

A Typological and Statistical Analysis of Early Twelver Biographies of the Imams: Focusing Upon al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfi*, al-Ṣadūq's *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā* and al-Mufīd's *al-Irshād*¹

Rouhollah Towhidi-niya

University of Tehran

Muhammad Muhammadifar

Islamic Maaref University

Abstract

This article presents an analysis of Twelver Shīʿī *ḥadīth*-based historiography, examining the nature and composition of early historiographical compendia. As such, it aims to broaden the perspective of historical studies concerning the lives of the *ahl al-bayt*, which have generally been characterised by a decontextualising approach that prioritises analysis of individual reports over attention to the character of the compendia in which they are gathered. The present analysis takes the form of a case-study of three of the most important early Twelver compendia concerning the lives of the Imams—Kulaynī's *al-Kāfi*, Ṣadūq's *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* and Mufīd's *al-Irshād*—and consists of two stages: a typology and a comparative analysis. Our principal findings include the identification of considerable commonalities across various aspects of these compendia, details of each author's theological attitude to the historiography of the lives of the *ahl al-bayt*, the objectives of their compendia and how each

¹ This article, translated by George Warner, was originally published in Farsi in *Ulumhadith* 26/3 (2021): 156-76, titled “Barrasī-yi Taḥlīlī-yi Rūykard wa Muḥtawā-yi Manābi‘ Tārīkh-i A’imma (Muṭālī‘i-yi Gūnīshināsī wa Kammī-yi Kitābhāyi *al-Kāfi*, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* wa *al-Irshād*).”

can be seen to be responding to the needs of the Twelver community at the time. Attention is further drawn to important differences between Twelver historiography concerning the Imams and the broader Muslim historiographical tradition, and also to the necessity and feasibility of developing a qualitative taxonomy for Twelver *ḥadīth*-based historiography.

Keywords: *ḥadīth*, historiography, Imams, Mufīd, Ṣadūq, Kulaynī, typology, quantitative analysis.

Introduction

We begin with an overview of this study's principal methodological tools, the first of which is quantitative analysis—a method that uses mathematical and statistical means to assess data.² Among the first to apply quantitative methods to the social sciences was the Franco-Belgian thinker Adolphe Quetelet, who was confident that apparently complex and random phenomena were based upon principles that could only properly be analysed through numerically grounded analysis. Like many other fields, the study of history is a valid context for the targeted use of such methods—an approach known variously as quantitative history, historiometry, or cliometrics—the goal of which is to subject historical data to statistical analysis. Overall, quantitative analysis has a broad range of possible applications to the study of history;³ in addition to the study of historical events themselves, it is notably used to examine both the content of historiographical literature and its provenance, enabling a wide range of productive approaches and outcomes.

² Alireza Ali Ahmadi and Wafa Ghafarian, “Uṣūl-i Shinākht wa Rawish-i Taḥqīq (bā Tikyi bar Muṭālī‘āt-i Tārīkhī),” *Faṣlnāmi-yi ‘Ulūm-i Insānī* 46-7 (1382 Sh./2003), 241-66.

³ François Furet, “Tārīkh-i Kammī,” trans. Mujtabā Fāḍilī, in Dāryūsh Raḥmāniyān (ed.), *Majmū‘i Maqālāt-i Tārīkh wa Hamkārihā-yi Miyān Rishti-yī* (Pazhūhishkadi-yi Tārīkh-i Islām: 1395 Sh./2016), 135-55; Maryam Shiypūrī, “Kiliyūmitrīk (Bahrigīrī az Dānish-i Āmār dar Tārīkh),” in Raḥmāniyān (ed.), *Majmū‘i Maqālāt-i Tārīkh*, 241-55.

In light of the above, it should be evident that typological and quantitative analysis has much to offer every branch of Islamic learning; the application of such analyses to the corpus of *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* relevant to a given field promises to enable a more comprehensive understanding of those sources, to the benefit of scholars who engage with them. Through such an approach, answers may be sought to several important questions concerning historical accounts of the Imams. What are the different concerns and topics that make up the corpus of narrations attributed to the Imams? What is the proportional weight of emphasis given to each topic within the overall corpus, and within individual compendia thereof? By means of statistical analysis, the results of such enquiries may, in turn, be used to uncover a wealth of information regarding historical works, their authors, and the historical contexts in which they were written.⁴ It is hoped that some of these benefits will be demonstrated in the present article.

The following study will apply the methods described above to three works—Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī’s (d. 329/941) *al-Kāfī*, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq’s (d. 381/991) *‘Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, and Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu‘mān al-Shaykh al-Mufid’s (d. 413/1022) *al-Irshād*—assessing each author’s approach to the records of the Imams’ lives and the kinds of narrations that each selects.⁵ This case study, meanwhile, will allow an objective consideration of the advantages of the methods used, keeping in mind, of course, that the present contribution represents only the first steps towards realising their promise in this field.

Before proceeding further, it behoves us first to discuss the chief reason behind the selection of this case study’s three main source texts, namely these works’ especial importance and influence in the

⁴ For further details, see Furet, “Tārīkh-i Kammī,” 135-53.

⁵ It should be noted that in what follows, when mention is made of these authors’ method and approach to their material, this refers specifically to their approach to historical sources, and this, in turn, specifically refers to the works under discussion. More expansive statements in this regard would, of course, require further research directed at their complete oeuvres.

longer Imāmī tradition of *ḥadīth*-based historiography. *Ḥadīth*-based historiography, it should be noted, is a source of particular value for historians seeking to reconstruct the lives of the Ma‘šūmūn. The designation “*ḥadīth*-based” in this context does not only denote the *ḥadīth*-like appearance of these works’ contents, not least their inclusion of *isnāds*, but more generally signifies the authors’ application of the standards and methods of *ḥadīth* literature (albeit to different extents, of course) in their approach to the material, and in their criteria for the selection of narrations in particular.⁶ As for *al-Kāfi*, *‘Uyūn* and *al-Irshād*, Rouhollah Towhidi-niya has previously demonstrated that the status of these three works of *ḥadīth*-based historiography was such that they still exerted significant influence on both the form and the content of subsequent writings on the lives of the Imams three centuries after their composition.⁷

Our choice of sources also pertains to another concern of this article, namely the qualitative categorisation of Twelver works on the lives of the Imams. Studies of the broader corpus of Imāmī *ḥadīth*-based historiography make clear that when it comes to the task of establishing reliable and comprehensive accounts of the Imams’ lives, this literature can be divided into at least three qualitative levels on the basis of its utility as source material.⁸ Thus, the first and highest level would

⁶ For more on Twelver *ḥadīth*-based historiography, see Rouhollah Towhidi-niya and Ne‘matollah Safari Forushani, “Barrasī-yi Taḥlīlī-yi Tārīkhniḡārī-yi Riwayī-yi Imāmiyyi tā Nīmi-yi Qarn-i Panjum,” *Faṣlnāmi-yi Tārīkh-i Islām* 64 (1394 Sh./2015), 12-35; Towhidi-niya, “Bāyistihā-yi Hamgarāyī-yi Zharfnigar dar Bāb-i Tārīkhniḡārī-yi Riwayī-yi Imāmiyyi,” *Faṣlnāmi-yi Tārīkh-i Islām* 76 (1398 Sh./2019), 173-202.

⁷ Towhidi-niya, “Naqsh-i Shī‘ayān dar Tadwīn-i Manābi‘-i Tārīkh wa Sīri-yi Imāmān-i Ahl-i Bayt (Naḡariyyi-yi Farāyand-i Mantīqī wa Jāmi‘-i Shiklgīrī-yi Manābi‘-i Tārīkh wa Sīri-yi Imāmān),” in *Majmū‘i Maqālāt-i Barguzīdi-yi Kungiri-yi Bayn al-Mīlālī-yi Naqsh-i Shī‘i dar Pīydāyish wa Gustarish-i ‘Ulūm-i Islāmī* (n. p.: 1397 Sh./2018).

⁸ For more on this taxonomy, see *ibid.*, 12-35; Towhidi-niya, “Arzyābī-yi Tārīkhniḡārī-yi Shaykh Ṣadūq dar Kitāb-i *‘Uyūn akhbār al-Riḡā*,” (Ḥawza diss., Qom, 1394 Sh./2015) 213-45.

include works such as those of the great masters of the early Shī'ī tradition, for example al-Irbīlī's (d. 692/1293 or 693/1294) *Kashf al-ghumma fi ma'rifat al-a'imma*, in which the authors make considerable efforts to use narrations that are truly reliable. The third and lowest level, on the other hand, would comprise works such as Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's (d. fifth/eleventh century) *Uyūn al-mu'jizāt* or al-Ṭabarī's (d. late fourth/tenth-early fifth/eleventh century) *Dalā'il al-imāma*, which pay little heed to critical standards regarding either *isnāds* or textual content, ascribe absurdities to the Imams, and generally lack credibility.⁹ To the second level would be allotted those works that exhibit some combination of the features of the other two.¹⁰ Works such as al-Barqī's *al-Maḥāsin* and al-Ṣaffār's *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* could tentatively be placed in this category.¹¹ In what follows, then, it will be shown how quantitative analysis of this study's limited sample of texts can shed light upon such qualitative taxonomies.

It must also be clarified that this study, as an examination of the historiography of the Imams' lives, does not examine all the *ḥadīth* in the works under discussion, but is confined to *ḥadīth* describing events that involve either the Imams themselves or the historical contexts and circumstances in which they lived. This corpus comprises both texts in which the narrator mentions the Imams in some fashion and texts recording the Imams' own utterances. Excluded, meanwhile, are texts with no clear narrative content, such as exegetical, legal or ethical statements.

⁹ These observations certainly do not entail any suggestion that there are no authentic narrations contained within such works, or that reports of the Imams' miraculous powers should be dismissed. Such reports are certainly worthy of scholarly attention, possessing exceptional power to elevate the Imams' status.

¹⁰ Full criteria for this taxonomy are presented in Towhidi-niya, "Barrasī-yi Taḥlīlī."

¹¹ Though these works are not analysed in the present article, the results of earlier studies make clear the validity of such an assessment. Naturally, a quantitative study of these works would clarify the matter, and it is our intention presently to embark upon such a study.

A final, all-important methodological starting point for this study is the awareness that the reports contained within a given work of Imāmī *ḥadīth*-based historiography are there because they have been selected by the work's author. Accordingly, the proportion of a compilation that the author chooses to allot to a specific kind of *ḥadīth* can be examined as a record of the author's priorities and his relative interest in a given topic.

It should, of course, be acknowledged that various elements of the above methodological considerations have been employed in previous studies of Twelver *ḥadīth*-based historiography. The novelty of the present study is in combining them with the specific focus on producing a typological and quantitative analysis of the three designated source texts.

The hypothesis of the present study is that despite these three authors' different approaches and, consequently, the diversity of content-types in these works—which could affect the assessment and use of narrations in these sources—overall, there is considerable similarity between the content of all three in terms of their approach to the needs of the Twelver community at the time, such that they may be understood as together following a shared method and purpose.¹²

Our study begins with typological analysis and then proceeds to quantitative analysis, the latter being a means of examining and clarifying the categories alighted upon through the former. Accordingly, the study is composed of three parts: the first surveys the identifiable types of *ḥadīth* within the three compendia, the second subjects the distribution of these types to statistical analysis, and the third presents the results gleaned from this analysis, beginning with what it can tell us about the individual compendia before moving to a comparative examination of all three works.

¹² This hypothesis emerges from the particular questions addressed in the present article, and it should be emphasised again that quantitative and statistical analyses can be used in pursuit of a wide variety of research goals.

1. Identifying Categories of Narration

Before beginning the process of categorisation itself, we first offer a few remarks regarding the methodological motivations behind this undertaking. Typology is an important tool of academic analysis, defined as “the rendering into distinct categories of events, actions and objects,”¹³ the goals of which are “the identification of similarities, the recognition of patterns (determining both how many patterns are present and how they may be understood), and the tracing of relationships between patterns within diverse data sets, establishing points of comparison.”¹⁴ Typologies in general are based on either a comparative or an inductive approach. In the case of the former, various types are conceptualised theoretically and these are then applied to a data set, while in the latter the categories are generated through statistical analysis of the data.¹⁵ The present article employs a comparative approach, with the aim of creating a typology of narrations pertaining to the lives of the Imams in our three chosen compendia. Moving, then, to the categories governing our source texts; the first to be noted is the overall category into which all of our source material fits, namely historically orientated narrations pertaining to the lives of the Imams (such narrations, as noted above, do not account for the entirety of the contents of the three compendia studied). These narrations, in turn, may be comprehensively classified on a number of levels. A first division is between those narrations focussing upon the Imams’ human, earthly nature, and those focussing upon their otherworldly, divine (*ilāhī*) nature.¹⁶ Both of these categories, in turn, may be subdivided

¹³ Khadige Safiri, *Shīwi-yi Taḥqīq-i Kiyfī* (Intishārāt-i Payām-i Pūyā: 1378 Sh./1999), 201.

¹⁴ Norman Bailey, *Ṭarrāḥī-yi Taḥqīqāt-i Ijtimāʿī*, trans. Ḥasan Chāwushīyan (Nashr-i Niyy, 1389 Sh./2010), 12.

¹⁵ For the uses of both kinds of typology, see Ramin Habibzade, “Barrasī-yi Anwāʿ-ī Dīndārī dar Biyn-i Dānishjūyān-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran” (Masters diss., Tarbiat Modares University, 1384 Sh./2005).

¹⁶ It should, of course, be acknowledged that these two sides of the Imams’ nature are not mutually exclusive, but it remains the case that one side is

into two further categories. Narrations concerning the Imams' earthly nature are either a) documentary texts that record specific events in the Imams' lives, or b) paradigmatic texts, that is to say those that attest to an Imam's overall mode of conduct, be it in general or with regard to particular circumstances. Narrations concerning the Imams' otherworldly nature, meanwhile, can be either a) descriptions of miracles that the Imams performed or of their wondrous characteristics, or b) those of a different type, the nature of which will be elucidated presently.

Beyond these general categories, our analysis in what follows will focus on four principal types of narration that recur in the sources as follows:

1. Narrations from which principles of theology and correct belief are derived. This category encompasses both narrations that are used by scholars to prove certain beliefs, inferring ideas about the Imams from their contents, and narrations in which the Imams directly expound upon Shī'ī doctrines. Examples of the first kind include accounts of the events at Ghadīr Khumm¹⁷ or of Imam 'Alī's vicegerency during the battle of Tabūk.¹⁸ Examples of the second kind would be texts that focus explicitly upon the Imams' knowledge of the unseen¹⁹ or their infallibility.²⁰ From here on in, this category will be referred to as "theological narrations."
2. Narrations that simply recount a particular historical event,

emphasised over the other in many narrations.

¹⁷ Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi* (Islāmiyya: 1362 Sh./1983), 1:289; Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* (Nashr-i Jahān: 1378 Sh./1999), 1:29; Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād fi ma'rifat hujaj Allāh 'alā al-'ibād* (Kungiri-yi Shaykh Mufīd, 1413/1992), 1:170-79.

¹⁸ Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 1:151-6.

¹⁹ E.g., Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:258, 272; Ṣadūq, *Uyūn*, 2:204-44; Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 2:198.

²⁰ E.g., Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:203, 459; Ṣadūq, *Uyūn*, 1:222.

with no obvious doctrinal objective or use. Examples of texts in this category include those recording the date of an Imam's birth or death,²¹ those concerning the Imams' family members (mothers, wives, children, etc.),²² and those recording the geographical details of an Imam's residence or travels.²³ Among other things, such reports are important for the information that they can supply regarding the political, societal and cultural circumstances of the Imams' lives. This category will be referred to as "purely historical narrations."

3. Narrations concerning the Imams' character and their way of being—how they behave amid and in response to different situations and different sorts of people. These include, for example, accounts of the Imams' confrontations with caliphs or others in political power,²⁴ or their coordination of Shī'ī communities in opposition to the schemes of their opponents.²⁵ Such reports can show the Imams' own political activities, their relationships with their companions and followers and how they instruct them,²⁶ their conduct with the leaders and wider membership of other groups of various kinds,²⁷ and their efforts to attract followers from different quarters of society.²⁸ Such reports may also show aspects of the intellectual and cultural character of the Imams. The following will refer to all such reports as "sīra narrations."
4. Narrations that focus upon the Imams' wondrous qualities and their excellence, and that seek to illustrate their superhuman

²¹ E.g., Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:497; Ṣadūq, *Uyūn*, 1:18; Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 1:17-25.

²² E.g., Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:452; Ṣadūq, *Uyūn*, 1:41.

²³ E.g., Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 4:43; Ṣadūq, *Uyūn*, 2:8.

²⁴ E.g., Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 4:553; Ṣadūq, *Uyūn*, 2:141-2; Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 2:234-5.

²⁵ E.g., Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 2:13, 227.

²⁶ E.g., Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:172-4; Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 2:194-9.

²⁷ E.g., Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:232, 2:657, 5:24; Ṣadūq, *Uyūn*, 1:138, 307-9; Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 2:187.

²⁸ Ṣadūq, *Uyūn*, 1:192.

status. Most such reports are accounts of miracles, either miracles performed by the Imams in order to illustrate their exalted nature, or external supernatural events that facilitate their endeavours.²⁹ This is not to deny that such reports do not also contain instances where the Imams' feats and attributes illustrate both their special status and their humanity. Examples of such texts include accounts of Imam 'Alī's lifting of the fortress gate at Khaybar,³⁰ or of the exceptional political and social instincts that different Imams exhibit as they manoeuvre and instruct their followers in response to the particular circumstances in which they lived.³¹ In what follows, this category will be referred to as "narrations of miracles (*mu'jizāt*) and excellence (*faḍīlal*)."

Inevitably, there will remain some narrations that do not easily fit into any of the above categories. Such reports will sometimes be referred to without differentiation as "miscellaneous narrations," but they also fall into four main types: first, narrations discussing scientific topics (both religious sciences such as law and sciences such as medicine) and the Imam's explanation thereof or response thereto; second, narrations concerning the practice of visiting the Imams' tombs, whether describing the practice thereof or its rewards and effects³²; third, narrations related to dreams and visions of the Imams, where either the details of what has been seen in a dream or vision are explained, or an account is given of decisions of the Imam influenced by and taken after a dream or vision; fourth, narrations concerning instances of the Imams foretelling the future, a significant portion of which pertain to the Twelfth Imam's occultation and his anticipated reappearance.

As a final word before putting these categories to use, it is worth

²⁹ E.g., Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:254; Ṣadūq, *Uyūn*, 1:20, 96; Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 1:346-9.

³⁰ E.g., Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, 1:127.

³¹ E.g., Ṣadūq, *Uyūn*, 1:163, 218.

³² While some of these are narrated from the Imams themselves (describing the visitation of previous Imams' tombs), this category also encompasses reports about the visitation of the Twelfth Imam, narrated from his followers.

reiterating that this taxonomy is not only a way of shedding light on the thematic structures of historiographical compendia, but is also a means of uncovering the goals, motivations, and methods of the authors of those compendia.

2. Statistical Analysis

The following will present a statistical analysis of the distribution of these eight categories of narration in Kulaynī's *al-Kāfi*, Ṣadūq's *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* and Mufīd's *al-Irshād*. It should be noted that two or more of these categories can sometimes appear within a single text; in such circumstances, each category has been accounted for in the enumeration.

2.1 *al-Kāfi*

Al-Kāfi contains 1,451 historical narratives regarding the Imams. Of these, 338 are miracle and excellence narrations (23%) and 224 are theological narrations (15%), 373 are purely historical narrations (26%) and 302 are character narrations (21%). 150 narrations (10%) have legal or other scientific content. Other kinds of narrations were minimally represented as follows: 38 narrations (3%) containing prophecies of the occultation and other future events, 1% concerning dreams and another 1% concerning tomb visitation.

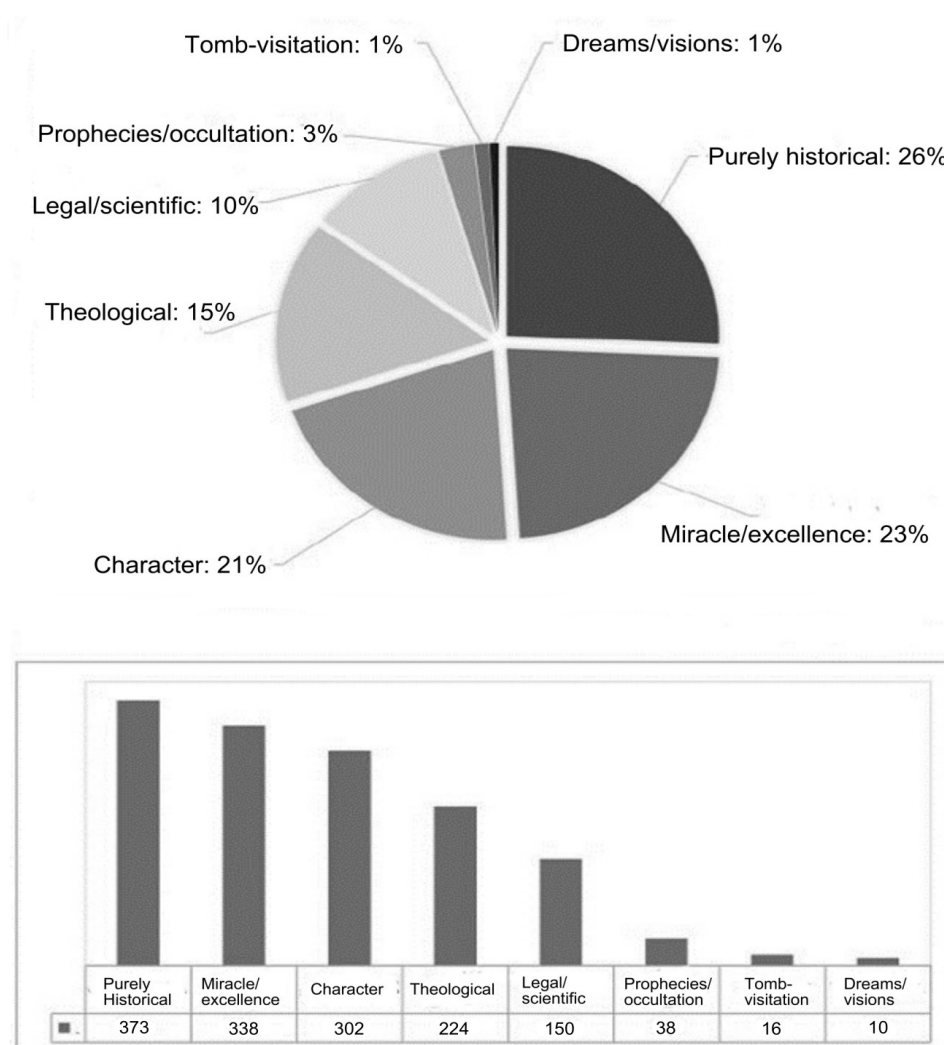


Figure 1. Distribution of *ḥadīth*-types in *al-Kāfi*.

2.2 *Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*

Of the texts in Ṣadūq's *Uyūn*, a total of 482 narrations are concerned with the history of the Imams. Of these, 130 are theological narrations (27%)—the largest share of any category. There are also considerable quantities of both purely historical narrations (98 narrations) and character narrations (94 narrations), each amounting to approximately 20%. Legal and scientific narrations make up around 16% with 76 narrations. Miracle and excellence narrations and narrations concerning tomb visitation both occur in similar, small quantities, 28 and

32 respectively, each approximately 6%. Narrations foretelling the future only amount to 3% (16 narrations) and those concerning dreams

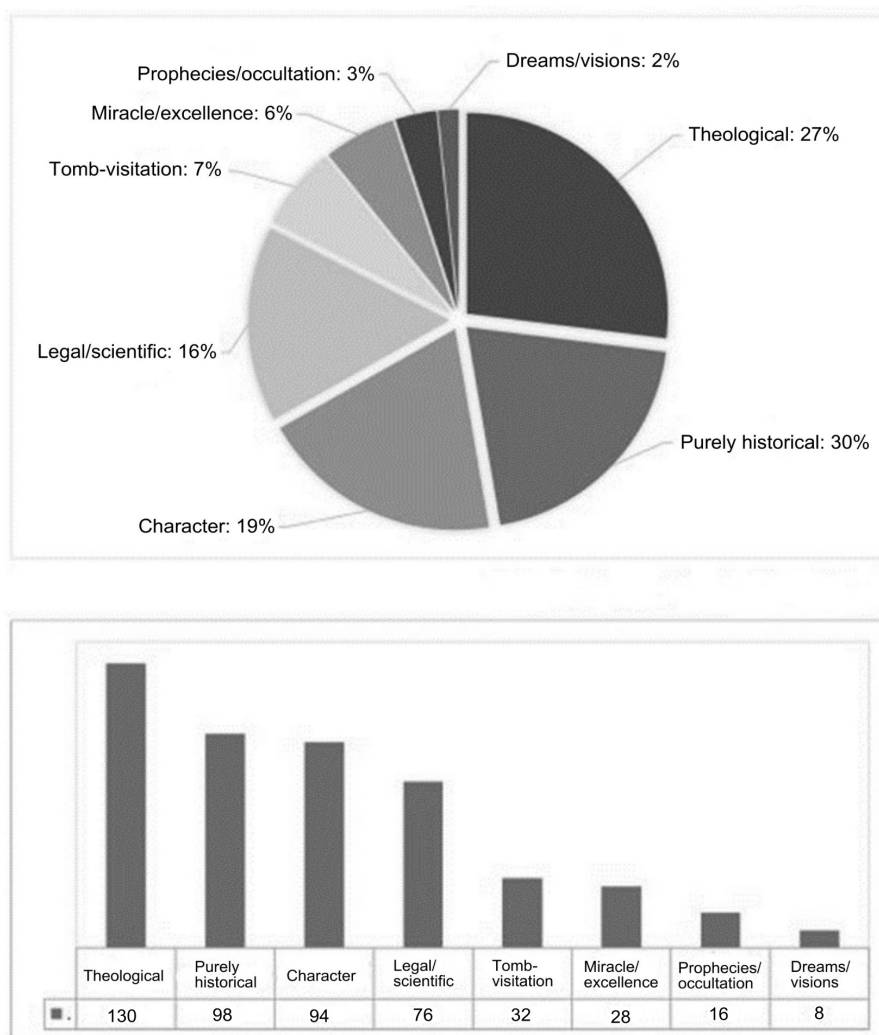


Figure 2. Distribution of *ḥadīth*-types in *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*.

even less at 2% (8 narrations).

2.3 *al-Irshād*

There are 559 narrations concerning the Imams in *al-Irshād*. The greatest portion is taken up by miracle and excellence narrations, of which there are 195 —more than a third of the total. The next largest portion is that allotted to character narrations, with 153 narrations—around 27%. Purely historical narrations and theological narrations make up the next largest portions with 106 narrations (19%) and 82 narrations

(15%) respectively. Other kinds of narration together account for only 4%, with 12 concerning tomb visitation, 4 concerning dreams, 4 concerning future events, and 3 concerning legal and scientific matters.

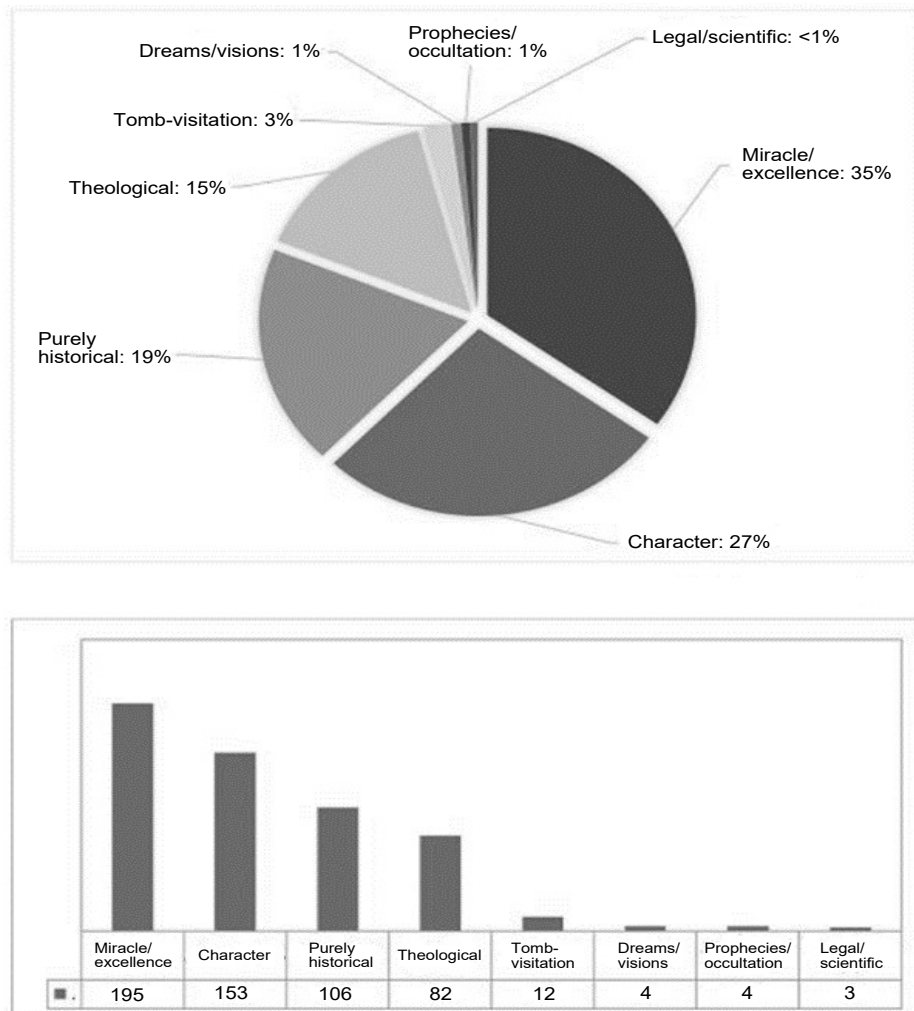


Figure 3. Distribution of *ḥadīth*-types in *al-Irshād*.

3. The Combined Results

Following the construction of our typology and the application thereof in statistical analysis, we move now to present our findings from this analysis, many of which have considerable potential to enrich scholarly understanding of our chosen source material. In order to clarify some of the results pertaining to the analysis below, a comparison of the statistical data collected from each of the three books is given here

in Figure 4.

3.1 Comparison Between *al-Kāfi*, *ʿUyūn* and *al-Irshād*

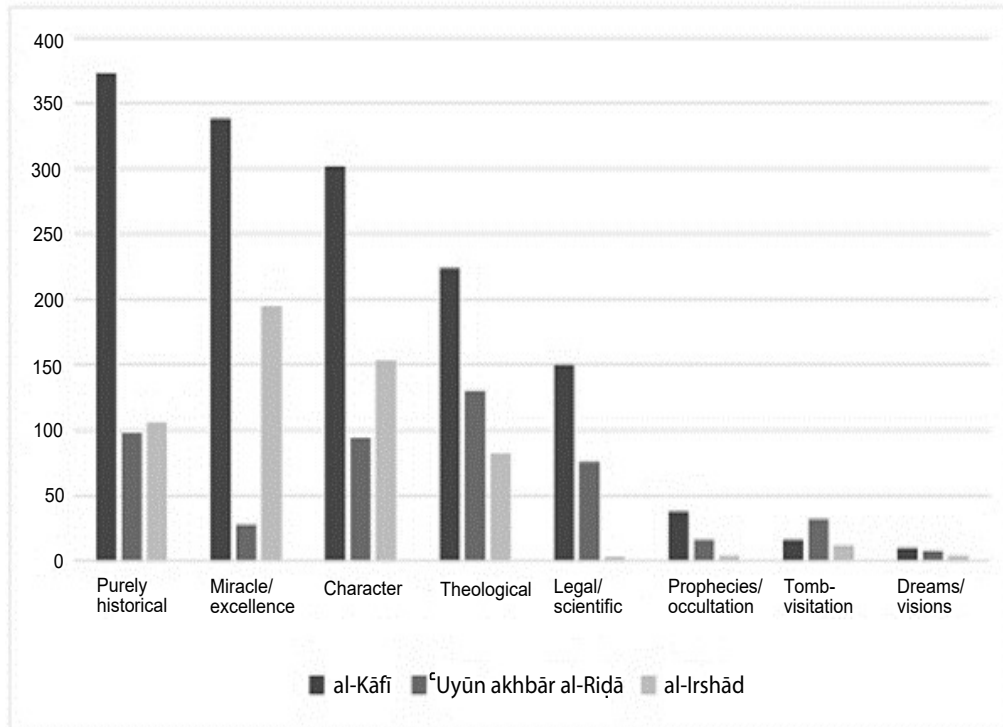


Figure 4. Comparison of Results.

3.1.1 The Quantitative Distribution of Different Narration Types

Though the works studied here are all examples of *ḥadīth*-based historiographical literature, it cannot be expected that they focus solely on historical events, given the complex objectives pursued by each of their authors. Nevertheless, the relative statistical preponderance of historically orientated narrations is an important point of distinction between our three sources. Such reports are much more frequently found in *ʿUyūn* and *al-Irshād* than they are in *al-Kāfi*, to the point where it can be confidently deduced that the primary motivation of the former two works' authors was to collect material pertaining to the biography of the Imams. As Figure 5 below illustrates, such reports dominate *al-Irshād* and *ʿUyūn*, while *al-Kāfi* is a more comprehensive (and much larger) work, of which historically focussed narrations are, accordingly, only a small fraction.

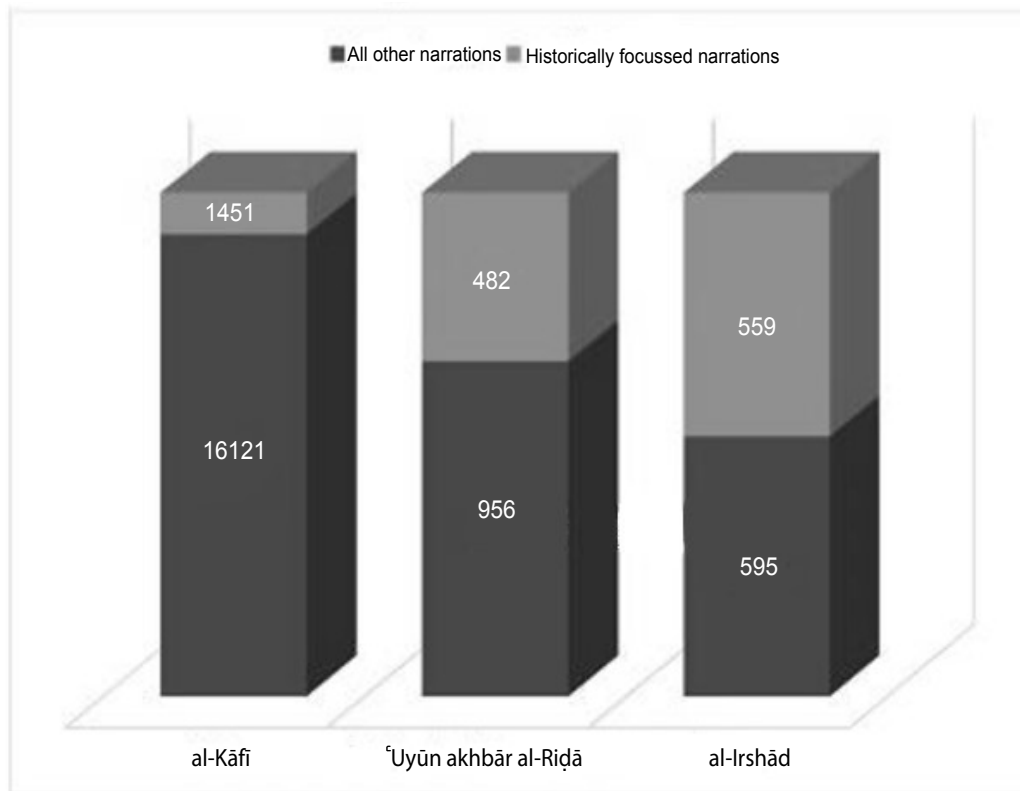


Figure 5. Overall proportion of historical material in *al-Kāfi*, *al-Irshād* and *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*

3.1.2 The Preoccupations and Methods of al-Kulaynī, al-Ṣadūq and al-Mufīd

Due to the particular situation of Twelver Shī'ism in this period, much of the literature produced by Twelvers has a distinctly theological concern. When it comes to the presentation of historical events, therefore, this is commonly geared towards the confirmation of Twelver beliefs or the refutation of distortions of those beliefs promulgated by opponents of the Twelvers, for example through accounts of the events of Ghadīr Khumm or of an imam's investiture by his predecessor. Comparing the usage of such theologically focussed materials in our sources, then, they account for about 15% of both Kulaynī and Mufīd's narrations, and 27% of Ṣadūq's. As far as Ṣadūq and Kulaynī are con-

cerned, these statistics are as one would expect—Ṣadūq was an important early Twelver theologian, whereas Kulaynī was primarily a *ḥadīth* scholar. In Mufid's case, however, the preceding analysis bids us to ask why such a prominent theologian in this instance transmits more purely historical reports than he does theological reports.

This discrepancy vanishes, however, upon closer inspection of the data, specifically when we take into account the miracle and excellence narrations. Narrations having to do with miracles or the divine powers of the Imams may not necessarily be directly linked to theological discussions, but the fact remains that they are perennially concerned with demonstrating the Imams' unique status and thus remain pertinent to theological matters in one way or another. Amongst other things, the authentication of such reports may serve to confirm an Imam's Imamate, or to demonstrate aspects of the Imams' nature such as his knowledge of the unseen. Returning to *al-Irshād*, then, theological narrations combined with miracle and excellence narrations together make up some 50% of the historical material, while the same materials together account for only 33% in *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* and 38% in *al-Kāfi*.

3.1.3 The Approach to Miracles

Our three authors' attitudes to narrations concerning miracles and other instances of the Imams' wondrous powers is a matter that invites careful examination. In *al-Kāfi* and *al-Irshād*, these reports amount to 23% and 35% respectively, while they represent only 6% in *ʿUyūn*. This indicates Ṣadūq's different view of Imāmī miracles, deeming them a correspondingly less important component of the Imams' biographies. The statistical data regarding Ṣadūq's treatment of miracle and excellence narrations in *ʿUyūn* show them amounting to only one fifth of the quantity of theological narrations that he includes. By contrast, the amount of miracle and excellence narrations in *al-Kāfi* is 50% greater than the quantity of theological narrations, and in *al-Irshād* there are twice as many miracle and excellence narrations as there are theological narrations.

Once more, these numbers raise a question concerning Mufid in

particular: how is it that this lynchpin of the Baghdad school and pioneer of Twelver rational theology comes to give such prominence to miracle and excellence narrations? The answer may again be found through closer attention to the data, in this case further interrogating the exact content of narrations of this type. Of the miracle and excellence narrations in *al-Irshād*, most either portray aspects of the Imams, such as their knowledge or sinlessness, that Mufid specifically espouses on the basis of rational and textual proofs, or they manifest aspects of the Imams' nature that, though exceptional, is generally comprehensible, such as Imam 'Alī's heroism on the battlefield or other instances of his defending the Prophet.³³ By contrast, miracle and excellence narrations in the other two works studied regularly involve highly supernatural events,³⁴ a fact that is highly illustrative of Kulaynī's and Ṣadūq's traditionist mode of *ḥadīth* scholarship. Here, then, we see the care that must be taken in analysing the attitudes to and uses of miracle and excellence narrations in these compendia.

3.1.4 The Authors' Evolving Approach to Historiography

One of the narration types that receives equal attention across all three compendia is purely historical narrations. Commonly encountered examples thereof in all three works include texts giving the dates of the Imams' births and martyrdoms, explanations of their genealogies, and texts disclosing the location of their tombs. In all three books, these account for between 20% and 25% of all historical narrations. In some instances, nevertheless, we do find a given author exhibiting especial interest in a particular sub-topic—narrations concerning tomb visitation, for instance, are three times more numerous in *Uyūn* than in either of the other works. This case may be explained by the fact that *Uyūn* is an entire work specifically concerned with one Imam—Imam al-Riḍā—and is thus especially comprehensive in its collection of materials concerning him, including details of proper pilgrimage to his place of burial.

³³ E.g., Mufid, *al-Irshād*, 1:33-191.

³⁴ E.g., Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:227, 237; Ṣadūq, *Uyūn*, 1:192.

In terms of the thematic structure of these purely historical narrations, one important factor revealed by the statistical data from all three works is the passage of time. To take one important example, one sees that the closer an author's lifetime is to the actual event of the occultation in 260/874, the more focus they place on narrations concerning the occultation of the Twelfth Imam. Thus, one finds 38 cases of such reports in *al-Kāfi*, 15 in *ʿUyūn* and only 4 in *al-Irshād*. Meanwhile, narrations concerned with the Imams' character and manners gain greater prominence as the occultation becomes more distant, such that these texts are most numerous in *al-Irshād*. This correlates strongly with what is known about the developing conditions of the Twelver community over this period, thus constituting an example of how statistical analysis can illustrate how the selection and presentation of narrations in these compendia is tailored to the needs of the community at the time of compilation.

3.2 Overall Results of the Analysis

3.2.1 Imāmī *Ḥadīth*-Based Historiography in Its Broader Intellectual Context

One aspect of the sources under discussion that has attracted some interest from previous scholarship is the relationship between Twelver *ḥadīth*-based historiography and the wider spectrum of Muslim historiography in general. As we have demonstrated in the preceding typological and quantitative analyses, these early examples of Twelver *ḥadīth*-based historiography were closely tied to and shaped by the specific context of the Twelver community and its needs at the time of their composition. A crucial part of that context was the death of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. When this occurred in 260/874, it was initially very unclear to most of his followers what form the succession would take, a circumstance that had two important consequences: first, the Imāmiyya were riven by internal disagreement on an unprecedented scale,³⁵ combined with intensified challenges levelled against them by

³⁵ al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa* (Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī wa Farhangī, 1374 Sh./1995), 96-112.

other, often powerful groups.³⁶ Second, this maelstrom of doctrinal confusion engendered lasting questions regarding the exact nature and cause of the occultation and how the Shī‘a should conduct themselves during the Imam’s continued absence.³⁷ Against this turbulent background, then, Imāmī religious scholars began to place increased focus upon the task of establishing the authority of the Imams’ *ḥadīth*, such that this corpus could meet the practical and intellectual needs of the Imāmī community in the face of these challenges. Though this endeavour revived the Imāmiyya over the following decades, it also bore its own consequences. We see these, for instance, in the great quantity of space allotted by the works analysed to theological narrations and character narrations; this is in marked contrast to the broader corpus of Muslim historiographical writing, wherein the main emphasis is placed upon narrations with a political focus. Generally speaking, Muslim historians of other traditions are less inclined to give their theological beliefs such wide expression in how they select their sources, tending rather towards constructing the fullest account possible of events deemed relevant to matters of government and to society at large.

It should be noted that these conclusions have considerable value for those seeking to make wider use of the narrations contained within *ḥadīth*-based historiographical works; for example, the specific objectives behind the compilation of the three texts studied here led their authors to include a significant number of extremist (*ghālī*) reports, since—notwithstanding such reports’ dubious character from other perspectives—they seemed to serve these particular objectives.³⁸

³⁶ For examples of other groups’ polemics against Twelvers at this time and of Twelver rebuttals thereto, see the introduction to Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-ni‘ma*, ed. Ali Akbar Ghaffari (Mu’assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 1429/2008).

³⁷ Andrew Newman, *Dawri-yi Shiklgīrī-yi Tashayyū‘-i Dawāzdah Imāmī*, trans. Mahdī Abūṭālibī, Muhammad Riza Amin, and Ḥasan Shukrullāhī (Mu’assisi-yi Shī‘i Shināsī, 1386 Sh./2007), 109.

³⁸ Regarding the penetration of *ghālī* ideas into the Twelver *ḥadīth* corpus,

3.2.2 The Qualitative Assessment of Twelver Historiography

The statistics revealed by the preceding study allow us to draw a number of general conclusions regarding the works studied. Though there do exist surface-level differences between them, the historical portions of all three of these compendia are based on the same set of principal content-types as follows:

1. A substantial core of purely historical narrations regarding the Imams' lives, their personalities and the circumstances in which they lived.
2. Narrations that illustrate variously the Imams' humanity and their enlightened, sinless nature. These first two types form the core of these compendia.
3. Material seeking to increase Twelver believers' faith in the Imams, while also rebutting attacks and theological critiques levelled against them by hostile groups.
4. Material proclaiming the Imams' exalted status in Shī'ī belief, such as reports of their wondrous qualities and, more rarely, of the miracles that they performed, including those of a dramatically supernatural nature.
5. Reports of the Imams' character and manners. This kind of material was consistently assigned a considerable portion of the works in question, reflecting the authors' concern to elevate them as examples and guides.
6. There is no reliance whatsoever in these works upon narrations that readers might find intellectually implausible, such as reports of dreams or of outlandish prophecies. This negative observation is important to make inasmuch as it marks a considerable contrast between these works and some other examples of Twelver *ḥadīth*-based historiography.

see Nāṣir Rafī'ī, *Durūs fi Waḍ' al-Ḥadīth* (Jāmi'at al-Muṣṭafā al-'Ālamiyya, 1388 Sh./2009), 68-74.

Sufficient context for these patterns of content and their significance is supplied by comparison with such works as al-Ṭabarī's *Dalā'il al-imāma*, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's *Uyūn al-mu'jizāt*, and al-Khaṣībī's (d. 346/957 or 358/968) *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, and (on another level) with a work like al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī's (d. 290/903) *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*. A survey of the balance of subject matter in these other works (as denoted by their subject headings) shows it to be almost the reverse of that found in the three studied here. The portrayal of the Imams therein casts them as thoroughly supernatural figures, minimising their humanity or effacing it altogether, while foregrounding miraculous deeds that disrupt the laws of creation and other themes that reflect some *ghālī* beliefs. Overall, their portrayal of the Imam evidences these authors having been substantially influenced by some of the Shī'ī beliefs entrenched within members of the respective periods, with the result that these compendia diverge greatly in content from the works of the leading Twelver scholars of the same era upon which the present study is focussed.³⁹

These distinctions between works like our three source texts and some other Twelver writings about the Imams' lives are further underscored by a number of factors, among which some observations concerning comparative influence are especially illustrative. Returning to the three-level qualitative schema for Twelver historiographical works outlined above, *al-Kāfi*, *Uyūn* and *al-Irshād* exert a considerable influence upon most well-regarded Twelver historiography in subsequent centuries, but their contents are, conversely, referred to only sparingly by second- and third-level works. Meanwhile, notwithstanding the difference between first-level sources, the three compendia studied in this article show very little influence from works like *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, and even where there is some overlap in content, the effect thereof

³⁹ Though a full statistical analysis of these books would constitute a separate study, these observations are based upon a comprehensive survey of their tables of contents, the overall impression of which (with regards to the contrast between these works and those studied here) is irrefutable.

upon the overall shape and essence of the compendia is clearly minimal.

3.2.3 The Defensibility of Twelver Historiography

The above makes plain that the works examined in the present study possess a more moderate, historically acceptable quality than works belonging to other levels of Twelver *ḥadīth*-based historiography. This is further underscored by the fact that these eminent works retain a status as foundational sources for subsequent writings about the Maʿṣūmūn, with both their method of composition and their contents exerting a discernible influence for some time after their composition, notwithstanding later authors' differences in approach and their access to earlier sources. For example, al-Fattāl al-Nīsābūrī's (d. 508/1115) *Rawḍat al-wā'izīn*, which presents the lives of the fourteen Maʿṣūmūn in thirty sessions (sg. *majlis*), makes various references to the names, views and *aḥādīth* transmitted by Kulaynī, Ṣadūq and Mufid.⁴⁰ Similarly, al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī's (d. 548/1153) important biography of the fourteen Maʿṣūmūn, *I'lām al-warā* draws heavily upon these authors' works.⁴¹ That these three scholars continued to exert such influence is a clear testament to their status, and indeed to the success of their endeavour—identified above—of gathering records of the Imams' lives and thereby meeting the needs of the Shī'a during the tribulations of the early post-occultation period.

One of the most valuable conclusions to be drawn from the present typological study is therefore that Twelver historical writings about the Imams rest on a firm, defensible basis. These works, it has been shown, adhere to valid and necessary Shī'ī teachings and themes, and steer clear of *ghālī* emphases on the highly miraculous.⁴² It is evident,

⁴⁰ E.g., Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Fattāl al-Nīsābūrī, *Rawḍat al-wā'izīn* (Manshūrāt-i Sharīf Raḍī: n.d.), 1:54, 59, 75, 76, 204, 215, 232, 234, 238, 278.

⁴¹ E.g., al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, *I'lām al-warā bi-a'lām al-hudā* (Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt: 1376 Sh./1997), 21, 24, 38, 65.

⁴² It should be reiterated that such a conclusion is not intended to denigrate those narrations that do portray the Imams as miraculous, only to point out

then, that quantitative analysis of the kind employed in the present study may serve as an effective defence against criticisms of Twelver historical literature about the Imams that dismiss this literature as dominated by implausible and exaggerated material.

Conclusion

We have shown in the above that by paying attention to how early Twelver authors of *ḥadīth*-based historiography select narrations—in particular their relative preference for different types of narrations—it is possible to discern their authorial goals and how they engage the context in which they write. Given the existence of these analytical possibilities, it is essential that researchers take them into account, ensuring that any scholarly use of narrations drawn from *ḥadīth*-based historiographies incorporates such examinations of the structure and content of these compendia.

We have further observed that the historical elements of Twelver *ḥadīth*-based historiography can be productively subdivided into four principal categories: theological narrations, purely historical narrations, character narrations, and miracle and excellence narrations. These are accompanied by four ancillary categories: narrations concerning law and other sciences, tomb-visitation, dreams and visions, and predictions.

Building upon this taxonomy, a statistical analysis of these categories' usage was carried out upon *al-Kāfi*, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* and *al-Irshād*, these works being selected on account of their being the most authoritative and influential examples of this literature. The analysis confirmed our hypothesis that, though these authors do have their differences—differences that are reflected in their works' content and have distinct repercussions for how narrations in these works should be evaluated and used—the three compendia studied nevertheless

that such reports addressed different concerns to those of the authors studied here.

possess a close resemblance in the kinds of narrations that they contain. This similarity, in turn, reflects their authors' response to the needs of the Twelver community at that time, and overall indicates a shared method and purpose behind all three compendia. The analysis also showed that over time these works exhibit a growing interest in historiographical and character-focussed material, relative to the interest shown towards theological and doctrinal discussions.

Significant differences, moreover, were observed between the content and preoccupations of the kinds of Twelver historiography exemplified by our principal sources and that exhibited by compendia of historical material about the Imams compiled by other groups, both Shī'ī and non-Shī'ī. Drawing partly upon previous studies, the article further showed that if Twelver *ḥadīth*-based historiographical literature is to be studied effectively, it is necessary to categorise the overall corpus of that literature according to a number of qualitative levels, a process that was demonstrated to be readily feasible. A crucial aspect of the three works studied here is their role as foundational sources for subsequent Twelver historiographical writings about the Imams, a fact that greatly bolsters defences of the historical viability of the broader corpus of Twelver writing on this subject. Such observations, of course, do not detract from the instructive value of any single *ḥadīth*; rather, they only affirm that the results of typological studies like that carried out here hold significant promise for application to the broader wealth of the historiographical tradition and beyond.

Bibliography

- Ali Ahmadi, Alireza and Ghafarian, Wafa, *Uṣūl-i Shinākht wa Rawish-i Taḥqīq (bā Tikyi bar Muṭāli'āt-i Tārīkhī)*, Faṣlnāmi-yi 'Ulūm-i Insānī: 1382 Sh./2003.
- Bailey, Norman, *Ṭarrāḥī-yi Taḥqīqāt-i Ijtimā'ī*, trans. Ḥasan Chāwushīyan, Nashr-i Niyy: 1389 Sh./2010.
- al-Fattāl al-Nīsābūrī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, *Rawḍat al-wā'izīn*, Manshūrāt-i Sharīf Raḍī: n.d.
- Furet, François, "Tārīkh-i Kammī," trans. Mujtabā Faḍīlī, in *Dāryūsh*

- Rahmāniyān (ed.), *Majmū'ī-yi Maqālāt-i Tārīkh wa Hamkārīhā-yi Miyān-i Rishti-yī*, Pazhūhishkadi-yi Tārīkh-i Islām: 1395 Sh./2016.
- Habibzade, Ramin, "Barrasī-yi Anvā'-i Dīndārī dar Bayn-i Dānishjūyān-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran," Masters diss, Tarbiat Modares University, 2006.
- Hazrati, Hasan, *Ta'ammulātī dar 'Ilm-i Tārīkh wa Tārīkhniḡārī-yi Islāmī*, Pazhūhishkadi-yi Tārīkh-i Islām: 1392 Sh./2013.
- Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, al-Ḥusayn, *Uyūn al-mu'jizāt*, Manshūrāt-i Raḡī: n. d.
- Khānjānī, Qāsim, *Shaykh Muḡid wa Tārīkhniḡārī-yi Islāmī*, Pazhūhishgāh-i Ḥawza wa Dānishgāh: 1392 Sh./2014.
- al-Khaṣībī, al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān, *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, Mu'assisi-yi Balāgh, 1365 Sh./1986.
- al-Kulaynī, Muḡammad b. Ya'qūb, *al-Kāfi*, Islāmiyya: 1362 Sh./2006.
- al-Muḡid, Muḡammad b. Muḡammad b. al-Nu'mān, *al-Irshād fi ma'rifat ḡujaj Allāh 'alā al-'ibād*, Kungiri-yi Shaykh Muḡid: 1413/1992.
- al-Nawbakhtī, al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā, *Firaq al-Shī'a*, Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī wa Farhangī: 1374 Sh./1995.
- Newman, Andrew, *Dawri-yi Shiklgīrī-yi Tashayyu'-i Dawāzdah Imāmī*, trans. Mahdi Abūṭalībī, Muḡammad Reza Amin, and Ḥasan Shukrullāhī, Mu'assisi-yi Shī'i Shināsī: 1386 Sh./2007.
- Rafī'ī, Nāṣir, *Durūs fi Waḡ' al-Ḥādīth*, Jāmi'at al-Muṣṭafā al-'Ālamiyya: 1388 Sh./2009.
- al-Ṣadūq, Muḡammad b. 'Alī, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḡā*, Nashr-i Jahān: 1378 Sh./2000.
- al-Ṣadūq, Muḡammad b. 'Alī, *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-ni'ma*, ed. Ali Akbar Ghaffari, Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī: 2008.
- al-Ṣadūq, Muḡammad b. 'Alī, *Man lā yaḡḡuruhu al-faqīh*, ed. 'Alī Akbar Ghaffārī, Jāmi'at al-Mudarrisīn: n.d.
- al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, Muḡammad b. al-Ḥasan, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, Maktabat Ayatollah al-Mar'ashī al-Najafī, 1404/1983.
- Safiri, Khadige, *Shīwi-yi Tahqīq-i Kiyfī*, Intishārāt-i Payām-i Pūyā: 1378 Sh./1999.
- Shiypūrī, Maryam, "Kiliyūmitrīk (Bahrigīrī az Dānish-e Āmār dar Tārīkh)", *Majmū'ī-yi Maqālāt-i Tārīkh wa Hamkārīhā-yi Miyān-i*

- Rishti-yī*, (Pazhūhishkadi-yi Tārīkh-i Islām: 1392 Sh./2013).
- al-Ṭabari, Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustam, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, Nashr-i Bi'that: n.d.
- al-Ṭabrisī, al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan, *I'lām al-warā bi-a'lām al-hudā*, Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt: 1998.
- Towhidi-niya, Rouhollah, "Arzyābī-yi Tārīkhniḡārī-yi Shaykh Ṣadūq dar Kitāb-i *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḡā*," Ḥawza diss, Qom, 1394 Sh./2015.
- Towhidi-niya, Rouhollah and Safari Forushani, Ne'matollah, "Barrasī-yi Tahḡilī-yi Tārīkhniḡārī-yi Riwayī-yi Imāmiyya tā Nīmi-yi Qarn-i Panjum," *Faṣḡnāmi-yi Tārīkh-i Islām* 64, (1394 Sh./2015), 12-35.
- Towhidi-niya, Rouhollah "Bāyistihā-yi Hamḡarāyī-yi Zharfnigar dar bāb-i Tārīkhniḡārī-yi Riwayī-yi Imāmiyyi," *Faṣḡnāmi-yi Tārīkh-i Islām* 76, (1398 Sh./2019), 173-202.
- Towhidi-niya, Rouhollah "Naqsh-i Shī'ayān dar Tadwīn-i Manābi'ī Tārīkh wa Sīri-yi Imāmān-i Ahl-I Bayt (Nazariyyi-yi Farāyand-i Manṡiqī wa Jāmi'ī Shikḡirī-yi Manābi'ī Tārīkh wa Sīri-yi Imāmān)," *Majmū'ī-yi Maqālāt-i Barguzīdi-yi Kungiri-yi Bayn al-Mīlalī-yi Naqsh-i Shī'a dar Pīydāyish wa Gustarish-i 'Ulūm-i Islāmī*, (n.p.: 1976).