writes, “It is necessary to reiterate and emphasise here, as previously stated, that

⁶¹ Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, 288-289.

⁶² Al-Ṣadūq, *‘Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. Mehdi Lājiwardī (Jahān), 1:24-26.

⁶³ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 89, footnote 195.

this book is a history of the sect and not a theological treatise. From the perspective of proof and theological reasoning, given the overwhelming multitude of relevant narrations, evidence, and countless indications, no reasonable and fair-minded person can doubt that the blessed names of the pure Imams were known to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him and his family), the pure Imams (peace be upon them), and those whom these eminent figures informed. The discussion revolves around how the Shī‘ī community, meaning ordinary individuals (including narrators and others, i.e., everyone except the custodians of the secrets of Imamate), became aware of these truths.”⁶⁴

1.1 Lack of mention of the idea of twelve Imams by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893) in *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin*

According to Kohlberg, the absence of the doctrine of twelve Imams, or the occultation of the last Imam, can be supported by a lack of mention of any narration indicating to the same in one of the earliest *ḥadīth* compilations, the *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin*.⁶⁵ Kohlberg adds that it is noteworthy that al-Barqī dedicated sections to narrations dealing with numerical issues, from three to ten, not bothering to allocate a chapter for the number twelve, as opposed to later scholars such as al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), who in his *al-Khiṣāl*, enumerates narrations dealing with numerical issues from one to over a thousand, and thus has a chapter on the number twelve where several narrations mentioning the twelve Imams are presented.⁶⁶

Several responses to this claim can be seen in the literature. Firstly, it is not possible to say with certainty what was omitted by al-Barqī in his *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin* as the aforementioned book has not reached us in

⁶⁴Modarressi, *Maktab dar farāyande takāmul*, 196, footnote 1.

⁶⁵Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 523.

⁶⁶Ibid.

its totality. In fact, only one-third of the original book is extant today.⁶⁷ Secondly, the purpose of al-Ṣadūq in his *al-Khiṣāl* was to gather all such numerical narrations as opposed to al-Barqī who had no such intention. The latter only cited forty such narrations, most of them dealing with ethical matters, under the chapter *Kitāb al-ashkāl wa-l-qarā'in*. In fact, even the famous narration stating that 'Islam is founded upon five things' was not brought in the aforesaid chapter but was recorded under the chapter, '*Bāb al-Sharā'i*'⁶⁸

Thirdly, whilst there may not be a direct reference to the idea of the twelve Imams in *al-Maḥāsin*, one of al-Barqī's other works that is extant today is *Rijāl al-Barqī* which chronologically mentions the names of those who narrated from the Prophet (s) and each of the Imams, until Imam al-ʿAskarī (a), which clearly alludes to the belief in twelve Imams.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Moghaddam, "Bāzkhānī wa naqd," 110; Akbari, "Examining Etan Kohlberg's works," 124. According to al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin* was made up of 98 chapters (see *al-Fihrist* ed. Jawād Qayyūmī (Mu'assisat nashr al-faqāhat: 2001), 44-45) and according to al-Najāshī, 90 chapters (see *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, ed. Mūsa Shubbayri Zanjānī (Mu'assisat al-nashr al-Islāmī: 1986), 76-77). By comparing the names of the chapters in both the above works and deducting repetitions, we reach a total of 120 chapters, a far cry from the extant version of *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin* that only contains 11 chapters! (Muḥammad Jawād Shubbayri Zanjānī, "Barqī, Abū Ja'far," *Dāneshnāmeḥ-e Jahān-e Eslām* 3, 158-160).

⁶⁸ Moghaddam, "Bāzkhānī wa naqd," 111; Alviri, "Naqd-i nazārīyi," 59; Seyed Abdul-Rahim Hoseini et al., "Barrasī wa naqd-i rawish-i Etan Kohlberg," 86; Akbari, "Examining Etan Kohlberg's works," 125.

⁶⁹ Alviri, "Naqd-i nazārīyi," 55; This argument is only effective to the extent that the authors of *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin* and *Rijāl al-Barqī* are considered one and the same; this is the popular opinion and amongst the earlier scholars was espoused by al-Najāshī (see *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 76) and al-Ṭūsī (al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī* ed. Jawād Qayyūmī (Mu'assisat al-nashr al-Islāmī: 1994), 373 and 383). However, in recent times this has been disputed and some scholars opine that the author of *Rijāl al-Barqī* was the grandson of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Barqī (see Muḥammad Jawād Shubbayri Zanjānī, "Barqī, Abū Ja'far").

1.2 Alterations to the famous al-Khiḍr narration

According to Kohlberg, al-Barqī reports a famous tradition in which Prophet al-Khiḍr testifies to the names of the Imams but only mentions the names of ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and the reporter adds ‘and he counted every last one of them’ without specifying the names or number of Imams after al-Ḥusayn.⁷⁰ The same narration appears in *al-Kāfi* and *Tafsīr al-Qummī* with the names of all twelve Imams.⁷¹ Modarressi also reiterates the same point but doubts the authenticity of the report of al-Qummī as the latter’s *Tafsīr* was supposedly compiled by his pupil, Abū l-Faḍl ‘Abbās b. Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim b. Ḥamza, presumably sometime during the first decades of the fourth/tenth century, by which time the complete version of the al-Khiḍr tradition was already in full circulation.⁷² In order to properly understand the responses given, we will first present the two versions of the narration in their entirety as reported in *al-Maḥāsin* and in *al-Kāfi*.

Al-Khiḍr narration in *al-Maḥāsin*

Narrated from him [Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Barqī], from his father, from Abī Hāshim al-Ja‘farī, he elevated the narration (*rafa‘ al-ḥadīth*), saying: Abū ‘Abd Allāh (a) [Imam al-Ṣādiq] said:

“Amīr al-Mu‘minīn (a) entered the mosque with al-Ḥasan (a), and a man entered and greeted him.

Al-Khiḍr narration in *al-Kāfi*

Narrated by several of our companions from Aḥmad b. Muḥammad [b. Khālid] al-Barqī from Abī Hāshim Dāwūd b. al-Qāsim al-Ja‘farī from Abī Ja‘far al-Thānī (a) [Imam al-Jawād], who said:

“Amīr al-Mu‘minīn (a) approached, accompanied by al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī (a), while leaning on

⁷⁰ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 523.

⁷¹ Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, 332; ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:44; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:525-526.

⁷² Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 100.

He replied with a greeting similar to his. The man said, 'O Amīr al-Mu'minīn, I came to ask you.' He said, 'Ask.' The man said, 'Inform me about where a man's soul is when he sleeps, how a newborn resembles his father, and how memory and forgetfulness occur.' Amīr al-Mu'minīn (a) looked at al-Ḥasan (a) and said, "Answer him," Al-Ḥasan (a) replied, "When a man sleeps, his soul is attached to the wind (*al-rīḥ*), and the wind is attached to the air (*al-hawā'*). If Allah wishes to seize his soul, the air pulls the wind, and the wind pulls the soul. If Allah wishes to return it to its place, the soul pulls the wind, and the wind pulls the air, and it returns to its place.

As for the new-born who resembles his father, when a man engages with his wife with a calm heart and a non-agitated body, the sperm settles in the womb, and the child resembles his father. If he engages with a preoccupied heart and an agitated body, the sperm settles in the womb. If it attaches to a vein from the veins of his uncles, the child will resemble his uncles. If it attaches

the hand of Salmān. They entered Masjid al-Ḥarām and sat down. A well-dressed, handsome man approached and greeted Amīr al-Mu'minīn, who returned the greeting. The man then sat down and said, 'O Amīr al-Mu'minīn, I will ask you about three matters. If you answer them, I will know that the people have wrongfully taken your position and that they are not to be trusted in their worldly affairs and in their afterlife. But if your answer is otherwise, then I will know that you and they are equal in status.'

Amīr al-Mu'minīn (a) said to him, "Ask me whatever you wish."

The man said, "Tell me, where does the soul of a man go when he sleeps? How does a man remember and forget? And how does it happen that a man's child resembles his paternal uncles and maternal uncles?"

Amīr al-Mu'minīn (a) turned to al-Ḥasan (a) and said, "Answer him." He said, "al-Ḥasan (a) answered him, and the man then said, 'I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and I have always borne

to a vein from the veins of his maternal uncles, the child will resemble his maternal uncles.

As for memory and forgetfulness, the heart is in a container, and the container is covered. When Allāh wishes the heart to remember, the cover is lifted, and the heart remembers.” The man said, “I bear witness that there is no god but Allāh, alone with no partner, and I bear witness that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger. I bear witness that your father, Amīr al-Mu’minīn, is truly the successor of Muḥammad, and I have always said this. I bear witness that you are his successor, and I bear witness that al-Ḥusayn is your successor,” and he counted every last one of them. I asked Abū ‘Abd Allāh (a), “Who was the man?” He replied, “Al-Khidr (a).”

witness to this. I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah, and I have always borne witness to this. I bear witness that you are the rightful successor of the Messenger of Allah (a) and his family), and the executor of his proof,’ and he pointed to Amīr al-Mu’minīn (a). ‘I have always borne witness to this. I bear witness that you are his successor and the executor of his proof,’ and he pointed to al-Ḥasan (a). ‘I bear witness that al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī is the successor of his brother and the executor of his proof after him. I bear witness that ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn is the executor of al-Ḥusayn’s affairs after him. I bear witness that Muḥammad b. ‘Alī is the executor of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn’s affairs. I bear witness that Ja‘far b. Muḥammad is the executor of Muḥammad’s affairs. I bear witness that Mūsā is the executor of Ja‘far b. Muḥammad’s affairs. I bear witness that ‘Alī b. Mūsā is the executor of Mūsā b. Ja‘far’s affairs. I bear witness that Muḥammad b. ‘Alī is the executor of ‘Alī b. Mūsā’s affairs. I bear witness that ‘Alī b. Muḥammad is the executor of Muḥammad b.

‘Alī’s affairs. I bear witness that al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī is the executor of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad’s affairs. I bear witness to a man from the descendants of al-Ḥasan who is not to be referred to by his name or his teknonym until his matter becomes manifest and he fills the world with justice as it had been filled with oppression. Peace be upon you, O Amīr al-Mu’minīn, and the mercy and blessings of Allah.’ Then he stood up and left. Amīr al-Mu’minīn said, ‘O Abū Muḥammad, follow him and see where he goes.’ So al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī went out and said, ‘As soon as he stepped outside the mosque, I did not know where he went on the earth of Allah. I returned to Amīr al-Mu’minīn and informed him. He said, ‘O Abū Muḥammad, do you know who he is?’ I said, ‘Allah, His Messenger, and Amīr al-Mu’minīn know best.’ He said, ‘He is al-Khiḍr.’”

The allegation is that al-Kulaynī altered the narration which he took from *al-Maḥāsīn* by appending the names of all twelve Imams. Several responses to this claim can be seen in the literature. Firstly, the phrase ‘and he counted every last one of them’ is itself evidence that the Shī‘as did not believe that there was an infinite number of Imams until the

end of time,⁷³ as alleged by Modarressi.⁷⁴ Secondly, this narration was recorded by al-Barqī in the chapter called *al-‘Ilal* – translated as ‘the reasons’ – which mainly focuses on those sections of reports that deal with questions and answers of the infallibles, and does not record the reports in their totality.⁷⁵

It seems that the reason why Kohlberg and Modarressi have considered the version of *al-Kāfi* to be a later interpolation is because the chain of narrators in the report of *al-Kāfi* includes the name of al-Barqī and hence the assumption is that al-Kulaynī took this report directly from *al-Maḥāsin* and then corrected it by adding the names of the rest of the Imams.⁷⁶ However, by comparing the report of *al-Kāfi* and *al-Maḥāsin*, it can be seen that there are variations in the content (*matn*), the chain of narrators (*isnād*) and even the Imam to whom the narrator ascribes the narration. If al-Kulaynī sought to merely append the names of the twelve Imams to the end of the narration, what explanation can be given to this great degree of variation in all sections of the report?

Four possible reasons have been given regarding this variation.

(1) Al-Kulaynī was quoting this narration from another work of al-Barqī other than *al-Maḥāsin*.⁷⁷

⁷³ Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 110.

⁷⁴ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 101.

⁷⁵ Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 110.

⁷⁶ This argument only stands for those who accept the Shī‘ī narrative of *ḥadīth* transmission. If one were to reject the standard narrative and only consider manuscripts, this argument would not hold because the oldest available manuscript of *al-Kāfi* (7th/13th century - 8th/14th century) predates the oldest available manuscript of *al-Maḥāsin* (10th/16th - 11th/17th century). In addition, al-Kulaynī was more popular and his work was copied many more times (Mohammad Ghandehari, “Ḥadīth-i shahādat-i Khidr bar dawāzdah Imām: Barrasī-i aṣālat wa naḥwi-ye intiqāl az uṣūl-i awwaliyyi bi jawāmi‘-i ḥadīthi,” *Imāmat Pazhūhī* 3, no. 12 (1392 Sh./2013), 224).

⁷⁷ According to al-Najāshī (*Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 72) and al-Ṭūsī (*al-Fihrist*, ed. Jawād Qayyūmī (Mu’assisat nashr al-faqāhat: 2001), 62), al-Barqī authored other

(2) The original version of *al-Maḥāsin* did have the full narration as reported in *al-Kāfi*, whereas the extant version available to us is only one-third of the original as mentioned previously. This possibility is further strengthened by the observation that while al-Kulaynī in *al-Kāfi* narrates from al-Barqī about 1500 times, most of these narrations cannot be found in the what remains of *al-Maḥāsin*.⁷⁸

(3) The report was summarised by al-Barqī himself and thus the phrase, “and he counted every last one of them” is al-Barqī himself summarising the narration. What supports this possibility is that it is only the first part of the narration that was in line with the chapter of *al-Ṭal* and thus there was no need for al-Barqī to report the full tradition. Interestingly, al-Kulaynī’s purpose of mentioning the narration lay in the second portion that mentioned the names of the Imams. Hence, in *al-Kāfi* the first part of this narration, that details the responses of Imam al-Ḥasan to the 3 questions of al-Khiḍr, has been condensed.⁷⁹ Some authors have even compared all of al-Barqī’s reports in this chapter with their renditions in other works, with the result being that most narrations in this chapter involve some degree of paraphrasing or excluding of certain segments.

There are 63 reports in this chapter that have been recorded by other authors but have been taken from a shared primary source. By comparing the rendition of al-Barqī with these other authors, whereby both were accessing the narrations from a common source, 40% of these 63 reports were shown to have been summarised or had certain segments excluded in *al-Maḥāsin*,⁸⁰ which clearly indicates that al-Barqī was only interested in bringing those sections of narrations that were in line with his chapter heading.

works apart from *al-Maḥāsin*. See also Muhammad Jawād Shubbayrī Zanjānī, “Barqī, Abū Ja‘far,” 159.

⁷⁸ Ghandehari, “Ḥadīth-i shahādat-i Khiḍr,” 224.

⁷⁹ Khayrabadi, “Barrasī-yi mas‘ali-yi ‘Ithnā ‘Ashariyya,” 223.

⁸⁰ Ghandehari, “Ḥadīth-i shahādat-i Khiḍr,” 239.

(4) One of the copyists of *al-Maḥāsin* summarised the narration, though this is unlikely and perhaps the weakest possibility.

Thus, in order to suggest tampering by al-Kulaynī, one would have to first disprove these four possibilities.⁸¹

Furthermore, by analysing the chains of narration of this al-Khiḍr report in *al-Maḥāsin*, *al-Kāfi*, *al-Ghayba* of al-Nu‘mānī, *Kamāl al-dīn*, ‘*Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, ‘*Ilal al-sharā’i*, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* of al-Mufīd as recorded in Ibn Shahrāshūb’s *Manāqib*, *al-Ghayba* of al-Ṭūsī, and *Tafsīr ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī*, we realise that whilst the chains may differ between the authors, they all go back to al-Barqī who reports from Abū Hāshim Dāwūd b. Qāsim al-Ja‘farī (d. 261/875). The report in *Tafsīr ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī*, however, does not have al-Barqī in the chain and it is Ibrāhīm b. Hāshim who directly reports this narration from Dāwūd b. Qāsim. We can thus be certain that the primary narrator of this narration was Abū Hāshim Dāwūd b. Qāsim al-Ja‘farī, who was one of the great companions of Imams al-Riḍā, al-Jawād, al-Hādī and al-‘Askarī.⁸² We can also safely assume that Dāwūd b. Qāsim recorded this narration in his book, as it was deemed highly reprehensible for primary narrators to transmit narrations verbally without writing them down. In the words of Modarressi,

⁸¹ Khayrabadi, “Barrasī-yi mas’ali-yi “Ithnā ‘Ashariyyah”,” 223. According to Andrew Newman, there was no reason for al-Barqī to mention the section of the narration with the names of all the Imams since he was one of the earlier companions and this was common knowledge at that time. “Al-Barqī was himself a companion of the ninth and the tenth Imams, and his father – from whom Aḥmad narrated the tradition – had been associated with the eighth and ninth Imams. Muḥammad narrated the tradition from Dāwūd b. al-Qāsim, Abū Hāshim al-Ja‘far, a Baghdadi prominent in the community and respected by the political authority, who had seen the eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh Imams, as well as the Hidden Imam. Given these associations, including the actual names of al-Ḥusayn’s successors would have been useful for later generations but perhaps less necessary at the time.” (Andrew Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī‘ism: Ḥadīth as Discourse between Qum and Baghdad* (Routledge: 2013), 63, footnote 53.

⁸² Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 124.

Authors sometimes noted if a report did not appear in the notebook of the ultimate authority for an oral transmission, [this was] a sign normally taken to indicate that the ascription was not reliable.⁸³

What further strengthens this assumption is that the primary narrator who transmitted the book of Dāwūd b. Qāsim was none other than al-Barqī himself.⁸⁴ The question then arises, if the main source of this narration was the book of Dāwūd b. Qāsim, from whom all the above authors were transmitting, then why does the version in *al-Maḥāsin* differ from the others? The answer lies in the fact that in the chapter of *al-ʿIlal*, 70% of reports (91 out of 130) were extracted by al-Barqī from the book of his father Muḥammad b. Khālid, which was also called *al-ʿIlal* (compare the chain of narrators in the above table).⁸⁵ It is noteworthy that throughout the rest of *al-Maḥāsin*, al-Barqī seldom reports from his father (about 28% of reports are narrated on the authority of Muḥammad b. Khālid). Therefore, the narration of al-Khiḍr in this chapter was taken from a completely different source (the *kitāb al-ʿIlal* of Muḥammad b. Khālid) than the one relied upon by the likes of al-Kulaynī (the book of Dāwūd b. Qāsim al-Jaʿfarī).⁸⁶ Perhaps it can be postulated that the reason why al-Barqī did not directly transmit from the book of Dāwūd b. Qāsim in this chapter – even though he was the main narrator of the book – was because at the time of compiling this section of *al-Maḥāsin*, he had not yet been granted permission to transmit the book, and this

⁸³ Modarressi, *Tradition and survival: a Bibliographical Survey of Early Shīʿite Literature* (Oneworld Academic: 2003), xv.

⁸⁴ Ghandehari, “Ḥadīth-i shahādat-i Khiḍr,” 228.

⁸⁵ Thus, even where al-Barqī could directly narrate from his teachers, in this chapter specifically, he relied on his father’s renditions of the narrations. For example, throughout *al-Maḥāsin*, al-Barqī frequently reports directly from Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, but in the chapter in question, all the reports of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr are reported on the authority of his father Muḥammad b. Khālid.

⁸⁶ Ghandehari, “Ḥadīth-i shahādat-i Khiḍr,” 233-234.

was something that was granted to him in his later years.⁸⁷

1.3 Lack of mention of the idea of twelve Imams by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/903) in *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*

Kohlberg claimed that there are no narrations in *Baṣā’ir* that mention the twelve Imams.⁸⁸ The response that has been given is that this is an erroneous statement, as there are no less than six narrations that clearly refer to the twelve Imams.⁸⁹ In addition, in another article written in the same year, Kohlberg actually discusses two of these narrations within a different context.⁹⁰

1.4 Lack of mention of the idea of twelve Imams in *Uṣūl al-arba‘a mi‘a*

An *aṣl* refers to a compilation of narrations transcribed by a narrator upon directly hearing them from an infallible. The 400 *uṣūl* (*al-uṣūl al-arba‘a mi‘a*) refers to the earliest compilations of Shī‘ī *ḥadīth*. The companions of the Imams would directly transcribe the words of the Imams in these booklets of theirs, with most of them being written down from the time of Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) and the latter Imams. The four major Shī‘ī *ḥadīth* books (*al-kutub al-‘arba‘a*) mainly relied on these 400 *uṣūl* and thus after the compilation of these major books, the 400 *uṣūl* began to be ignored and today, only sixteen of them are extant. Kohlberg argues that the idea of twelve Imams, or the occultation of

⁸⁷ Ibid, 235.

⁸⁸ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 523; Modarressi also states the same but adds that there are three such narrations that seem to be later interpolations (Modarressi, *Maktab dar farāyandi takāmul*, 191-192).

⁸⁹ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, 280 (*ḥadīth* 15), 320 (*ḥadīths* 4 and 5), 319 (*ḥadīth* 2), 372 (*ḥadīth* 16) 405 (*ḥadīth* 4).

⁹⁰ Etan Kohlberg, “The Term “Muḥaddath” in Twelver Shī‘ism,” in *In Praise of the Few. Studies in Shī‘ī Thought and History* (Brill: 2020), 242-249.

the last Imam, cannot be found in these earliest works, except for two narrations, one of which mentions that there will be eleven Imams (in the *aṣl Abī Saʿīd ʿAbbād al-ʿUṣfurī*), whilst the other says there will be seven Imams (in the *aṣl Muḥammad b. al-Muthannā al-Ḥaḍramī*).⁹¹ Modarressi also makes a similar claim, but clarifies that there are actually two such narrations in the *aṣl Abī Saʿīd ʿAbbād al-ʿUṣfurī* which indicate towards eleven Imams.⁹²

Several responses to this claim can be seen in the literature. Firstly, these are erroneous statements. There are several narrations in the aforementioned works that clearly refer to the twelve Imams. For example, in the very same *aṣl Abī Saʿīd ʿAbbād al-ʿUṣfurī*, there are other narrations that speak of twelve Imams. Imām al-Sajjād (a) is reported to have said, “Indeed, Allah created from the light of his greatness, Muḥammad, ʿAlī and eleven from his descendants...”⁹³

Another narration in the aforesaid *aṣl* quotes Imām al-Bāqir (a) quoting the Prophet (s) as saying, “Indeed, me and eleven of my descendants, and you O ʿAlī, are the pegs of the earth...so when the eleventh of my descendants departs, the earth and its inhabitants will be destroyed and they will not be given respite.”⁹⁴ In light of these narrations, it is clear that the narrations referenced by Kohlberg and Modarressi in which the Prophet only mentions eleven of his descendants as being the leaders are referring to the rest of the twelve Imams excluding Imam ʿAlī (a), because Imam ʿAlī (a) is not a descendant of the Prophet.⁹⁵

The author of the abovementioned *aṣl* is Abū Saʿīd al-ʿUṣfurī whose original name, is ʿAbbād b. Yaʿqūb (d. ca. 250/864).⁹⁶ Some, like

⁹¹ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿAshariyya,” 532

⁹² Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 101

⁹³ Diyā al-dīn al-Maḥmūdī, Niʿmatullah al-Jalīlī and Mehdī Ghulām ʿAlī, *Al-Uṣūl al-sittat ʿashar min al-uṣūl al-awwaliyya* (Dār al-Ḥadīth: 2002), 15.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 16.

⁹⁵ Alviri, “Naqd-i nazariyi,” 55.

⁹⁶ Najāshi quotes Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī who says that the companions would say

Modarressi, maintain that he was a Zaydī whilst others surmise that he was definitely an Imāmī Shī‘ī.⁹⁷ Interestingly, in *Tradition and Survival*, Modarressi claims that most of the narrations in this *aṣl*, including the abovementioned ones, were taken from the book of Ibn Abī al-Miqdām (d. 172/789).⁹⁸ This means that if one were to ascertain the reliability of ‘Abbād b. Ya‘qūb, and thus accept that he reported this from Ibn Abī l-Miqdām, we could thus say that these narrations were circulating in Shī‘ī circles before 170 AH, and were we to go one step further and ascertain the reliability of Ibn Abī l-Miqdām, we can conclude that these narrations were in circulation before 150 AH (as that is the year of the demise of Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī, from whom Ibn Abī l-Miqdām

this ‘Abbād al-‘Uṣfurī is ‘Abbād b. Ya‘qūb (see entry 793 in *Rijāl al-Najāshī*). This seems to be the reason why many, like Modarressi, have considered him to be one and the same with another narrator by the name ‘Abbād b. Ya‘qūb al-Rawājini. A minority have opined that ‘Abbād al-‘Uṣfurī is different to ‘Abbād al-Rawājini based on the following indicators:

1. Neither al-Ṭūsī nor al-Najāshī have mentioned the ascription of “Rawājini” for Abū Ṣāid al-‘Uṣfurī
2. Al-Ṭūsī has two separate entries. One for ‘Abbād al-‘Uṣfurī and one for ‘Abbād al-Rawājini.
3. The chain of al-Ṭūsī to ‘Abbād al-‘Uṣfurī differs with his chain to ‘Abbād al-Rawājini suggesting that these are two different individuals with similar names. (Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 119-120; See also Muḥammad Taqī Shūshtārī, *Qāmūs al-rijāl* (Mu’assisat al-nashr al-Islāmī: 1989), 5:658-664; Morteza Naderi, “Aṣālat wa i’tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat-i Imām-i dawāzdahum (taḥlīl-i intiḳādī-yi nazārī-yi wābastegī-yi Imāmiyya bi wāqifa dar aḥādīth-i ghaybat)” (PhD diss., Dānishkadi-yi Ilāhiyyāt wa Ma‘ārif-i Islāmī, 1396 Sh./2017), 86). See Etan Kohlberg, “*al-Uṣūl al-Arba‘umī’a*,” in Harald Motzki (eds.) *Hadith Origins and Developments* (Routledge: 2016), 132-133, for an extensive discussion that describes how it was the inveterate liar Abū Sumayna who, using the method of *tadlīs al-shuyūkh*, corrupted the name of ‘Abbād al-‘Uṣfurī (and not his book!)

⁹⁷ See for example, Al-Khū‘ī, *Mu‘jam rijāl al-ḥadīth wa tafṣīl ṭabaqāt al-ruwāt* (1992), 10:237.

⁹⁸ Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 206.

reports from).⁹⁹

Modarressi also mentioned that the earliest written record of the Prophet foretelling the coming of twelve Imams was in the *Amālī* of the Egyptian Sunnī scholar Layth b. Sa‘d (d. 175/792). However, the abovementioned evidence clearly suggests that these narrations were circulating within Shī‘ī circles before this. Secondly, the book *Ithbāt al-raj‘a* attributed to Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Naysābūrī (d. 260/873-4) contains four narrations alluding to the twelve Imams.¹⁰⁰

With regards to the narration of seven Imams, Kohlberg himself acknowledges this as being an Ismā‘īlī tradition. Furthermore, Shaykh al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, when transcribing the extant sixteen *uṣūl*, explicitly states that two of the narrations in this compendium were clearly said in the state of *taqiyya* (dissimulation), including this one.¹⁰¹

It must also be added that whilst it is true that we only have access to sixteen *uṣūl* today, that does not exclude the possibility of being able to identify the contents of the lost *uṣūl*. Later authors like al-Kulaynī were extracting and sorting their narrations from these earlier written works. By analysing al-Kulaynī’s chain of narrators, one can identify

⁹⁹ Reza Ghorbani Zarrin, “Barrasī-yi qidmat-i aḥādīth-i dawāzdah Imām dar al-Kāfī,” *Imāmat Pazhūhī* 3, no. 12 (1392 Sh./2013), 161-162.

¹⁰⁰ See Ḥadīth numbers 1, 4, 5 and 6 in al-Faḍl b. Shādhān, *Ithbāt al-raj‘ā*, ed. Ghulam Hasan Muharrami (Dār al-mujtabā: 2013); Fatema Hussein Tehrani, “Mahdaviyyat az dīdgāh-i mutakallimīn-i Shī‘a dar qarn-i 3 wa 4 bā rūykard-i naqd-i āthār-i mustashriqān (Masters diss., Dānishgāh-i Qur‘an wa Ḥadīth, 1395 Sh./2016), 180-181. This response is only acceptable to those who accept the attribution of such a work to Faḍl. For a critique of this attribution, see Hassan Ansari, *Huwiyyat-i wāqī‘ī-yi kitāb-i Ithbāt al-raj‘a mansūb bi Faḍl b. Shādhān, Barrasīha-yi Tahqīqī*, <http://ansari.kateban.com/post/1286> and translated into English on Iqra Online, <https://iqraonline.net/ithbat-al-rajaa-of-fadhl-bin-shadhan/>. For an example of a defense of this attribution, see Mehdi Farrokhi et al., “Mawjūdiyyat-i khārijī-yi kitāb Ithbāt al-raj‘at-i Faḍl b. Shādhān Nīshābūrī bā tā‘kid bar naql-i riwāyāt-i kitābash dar āthār-i mutā‘akhhir az ū,” *Shī‘ah Pazhūhī*, 7, 20, (1400), 229-253.

¹⁰¹ Ḍiyā al-dīn al-Maḥmūdī, Ni‘matullāh al-Jalīlī and Mehdī Ghulām ‘Alī, *Al-Uṣūl al-sittat ‘ashar*, 170; Alvīrī, “Naqd-i nazariyi,” 55.

the earlier sources that al-Kulaynī relied upon. For example, one study investigated the twenty reports that al-Kulaynī brings under *Bābu mā jā’a fi l-ithnay ‘ashara wa-l-naṣṣi ‘alayhim* (the Chapter of what has been reported about the Twelve and their explicit designation).

Another study collectively looked at the narrations regarding the twelve Imams in *al-Kāfi*, *al-Ghayba* of al-Ṭūsī and *al-Ghayba* of al-Nu‘mānī (a total of 64 narrations) to identify the earliest sources that were being used to gather these narrations. The result was that these narrations can be traced back to the earliest compilations of the companions such as *Kitāb ‘Abān b. ‘Uthmān al-Aḥmar* (d. 200/815), *Kitāb Ibn Abī ‘Umayr* (d. d. 217/832) and *Kitāb Muḥammad b. Sinān* (d. 220/835).¹⁰²

Thus, the conclusion that can be deduced is that from at least the second half of the second/eighth century, the narrations regarding twelve Imams were being circulated by the companions and were preserved in their books.¹⁰³

1.5 The description of the Twelvers according to *Kitāb firaq al-shī‘a* and *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-l-firaq*

Kohlberg stated that al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, in his *Kitāb firaq al-shī‘a*, and Sa‘d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Qummī, in his *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-l-firaq* (both completed around 287/900) described the state of the Imāmiyya after the death of the eleventh Imam, but no mention is made that the number of Imams had reached twelve, the name of the twelfth Imam or that he would have two occultations.¹⁰⁴ Modarressi makes a similar claim whilst adding,

Other scholars, such as the two Nawbakhtīs, Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ash‘arī and Ibn Qiba, all from the latter part

¹⁰² Muḥammad Reza Wahhabi, “Aḥādīth-i Ithnā ‘ashar dar manābi‘-i si qarn-i nakhust-i Shī‘a”, *Ulūm-i Ḥadīth* 16, no. 2 (1390 Sh./2011), 85-109.

¹⁰³ Zarrin, “Barrasī-yi qidmat-i aḥādīth.”

¹⁰⁴ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 522;

of the third/ninth century, also failed to refer to that statement in any of their surviving works.¹⁰⁵

This is an erroneous statement. Both the abovementioned books describe a sect after the death of the eleventh Imam (a) who believed that the successor of the eleventh Imam (a) was his son whose name was ‘Muḥammad’, was the ‘Qā’im’ and had gone into ‘one of his two occultations.’¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, it is not accurate to reject the attribution of such beliefs to scholars such as Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī and Ibn Qiba, as we do not have access to most of their writings.¹⁰⁷ For example, more than thirty works have been attributed to Abū Sahl,¹⁰⁸ out of which only a portion of the book *al-Tanbīh* and a few pages of *al-Anwār* are extant.

2. Narrations describing the idea of twelve Imams in post-occultation sources

2.1 *Kitāb al-Kāfi*

According to Modarressi, al-Kulaynī was one of the first authors to gather narrations predicting that there would be twelve Imams. Twenty such narrations are gathered in a chapter entitled *Bābu mā jā’ā fi l-ithnay ‘ashara wa-l-naṣṣi ‘alayhim* (the Chapter of what has been reported about the Twelve and their Explicit Designation). However, aspersions are raised regarding the originality of this chapter in *al-Kāfi*. According to Modarressi, the whole chapter is not in its proper place and appears to be a later addition, and the fact that al-Nu‘mānī only quotes of four out of the twenty narrations of this chapter is a further

¹⁰⁵ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 100.

¹⁰⁶ Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī’a* (Dār al-aḍwā’: 1983), 102-103; Sa’d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Ash‘arī, *al-Maqālāt wa-l-Firaq*, 114; Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 111.

¹⁰⁷ Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 113.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 31-32; Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 12-13.

source of suspicion.¹⁰⁹

Several responses to this claim be seen in the literature. Apart from the abovementioned chapter, narrations about the Imams being twelve have been mentioned in two other chapters that seem to have been completely overlooked by Modarressi: *Bābu mā naṣṣa Allāh ‘azzawajal wa rasūluhū ‘ala l-‘imati ‘alayhimu l-salām wāḥidan fa wāḥidan* (the Chapter of Explicit Designation of each of the Imams by Allah the Almighty and His Prophet)¹¹⁰ and the whole chapter that discusses the birth and death of each of the Imams.¹¹¹ As for the aforesaid chapter being “not in its most proper place”, this is a mere claim made by Modarressi for which no evidence is presented.¹¹²

With regards to why al-Nu‘mānī only reported four (out of twenty) of these narrations, the assumption being made is that al-Nu‘mānī had complete access to *al-Kāfi*, presumably because he was one of the students of al-Kulaynī and one of the people who copied *al-Kāfi* (hence why he is also known as al-Kātib). However, there is evidence that indicates that at the time of compiling his *al-Ghayba*, al-Nu‘mānī did not have complete access to his copy of *al-Kāfi*, or at the very least, the section of *al-Kāfi* under discussion. In his introduction to *al-Ghayba*, he says:

I have gathered in this book, by the help of Allah, narrations that have been reported by our teachers from Imam ‘Alī (a) and the truthful Imams regarding the occultation (ghayba) and related topics, based on what was available to me. I did not report everything that has reached me in this regard due to it not being in my reach and neither did my memory have the capacity to remember all of it. What people report about these

¹⁰⁹ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 102.

¹¹⁰ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:286-329.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 439-525; Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 116.

¹¹² Ibid, 116.

topics is much more and much greater than what I have reported...¹¹³

By comparing the narrations reported from *al-Kāfi* in *al-Ghayba*, it is clear that most of the narrations that have been taken from *al-Kāfi* are found very close to each other in the chapters of *al-Kāfi*, implying that al-Nu‘mānī had physical access to those sections of *al-Kāfi*. Unfortunately, the chapter that is under discussion - *Bābu mā jā’a fī l-ithnay ‘ashara wa-l-naṣṣi ‘alayhim* (the Chapter of what has been reported about the Twelve and their Explicit Designation) - is quite far from the other set of chapters to which al-Nu‘mānī apparently had access. Perhaps one may then question how it is that al-Nu‘mānī reported four (out of the twenty) narrations from *al-Kāfi* that speak of twelve Imams, if he did not have access to this section of *al-Kāfi*? By comparing the chain of narrators (*isnād*) and the content (*matn*) of these four narrations, what is apparent is that there are variations between what is in *al-Kāfi* and in *al-Ghayba* in three of these narrations, such that it seems highly likely that al-Nu‘mānī did not obtain these narrations from *al-Kāfi* itself.¹¹⁴ There is only one narration that is exactly identical in both works. However, due to the fact that there are several narrations in *al-Ghayba* which have the name of al-Kulaynī in their chain of narration, yet are narrated in a different manner in *al-Kāfi*, the most realistic possibilities are either that (1) al-Nu‘mānī was reporting these four narrations verbally from al-Kulaynī (and not from *al-Kāfi* directly), or (2) that he was reporting from another work of al-Kulaynī other than *al-Kāfi*, or perhaps (3) al-Nu‘mānī was relying on his memory of what had been recorded in *al-Kāfi* and thus was only able to recall these four narrations.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, there is no solid evidence that al-Nu‘mānī intended to gather all reports about twelve Imams for one to thus question as to why

¹¹³ Al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 29.

¹¹⁴ Muḥammad Jawād Shubbayri Zanjāni, *al-Kātib al-Nu‘mānī wa Kitābuhū l-Ghayba*, ‘Ulūm al-ḥadīth 3 (1419 AH), 228.

¹¹⁵ Zarrin, “Barrasī-yi qidmat-i aḥādīth,” 155-157.

he did not report the sixteen other narrations that are found in *al-Kāfi*.¹¹⁶

2.2 The narration of ‘Six days, six months or six years’

According to Modarressi, there was a rumor that had spread during the minor occultation that the Imam would only be in hiding for six days, six months or six years.¹¹⁷ He bases this claim on the narration mentioned by al-Nu‘mānī whilst also pointing out how this report has been tampered with in other renditions such as the versions reported by al-Kulaynī and al-Ṭūsī.¹¹⁸ However, this narration has absolutely no indication that such a rumor was floating around at any time whatsoever. It is a prophecy narrated by Imam ‘Alī (a), and can in no way be used to decipher the state of the Shī‘ī community during the minor occultation.¹¹⁹

Modarressi also claimed that al-Ṭūsī completely omitted the part of the narration that spoke about the occultation being six days, six months or six years. However, al-Ṭūsī has recorded this narration twice in his *al-Ghayba*, once in full (including the aforesaid phrase)¹²⁰ and once in brief (without the aforesaid phrase) i.e., only that section of the narration was quoted that was relevant to the chapter.¹²¹

As for why al-Nu‘mānī’s version has the phrase “a period of time” instead of “six days, six months or six years”, more than one possibility has been suggested, which must be proven to be false before one can suggest intentional tampering. Al-Nu‘mānī may have heard this narration from al-Kulaynī verbally and thus was not quoting from the

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 158-159.

¹¹⁷ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 87.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 87 and 103.

¹¹⁹ Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 117; Hussein Tehrani, “Mahdawiyyat az dīdgāh-i mutakallimīn-i Shī‘a,” 203-204; Naderi, “Aṣālat wa i‘tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat,” 101.

¹²⁰ Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, ed. ‘Alī Ahmad Nasih and Abdallah Sarshar (Mu‘assisat al-ma‘ārif al-Islāmiyya: 2004), 165, *ḥadīth* 127.

¹²¹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 336, *ḥadīth* 282; Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 118; Naderi, “Aṣālat wa i‘tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat,” 101.

book *al-Kāfi* directly, and because this was a verbal transmission, al-Kulaynī may have paraphrased the narration, as is commonly known amongst scholars of *ḥadīth*.¹²² An alternative possibility is that this phrase was changed by a later copyist of *al-Ghayba*. Al-Majlisī explicitly states in *Biḥār al-anwār* that the phrase ‘Six days, six months or six years’ has been reported by al-Nu‘mānī in his *al-Ghayba*.¹²³ This means that in Majlisī’s copy of *al-Ghayba*, this section of the narration had not been tampered with. Clearly, it was one of the later copyists who edited the phrase, and thus al-Nu‘mānī should not be accused of this.¹²⁴

2.3 Discrepancies in descriptions of the respective lengths of the first and second *ghayba*

According to both Modarressi and Kohlberg, there are conflicting reports about which of the two occultations would be the longer one and which would be the shorter one.¹²⁵ The impression gained from such a discrepancy is that initially it was not quite clear which of the two would last longer; only later was it established that the second occultation would be the longer one.

However, this is an erroneous statement. Both Modarressi and Kohlberg refer to the same narration “according to which the first *ghayba* will also be the longer one.”¹²⁶ However, upon referring to the reference given in their footnotes, it seems that the narration has clearly been misunderstood:

Ishāq b. ‘Amār al-Ṣayrafī says, I heard Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) say, “For the Qā’im, there are two occultations. One of

¹²² Moghaddam, “Bāzkhānī wa naqd,” 118; Refer to the previous section for evidence to support this claim.

¹²³ Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:118.

¹²⁴ Naderi, “Aṣālat wa i‘tebār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat,” 101.

¹²⁵ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 87; Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 528.

¹²⁶ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 528.

them is long and the other is short. As for the first one, a group from his Shī‘as would know of his whereabouts, whereas for the other one, no one would know of his whereabouts except his special compatriots who are on his religion (*khāṣat mawālīhī fī dīnihi*).¹²⁷

It is not clear how such a narration supports their claim. Perhaps the phrase “one of them is long and the other is short” was understood as referring to the occultations in chronological order, but this is clearly unwarranted.¹²⁸

3. Adopting beliefs from other Shī‘ī sects such as the Wāqifa

According to both Modarressi and Kohlberg, the idea of the occultation of the Imam is something that has its roots in the Wāqifī sect who claimed that the seventh Imam (a) was the Qā‘im and had gone into occultation.¹²⁹ However, the sources referenced by both Modarressi and Kohlberg that attribute such a belief to the Wāqifīs were written around the same time as works that describe the occultation of the Imam as part of the tenets of the Twelver creed, and as such, based on their working methodology, it is not accurate to use this as evidence that a certain group held these beliefs before the Twelvers.¹³⁰

According to Kohlberg himself, al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb al-Zarrād (d. 224/839) in his *Kitāb al-mashyakhā* reports a narration from Imam al-Bāqir (a) that mentions the two occultations of the Qā‘im.¹³¹ This author is one of the greatest companions of the seventh, eighth and ninth

¹²⁷ Al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 170.

¹²⁸ Hussein Tehrani, “Mahdawīyyat az didgāh-i mutakallimīn-I Shī‘a,” 202-203; Naderi, “Aṣālat wa i‘tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat,” 103.

¹²⁹ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 87-88; Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 528.

¹³⁰ Alviri, “Naqd-i nazariyi,” 60.

¹³¹ Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘Ashariyya,” 531.

Imam and was contemporaneous to al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-Baṭā’ini, one of the alleged Wāqifis who wrote a book on the *ghayba*. As such, based on what evidence can it be alleged that the Twelvers borrowed this concept from the Wāqifis (if not the opposite)?¹³²

Furthermore, the narrations that discuss the occultations have been reported by both Wāqifis and non-Wāqifis. An extensive study that analyses the role of the Wāqifis in spreading the narrations concerning the occultation shows that the number of narrations reported by non-Wāqifis is actually much larger than those reported by the Wāqifis. There are a total of 130 narrations about the *ghayba* in *al-Kāfi*, *al-Ghayba* of al-Nu‘mānī, *Kamāl al-Dīn* of al-Ṣadūq and *al-Ghayba* of al-Ṭūsī. From these 130, only 23 (17.7%) are exclusively reported by Wāqifis.¹³³ Furthermore, even in the reports of the Wāqifis, they were not the primary narrators who heard these narrations from the Imam, but rather, secondary reporters who heard these narrations from other Imāmīs such as Muḥammad b. Muslim and Zurārah b. ‘Ayan.¹³⁴

Within the Imāmī *ḥadīth* corpus, narrations about the occultation are reported from the Holy Prophet (s) and all the Imams leading up to Imam al-Kāẓim i.e., before even the formation of the Wāqifī sect. These narrations can be traced back to early works which report the narration alongside chains of narrators that do not include Wāqifis. For example, in a famous narration that has been recorded in many works, Kumayl b. Ziyād al-Nakha‘ī (d. 82/701) reports from Imam ‘Alī (a) that the earth will never be devoid of an infallible, either manifest and well known or afraid and hidden. This narration has been narrated by both Shī‘ī and Sunnī narrators and can be found in the earliest works, with a complete chain of narrators, such as *al-Ghārāt* of Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Thaqafī al-Kūfī (d. 283/896-7). It has also been reported in a *mursal*¹³⁵

¹³² Alviri, “Naqd-i naẓariyi,” 61.

¹³³ Naderi, “Aṣālat wa i‘tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat,” 192.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 105.

¹³⁵ Referring to a report in which one or more of its transmitters are not

fashion in heresiographical works like *al-Maqālāt wa-l-firaq* of Sa‘d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Ash‘arī al-Qummī (d. 301).

Interestingly, Modarressi himself quotes the same narration in one of the responses of Ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and describes it in the footnotes as “a well-transmitted statement of ‘Alī quoted in the sources.”¹³⁶ In the Persian translation of *Crisis and Consolidation*, Modarressi adds that Zaydī works also report this tradition but exclude the last phrase.¹³⁷ However, a recent discovery has been made in one of the oldest Zaydī libraries where a manuscript of a Zaydī work was found containing the full narration with the aforementioned phrase. What is more interesting is that in the commentary of the narration, the Zaydī scholar has mentioned the opinion of the Imāmīs as well about the occultation of the Imam.^{138,139}

Further, whether one considers the reason for the breaking away of the Wāqifis from the mainstream Imāmī community to be greed and hankering after their personal desires, or simply a mistake in identifying the seventh Imam as the awaited Qā’im, the simple fact that they claimed that the Imam had gone into occultation is itself a proof that such a belief already existed within the Imāmī school of thought. In other words, just as sects before them like the *saba’iyya* and the *kaysāniyya* had claimed that the Imam had gone into occultation, the Wāqifis did the same, because the Imāmī community already subscribed to the tenet that the awaited Qā’im would go into occultation.¹⁴⁰

mentioned, and thus lacks continuity in its chain of transmitters.

¹³⁶ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 227.

¹³⁷ Modarressi, *Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul*, 288.

¹³⁸ Muḥammad Kazim Rehmati, “Yek irjā’-i kuhan bi Ibn Qiba wa maṭlabī darbāri-yi ū,” *Payām*, 3 (1388 Sh./2009), 673-675.

¹³⁹ For a detailed analysis of the sources and transmission of many such reports that are narrated prior to the formation of the Wāqifis, see Naderi, “Aṣālat wa i‘tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat,” 162-177.

¹⁴⁰ Alviri, “Naqd-i nazāriyi,” 61.

4. Adopting the *ḥadīth* of twelve Imams from Sunnī sources

According to both Kohlberg¹⁴¹ and Modarressi,¹⁴² the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet foretelling the coming of twelve Imams was originally only found in Sunnī sources and it was only after the occultation of the twelfth Imam that the Shī'as incorporated these narrations in their own books. Before this point, such narrations "had never attracted the attention of Shī'ite traditionists."¹⁴³

There are three such narrations in the earliest Sunnī works, the primary narrators of which are four famous companions of the Prophet. The first narration is reported by ibn Mas'ūd, the second narration by Jābir b. Samura and Sa'd b. Abī Waqqās and the third narration by Abū Juḥayfa. A quantitative analysis of the transmission of these three narrations in Sunnī works shows that within the first three centuries, approximately 200 narrators reported these narrations, a majority of which are considered trustworthy according to Sunnī Rijāl standards, and around 25-30% of these narrators are classified as Imāmī Shī'ī. By assessing each of the narrators as well as the generation (*ṭabaqa*) they fall into, it is clear that during the time of every single Imam, these narrations were being spread by both Sunnī and Shī'ī narrators of *ḥadīth*.¹⁴⁴

According to Modarressi, these narrations were first recorded by Sunnī scholars such as Layth b. Sa'd (d. 175/792) and Abū Dāwūd al-

¹⁴¹ Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-'Ashariyya," 529.

¹⁴² Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 100.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 100.

¹⁴⁴ Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāh-i naqd*, 169-171; In fact, even amongst the *tābi'īn*, there were certain companions like Masrūq b. Ajda' who transmitted this report. It seems likely that he was a Shī'ī based on the fact that it is reported that he would carry a clay tablet with him wherever he travelled in order to prostrate on it during his prayers (see *ibid*, 170).

Ṭayālīsī (d. 204/819-820).¹⁴⁵ However, there are certain Shī‘ī narrators within Sunnī works who are recorded to have reported these narrations even before these two Sunnī authors, such as Faṭr b. Khalīfa (d. 150/767) and Shu‘ba b. Ḥajjāj (d. 160/777). Thereafter, these narrations were recorded in other *ḥadīth* compendiums,¹⁴⁶ such as the *Musnad* of ‘Alī b. al-Ja‘d al-Jawharī (d. 230/845).¹⁴⁷

5. Imāmī belief in an endless chain of Imams until the end of times

According to Modarressi, the early Imāmī community upheld that there was no defined number of Imams and in fact, the chain of Imams would continue until the Day of Judgement. This idea then changed as the occultation was prolonged more than expected.¹⁴⁸ However, the evidence brought forth by Modarressi – in the footnote of both English and Farsi versions of his works - for such a claim has no relevance to the said claim:

“See Nawbakhtī:116, 118; Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh: 102, 106...”¹⁴⁹

Since both references are for the most part identical, it will suffice to just look at one, and thus, analysis will focus on the reference referring to page 102 of the work of Sa‘d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Ash‘arī al-Qummī (d. 301), *al-Maqālāt wa-l-firaq*. Here, the author begins to describe the sects that existed after the passing away of Imam al-‘Askarī (a), the first of which is the Imāmiyya who are described as

Those who believe that after the demise of al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī (a), Allah has a proof on the earth and a vicegerent who is the son of al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī

¹⁴⁵ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 100.

¹⁴⁶ See above where the Aṣl of Abū Sa‘īd al-‘Uṣfūrī was discussed.

¹⁴⁷ Jawharchī, *Tārīkh dar gudhargāh-i naqd*, 174.

¹⁴⁸ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 86; See also, *Ibid*, 101.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 86; Modarressi, *Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmūl*, 168.

al-Riḍā.... He is a guide for the nation, rightly guided, following the original path and the past traditions of the preceding Imams. He continues in the same manner as those who have passed and will remain in this role among those who are to come until the Hour. The Imamate remains in the progeny, following the order of succession and the system of birth. It does not transfer or deviate from this line. The Imamate will not revert to two brothers after Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, nor is it permissible for it to do so. It will remain exclusively in the lineage of Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad until the end of creation and the cessation of God’s command and prohibition, and the lifting of obligation from His servants. ...

The author continues to reiterate that Imamate is not transferable between brothers, according to the Imāmiyya. Similarly on page 106, the author states,

As long as affairs are in the hands of Allah, Imamate will remain in the progeny of Imam al-‘Askarī (a) and will not go to a brother, uncle, cousin or grandchild.... The *ijmā‘* (unanimous opinion) of the Shī‘a is on this.

This repeated emphasis by the author that until the Day of Judgement, Imamate will never transfer between brothers is a means of rejecting the claims of Ja‘far, the brother of Imam al-‘Askarī (a) and other claimants. In addition, the next five pages clearly indicate that the author’s main focus is on rejecting the transfer of Imamate between familial relations other than father-son and the absolute prohibition of revealing any detail about the twelfth Imam such as his name or whereabouts. There are no indications whatsoever that the Imāmīs were under the impression that there would be a continuous chain of Imams after Imam al-‘Askarī until the Day of Judgement. It would seem impossible for Sa‘d b. ‘Abdullāh al-Ash‘arī to even posit such a view, since he is one

of the narrators (in at least 4 different chains of narrators), who have reported the famous *ḥadīth al-lawḥ*, which describes the roles of each of the twelve Imams and in which the twelfth Imam is explicitly described as the seal of vicegerents.¹⁵⁰ Thus, Modarressi’s claim that the Imāmīs believed in a continuous chain of Imams remains unsubstantiated, with the evidence provided in the footnotes of his work bearing no relevance to such a claim.

In the Farsi translation of Modarressi’s work, he further buttresses his claim by referencing *Kitāb al-Shajara* of the Ismā‘īlī Abū Tammām (d. c. 4th/10th century). This book is not only insignificant in terms of heresiographical data, but is replete with claims that are in opposition to what is unanimously accepted by major heresiographers. Furthermore, the aforesaid work also does not prove Modarressi’s point, assuming the work is authoritative, as “a group that believes in a non-specified number of Imams” has no relation with “the beliefs of the Imāmiyya at the time of the beginning of the minor occultation.”¹⁵¹ The latter group is even explicitly described as the majority of the Shī‘a, who believe in twelve Imams. This implies that, at most, only a minority sect, believed in an infinite chain of Imams, whilst Modarressi’s claim was that most of the Shī‘ī believed this.¹⁵²

Furthermore, there are strong counter indications to this claim in works predating Abū Tammām by other Ismā‘īlī authors. Consider the

¹⁵⁰ Al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 62-64; al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Jāmi‘at al-mudarrisīn: 1983), 477; Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 1:308, Ibn Bābawayh, ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra* (Madrasat Imām al-Mahdī: 1983), 103.

¹⁵¹ Javad Ala Almohadesin, “Ketābī ki bahāni dast-i Akbar Ganji shud,” *Tābnāk*. Accessed 14th May 2024, <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/89155/%DA%A9%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87%E2%80%8C%E2%80%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%A8%D8%B1-%DA%AF%D9%86%D8%AC%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%AF>

¹⁵² For a more detailed analysis of all of Modarressi’s references regarding this point, see *Ibid*.

report of Ja'far b. Aḥmad b. Haytham in the book *al-Munāẓarāt* in his debate and dialogue with Abū 'Abdullāh, the great Fatimid missionary in the Maghreb, on 3rd Rajab 296/908 in the city of Raqqada.¹⁵³ Speaking from the position of someone who had been an *Ithnā-‘asharī* Imāmī and familiar with the sect four years prior to the mentioned date, he stated that the Twelver Imāmīs are the majority of the Shī‘a and emphasised that they have provided reasons to support the belief that there are twelve Imams. At the request of Abū 'Abdullāh, Ibn Haytham elaborated the arguments of the Twelver Shī‘a and claimed that they refer to things such as the twelve celestial constellations, the twelve months of the year, the twelve hours of the day, and the twelve hours of the night. Undoubtedly, such arguments could not be considered the most important and scholarly evidence of the Twelvers. However, the essence of these references could indicate the consolidation of the doctrine of the twelve Imams. Unfortunately, during this discussion, Abū 'Abdullāh interrupted Ibn Haytham and did not give him the opportunity to further elaborate on the evidence of the Twelver Shī‘a. It seems that Ibn Haytham himself was not particularly interested in this task and, in any case, was ready to accept the Ismā‘īlī invitation.¹⁵⁴

A general weakness in relying on heresiographical works is that often, the authors of such works posit the existence of sects that do not actually exist in the real world. For example, if a handful of people hold onto a certain opinion, these works tend to classify them as a sect. Proper historical investigation needs to be done in order to assess the extent to which these works represent a society's stratification.¹⁵⁵

This concludes the section on Twelver responses to the assertions of Kohlberg and Modarressi and it is hoped that the reader was able to appreciate the depth of scholarship, precision and academic intergrity

¹⁵³ Ibn al-Haytham, *The advent of the Fatimids: A contemporary Shī‘ī Witness: An edition and English translation of Ibn al-Haytham's Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, ed. Wilfred Madelung and Paul Walker (I.B. Tauris: 2001), 92.

¹⁵⁴ Moghaddam, "Raḥyāftī no bi tārikh," 95.

¹⁵⁵ Ala Almohadesin, "Ketābī ki bahān-i dast-i Akbar Ganji shud."

that has been shown by those responding to these discussions from within the seminary and affiliated institutions. The next section will broadly discuss emerging discourses within the seminary that resulted from the above engagement.

The relationship between history and theology and an emerging discourse on Twelver intellectual historiography

Responses to Hossein Modarressi’s *Crisis and Consolidation* following its official Persian translation has brought novel questions to the fore, which has shaped a rich discourse in Iranian scholarly circles. This section attempts to briefly sketch the background of the interlocutors and delineates some of the questions being asked in the aftermath of the said book. This will also assist us in showing how modern intellectual history intersects with the development of a religious intellectual tradition.¹⁵⁶

Being a work of intellectual history, dealing with doctrinal issues while employing the *ḥadīth* corpus, the publication of *Crisis and Consolidation* provided an opportunity for researchers from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds to join a discourse that amongst other debates, sharpened the contours of and the interplay of various fields: in particular, the fields of history, intellectual history and theology. The scholars critiquing this work have raised many of these questions in a multitude of conferences and discussions, and thus have set the terms of this discourse, alongside those interested in Western academic studies of Shī‘ism in general.

¹⁵⁶ As discussed below, one of the debates that has emerged concerns the relationship between Theology and History, Ni‘matullah Safari, member of faculty at the department of History at Al-Mustafa University, believes the debate has its roots in the reaction that arose following the publication of *Shahīd-i-Jāwīd*. Thus, *Crisis and Consolidation* might merely be seen as a trigger that revealed underlying questions and tensions. Ni‘matullah Safari and Muhammad Taqi Sobhani, “Rābiṭi-yi ‘ilm-i kalām wa ‘ilm-i tārikh”, *Ni‘matullah Safarī Furūshāni*, <https://www.nsafari.ir/>

Parts of this discourse have also been touched upon in book reviews and introductions of books offering an alternative historical reading of Shī‘ī thought, as well as surfacing in obituaries and sessions held in memory of deceased historians of early Islam.¹⁵⁷ There are now independent publications in Persian that focus specifically on intellectual history and the history of ideas in the context of Islamic and Shī‘ī Studies.¹⁵⁸ Some of the interlocutors are historians employed at university departments of history in Qom and Tehran, others are known to be experts of *ḥadīth*, and yet others come from a theological background. This variety promises a diversity of concerns and opinions.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Sayyid Morteza ‘Āmili was seen by some to be a theologian who tainted History with Theology. See the remarks of Dr Ḥasan Ḥaḍratī, assistant professor of history at the University of Tehran. at Ḥasan Ḥaḍratī, “Naqd wa barrasī-yi tārikh nigārī-yi marhūm ustād sayyed Morteza ‘Āmili”, *Dānishkadi-yi Adabiyat-i ‘Ulūm-i Insānī*. <https://literature.ut.ac.ir/-/%D9%86%D9%82%D8%AF-%D9%88-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AE-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%B6%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%DB%8C>.

Alternatively, Mahdi Pishva‘i was thought by Abdol Hossein khosropanah to have struck a good balance between disciplines of theology and history. Obituary posted on the latter’s Eitaa channel at @khosropanah_ir, posted on 15 August, 2021.

¹⁵⁸ This was preceded by oral lectures by some professors.

¹⁵⁹ For instance, despite his own reservations, Ni‘matullah Safari places *Crisis and Consolidation* in high esteem and pronounces it as the best book written to date on the Intellectual history of Shī‘ism, and best explains available historical data. Speaking immediately after him in the same conference, Sobhani believes it is only to be praised for its extensive referencing to multiple and diverse early sources, but not to be praised for a proper comprehension and analysis of the sources. Ni‘matullah Safari, Muhammad Taqi Sobhani et al., “*Nishast-i naqd-i kitāb-i maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul: Jalasi-yi awwal*,”

Despite this diversity, however, critics have unanimously acknowledged the void left by the Shī‘ī tradition in the field of intellectual history and the need to do more. It may be suggested that this is the reason Orientalists took over the narrative.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, both the need to understand and critique, as well as the need to develop an independent, ‘local’ and ‘faith-compatible’ field of intellectual history, has provided the impetus for fresh debate.^{161 162}

For example, in their attempt to provide a fitting scholarly critique on a comparable level, critics have found themselves compelled to

Kitāb-i Māh-i Dīn 142 (1388 Sh./2009), 41–43.

In yet another conference held in honor of Sayyid Morteza ‘Āmilī on the fortieth day after his passing, Hazrati attacked the deceased for consciously allowing his theological beliefs to intervene in historical analysis. He compared his work to Hossein Modarressi, whom the speaker thought was faithful to history and didn’t commit the fallacy committed by the former. While acknowledging that theology and history have different topics to discuss as disciplines, he asserted that a theologian is dependent on history if he wishes to prove a number of key doctrines. Ḥasan Ḥaḍratī, “Naqd wa barrasī.”

¹⁶⁰ Whilst critics declared Hossein Modarressi to be borrowing methodology from the Orientalists, they didn’t consider him an Orientalist. In contrast, Kohlberg and Heinz Halm were categorised as “*mustashriq*” (lit. Orientalist). This is because in the Iranian context, *mustashriq* — although a literal translation of “Orientalist” — denotes any westerner who studies the east. Hailing from the west is also defined ethnically. Therefore, a Muslim Islamic researcher born in the west or migrating to a university in the United States would not be termed an orientalist, while his white Caucasian colleague in the same department would. This is in contrast to the way in which the term “Orientalist” is currently understood in academic circles in English-speaking countries.

¹⁶¹ Gerami explicitly states that his book on intellectual history was in part the result of his observations following the publication of *Crisis and Consolidation*. Hadi Gerami, *Muqaddami-yī bar tārikh negārī-yi ingārii-yī wa andīshi-yī* (Imam Sadiq University, 2017), 12.

¹⁶² Interestingly though, the discourse avoids two key terms that gained popularity in Iran after the revolution and still continue to receive mixed reactions; *Islāmī sāzī-yi ‘ulūm* (Islamisation of the Sciences) and *Ilm-i dīnī* (Religious Science).

question the nature of intellectual history, and how it might diverge from the manner in which Shī‘ī doctrines and their evolution have been addressed by the tradition up to this point. Other researchers have asked how the field of intellectual history might be redefined and understood in a local context, and what existing and innovative methods should be employed to conduct a valid intellectual history of Shī‘ism.¹⁶³

The participants of this discourse concur that the study of intellectual history is necessary and does not inherently pose a threat to faith, as well as agreeing that it reveals new perspectives and insights not offered by historical sources and studies produced by the tradition.¹⁶⁴ Thus, the shortcomings identified in the works of Modarressi and Kohlberg serve to reinforce the belief that the study of intellectual history should be conducted using appropriate methodology. In fact, there are several instances where interlocutors accuse Modarressi of being ‘un-academic’ (*ghayr ‘ilmī*), or overstepping into the realm of theology, instead of adhering to the boundaries of his work stated as intellectual history.¹⁶⁵

These questions then invite a discussion pertaining to the relationship of history – in particular intellectual history – with existing disciplines such as theology. This intersection of disciplines, may, for example, pose a challenge when discussing the actions and sayings of the Imams (a) and the Prophets (s) as recorded in history, and whether they possess supernatural qualities.¹⁶⁶

There are a number of individuals who have attempted to address the questions mentioned above,¹⁶⁷ and yet others who have written on

¹⁶³ Ibid, 31.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 51–52; Mohammad Taqi Sobhani, “Az tārikh tā andīsheh,” *Khīradnāmeḥ-ye Hamshahrī*, no. 28 (2008), 13–14.

¹⁶⁵ Mohammad Taqi Sobhani et. al, *Naqd wa barrasī-yi nazārī-yi taṭawwur-i tārikhī-yi tashayyū‘* (Majma‘ ‘ālī ḥikmat: 1388 Sh./2009), 22–23.

¹⁶⁶ Safari and Sobhani, “Rābiṭi-yi ‘ilm-i kalām wa ‘ilm-i tārikh.”

¹⁶⁷ For instance, Dr Hazrati and Sulaymānī Amīrī, a professor of History from a seminary in Qom, share a common interest in the subject matter but might have a difference of opinion. A lecture delivered by the former that touches

an aspect of Shī‘ī intellectual history. Two research teams in Iran can be identified that have seriously attempted to answer some of these questions and consistently produced works on Shī‘ī intellectual history.

A group of researchers is led by Dr. Mohammad Taqi Sobhani, a seminarian with a variety of interests who specialises in discussions related to Imamate. Known to be mildly skeptical of the dominant Sadrian philosophy,¹⁶⁸ he leads a network of institutes in Qom focusing on theological studies, specifically issues that relate to the doctrine of Imamate. Under his stewardship, the group has published several works on the history of Shī‘ī *kalām*, producing at least ten volumes that explore various theological issues, trends, and methodologies identifiable in Shī‘ī history, from the era of the Imams in Medina to the theological school of Hilla.¹⁶⁹

Sobhani asserts that the interrelation between history and theology, as well as intellectual history and theology as distinct disciplines, calls for individual scrutiny. When these fields are compared in terms of their definitions, methodologies, subject matter, and objectives, he acknowledges that theology, history, and intellectual history may intersect on numerous subjects related to a historical event involving a divine figure. He maintains that theological presuppositions not only influence but should also guide the interpretation of history by introducing hypothetical possibilities of immaterial dimensions and interventions. However, he clarifies that this does not necessarily imply

on this topic is available. Ḥasan Hazrati, “Nisbat-i ‘ilm-i kalām wa ‘ilm-i tārikh dar Ashūrā shināsī”, *Pazhūhish-i ‘ulūm-i insānī wa muṭālī‘āt-i farhangī*, <https://www.ihcs.ac.ir/fa/news/15729/>. The latter has published a paper. Javād Sulaymānī Amīrī, “Manṭiq-i ta’sīr gudhārī-yi bāvarhā-yi kalāmī bar tārikh pazhūhī,” *Ma‘rifat-i kalāmī*, no. 25 (2020), 157–176.

¹⁶⁸ See Mahdī ‘Abdullāhī’s criticism of his views on Islamic Philosophy. Mahdī ‘Abdullāhī, “Naqdī bar sukhanān-i Muhammad Taqi Sobhani dar hamāyish-i jāyigāh-i ‘aql dar kalām wa falsafī,” *Mehr*, Accessed 18th May 2024, <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4481078/>

¹⁶⁹ See for instance: Sayyid ‘Alī Ḥusayn-zādeh Khidrābād, *Madrisi-yi kalāmī-yi Madini: az āghāz tā imāmat-i Imam Bāqir* (as) (Dār al-ḥadīth: 2023).

a theological dictation of historical analysis, and concludes that none of these disciplines are capable of independently resolving each other's issues or intervening in each other's respective domain.¹⁷⁰

Another research group, primarily based at the University of Imam al-Şādiq (a) in Tehran is led by Dr. Ahmad Pakatchi. This group leans more towards the study of Qur'ān and *hadīth* and their historical transmission. One of Pakatchi's students, Hadi Gerami, has authored a work on intellectual history, with a foreword by Pakatchi. The author expresses gratitude towards his mentor for the significant contributions made to the discipline of intellectual history, and acknowledges the instrumental role that Modarressi's scholarly work has played in the formation of this discipline within the Iranian context. Gerami's primary focus lies in the expansion and evolution of intellectual history in Iran. A notable obstacle to this progression has been the perceived discord between this discipline and theological beliefs or faith. In a separate chapter, Gerami explores the interplay between theology and intellectual history. He concludes that any apparent conflict between these two fields is merely superficial, provided that the historian refrains from overstepping his boundaries by delving into doctrinal territory. He believes that Hossein Modarressi committed this fallacy.¹⁷¹

The team led by Sobhani maintains a clerical identity despite university degrees, whilst the team based at the Imam Sadiq University asserts a non-clerical identity, despite Dr. Pakatchi and his students having engaged in seminary studies at some point in their careers. The latter is more open to social sciences in Western academia, and often engages with Western academia on topics of interest, confidently using the terminology and concepts existing in these disciplines; Pakatchi himself is known to be an expert in semiotics. Meanwhile, the other team has formulated and developed its own categories, terminology,

¹⁷⁰For more details, refer to his lecture series on the relationship between theology and History, available at <https://eitaa.com/mtsobhanii?q=م+ال+ک+و+خ+ی+رات+ه+ط+ب+ار>, accessed on May 18, 2024.

¹⁷¹Hadi Gerami, *Muqaddami*, 63–80.

and phases of Shī‘ī history, perhaps in an attempt to evade a Western framework as they proceed to elucidate the contours of Shī‘ī intellectual history.

Conclusion

This work has attempted to demonstrate a lively discourse that has ensued within the seminary and relevant university departments in Iran, after the publication of the Persian translation of Hossein Modarressi’s *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shī‘ite Islam*. There are several conclusions that can be gleaned from this exposition. Firstly, there is a critical need for dialogue and engagement between scholars in Western academia writing in English, and traditional seminarians or scholars who represent the sect, writing in non-European languages such as Arabic or Persian. To this date, there are almost no original works written in English that meticulously engage with and critique works produced by Western academia on Shī‘ī Studies from a traditional perspective. This paper has only given a glimpse of the vast amount of critical research ongoing within the seminary, affiliated institutions and relevant university departments in Iran. This comprehensive survey of one such topic should be considered as a first step in presenting such research to a wider audience. It is anticipated that this study will spark an interest in other researchers to carry out similar projects bringing to light the critical engagement of the tradition with the studies and ideas pertaining to the origin and development of Shī‘ite doctrine.

In addition, the discussions surrounding intellectual history and its parameters, sparked by critiques of *Crisis and Consolidation*, is currently one of the liveliest areas of discourse within the seminary. The results of this discussion would have significant consequences on other areas of study within the tradition and thus should be closely monitored. This also demonstrates how modern intellectual history intersects with the development of a religious intellectual tradition.

Appendix

List of works critiquing Hossein Modarressi

No.	Title	Authors/ Contributors	Entry Type	Year	No. of Pages
1	<i>Ta'ammulī dar ḥadīth va dark-i tārikhī-yi 'aqā'id</i>	Majīd Reza'ī	Article	1996	21
2	<i>Pīrāmūn-i kitāb Maktab dar farāyand-itakāmul: nātamāmī-yi dīdgāh-i Duktur Modarressi Tabataba'i darbāri-yi Ibn Qiba wa nawbakhtīyān</i>	Sayyid Mohammad Zowqī	Answer to a Question Published Online	2006	6
3	<i>Naqd-i naẓariyyi-i 'Ulamā-yi abrār bā tā'kīd bar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Hamidreza Qorbani Mobin	Master's Thesis	2010	120
4	<i>Ta'ammulī dar maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Mohammad Şafar Jibrā'īlī	Article	2007	31
5	<i>Naqdī bar yik kitāb</i>	Ḥasan Yūsufiyān	Article	2007	18

No.	Title	Authors/ Contributors	Entry Type	Year	No. of Pages
6	<i>Four posts on the author's web-blog: Naqdhā-yi Hassan Ansari bar kitāb-i maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul, Taḥqīq-i nimūni, Kitāb-i maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul va tazakkur-i du nukti, Bāz ham dar bāri-yi kitāb Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Hassan Ansari	Blog posts	2007-2016	8
7	<i>Maktab dar farāyand-i tahājumāt-i tārikhī</i>	Mortezā Razawī	Book	2008	304
8	<i>Kudām takāmul? Molāhizātī intiqādī darbāri-yi yik kitāb janjālī</i>	‘Abdullāh Īmāgar	Article	2008	3
9	<i>Gozārish-i jalasāt-i naqd wa barrasī-yi Kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Hasan Ṭarumi	Article (transcription of a conference)	2008-2009	53

No.	Title	Authors/ Contributors	Entry Type	Year	No. of Pages
10	<i>Naqd-i bīṭarafī dar kitāb Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmūl</i>	Mahdi Cheheltanī	Article	2009	8
11	<i>Pāsukh-i Hasan Tarumi bi javābī-yi Hossein Modarresi Tabataba'i</i>	Hasan Ṭarumi	Article	2009	8
12	<i>Guzarī bar shiklgīrī-yi i'tiqādāt-i Islāmī</i>	Ashkān Shīrāzī	Article	2009	4
13	<i>Nishast-i naqd-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmūl: Jalasi-yi awwal</i>	Sobhani, Safari, Wāsi'i	Article (Transcription of a conference)	2009	24
14	<i>Nishast-i naqd-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmūl: Jalasi-yi duwwum</i>	Sobhani, Safari, Wase'i	Article (Transcription of a conference)	2009	26
15	<i>Naqdhā-yi Hasan Tarumi bar moqaddami-yi kitāb Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmūl</i>	Ṭarumi, Fakhkhari	Article (Transcription of a session)	2009	8
16	<i>Ta'ammulī dar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmūl</i>	Maḥmūd Hedāyat Afzā	Article	2009	11

No.	Title	Authors/ Contributors	Entry Type	Year	No. of Pages
17	<i>Naqdī bar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmūl</i>	Ḥusiyūn Kahfi	Summary of the session made available online	2009	19
18	<i>Yik irjā‘-i kuhan bi Ibn Qiba wa maṭlabī darbāri-yi ū</i>	Moḥammad Kazem Rahmati	Article	2009	3
19	<i>Naqd-i bakhsh-i siwwum-i kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmūl dar majmū‘i-yi tārikh dar gudhargāh-i naqd</i>	Şobhani, Safari, Wase‘i	Article (transcription of a conference)	2009	46
20	<i>Naqd wa barrasī-yi naẓariyyi-yi taṭawwur-i tārikhī-yi tashayyū‘</i>	Sobhani, Abbazi, Kazem Tabataba‘i, Yusefi Gharavi	Book (transcription of a conference)	2009-2010	108
21	<i>Ketābī ki bahāni-yi dast-i Akbar Ganjī shud</i>	Javad Ala Almohadesin	Article Published online on a news agency’s website	2010	11
22	<i>Vizhiqihā-yi asāsī-yi Imāmān dar andīshi-yi Ibn Qiba</i>	Aşghar Gholami	Article	2010	32

No.	Title	Authors/ Contributors	Entry Type	Year	No. of Pages
23	<i>Andīshi-yi tafvīd wa ārā-yi mafawwizi: Wākāvī-yi yik khalt-i nā-muwwafaq</i>	Alireza Farajpoor	Article	2010	24
24	<i>Barrasī-yi nazariyyi-yi Imāmat dar maktab-i kalāmī-yi Shī'a wa farđiyyi-yi 'ulamā-yi abrār (az manẓar-i falsafī)</i>	Thamineh Fooladgar	Master's Thesis	2010	120
25	<i>Işmat-i Imām dar tārīkh-i tafakkur-i Imāmiyyi tā pāyān-i qarn-i panjum-i hijrī</i>	Muḥammad Ḥuseyn Fārīyāb	Book	2011	472
26	<i>Naqd wa barrasī-yi nazariyyi-yi 'ulamā-yi abrār az dīdgāh-i Qur'an wa aḥādīth</i>	Morteẓā Ḥāj Ḥusiynī, Thamineh Fooladgar	Article	2011	16
27	<i>Molāhiẓātī darbāri-yi goftimān-i tafvīd dar nukhustīn qurūn-i Islāmī</i>	Hadi Gerami	Article	2011	30

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28	<i>Barrasī-yi chahār nukti darbāri-yi zindigī-yi Imām Şādiq az kitāb-i Duktur Hossein Modarressi</i>	Sayyed Moḥammad Reza Mousavi	Article	2012	22
29	<i>Naqdī bar farḍiyy- yi taṭawwur-i Imāmat-i Shi‘ī: Barrasī-yi istinādhā-yi kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul, bakhsh-i marbūṭ bi durān-i Imāmat-i Ḥaḍrat-i Imām Bāqir</i>	Javad Ala Almohadesin	Article	2012	28
30	<i>Mi‘yār-i ghuluww dar andīshi-yi Shiykh-i Şadūq</i>	Mohammad Baqer Malekian, Zoheyr Bolandghamatpoor	Article	2012	16
31	<i>Molāhiḏāti bar Khānish-i Modarressi Tabataba‘i az Ibn Qiba</i>	‘Abbās Mīrzā‘ī	Article	2012	19

No.	Title	Authors/ Contributors	Entry Type	Year	No. of Pages
32	<i>Barrasī-yi intiqādī-yi didgāh-i nu-andīshān-i mu'āsir darbāri-yi 'īshmat-i imām tā ta'kīd bar nazar-i aṣḥāb-i a'immi</i>	Ābqad Tashakkerī, Muḥammad 'Alī Vatan Dūst	Article	2012	31
33	<i>Muṭālī'āt-i mustashriqān dar bāb-i Mahdawīyyat wa didgāh-i Shī'ayān rāji' bi ān</i>	Batool Khan Alizadeh	Master's Thesis	2012	120
34	<i>Naqd-i ravishshinasī-yi nazariyyi-yi 'ulamā-yi abrār bā tā'kīd bar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Qorbani Mobin, Hamidreza, Khosropanah	Article	2013	20
35	<i>Ṣifāt-i farābashaṛī-yi Imāmān az nigāh-i aṣḥāb-i a'immi</i>	Sayyed Mohammad Hasan Alavi	Article	2013	40
36	<i>Barrasī-yi qidmat-i aḥādīth-i dawāzdah Imām dar al-Kāfī</i>	Reza Qorbani Zarrin	Article	2013	32

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37	<i>Padidār-shināsī-yi Jāygāh-i Imāmat wa maqāmāt-i Imāmān dar 'aqā'id-i Abdullāh b. Abī Ya'fūr</i>	Moḥammad Hossein Afrakhteh	Article	2013	44
38	<i>Tabyīn-i ma'nāyī-i iṣṭilāh-i 'ulāmā-yi abrār bā ta'kīd bar Jaryānāt-i fekrī-yi aṣḥāb-i a'immi</i>	Mohammad Ja'far Rezaei, Safari	Article	2013	16
39	<i>Barrasī-yi ārā-yi tārikhī-yi ghaybat-i sughrā dar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Aḥmad Kachāyī	Article	2014	18
40	<i>Naqsh-i ghālīyān dar intishār-i riwāyāt bā mazāmīn-i fawq-i basharī būdan-i a'immi</i>	Muḥammad 'Alī Chelongar, Mehra Tabataba'i Poodeh	Article	2014	27
41	<i>Tabyīn-i nazariyyi-yi ghaybat-i Imām dar andīshi-yi Ibn Qiba Rāzi</i>	Abbas Mirzaei, Marziyeh Amri	Article	2014	18

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42	<i>Bāzkhānī-yi guzārish-i dass wa tahrīf-i ghālīyān dar partu-yi kār kard-i farhangī-yi nahād-i Imāmat</i>	Sayyed Alireza Hosseini Shirazi, Taher Aziz Vakili	Article	2014	40
43	<i>Naqsh-i ‘anāsir-i tārīkhī dar tabyīn-i ‘aqāyid-i ahl-i bayt</i>	Sayyed Mustafa Motahhari	Book	2015	212
44	<i>Barrasī-yi tārīkhī-yi tafakkur-i Shī‘ī-yi ithnā-‘ashariyyi</i>	Ghulām Ḥasan Muḥarrammī	Book	2015	244
45	<i>Nigāhī bi tārīkh-i tafakkur-i Imāmiyyi: az āghāz tā zuhūr-i Safawiyyi</i>	Mahdi Farmanian, Mustafa Sadeqi Kashani	Book	2015	190
46	<i>Tahlīl-i intiqādī-yi didgāh-i Modarressi Tabataba‘ī dar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul dar murid-i aḥādīth-i Shī‘ī</i>	Muḥammad Mighdad Amiri, Abdilhadi Faghihzadeh	Article	2015	22
47	<i>Az ghuluww tā taqṣīr: ta‘ammulī dar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Sayyede Munā Mousavi	Article	2015	22

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48	<i>Naqd-i nazariyyi-yi ‘ulamā-yi abrār bar asās-i didgāh-i aṣḥāb-i ijmā‘-i Imāmayn Ṣādiqayn</i>	Akbar Baqeri	PhD Thesis	2016	200
49	<i>Tabyīn-i ravish-shināsī-y tārīkh-i tafakkur dar ‘arṣi-yi Imāmat az didgāh-i Modarresi wa naqd-i ān</i>	Hamidreza Qorbani Mobin	PhD Thesis	2016	200
50	<i>Ibn Qiba Rāzī wa Imāmat-i ḥadd-i aqallī: ta‘ammulī dar didgāh-i Modarresi Tabataba‘i darbāri-yi Ibn Qiba</i>	‘Abbās Mīrzā, Ṭūli Fārūq	Article	2017	16
51	<i>Aṣālat wa i‘tibār-i aḥādīth-i ghaybat-i Imām-i dawāzdahum (taḥlīl-i intiqādī-yi nazariyyi-yi wābastigī-yi Imāmiyyi bi wāqifi dar aḥādīth-i ghaybat)</i>	Morteza Naderi	PhD Thesis	2017	200
52	<i>Ilm-i Imām dar bāwar-i Shī‘ayān-i nukhustīn</i>	Sayyed Abdulhamid Abtahi	Book	2018	263

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53	<i>Maqāmāt-i imāmān: Naqdī bar kitāb Maktab dar frāyand-i takāmul wa nazariyyi-yi ‘ulamā-yi abrār</i>	Mustafa Sulaymāniyān	Book	2019	364
54	<i>Barrasī-yi intiqādī-yi didgāh-i nu-andishān-i mu‘āshir darbāri-yi gustari-yi ‘ilm-i Imām bā ta’kīd bar nazar-i aṣḥāb-i ā’immi</i>	Ābqad Tashakkurī, Ghulamhossein Shānehchī	Article	2019	24
55	<i>Rahyāft-i nu bi tārikh-i piydāyish-i tashayyū’-i ithnā ‘asharī: shiklgīrī-yi bihingām</i>	Hāmid Montazarī Moqaddam	Article	2019	20
56	<i>bāzshināsī tārikh-i āghāz-i pardākht wa daryāft-i Khums; barrasī-yi intiqādī-yi didgāh-i bāztāb yāfti dar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Javād Solaimānī Amīrī	Article	2019	27

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57	<i>Barrasi-yi intiqādī- yi nazariyyi-yi ‘ulamā-yi abrār bā ta’kīd bar ‘iṣmat wa karāmat-i imām</i>	Taqī Khalīlī	Master's Thesis	2019	120
58	<i>Bāzkhānī wa naqd-i didgāhhā- yi Kohlberg wa Modarresi Tabataba‘ī darbāri-yi piydāyish-i tashayyu‘-i dawāzdah imāmī</i>	Hāmid Montazarī Moqaddam	Article	2020	21
59	<i>Naqd-i mabnā‘ī-yi kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul bā ta’kīd bar rūykard-i taḥawwul-i tārīkhī-yi ‘aqā‘id-i Shī‘a</i>	Hādī Razāqī Harīkandehī	Article	2020	21
60	<i>Barrasī wa naqd-i ‘ilm-i ghayb-i imāmān dar kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul (mabānī, ravish wa muḥtawā’)</i>	Asadullāh Rahīmī	PhD Thesis	2020	200
61	<i>Rijāl al-Kashshī wa nazariyat al-taṭawwur al- imāma</i>	Mohammad Baqer Malekian	Article	2020	44

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62	<i>Nazariyyi-yi imāmat-i Shī'i wa lavāzim-i ān nazd-i aṣḥāb-i a'immi</i>	Muḥammad Naqī	PhD Thesis	2020	200
63	<i>Barrasī wa naqd-i mabānī-yi Qur'ānī, ḥadīthī va kalāmī-yi kitāb-i Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul darbāri-yi 'ilm-i ghayb-i imāmān</i>	Ḥusayn 'Abdulmuḥammadī, Asadullāh Rahīmī	Article	2021	20
64	<i>Maktab dar imtidād-i hidāyat: dar naqd-i ketāb Maktab dar farāyand-i takāmul</i>	Ghulām ḥasan Muḥarramī, Sayyid 'Alī Ḥusaynī Milānī (Introduction)	Book	2022	428

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