The Four Books of Shiʿi Hadith: From Inception to Consolidation

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Abstract

Since their compilations in the tenth and eleventh centuries CE, the four hadith books, al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār, have left an indelible mark on Shiʿi religiosity. The present study takes as its starting point the earliest instance in which these four compilations were collectively referred to as the Four Books (al-kutub al-arbaʿa). I investigate the major developments in the period between the inception of this phrase in the fifteenth century and its consolidation as the demarcator of a unique Imami hadith corpus in the seventeenth century. Following the introduction, each section of the article focuses on a figure whose ideas contributed to this consolidation process. In the conclusion I summarize the findings of the previous sections and reflect on the notion of hadith canonicity within the context of Imami jurisprudence during the period under study.

Keywords

Shiʿi hadith – the Four Books – hadith criticism – Shiʿi jurisprudence – Islamic intellectual history

1 Introduction

When Shiʿi scholars are asked, what are the most authoritative hadith books of their tradition, nearly all respond, the Four Books (al-kutub al-arbaʿa). In
providing this answer they follow a tradition stretching back at least five centuries.¹ Compendia of statements attributed to the Prophet and the imams, these four books contain teachings on a variety of subjects, albeit with a primary focus on legal precepts.² The first of the Four Books is al-Kāfī fī ‘ilm al-dīn (henceforth, al-Kāfī), compiled by Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941).³ He reportedly began working on al-Kāfī in Qom and completed it twenty years later, towards the end of his life. The book’s title and preface point to al-Kulaynī’s aspiration to provide his readers with a ‘sufficient’ (kāfī) source for the knowledge of religion.⁴ A compendium of 16,202 hadiths, al-Kāfī covers a vast array of topics.⁵ These hadiths are thematically arranged

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¹ Three branches of Shi‘ism have survived to this day: Imami, Zaydi, and Isma‘ili. In this article, ‘Shi‘i’ refers to the Imami branch unless otherwise noted.


⁴ Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, ed. M. Ḥ. al-Dirāyatī, 15 vols. (Qom: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1429), 116–19. This text was initially referred to as Kitāb al-Kulaynī; the title al-Kāfī was established a few decades after al-Kulaynī’s death, perhaps inspired by his remark in the preface that he intends the book to serve as a ‘sufficient’ source of knowledge. See H. Ansari, Barresihā-ye tārīkhī dar ḥozeh-ye eslām va tashayyoʿ (Tehran: Ketābkhāneh, mūzeh va markaz-e asnād-e shūrā-ye eslāmī, 1390 sh.), 100 (n. 14).

⁵ Al-Kāfī’s vast scope may be better grasped by comparison to the number of hadiths in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), the most authoritative compilation of Sunni hadith. According to Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449), the Ṣaḥīḥ contains 7,275 hadiths with full transmission chains; this number is reduced to 2,602 if the repeated hadiths are excluded. Al-Bukhārī’s book includes 1,341 hadiths with incomplete chains of transmission. See Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Ḥady al-sārī, ed. A. F. ‘Abd al-Bāqī and A. Ibn Bāz (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1428–1429), 562.
into three parts. The first part contains 3,786 hadiths pertaining to doctrine (uṣūl, lit. “roots”); the second has 11,819 hadiths on law (furūʿ, lit. “branches”); the third, often referred to as al-rawda (lit. “garden”), has 597 hadiths on miscellaneous topics that do not directly pertain to those addressed in the first two parts.6 Al-Kāfī is the earliest extant major compilation of Imami hadith.7

The second of the Four Books, Man lā yaḥḍuruhu l-faqīh (henceforth, al-Faqīh), was compiled by Muḥammad ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991) and completed around 366/978, thirty-seven years after al-Kulaynī’s death.8 Whereas al-Kāfī contains hadiths pertaining to both creed and law, al-Faqīh is exclusively dedicated to law.9 As the book’s title and preface suggest, Ibn Bābawayh intended his book of 5,963 hadiths to serve as a self-help guide for those without access to a jurist on whose rulings they could rely.10 The remaining two of the Four Books, Tahdhīb al-aḥkām and al-Istibṣār fi-mā ukhtulīfa min

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7 No Imami hadith compilation is extant in its entirety prior to al-Kāfī. The only extant work similar to al-Kāfī is the Maḥāsin of al-Barqī (d. ca. 280/894), which has not survived in its entirety and most of its original content is reportedly lost. Other important pre-Kāfī works – though much narrower in scope in their extant editions than al-Maḥāsin – include Nawādir al-ḥikma attributed to Aḥmad b. ʿĪsā al-Ashʿarī (d. after 280/894) and Qurb al-insād of al-Ḥimyarī (d. after 297/909). On early Imami hadith literature, both prior to al-Kulaynī and contemporary with him, see H. Modarressi, Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shiʿi Literature (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003); Ansari, Lʿimamat; Newman, Formative Period; R. Vilozny, Constructing a Worldview: Al-Barqī’s Role in the Making of Early Shiʿi Faith (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016); M. M. Bar-Asher, Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmi Shiʿism (Leiden: Brill, 1999); M. A. Amir-Moezzi, “al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (m. 290/902–3) et son Kitāb Başāʾir al-Darajāt”, in idem, The Silent Qur’an and the Speaking Qur’an, ch. 4.


al-akhbār, were compiled by Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067). Born in Khorasan in 385/995, at the age of twenty-three he moved to Baghdad where he would remain for the next forty years; it was during this period that al-Tahdhib and al-Istibṣār were compiled. Like al-Faqīh, both books address only legal topics. Al-Tahdhib contains 13,590 hadiths and is both longer and more comprehensive than either al-Faqīh or the legal part of al-Kāfī. In al-Istibṣār, al-Ṭūsī selects 5,511 contradictory or conflicting hadiths from his Tahdhib and attempts to bring them into concord. It is to be noted that these four compilations have a great number of hadiths in common.

These four books – al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhib, and al-Istibṣār – were compiled and widely used long before their consolidation as the Four Books (al-kutub al-arbaʿa). The present study, however, takes as its starting point the earliest instance in which the phrase al-kutub al-arbaʿa enters Imami hadith discourse. It investigates the major developments in the period between the inception of this phrase in the fifteenth century and its consolidation as the demarcator of a unique hadith corpus in the seventeenth century. To this end, I will analyze five thinkers from this period whose views had a decisive impact on the consolidation process. Among the questions I address are: when and in what contexts do the earliest extant references to the Four Books occur? What features distinguish the Four Books from other Imami compilations? What theoretical principles inform each of these five thinkers’ methodologies of hadith verification? In what ways are their respective assessments of the reliability of the hadiths in the Four Books informed by each thinker’s understanding of the historical trajectory of Imami hadith from its earliest textual manifestation to his time? A key and recurring issue in this article pertains to

10 Ibn Bābawayh, Man lā yaḥḍuruhu l-faqīh, 1:2–3.
12 In 448/1057, after the Seljuqs burned down his vast library in Baghdad, al-Ṭūsī migrated to Najaf, where he spent the rest of his life. During his stay in Najaf, he founded the city’s seminary, which to this day stands, along with Qom, as the most prestigious Imami Shiʿi center of clerical training and scholarship.
the contrasting justifications provided for establishing the privileged status of the Four Books and the different methods proposed for verifying their hadiths.

2 Ibn Abī Jumhūr and the Four Sources

In 888/1483, around the age of fifty, Ibn Abī Jumhūr (fl. 906/1501) completed a concise book on legal reasoning entitled Kāshifat al-ḥāl 'an aḥwāl al-istidlāl.15 In the preface, he states that Kāshifat al-ḥāl was written because of a pressing request of the author’s friend. Ibn Abī Jumhūr notes that he was asked to compose an epistle outlining the essential elements involved in the process of legal reasoning in regard to one’s religious obligations.16 The purpose of this reasoning, he writes, is to arrive at the knowledge of the precepts that believers must observe.17

According to Ibn Abī Jumhūr, legal reasoning involves knowledge of three kinds of sciences: linguistic, rational, scriptural. The science of language is comprised of the disciplines of lexicography, morphology, and syntax; the rational sciences of logic, theology, and jurisprudence; and the scriptural sciences of exegesis, hadith, and rijāl.18 He next outlines the knowledge required in each of these disciplines. Ibn Abī Jumhūr reassures the readers that in order to engage in legal reasoning they need not possess the expertise of Sibawayh in syntax;
nor are they expected to reach, like Avicenna, the summit of logic.\textsuperscript{19} To ease such concerns, he provides a list of recommended readings for each of the nine above-mentioned disciplines.\textsuperscript{20} In his view, this suggested reading list provides the uninitiated with a sufficient grounding in the three sciences involved in legal reasoning. Regarding the discipline of hadith, Ibn Abī Jumhūr writes:

It is not incumbent upon an investigator to know those hadiths by heart but rather it will suffice him to consult some of the authenticated sources (\textit{al-uṣūl al-muṣaḥḥaha}) and to be capable of accessing those hadiths as they are recorded in one of the esteemed books (\textit{al-kutub al-muʿtabara}). They say, it is sufficient to refer to only one of the Four Sources, be it \textit{Kitāb al-Kāfī} of al-Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī (may God’s mercy be upon him), or \textit{Kitāb Tahdīḥ} of al-Shaykh Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī (may God’s mercy be upon him), or \textit{Kitāb Man lā yaḥḍuruhu l-faqīh} of al-Shaykh Ibn Bābawayh (may God’s mercy be upon him). Even if he relies only on \textit{al-Istibṣār} of al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, that is equally acceptable since it is one of the Four Sources; but if he examines all of them, that is most desirable.\textsuperscript{21}

In support of his recommended reading list, Ibn Abī Jumhūr invokes the authority of scholars, stating that “they say” it is enough to consult any one of these four books.\textsuperscript{22} He does not specify which of his contemporaries or predecessors made this recommendation and whether they also used the phrase the ‘four sources’ (\textit{al-uṣūl al-arbaʿa}) to demarcate the sufficient books of Imami hadith from other available works.\textsuperscript{23} He does allude to a passage in one of his recommended \textit{rijāl} books – \textit{Khulāṣat al-aqw āl} – in which al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325) refers to three of the four books collectively as the “three books” (\textit{al-kutub al-thalātha}). Ibn Abī Jumhūr draws attention to the final section of the \textit{Khulāṣa} where al-Ḥillī documents the transmission path through which

\footnotesize{Sunna, and consensus are inferred based on the general principles outlined by the Prophet and the imams (see \textit{Kāshīfat al-ḥāl}, 55–57).

\textsuperscript{17} Ibn Abī Jumhūr, \textit{Kāshīfat al-ḥāl}, 53.

\textsuperscript{18} The discipline of \textit{rijāl} is concerned with determining the credibility of hadith narrators.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 78, 80, 82.

\textsuperscript{20} See the Appendix for a list of Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s recommendations in each of these disciplines.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 89–92. All English translations in this article are my own.

\textsuperscript{22} Elsewhere in \textit{Kāshīfat al-ḥāl} (p. 133), Ibn Abī Jumhūr reiterates that it is sufficient for those who seek to derive rulings to turn to these four books as their sources of hadith.

the hadith compilations he refers to as the “three books” have reached him. These are Ibn Bābawayh’s al-Faqīh, and al-Tahdhib and al-Istibṣār of al-Ṭūsī.24 “If only”, Ibn Abī Jumhūr writes, “he had likewise mentioned the fourth book, meaning al-Kāfi, as he did with these three, that would have been most desirable and the height of perfection. I do not know why he overlooked al-Kāfi in the way that he did, even though it is the [primary] source (al-aṣl) which is relied upon.”25 There is, thus, at least one precedent of an explicit collective reference to three of the four books that constitute the Four Sources before the time of Ibn Abī Jumhūr. Nonetheless, Ibn Abī Jumhūr does not explain how the Four Sources came to be seen as sufficient sources of hadith. Indeed, the current available textual data suggests that he was the first to refer to al-Kāfi, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhib, and al-Istibṣār collectively as the Four Sources.26

According to Ibn Abī Jumhūr, these four compilations form a comprehensive corpus in which nearly all the hadiths available to the early scholars have been preserved:

The early scholars collected the hadiths from dispersed places, unearthed them from scattered sources and – having explicated their transmission methods, described their transmission chains, and mentioned the names of those who transmitted the hadiths from the imams – recorded them in compilations, such that nothing is excluded from them except for a negli-

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24 Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, Khulāṣat al-aqwāl fi maʿrifat al-rijāl, ed. J. al-Qayyūmī (Qom: Mu’assasat Nashr al-Faqāha, 1431), 443. Whereas Ibn Abī Jumhūr uses the phrase “the three sources” (al-uṣūl al-thalātha), al-Ḥillī refers to them as the “three books” (al-kutub al-thalātha). This may indicate that Ibn Abī Jumhūr regards kitāb and aṣl as synonymous in this context. Furthermore, as Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s passage on his recommended hadith sources illustrates, after mentioning that it suffices to consult any of the Four Sources (al-uṣūl al-arbaʿa), he refers to each (except for al-Istibṣār) as a kitāb (e.g., kitāb Tahdhib) Also, see footnote 28.

25 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Kāshifat al-ḥāl, 141–142. The absence of al-Kāfi in this passage does not indicate al-Ḥillī’s disregard for al-Kulaynī’s book. Indeed, he describes al-Kulaynī as the “most trusted person in hadith” (Khulāṣat al-aqwāl, 245) and quotes from al-Kāfi throughout his writings.

26 H. Ansari, “Dar ḥāshīyeh-ye yek maqāleleh darbāreḥ-ye Shaykh-e Ṣadūq”, online: https://ansari.kateban.com/post/3274 (accessed 10 February 2021). To the best of my knowledge, the term al-uṣūl al-arbaʿa does not appear in any other of Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s extant writings. In two of his transmission licenses, he names the hadith sources that he authorizes the licensees to transmit, mentioning al-Kāfi, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhib, and al-Istibṣār, along with “…other books [of hadith].” In neither case does he refer to these four compilations as al-uṣūl al-arbaʿa, even though both licenses were issued after he had completed Kāshifat al-ḥāl, where the phrase is seen. See Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Ḥāṣidat al-ḥadīth, ed. M. H. al-Wāʿiẓ al-Najafi (Beirut: Mu’assasat Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-ʿAṣrāʾi li-Ilhām al-ʿUthūr, 1439), 371, 382–383. I thank Majid Montazermehdi for providing me a copy of this volume.
gible number [of hadiths]. They did all of this to establish the guidelines, collate the stray hadiths, determine legal precepts, and zealously preserve Islam.27

In his view, as a result of the efforts of early scholars, no tasks remain for their successors other than preserving what they established and studying what they compiled.28 In the context of hadith transmission, the term ‘early’ scholars (mutaquaddimūn) often refers to those who were contemporary with the imams; they are contrasted with ‘later’ scholars (mutaʾakhkhirūn) who lived in the period after the twelfth Imam went into Occultation (ghayba) in 260/874.29

Ibn Abī Jumhūr adds a caveat to his assertion regarding the sufficiency of the Four Sources. In his view, the mere presence of a given hadith in any of these four compilations does not automatically establish its authenticity. This is why, in his view, without sufficient knowledge of the science of rījāl, legal reasoning should not be undertaken. He remarks that the science of hadith would not be on a straight course without the science of rījāl, since it is through the latter that authentic hadiths are distinguished from the rest.30 As a result, he writes, those who engage in legal reasoning have the utmost need of this science.31 Hence, he instructs the reader to consult the Four Sources side by side with his recommended list of books on rījāl.32 Although he considers these four compilations as sufficient sources of hadith, no hadith should be accepted as reliable without a verification process.

Ibn Abī Jumhūr outlines this verification process in Kāshifat al-ḥāl and in his hadith compilation Ghawālī al-laʾālī. He divides all hadiths into three

27 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Kāshifat al-ḥāl, 136–137.  
28 Ibid., 137. In the introduction to his own hadith compilation, Ghawālī al-laʾālī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr uses the phrases “dispersed places” and “scattered books” to explain why he set out to compile this book (Ghawālī, 133). Whereas in Kāshifat al-ḥāl he refers to “scattered sources” (uṣūl mutafarriqa), in Ghawālī he uses “scattered books” (kutub mutafarriqa), another indication that he uses uṣūl and kutub interchangeably.

29 The qualifiers ‘early’ and ‘later’ have different meanings, depending on the discipline as well as the time period of those who invoke them. See H. Modarressi, Introduction to Shiʿī Law: A Bibliographical Study (London: Ithaca, 1984), 23–24. On the twelfth Imam’s Occultation (ghayba) and its theological conceptualizations among early Imami scholars, see al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba; Ibn Bābawayh, Kamāl al-dīn; and al-Ṭūsī, al-Ghayba. The earliest extant sources are contextualized in Ansari, L’imamat. On the lives and designations of the twelve imams, see H. Modarressi, Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shiʿite Islam (Princeton: Darwin, 1993). On the role and number of the Shiʿi imams, see Kohlberg, In Praise of the Few, chs. 10–12.

30 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Kāshifat al-ḥāl, 70 and 153.  
31 Ibid., 92.  
32 Ibid., 137–142. For a list of major Imami rījāl works, see Modarressi, Introduction, 5 (n. 3).


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groups. First, those that yield knowledge in their recipients and hence remove the need for inquiring about the credibility of their narrators. These hadiths are called *mutawātir*; their widespread and concurrent transmissions eliminate the possibility of forgery and collusion by reporters. Second, those hadiths that have been transmitted in continuous chains by more than three Imami and upright narrators, are renowned and widely quoted in the community, and extensively used by scholars as evidence for their rulings. These hadiths are called prevalent (*mashhūr*). He explains that although prevalent hadiths do not have the same epistemic status as *mutawātir* hadiths, they fall only slightly short of yielding knowledge in the recipients, leaving them with a preponderant conjecture (*ẓann*). The third group of hadiths are called *āḥād*. These are hadiths transmitted by less than four narrators and leave their recipients with mere conjecture regarding their veracity.33

According to Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *āḥād* hadiths are themselves divided into three groups. Those with an unbroken chain of transmission beginning from the last narrator all the way back to the Prophet or an imam are called *musnad* (connected); those with a missing link in the transmission chain are called *maqṭūʿ* (disconnected); and those in which the first narrator appearing in the transmission chain quotes the Prophet or an imam without having personally heard the hadith and without naming the intermediary person through whom the hadith was initially reported to him are called *mursal* (conveyed).34 Ibn Abī Jumhūr then introduces a further division according to which – in light of the available rijāl information concerning the narrators present in the transmission chain – any given *musnad* hadith belongs to one of the following four categories: (1) authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*): hadiths transmitted only by upright (*ʿadīl*) Imami narrators;35 (2) sound (*ḥasan*): hadiths transmitted by Imami narrators whose character has been praised (*mamdūḥ*) even though their uprightness (*ʿadāla*) as narrators has not been explicitly recorded; (3) credible (*muwaththaq*): hadiths transmitted by upright non-Imami narrators, Shiʿi or otherwise; and (4) weak (*ḍaʿīf*): hadiths that do not fall under any of the above three categories (e.g., when any of the narrators appearing in the chain is accused of forgery).36

Within this framework, even if, for example, five of six Imami narrators

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34 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Kāshifat al-ḥāl*, 118. In other words, the name of the person who is directly reporting the hadith from the Prophet or an imam is omitted in the transmission chain.
35 An upright narrator (*ʿādīl*) is often defined as a Muslim adult of sound mind who commits neither major sins nor is prone to commit minor ones. This quality is thought to ensure the narrator’s truthfulness and his unwillingness to fabricate reports and transmit them to others.
appearing in the chain are considered upright and one is recorded as praiseworthy, the hadith would be classified as sound rather than authentic.

Ibn Abī Jumhūr notes that the Imami hadith compilers did not classify their hadiths according to this fourfold division. In his view, the compilers’ chief concern was to record the hadiths attributed to the imams along with the transmission chains through which they received them. Hence, he argues, the readers of these compilations must identify the narrators mentioned in each transmission chain and examine their status in the rijāl books in order to determine to which of the four categories a given hadith belongs. He notes that such an investigation is difficult and laborious; one can dispense with it, however, by reading several works composed by prominent scholars who have already probed the extant hadiths found in these compilations and evaluated each one’s degree of reliability.37

Having presented the fourfold division of hadiths, Ibn Abī Jumhūr points to disagreements among Imami scholars regarding the legitimacy of relying on


āḥād hadiths as sources of their legal rulings. In his view, except for al-Murtadā (d. 436/1044) and Ibn Idrīs (d. 598/1201), both of whom rejected the authority of āḥād hadiths, Imami scholars consider it obligatory to use them. Ibn Abī Jumhūr agrees with the majority position and regards āḥād hadiths as a pivotal source of law. He argues that relying on āḥād hadiths is obligatory, particularly when they are accompanied with corroborating indicants (qarāʾīn) from the Qurʾan, mutawātir hadiths, or the community’s consensus. Likewise, he argues that it is obligatory to rely on a wāḥid hadith to issue a legal ruling if most members of the community act upon the hadith, or if its transmission is widespread (mashhūr) among them, or if scholars issue their ruling based on its purport.38 Lastly, if reason confirms the hadith’s purport, it becomes obligatory to use it as the source for issuing a legal ruling.39

It is to be noted that evaluating the hadiths transmitted in the Four Sources by the fourfold verification method would undermine the reliability of the majority of them, on account of defects identified in their narrators or in their transmission chains. Just as Ibn Abī Jumhūr does not treat all the hadiths quoted in the Four Sources as authoritative, he does not categorically reject all the defective hadiths. In his view, hadiths with transmission defects (e.g., īrsāl and qaṭʿ), may nevertheless still be used if they meet other verification requirements (e.g., historical precedent, prevalence among scholars, rational proof).40 Besides these, he presents an additional corroborating indicant for verifying mursal hadiths. He argues that if it is known that the person conveying the hadith narrated only from credible sources, the mursal status of his transmission chain does not invalidate the hadith.41 Hence, he lends credence to the mursal narrations of Ibn Abī ‘Umayr (d. 217/832) – a revered companion of three imams – despite their defective transmission chains. It is known,

38 Ibn Abī Jumhūr was not the first scholar to propose these criteria; some of his predecessors, such as Muhammad ibn Makkī al-ʿĀmilī (d. 786/1384), better known as al-Shahīd al-Awwal, also considered a hadith’s prevalence in the community as an indicator of its reliability despite its defective transmission chain. See, for instance, Ibn Makkī, Dhikrā al-shīʿa fi aḥkām al-sharīʿa, in Mawsūʿat al-Shahīd al-Awwal, 21 vols. (Qom: Markaz al-ʿĀlī li-l-ʿUlūm wa-l-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1435), 516 and 218.
40 Ibid., 124.
41 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Gḥawālī, 1302 (n. 1). The acceptability of relying on mursal hadiths is mentioned in the earliest extant Imami treatise on jurisprudence, al-Tadhkira bi-ʿusūl al-fiqh. In this work, al-Mufid (d. 413/1022) gives credence to those mursal hadiths that Shiʿis, by agreement, use as sources of legal rulings. See al-Mufid, al-Tadhkira bi-ʿusūl al-fiqh, ed. M. Najaf (Qom: al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, Nihāyat al-wuṣūl liʿlābīn al-ʿusūl, ed. I.}
he writes, that Ibn Abī ʿUmayr – a narrator whose credibility is firmly established – would refrain from transmitting hadiths from discredited individuals (majrūḥ) and would only transmit mursal hadiths from credible narrators.42 Ibn Abī Jumhūr also lends credence to hadiths reported by upright non-Imami narrators.43 Most of his predecessors did not consider these hadiths authoritative since, in their view, only hadiths with upright Imami narrators may serve as reliable sources of law.44 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, however, argues that hadiths of upright non-Imami narrators may be reliable so long as they are corroborated by supporting indicants. Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s application of the fourfold verification method results in lending credence to a large number of hadiths transmitted in the Four Sources which, in his view, may serve as reliable sources when deriving legal rulings.


44 Non-Imami narrators are not downgraded because they are thought to be incapable of being upright individuals and credible transmitters, but because the imams may have been compelled to practice taqiyya (precautionary dissimulation) in their presence. Due to violent opposition and systematic persecution, the imams at times practiced taqiyya and refrained from expressing their views in public as a means of shielding their followers from persecution. The necessity of dissimulation impelled the imams to modify their statements in ways that would not endanger their followers. Sometimes dissimulation required the imams to express the opposite of their actual views. This was done in order to indicate an apparent agreement between Shiʿi and Sunni positions, when dissenting views would set Shiʿis apart from the rest of Muslims and invite opposition and conflict between them. In this context, if a non-Imami, for example, asked a question and received an answer from the imam, the imam may have practiced taqiyya when answering the question. As a result, in cases in which a non-Imami narrator is found in a hadith’s transmission chain, one cannot know for certain whether the hadith expresses the imam’s genuine view or whether his statement was uttered under taqiyya. In such cases, a non-Imami transmitter might accurately narrate the imam’s statement to others but his hadith will not be treated the same as if an Imami narrator had transmitted it. On taqiyya, see Kohlberg, In Praise of the Few, ch. 15.
As Ibn Abi Jumhûr explains in the preface, *Kâshîfât al-ḥâl* is a sufficient but not a comprehensive guide to legal methodology. Consequently, he does not elaborate on his verification approach to the Four Sources. Systematic discussions on verification methods are often found in works of hadith criticism (*dirâyat al-ḥadîth*).\(^\text{45}\) Although no text on hadith criticism is found among his extant writings, a trace of Ibn Abî Jumhûr survives in the earliest extant Imami book on hadith criticism, namely, *al-Bidâya fi 'ilm al-dirâya* of Zayn al-Dîn al-Āmîlî.\(^\text{46}\) Written seven decades after *Kâshîfât al-ḥâl*, it presents a more extensive discussion of the Four Sources. The significance of Ibn Abî Jumhûr’s collective reference to *al-Kâfî*, *al-Faqîh*, *al-Tahdhîb*, and *al-Istibbâr* as the Four Sources, along with his assertion that they stand as sufficient hadith books to be relied upon for the purposes of legal reasoning, was duly noted by his readers.

### 3 Al-Shahîd II and the Four Books

*Al-Bidâya fi 'ilm al-dirâya* is regarded as the first Imami book of hadith criticism.\(^\text{47}\) Its author, Zayn al-Dîn al-Āmîlî, is an esteemed figure in Shi‘î intellectual history.\(^\text{48}\) Born in 911/1506 in Juba’, now in southern Lebanon, he was executed in 965/1558 by the Ottoman authorities on charges of heresy, and is better known in the Shi‘î tradition as al-Shahîd al-Thânî (the Second Martyr).\(^\text{49}\)

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\(^\text{45}\) Hadith criticism is generally concerned with the study of oral and written transmission, questions relating to authenticity, and methods of verification. Its practitioners probe the narrators’ credibility, analyze the methods and reliability of transmission chains, assess the accuracy of manuscripts, delineate authenticity criteria, and articulate methods for ascertaining whether a given hadith meets these criteria.

\(^\text{46}\) According to al-Ṭihrānî, in a note written at the end of his discussion of the fourfold division in *Kâshîfât al-ḥâl*, Ibn Abî Jumhûr directs those who wish to know more about the divisions of hadiths to read his other work, *Tuḥfat al-qâṣidîn fī ma‘rîfî istilâh al-muḥaddithîn*; this work is not extant. See al-Ṭihrānî, *al-Dhârî‘a*, 3:461–462. No such remark is found in the extant editions of *Kâshîfât al-ḥâl* (see the editor’s comment on p. 119, n. 1). Incidentally, Zayn al-Dîn al-Āmîlî seems to have written a text on the same subject with a similar title (*Ghunyat al-qâṣidîn fī ma‘rîfî istilâhât al-muḥaddithîn*), which is not extant (al-Dhârî‘a, 16:68).


\(^\text{48}\) Numerous Imami scholars descended from the Jabal al-Āmil region, hence bearing the name al-Āmilî. Except for Ibn Abî Jumhûr, the other four figures studied in this article...
He was an active scholar and prolific author; the recent edition of his collected writings runs to twenty-eight volumes. Among them are *al-Bidāya*, and its auto-commentary *al-Riʿāya li-ḥāl al-bidāya fi 'ilm al-dirāya*, both composed in 959/1552. In these two texts, Al-Shahīd 11 elaborates on his approach to hadith verification.

Al-Shahīd 11 intended for *al-Bidāya* and *al-Riʿāya* to serve as summary introductions to hadith criticism. *Al-Bidāya* is terse, and the author notes in his auto-commentary that the text’s succinct length is designed to facilitate its memorization and increase its benefits, adding that, “people’s dispositions in this era do not bear the many burdens of knowledge, especially concerning this topic”. In other writings, Al-Shahīd 11 faults his contemporaries, Persian scholars in particular, for spending their lives in pursuit of philosophy and logic instead of dedicating themselves to acquiring “religious knowledge”, noting that they adhere to the Prophet’s religion at the same time that they strive to revive the religion of Aristotle. In their view, their neglect of the transmitted sciences has led to the scarcity or extinction of the books of hadith and *rijāl* even though, he writes, these two are the foundations of the *shari‘a*.

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49 Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, as his name indicates, was not the first scholar to bear the honorific “shahīd” (martyr). He was preceded by Muḥammad ibn Makkī al-ʿĀmilī – al-Shahīd al-Awwal (the First Martyr) – who was executed in 786/1384 by the Ottoman authorities. On al-Shahīd al-Thānī’s life and work, see Afandī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:365–386; D. J. Stewart, “The Ottoman Execution of Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī”, *Die Welt des Islams* 48:3 (2008), 289–347 (n. 4 provides a list of studies on al-Shahīd 11’s life).


52 In two of his transmission licenses, dated 961/1554 and 962/1555, Al-Shahīd 11 gives permission for the transmission of one of his texts that he refers to as *al-Riʿāya fī ʿilm al-dirāya*, most likely, his auto-commentary on *al-Bidāya fī ʿilm al-dirāya*. See Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *al-Ijāzāt*, in *Mawsūʿat al-Shahīd al-Thānī*, 4:428, 430.

53 Al-Shahīd 11 ends his auto-commentary by referring the reader to his *Ghunyat al-qāṣidīn fī maʿrifat iṣṭilāḥāt al-muḥaddithīn* for more details (*al-Riʿāya*, 182). This book is not extant.


55 Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Taqlīd al-mayyīt*, in *Mawsūʿat al-Shahīd al-Thānī*, 330. His extant writings indicate that philosophy and logic were not al-Shahīd 11’s forte; at times, a lack of substantive intellectual engagement with those he criticizes gives his criticisms of philosophers a tenor.
Al-Shahīd ii laments that in his time an “eminent” scholar might reach the end of his life without “having even looked at one of the books of hadith such as al-Kāfī, al-Tahdhīb, al-Faqīh, and others”. He remarks that the fault does not rest merely with his contemporaries since their teachers and the teachers of their teachers had the same negligent attitude towards hadith books. According to al-Shahīd ii, because of this generational neglect, even if a person is aware of the problem and is determined to pursue these hadith books, he can hardly do so, since copies of these books have become scarce.57

Al-Shahīd ii’s critical appraisal of his contemporaries is accompanied by his effort to remedy what he perceives as their disregard for hadith by writing three works on hadith criticism.58 He defines hadith criticism (dirāyat al-ḥadīth) as the science of reflecting on the transmission and content of hadiths in order to determine which ones are to be accepted and used as a basis for legal action.59 Having emphasized the centrality of hadith and the sciences of rījāl and dirāya, he proceeds to discuss the extant corpus of Imami hadith and what he believes constitutes its representative sources, the Four Books (al-kutub al-arbaʿa).

In addition to being the author of the first extant Imami handbook of hadith criticism, al-Shahīd ii is also the first scholar, thus far identified, to use the phrase ‘the four books’ (al-kutub al-arbaʿa) to refer to al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh,
al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār.⁶⁰ As noted, Ibn Abī Jumhūr was the first person, thus far identified, to refer to these four compilations collectively as ‘the four sources’ (al-üşūl al-arbaʿa) of Shiʿi hadith.⁶¹ Al-Shahīd ii had read Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s Kāshifat al-ḥāl.⁶² His elaboration of the genesis and authority of the Four Books, however, is more detailed than that of his precursor.

In al-Riʿāya, al-Shahīd ii prefaces his discussion on Imami hadith sources by cautioning against drawing rigid boundaries for the hadith corpus. In his view, limiting the corpus by declaring that it contains a specific number of hadiths – as he claims Ibn Ḥanbal had done – is untenable since hadiths were initially transmitted orally; this leaves open the possibility for certain hadiths to have been lost or not transmitted to everyone.⁶³ This possibility, he adds, is greater for Shiʿis since numerous individuals narrated hadiths from the imams. He then addresses the transformation of hadiths from oral to textual sources.

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⁶¹ Despite using ʿṣūl in place of kutūb, Ibn Abī Jumhūr considers these two as synonymous in this context. See note 10.
⁶² R. Jafariyan, “Tārīkh-e ejtehād va taqlīd az Sayyid Murtaḍā tā Shahīd-e Thānī va taʾthīr-e ān dar andīsheh-ye sīyāsī-ye shīʿeh” , ʿOlūm-e sīyāsī 27 (1383 sh.), 157–192. For examples of quotations and references to Kāshifat al-ḥāl in al-Shahīd ii’s writings, see Mawsūʿat al-Shahīd al-Thānī, 3:17, 4:74–75, 78, 81, 83, 88, 90. Like Ibn Abī Jumhūr, who lists the essential and complementary sciences in Kāshifat al-ḥāl, al-Shahīd ii, in Munyat al-murīd, provides a list of four primary and ten secondary sciences through which knowledge of the revealed law is acquired. He lists theology (kalām), Qurʾanic recitation and exegesis, hadith, and law (fiqh) as the four primary religious sciences. The ten secondary sciences are: linguistics (nahw, šarf, istiqāq); rhetoric (maʿānī, bayān, badiʿ); jurisprudence (ʿṣūl al-fiqh); logic (manṭiq); and the evaluation of hadith transmitters (rijāl) (Munyat al-murīd, 365–378). On Munyat al-murīd, see D. J. Stewart, “Notes on Zayn al-dīn al-ʿĀmilī’s Munyat al-murīd fī ādāb al-mufīd wa-l-mustafīd”, Journal of Islamic Studies 21:2 (2010), 235–270.ʿAlī al-Karakī’s (d. 940/1534) short treatise, Ṭarīq istinbāṭ al-aḥkām al-sharʿīyya, may have been another indirect source of al-Shahīd ii’s familiarity with Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s reference to al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār as the Four Sources. Al-Karakī was a contemporary of both Ibn Abī Jumhūr and al-Shahīd ii, and his Ṭarīq istinbāṭ reads as though it were written as a condensed version of Kāshifat al-ḥāl. In this work, he includes book recommendations on different disciplines pertaining to legal reasoning. He mentions al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār as the sources of hadith to be consulted in the process of legal reasoning. See al-Karakī, Ṭarīq istinbāṭ al-aḥkām al-sharʿīyya, ed. A. al-Faḍlī (Qom: Maktabat al-Islāmīyah al-Kubrā, 1396), 14–15. He does not, however, use the phrase “the Four Sources” to refer to them. Whether or not al-Karakī had read Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s book is uncertain. Ibn Abī Jumhūr and al-Karakī both studied under ʿAlī ibn Hilāl al-Jazāʾirī (d. 937/1531), and it may have been under his influence that they adopted this approach to writing texts on the correct methods of legal reasoning. See H. Ansari, “Shahīd-e Awwal va atharī māndegār va maghfūl az ū”, online: http://ansari.kateban.com/post/2964 (accessed 10 February, 2021). On al-Jazāʾirī, see Afandi, Riyūd, 4:280–283.
The hadith sources of the early scholars consisted of 400 compositions (muṣannafāt) by 400 composers. They called these compositions ‘sources’ (uṣūl) and upon them they relied. Eventually, however, circumstances led to the loss of the majority of these [400] sources, and then a group of scholars gathered them [i.e., the remaining sources] into specialized books (kutub) in order to make them accessible for the seeker.\(^6^4\) From these, the best collections are al-Kāfī by Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī and al-Tahdhīb by al-Shaykh Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī. Neither of these two books is sufficient apart from the other: the first covers hadiths related to various subsidiary fields and the second covers hadiths that specifically pertain to legal rulings. As for [al-Ṭūsī’s] al-Istibṣār, it is, in general, more limited in scope than al-Tahdhīb, and the latter therefore makes the former redundant. Although al-Istibṣār is distinguished by its investigation of how to reconcile conflicting [hadith] reports, that feature is extraneous to [the field of] hadith per se.\(^6^5\) [Ibn Bābawayh’s] Man lā yahḍuruhu l-faqīh is also a good book except that in most cases it does not include anything more than what is already found in the two books [i.e., al-Kāfī and al-Tahdhīb]. In any case, our [hadith] reports are not confined to these books; but those reports that are excluded from them are no longer extant, and the jurist is not obligated to search for them.\(^6^6\)

Al-Shahīd ii explains that during the formative period,\(^6^7\) Shi’i scholars had composed “400 sources” (al-uṣūl al-arbaʿumiʿa) containing the imams’ statements on various matters.\(^6^8\) He notes that most of these sources were gradually lost. At a later stage, these “400 sources” were incorporated into abridged collections, the most prominent of which are al-Kāfī, al-Tahdhīb, al-Istibṣār

\(^{63}\) Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) reportedly held that there are slightly less than 700,000 ṣaḥīḥ hadiths. See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, Tadrīb al-rāwī fī sharḥ taqrīb al-Nawawī, ed. N. al-Fāryabī, 2 vols. (Riyad: Maktabat al-Kawthar, 1415), 1:41 and 196.

\(^{64}\) This sentence is equivocal. Al-Shahīd ii’s statement may mean that after the majority of the “400 sources” were lost, a group of scholars gathered the remaining ones into collections to preserve them and make them accessible to future readers. Alternatively, it was only after a group of scholars gathered them into collections that the “400 sources” were lost. It is to be noted that less than twenty of these purported “400 sources” have survived; sixteen of them are collected in al-Uṣūl al-sitta ʿashar, ed. Ḥ. Muṣṭafawī (Qom: n.p., 1405).

\(^{65}\) In the preface to al-Istibṣār, al-Ṭūsī remarks that his aim in this book is to reconcile the seemingly conflicting hadiths found in his previous compilation, al-Tahdhīb. See Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, al-Istibṣār fi-mā ukhtulifa min al-akhbār (Beirut: al-ʿĀlamī, 1426), 5–6. In light of al-Ṭūsī’s stated aim, Al-Shahīd ii holds that al-Istibṣār does not represent a new hadith compilation since there is almost no hadith in it that was not already quoted in al-Tahdhīb.

\(^{66}\) Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, al-Rīʿāya, 43–44.
and al-Faqīh. He singles out al-Kāfī and al-Tahdhīb as the “best” extant Imami compilations and regards al-Istibṣār and al-Faqīh as complimentary rather than essential sources. He is neither precise in outlining the features that render these books the “best” compilations nor does he mention other available hadith sources that might have been included in this category but, due to one or another shortcoming, are set aside. He notes, however, that although the imams’ statements are not limited to what is found in these four compilations, what has been left out from them is no longer readily available. Al-Shahīd ii concludes that al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār provide jurists with sufficient hadith sources to issue their rulings; he adds that jurists are not required to search for sources other than these four books to determine whether or not there are any hadiths pertinent to a given ruling.69

Notice that al-Shahīd ii does not mention the phrase “al-kutub al-arbaʿa” in the above passage, although it does appear in some of his transmission licenses (ijāzāt) to his students.70 Nine years prior to al-Riʿāya’s completion, in his license to ‘Atāʾ Allāh al-Mūsawī, dated 950/1543, al-Shahīd ii refers to the “Four Books of hadith” (kutub al-ḥadīth al-arbaʿa), calling them the “foundations of religion and the ground of certainty”.71 This was sixty years after Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s reference to al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār as the Four Sources. In another license, dated 957/1550, he characterizes the “Four

67 In this context, “formative” refers to the period in which the imams’ followers had direct access to them. This changed in 260/874, when the twelfth and last imam went into concealment, beginning the era known as the Occultation (ghayba). According to Imami eschatology, this era will continue until the appearance of the twelfth Imam at the End of Times.

68 These “400 sources” reportedly were compiled by the companions who directly heard the hadiths from the imams and recorded them in writing. See Modarressi, Tradition and Survival, xiv. On these “400 sources”, see E. Kohlberg, “al-Uṣūl al-arbaʿumiʾa”, in idem, In Praise of the Few, chapter 21. See also M. H. al-Jalālī, Dirāsa ḥawl al-uṣūl al-arbaʿumiʾa (Tehran, 1394).

69 Al-Shahīd ii’s remark that jurists are not obligated to look beyond these four compilations suggests that in his view searching for other sources is highly unlikely to result in finding materials that are not already found in the Four Books. Some of al-Shahīd ii’s successors disagreed. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭurayḥī (d. 1085/1674), for instance, criticized al-Shahīd ii and argued that it is incumbent upon jurists to search for hadiths in all the extant sources and not limit themselves to the Four Books (al-Ṭurayḥī, Jāmiʿ al-maqāl, 48). Also see Ni’matullah al-Jazāʾirī’s (d. 1112/1701) remarks in his introduction to his commentary on al-Ṭūsī’s Tahdhīb (quoted in al-Baḥr ānī, al-Ḥadāʾiq al-nāḍira f ī aḥkām al-ʿitra al-ṭ āhira, ed. M. T. al-Īrwānī, 26 vols. [Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ, 1413], 161–62).

70 By issuing an ijāza, the teacher certifies the right of a student to transmit on his authority. On ijāza as a license for hadith transmission, see Encyclopaedia Iranica, s.v. “Ejāza” (D.J. Stewart); R. Gleave, “The Jāza from Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1772) to Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Bahr al-ʿUlūm (d. 1212/1797–8)”, Iran 32 (1994), 115–123.
Books of hadith” as the “sustainer of faith and the ground of the pillars of Islam”. In 958/1551, the phrase the ‘four books’ appears in a license he issued to ‘Ali ibn Ṣāʾigh al-Mūsawī. In a license issued seven months before his execution, al-Shahīd II characterizes the Four Books as the “mainstay of the [Imami] tradition”.

Al-Shahīd II’s reference in al-Riʿāya to al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār is immediately followed with a discussion of hadith authenticity. Like Ibn Abī Jumhūr, he adheres to the fourfold verification method. In his view, with few exceptions, a hadith’s content does not have any bearing on its reliability (iʿtibār); the deciding factor is its chain of transmission.

As noted in the previous section, the fourfold method of hadith verification had become an established practice among Imami scholars, beginning with al-Ḥillī. Al-Shahīd II’s positions, however, differ from those of his predecessors on a few consequential matters pertaining to the application of this method. For instance, he categorically rejects lending credence to mursal and munqaṭiʿ hadiths, departing in this respect from Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s position. He remarks that some of his predecessors regarded as authentic any hadith whose transmission, in their assessment, has no discrediting objection (taʿn) even if its transmission chain is defective (irsāl, qaṭʿ) or contains non-Imami narrators. He explains, for example, that some scholars consider the mursal hadiths of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr to be authentic despite their defective transmission chains. In their view, Ibn Abī ʿUmayr’s status as a revered companion and credible transmitter compensates for any defects identified in his transmission chains. Al-Shahīd II disagrees. In his view, one may not compensate for a hadith’s defective transmission chain by invoking a corroborating indicant external to it, even if the defect was committed by the imams’ most prominent companions. Even if Ibn Abī ʿUmayr’s status as a credible narrator is known, it is still

71 Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, al-Ijāzāt, 413.
72 Ibid., 419.
73 Ibid., 422.
74 Ibid., 432.
75 Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, al-Riʿāya, 46–54.
76 For those who use the fourfold method, a hadith does not have to be authentic (ṣaḥīḥ) in order to be regarded as a reliable (muʿtabar) source of law. In al-Shahīd II’s view, for example, a sound (ḥasan) hadith may be used as a source of law even though it is not, strictly speaking, “authentic”.
77 Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, al-Riʿāya, 44.
to be determined whether the unidentified narrators from whom he transmitted were also credible. Hence, al-Shahid II does not accept relying on mursal hadiths and argues that, because there are many weak narrators in chains of transmission, any unidentified narrator in the chain may be categorized as weak if his identity becomes known.78

As noted, Ibn Abī Jumhūr allows for certain exceptions in his application of the fourfold method. For example, he justifies relying on hadiths with defective narrators (e.g., non-Imami) or defective transmission chains (e.g., ʿirsāl) if they are accompanied by corroborating indicants external to their transmission chains. Such indicants include cases in which a hadith is widely narrated (mashhūr) in the community or in which acting on the content of the hadith has been a prevalent practice among jurists.79 Al-Shahid II addresses this argument from prevalence (shuḥra) in al-Riʿāya. He notes that some Imami scholars sanction acting on a non-ṣaḥīḥ hadith if it is widely narrated (shuḥrat riwāya), meaning that it is found in several sources with either the same wording or with different wordings that are close in meaning. Likewise, he remarks, some Imami scholars hold that it is acceptable to rely on a non-ṣaḥīḥ hadith if it is widely relied upon (shuḥrat fatwā), meaning that in their legal books jurists have issued rulings based on the content of this hadith.80 He explains that this position is due to the strong conjecture (quwwat al-ẓann), stemming from prevalence, that the narrator of such a hadith must have been credible since many jurists have relied upon the content of his transmitted hadith. Hence, according to this view, it is acceptable to rely on non-ṣaḥīḥ hadiths that satisfy these criteria even though their transmission chains are defective; the prevalent status of these hadiths compensates for their defective transmission path.81

Al-Shahid II finds these arguments unconvincing; he rejects the claims to prevalence as a means of compensating for a defective transmission chain and rendering an otherwise unreliable hadith reliable. A critical factor for him is the source and the period of prevalence. He argues that most rulings regarded as

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78 Najm al-Dīn al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī (d. 676/1277) also articulated this position, arguing that mursal narrations, whether transmitted by Ibn Abī ʿUmayr or others, lack authority since the unidentified person in the transmission chain might be a weak narrator. See al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī, al-Muʿtabar fī shar ḥ al-mukhtaṣar, 2 vols. (Qom: Muʾassasat Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ, 1364), 1:165. Al-Muḥaqqiq accepts reliance on a mursal hadith whose veracity is corroborated by indicants such as early jurists’ widespread reliance on the hadith’s content in their rulings (e.g., al-Muʿtabar, 1:47). While, in principle, al-Shahid II rejects acting on mursal hadiths, in a few of his rulings he appears to lend credence to Ibn Abī ʿUmayr’s mursal narrations. Occasional disparities, however, between a scholar’s jurisprudential principles and his legal rulings are a common phenomenon.


80 See, for instance, Ibn Makkī, Dhikrā al-shīʿa, 12.
‘prevalent’ today were not necessarily considered as such in the past. He identifies al-Ṭūsī as the source to which most claims of juristic prevalence are traced. In his view, al-Ṭūsī’s immediate successors, due to his great influence, blindly followed his opinions, as did most later scholars. The only exceptions were a minority such as Ibn Idrīs who criticized al-Ṭūsī’s reliance on āḥād reports. According to al-Shahīd II, what al-Ṭūsī’s successors treat as ‘prevalent’ legal rulings are in fact al-Ṭūsī’s personal rulings and thus are not representative of the earlier legal tradition. In order to distinguish between al-Ṭūsī and his predecessors, he points to al-Murtaḍā who, in contrast to al-Ṭūsī, categorically rejected the authority of āḥād hadiths, much less sanctioning relying on non-ṣaḥīḥ āḥād hadiths. Hence, he concludes, post-Ṭūsī claims to prevalence do not compensate for deficient transmission chains. Al-Shahīd II’s rejection of prevalence, however, is not categorical. He endorses reliance on the prevalent status of a hadith if the hadith is known to have been acknowledged as such by the Imami scholars preceding al-Ṭūsī; nevertheless, limiting the authority of prevalence to pre-Ṭūsī scholars restricts its scope as an authenticity-granting mechanism.

Unlike Ibn Abī Jumhūr, for al-Shahīd II the principle means of verifying a hadith is through its transmission chain; external corroborating indicants do not redeem a hadith’s defective transmission chain except in rare cases. This leads him to regard as unreliable most hadiths with defective narrators (e.g., non-Imami) and/or defective transmission chains (e.g., ʾirsāl). These include a large number of the hadiths narrated in the Four Books. Hence, despite their agreement on the centrality of the Four Books and their adherence to the same verification method, Ibn Abī Jumhūr and al-Shahīd II provide different assessments of the reliability of the hadiths narrated in these four compilations. According to some scholars, the application of al-Shahīd II’s method to the transmission chains of the hadiths narrated in al-Kāfī would

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81 Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, al-Riʿāya, 58. He remarks that some jurists prefer a weak but prevalent hadith over an authentic hadith whose content was not widely relied on by early scholars (ibid., 56).

82 For Ibn Idrīs’s rejection of relying on āḥād hadiths and his criticisms of post-Ṭūsī scholars, see his al-Sarāʾīr al-ḥāwī li-taḥrīr al-fatāwī, in Mawsūʿat Ibn Idrīs al-Ḥillī, ed. S. M. al-Kharsān, 14 vols. (Qom: Dalīl-e Mā, 1429), 8:108–120.

83 In al-Shahīd II’s view, scholars who were either the imams’ companions or were born shortly after the twelfth Imam went into Occultation – due to their proximity to the imams – would not issue their rulings based on hadiths they knew to be unreliable. For this reason, he asserts, it is acceptable to act on evidence from prevalence (shuhra) if it can be reliably traced to this period (ca. the first three centuries AH). By the time al-Ṭūsī became well-established, however, most of these scholars had died and could not be directly consulted. See al-Shahīd al-Thānī, al-Riʿāya, 57–58.
yield 5,072 “authentic” hadiths, less than a third of its total hadiths. Such an assessment is intriguing since he regards al-Kāfī as a book “whose likeness is not found in the world” and states that “nothing like it has been compiled in Islam”. Hence, despite considering al-Kāfī and al-Tahdhīb as the “best” Imami hadith compilations – and regarding them, along with al-Faqīh and al-Istībshār, as “the foundations of religion, the ground of certainty, the mainstay of the [Imami] tradition, the sustainer of faith, and the ground of the pillars of Islam” – in al-Shahīd 11’s assessment not every hadith narrated in the Four Books is authentic; in fact, only a minority of their hadiths may reliably be used for determining legal rulings.

4 Al-Ḥārithī and the Five Hadith Sources

About two years after al-Shahīd 11 completed al-Riʿāya, his disciple Ḥusayn ibn ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Ḥārithī (d. 984/1576) wrote a book on hadith criticism entitled Wuṣūl al-akhyār ilā uṣūl al-akhbār. Al-Shahīd 11 and al-Ḥārithī were close companions who studied together with Shiʿi and Sunni scholars in the Levant, Cairo, Mecca, Istanbul, and Iraq. The persecution of the Shiʿi communities of Jabal Ἄmil by Ottoman authorities – which would culminate in al-Shahīd 11’s execution – compelled al-Ḥārithī to emigrate from his homeland in 956/1549. Approximately five years later, shortly after his arrival in Iran, he wrote Wuṣūl al-akhyār. In the preface, al-Ḥārithī remarks that he was inspired to write the book by the enthusiasm of the people of his adopted home for hadith and law.

A further motivation for writing the Wuṣūl, al-Ḥārithī notes, was his contemporaries’ general neglect of hadith. He regards reflection on God’s religion as obligatory for all Muslims; this reflection, al-Ḥārithī maintains, rests upon the transmitted hadiths of the Prophet and the imams. Hence, he asserts,

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84 See, for instance, al-Baḥrānī, Luʾluʾat al-baḥrayn, 376–377.
85 Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, al-Ijāzāt, 423 and 414.
87 In his lengthy transmission license, dated 941/1534, al-Shahīd 11 expresses his admiration for al-Ḥārithī’s piety and veneration for his scholarly talent. See his al-Ijāzāt, 383–410.
those with understanding and zeal must dedicate themselves to examining the transmission of hadiths and their narrators, to become proficient in incorporating hadiths in their argumentations, and to learn the technical hadith terminology used by Shi’i scholars. Like al-Shahīd ii, he laments that the sciences of hadith have declined in his time. By contrast, he writes, earlier generations of scholars assiduously engaged in hadith criticism, and although they did not compose books dedicated to this topic, they articulated their views in numerous books on law, jurisprudence, hadith, and rijāl. His Wuṣūl seeks to fill this gap.

Al-Ḥārithi’s remark that no Imami scholar before him had written a text on hadith criticism may indicate that when he wrote the Wuṣūl, he was not aware of al-Shahīd ii’s al-Bidāya which, as noted, was the first extant Imami text in this field. In any case, Wuṣūl is a more comprehensive book than al-Bidāya and its autocommentary, al-Riʿāya. Al-Ḥārithi begins with a lengthy introduction in which he discusses the significance of hadith as a source of guidance, the biographies of the Prophet and the imams, the status of the Prophet’s Companions as transmitters of his Sunna, and the shortcomings of the Sunni hadith corpus, including its two most authoritative sources, the Ṣaḥiḥān of al-Bukhārī and Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj. This introductory section, together with al-Ḥārithi’s discussion of several topics pertaining to hadith criticism, render the Wuṣūl a longer text than al-Shahīd ii’s Bidāya, which provides a concise treatment of the topic without engaging in doctrinal discussions.

Al-Ḥārithi describes hadith and its transmission in reverential terms. For instance, in a chapter on the codes of conduct observed by hadith scholars, he quotes three related sayings that highlight the status of hadith: every religion has its knights, and the knights of this religion are the companions of hadith transmission (aṣḥāb al-asānīd); there is no heretic in the world except that he loathes the people of hadith (ahl al-ḥadīth); nothing is more burdensome and

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90 Al-Ḥārithi, Wuṣūl, 31–32.
91 Ibid., 33.
92 Ibid., 34.
93 According to Afandī, the Wuṣūl was the second Imami book on hadith criticism after al-Shahīd ii’s al-Bidāya (see Riyāḍ, 2115). Stewart dates the Wuṣūl’s completion to ca. 961/1554 (see, “An Episode”, 495–496), which would be two years after al-Bidāya’s completion. Critical editions of al-Bidāya are based largely on a manuscript of the text transmitted by al-Ḥārithi in 969/1562, ten years after al-Bidāya was written (see Mawsūʿat al-Shahīd al-Thānī, 2:317–318). This transmission license, however, was issued about eight years after al-Ḥārithi reportedly wrote the Wuṣūl.
94 Al-Ḥārithi, Wuṣūl, 39–123.
loathsome to the disbelievers (ahl al-ilhād)\textsuperscript{95} than hearing hadith and its narration.\textsuperscript{96} Consistent with al-Ḥārithī’s emphasis on the importance of hadith and its transmission, the \textit{Wuṣūl} contains a brief section on the extant textually transmitted sources of Imami hadith.

Our sources are five – \textit{al-Kāfī}, \textit{Madīnat al-‘ilm}, \textit{al-Faqīh}, \textit{al-Tahdhīb}, \textit{al-Istibṣār}. In our view, they contain the majority and the most important of the hadiths transmitted on the authority of the Prophet and the infallible imams, such that nothing is excluded from them except for a negligible number [of hadiths]. These sources bring together and include hadiths, authentic and otherwise, concerning articles of belief and conduct, traditions and customs, admonitions and supplications, Qur’ān commentary, and noble virtues – which can neither be easily numbered nor found in other collections.\textsuperscript{97}

Al-Ḥārithī’s passage has a few points in common with al-Shahīd II’s statement regarding the Four Books. Like al-Shahīd, he holds that these sources contain most but not all of the narrated hadiths of the Prophet and the imams. Al-Ḥārithī and al-Shahīd II also agree that not every hadith quoted in these sources is authentic. He remarks that the compilers of the Five Sources collected hadiths “authentic or otherwise” on various topics. In principle and with some minor modifications,\textsuperscript{98} al-Ḥārithī subscribes to the fourfold model of hadith verification and ascertains the reliability of hadiths based on the information found in their transmission chains.

Al-Shahīd II and al-Ḥārithī disagree over the number of compilations they regard as major sources of hadith. Al-Ḥārithī includes \textit{Madīnat al-‘ilm} as a fifth major source of Imami hadith and refers to them collectively as the Five Sources (\textit{al-uṣūl al-khamsa}). Two things are noteworthy about al-Ḥārithī’s inclusion of \textit{Madīnat al-‘ilm}. First, this work, attributed to Ibn Bābawayh, is no longer extant;\textsuperscript{99} even prior to al-Ḥārithī, who seems to have been one of the last individuals with access to it, \textit{Madīnat al-‘ilm} was not a widely-cited

\textsuperscript{95} Depending on the context, \textit{ilhād} can also denote atheism, heresy, and irreligion. See \textit{EF2}, s.v. “Muhlid” (W. Madelung).

\textsuperscript{96} Al-Ḥārithī, \textit{Wuṣūl}, 175. He quotes these sayings from Sunni sources (see ibid., footnotes 1–3).


\textsuperscript{98} For instance, compare al-Shahīd II and al-Ḥārithī’s definitions of “authentic” hadith (al-Ḥārithī, \textit{Wuṣūl}, 135–136).
compilation. In fact, few traces of the book are found in major Imami texts preceding al-Ḥārithī.\textsuperscript{100} Second, al-Shahīd ii, who apparently had access to \textit{Madīnat al-ʿilm}, excludes it from the list of his recommended hadith compilations. In a lengthy license issued to al-Ḥārithī, dated 941/1534, al-Shahīd ii grants him the permission to transmit books of hadith “such as \textit{al-Tahdhīb}, \textit{al-Istibṣār}, \textit{al-Faqīh}, \textit{Madīnat [al-ʿilm]}, \textit{al-Kāfī}, and the others”.\textsuperscript{101} Al-Shahīd also mentions \textit{Madīnat al-ʿilm} in his license to ‘Atāʾ Allāh al-Ḥusawī. In the same license he refers to the Four Books as “the foundations of religion and the ground of certainty”; it is only when he lists Ibn Bābawayh’s collections other than \textit{al-Faqīh} (namely, \textit{al-ʿIlal}, \textit{al-Amālī}, and \textit{Thawāb al-ʿamāl}) that he refers to \textit{Madīnat al-ʿilm}.\textsuperscript{102} Neither Ibn Abī Jumhūr nor al-Shahīd ii includes \textit{Madīnat al-ʿilm} among the hadith sources to be consulted in legal reasoning.\textsuperscript{103}

ʿAbdullāh Afandī al-Isfahānī (d. ca. 1130/1717), in his gloss on al-Hurr al-ʿĀmilī’s biographical dictionary \textit{Amal al-āmil fī ‘ulamāʾ Jabal ʿĀmil}, makes several observations about \textit{Madīnat al-ʿilm}. According to Afandī, some claim that \textit{Madīnat al-ʿilm} contained all of Ibn Bābawayh’s transmitted hadiths. He finds this position untenable. First, he argues that those who maintain this view have not provided any evidence for their position; second, al-Ḥillī, in his \textit{Muntahā}, quotes a hadith from \textit{Madīnat al-ʿilm} that is not found in any of Ibn Bābawayh’s other books.\textsuperscript{104} Next, he refers to al-Ḥārithī’s remark in the \textit{Wuṣūl} concerning the Five Sources. In Afandī’s view, this reference indicates that \textit{Madīnat al-ʿilm} was available to al-Ḥillī’s successors (e.g., al-Ḥārithī). He suggests, however, that al-Ḥārithī might have lost the book on one of his travels


\textsuperscript{101} Al-Shahīd al-Thānī, \textit{al-jāzāt}, 408.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 413–414.

\textsuperscript{103} The exclusion of \textit{Madīnat al-ʿilm} from their list of recommended compilations may indicate that Ibn Abī Jumhūr and al-Shahīd ii did not have access to this text in its entirety, that its contents did not pertain to legal matters, or that any legal hadiths it contained were available in \textit{al-Faqīh} or in other compilations, such as \textit{al-Kāfī} and \textit{al-Tahdhīb}.
since his son and foremost disciple, Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1031/1621), does not seem to have had access to it.105 He notes that a few contemporaries of al-Ḥārithī and Bahāʾ al-Dīn also claimed to have seen Madīnat al-ʿilm. Afandī reports that al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104/1693) personally recounted to him that he saw the book when he was living in Jabal Ṭāmil.106

Afandī’s remarks concerning Madīnat al-ʿilm did not settle the questions surrounding it. Nearly two centuries later, al-Khwānsārī (d. 1313/1895) questioned al-Ḥārithī’s access to the book altogether. In his bio-bibliographical dictionary, Rawdāt al-jannāt, al-Khwānsārī argues that from the times of Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, Ibn Makkī, and al-Shahīd II scholars had searched for Madīnat al-ʿilm to no avail. Furthermore, he considers it impossible for al-Ḥārithī to have had access to Madīnat al-ʿilm since, if that were true, other major hadith scholars of the time, such as al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, al-Majlisī, and al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, would have relied on it in their compilations. He concludes that either the whereabouts of this book remain unknown or it was not an important work, was not extensively copied, and hence is no longer extant.107 Until further evidence becomes available, these observations remain speculations. In the present context, it suffices to say that al-Ḥārithī is the only figure to add Madīnat al-ʿilm to the Four Books and present them as the five foundational sources of Imami hadith.

Al-Ḥārithī’s flight to Iran left an enduring impact on Safavid intellectual developments in the sixteenth century. He continued to promote al-Shahīd II’s teachings, was appointed by royal decrees to important posts,108 and through his writings as well as training a series of influential students, played an instrumental role in the revival of hadith in Iran. Two of these students were pivotal in consolidating the status accorded to the Four Books: al-Shahīd II’s son, Ḥasan and al-Ḥārithī’s son, Bahāʾ al-Dīn.
None of the three figures discussed thus far explained in detail what distinguishes \textit{al-Kāfī}, \textit{al-Faqīh}, \textit{al-Tahdhīb}, and \textit{al-Istibşār} from the other works of hadith. A century after Ibn Abī Jumhūr's first mention of the Four Sources, a more elaborate examination of their unique features was provided by al-Shahīd 11's son, Ḥasan ibn Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1011/1602), also known as al-Shaykh Ḥasan. Seven years old at the time of al-Shahīd 11's execution in 965/1558, al-Shaykh Ḥasan was initially trained by his father's disciples and received a transmission license from al-Ḥārithī. He then journeyed to Najaf to study with Aḥmad al-Ardabīlī, one of the most prominent scholars of the time. After al-Ardabīlī's death in 993/1585, he returned to his hometown of Juba', where he spent the rest of his life.\footnote{Note that al-Ḥārithī had a complicated relationship with the Safavid establishment. See Stewart, “The First Shaykh al-Islām".}

Al-Shaykh Ḥasan is chiefly remembered for his \textit{Maʿālim al-dīn wa-malādh al-mujtahidīn} (994/1586).\footnote{On al-Shaykh Ḥasan's life, see al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, \textit{Amal al-āmil}, 1:57–63; Afandī, \textit{Riyāḍ}, 1:225–233; Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn, \textit{Aʿyān al-shīʿa}, 5:92–99.} Like many books of jurisprudence, \textit{Maʿālim} contains a chapter on hadith authority, transmission, and authenticity.\footnote{\textit{Maʿālim} is widely read in the Shiʿi intellectual tradition and has been subject to numerous commentaries and glosses. See al-Ṭihr ānī, \textit{al-Dharīʿa}, 6:83; al-Amīn, \textit{Aʿyān al-shīʿa}, ed. Ḥ. al-Amīn, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Taʿāruf li-l-maṭbūʿāt, 1403), 10:352.} Al-Shaykh Ḥasan also outlines his views on hadith authenticity, with a focus on the Four Books, in another work, \textit{Muntaqā al-jumān fī l-aḥādīth al-ṣiḥāḥ wa-l-ḥisān} (1006/1597). A collection of hadiths on the obligatory rituals (ʿibādāt), such as the daily prayers and fasting, \textit{Muntaqā} opens with a lengthy introduction arranged in twelve sections. He remarks that he was prompted to compile the book by witnessing his contemporaries’ disregard for hadith. Apparently, the efforts of al-Shahīd 11 and al-Ḥārithī, who expressed the same concern, did not fully satisfy al-Shaykh Ḥasan. In his view, the neglect of hadith had led to numerous errors, distortions, alterations, and forgeries of texts.\footnote{Al-Shaykh Ḥasan, \textit{Maʿālim al-usūl}, ed. 'A. Muḥammadi (Qom: Dār al-Fikr, 1374), 253–297.} This is particularly troubling, he states, since in most cases deriving legal rulings depends on hadith and the jurists' responsa on most issues are traced back to hadiths.\footnote{Al-Shaykh Ḥasan is also troubled by the negligence of some of his contemporaries in matters pertaining to hadith verification. He avers that some scholars, instead of taking heed of the intricate matters pertaining to the hadith
corpus, have widened the scope of reliable hadiths. In his view, they quote in their books hadiths that they regard as “reliable” without taking into consideration the difference between authentic and weak transmission methods (tariqats) and without distinguishing between sound and defective transmission chains (isnṣads). Rather, he claims, they often rely on what they take to be indicants (qarāʾīn) and hints (amārāt) that lead to accepting otherwise “weak” transmissions. In Muntaqā, al-Shaykh Ḥasan attempts to counter this approach to hadith verification.

Muntaqā’s reputation is partly due to al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s decision to compile a book comprised only of the authentic and sound hadiths quoted in the Four Books. This is because, he explains, these four books have received “excessive attention” from later scholars due to the excellence they see in them (ziyādat al-tīnāʾ li-mā raʾaw lahā min al-maziyya). As a result, the Four Books have been privileged (ustuʿthirat) over many other well-known and available hadith books. The later scholars he is referring to include Ibn Abī Jumhūr, al-Shahīd al-Thānī, and al-Ardabīlī who, in two of his works – Majmaʿ al-fāʿida and Zubdat al-bayān – mentions the phrase “the Four Books”. Al-Shaykh Ḥasan, however, was the first scholar to use the phrase al-kutub al-arbaʿa in the context of a hadith compilation and in hadith criticism discussions. Unlike Ibn Abī Jumhūr, who considered the Four Books as sufficient hadith sources for legal purposes, and al-Shahīd al-Thānī, who described al-Kāfī and al-Tahdhīb as the best Imami hadith compilations and regarded them, together with al-Faqīh and al-Istibṣār, as the “mainstay of the [Imami] tradition”, al-Shaykh Ḥasan characterizes them as the later scholars’ privileged compilations. In his view, it is the privileged status assigned to these four books that sets them apart from other available hadith works.

112 Al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s father, al-Shahīd al-Thānī, was also troubled about scribal errors and the textual distortion of hadith books. On his dream regarding the textual integrity of al-Kāfī’s extant manuscripts, see Stewart, “The Genesis of the Akhbārī Revival”, 175–176. On textual distortion (taṣḥīf), see al-Shahīd al-Thānī, al-Riʿāya, 157–160.

113 Al-Shaykh Ḥasan, Muntaqā, 1:2. In his transmission license to Najm al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī, al-Shaykh Ḥasan remarks that the majority of shariʿa rulings revolve around the orbit of hadith. See al-Majlīsī, Biḥār, 25:204.

114 Al-Shahīd al-Thānī outlines seven methods of hadith transmission in al-Riʿāya (126–152).

115 Al-Shaykh Ḥasan, Muntaqā, 1:2.

116 Ibid., 1:1–2.

117 Al-Ardabīlī uses the phrase al-kutub al-arbaʿa first in his Majmaʿ al-fāʿida wa-l-burhān (985/1577), and later in Zubdat al-bayān (989/1581). In both instances, he mentions the phrase in passing and without any elaboration. In Majmaʿ al-fāʿida, while examining the reliability of a particular hadith, al-Ardabīlī remarks that its quotation in the Four Books lends credence to its reliability. See Aḥmad al-Ardabīlī, Majmaʿ al-fāʿida wa-l-burhān fi

118 Al-Shaykh Ḥasan, Muntaqā, 1:2.
Al-Shaykh Hasan provides another explanation for limiting Muntaqā to the hadiths found in the Four Books. He writes that al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhib, and al-Istibsār are the only available hadith books whose attribution to their respective compilers is generally conclusive (tawātur ījmālī) and for which there are circumstantial indicants that their content is known to have been correctly transmitted. For instance, it is known through generally conclusive transmissions that it was al-Kulaynī and not someone else who compiled al-Kāfī, and circumstantial indicants establish that its content, as transmitted, was, in fact, entirely compiled by him. Al-Shaykh Hasan's comment, therefore, has no bearing on the reliability of the hadiths quoted in the Four Books and it remains to be ascertained whether a given hadith has been reliably transmitted from the Prophet and the imams, in every link within the chain, until it reached al-Kulaynī, Ibn Bābawayh, and al-Ṭūsī. Regardless of the reliability of the hadiths included in the Four Books, in al-Shaykh Hasan's view, nothing has been deleted from or added to these four books and the integrity of their manuscripts has been preserved over the centuries. It was for this reason, he explains, that when he composed Muntaqā, he limited himself to the Four Books, noting that other hadith books were available, but that none of them shares the above-mentioned characteristics with these four compendia. Al-Shaykh Hasan's book, therefore, is comprised of authentic and sound hadiths pertaining to the acts of worship quoted in the Four Books. Hence the title, Muntaqā al-jumān fī l-aḥādīth al-ṣiḥāḥ wa-l-ḥisān (Selected Pearls from the Authentic and Sound Hadiths).

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**118** Al-Shaykh Hasan, Muntaqā, 1:2. As noted, Ibn Abī Jumhūr uses the phrase al-uṣūl al-arbaʿa rather than al-kutub al-arbaʿa (even though he uses uṣūl and kutub interchangeably). As for al-Shahīd ii, he refers to al-kutub al-arbaʿa in his transmission licenses, but does not use the phrase in his books on hadith criticism.

**119** Despite having received a license from al-Ḥārithī to transmit several hadith texts, al-Shaykh Hasan makes no mention of Madinat al-ʿilm as a foundational source of Imami hadith. He does refer to Madinat al-ʿilm in his transmission license to al-Sayyid Najm al-Dîn al-Husaynî. See al-Majlisî, Bihār, 25:206.

Muntaqā’s title signals al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s method of hadith verification. He follows al-Shahīd II’s approach to the fourfold verification, albeit with modifications. He points out that the fourfold division is a later development in Imami intellectual history. For early scholars, he writes, a hadith was either authentic or not: there were no intermediary categories, and they regarded as authentic any hadith whose attribution to the imams was established. Prior to Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥilli, he notes, only Ibn Ṭāwūs used the fourfold division. He argues that the twofold division, however, is no longer useful in determining a hadith’s authenticity. This is because earlier scholars – who lived shortly after the period in which the hadiths were transmitted by the imams’ immediate companions – had access to pieces of evidence for establishing a hadith’s reliability that were no longer available to others. What distinguishes recent scholars from their predecessors is the time gap between the two groups, which led to “the closing (insidād) of the door of trust” for later scholars. Whereas early scholars could verify the authenticity of hadiths through tangible means, their successors had only traces of earlier evidence. “They enjoyed with the eye,” he writes, “and our share is the trace they have left behind.” Hence, later scholars had to develop methods of verification to ensure the reliability of hadiths.

More research is needed, especially on the manuscript tradition of the Four Books, to comprehensively assess al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s assertion regarding their mutawātir transmission. It is to be noted that the earliest extant manuscript of al-Kāfī, so far identified, dates to the 7th/13th century. See, Amir-Moezzi and Ansari, “Muḥammad b. Yaʾqūb al-Kulaynī,” 229 (n. 234). On some of the challenges facing the study of early Imami hadith manuscripts, see Ansari, “Dafāter-e ḥadīth dar maḥak-e naqd”, in idem, Barresīhā-ye tārīkhī, 934–938.

121 Al-Shaykh Ḥasan, Montaqā, 1:26–27. He had articulated this view a decade earlier in the Maʿālim (p. 291). He does not give examples of which hadith books he has in mind. Perhaps these works were either not extant in their entirety (e.g., al-Barqī’s Maḥāsin) or their attributions to their respective compilers was disputed. Also see ‘Alī al-Quhpāʾī, Majmaʿ al-rijāl, ed. S. Ẓ. al-Ḥillī, 7 vols. (Esfahan: n.p., 1384–87), 7:234–235. Al-Quhpāʾī (d. 1061/1651) completed this work in 1016/1607, ten years after al-Shaykh Ḥasan wrote Montaqā.

122 One of Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥilli’s now lost books had a similar title, al-Durr wa-l-marjān fī al-aḥādīth al-ṣiḥāḥ wa-l-ḥisān. See al-Ḥilli, Khulāṣat al-aqwāl, 110.

123 Al-Shaykh Ḥasan, Maʿālim, 296–297; idem, Montaqā, 1:2.

124 Ibid., 1:14.

125 Ibid., 1:13.

126 Ibid., 1:14.
For al-Shaykh Ḥasan, a hadith is authentic when all of the narrators appearing in the chain of transmission are Imami, upright (ʿadl), and accurate (ḍābiṭ); these requirements must be met in every link in the chain. Any defect in the chain of transmission, such as ḵaṭ or ṣād, renders the hadith unreliable. In al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s verification scheme, a narrator’s uprightness is established through the testimony of at least two individuals of recognized uprightness. He defines uprightness as the quality present in a person’s soul that restrains him from committing major sins, from being likely to commit minor ones, and from things that, although are not technically sins, undermine honorable conduct. Presumably, the presence of these qualities in a person prompts him to be truthful in his transmissions. The majority of Imami scholars considered the attestation of one person of recognized uprightness a sufficient criterion for determining a narrator’s uprightness. For al-Shaykh Ḥasan, however, if a narrator is judged as upright by only one individual, that does not establish that he was in fact upright.

This disagreement between al-Shaykh Ḥasan and his predecessors regarding the criteria for uprightness has significant implications for the scope of authentic hadiths. Whereas his predecessors, following Ibn Ṭāwūs and al-Ḥillī, divided hadiths into four categories, al-Shaykh Ḥasan, while accepting the fourfold division, added a modification to the category of authentic hadiths, thereby creating a fivefold division. He distinguishes between two standards of hadith authenticity. According to the first standard, a hadith is authentic if the uprightness of every narrator in its chain of transmission is confirmed.

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127 E.g., having direct access to the imams or hearing the hadiths in person from highly regarded companions of the imams.
128 Ibid., 13.
129 Al-Shaykh Ḥasan, Muntaqā, 135; idem, Maʿālim, 296.
130 Ibid., 278.
131 Al-Shaykh Ḥasan mentions al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī as his precursor in this regard. See al-Shaykh Ḥasan, Maʿālim, 281; idem, Muntaqā, 136. For al-Muḥaqqiq’s view, see al-Maʿārij al-ṣaḥīḥ, ed. M. H. al-Raḍawī (Qom: Muʿāṣasat Āl al-Bayt, 1403), 150.
132 Al-Shaykh Ḥasan mentions that just as a plaintiff’s claim in court must be corroborated by the testimony of at least two upright witnesses – except in cases such as adultery where four witnesses are required – a narrator’s uprightness must be affirmed by at least two individuals of recognized uprightness. In his view, just as the testimony of a single witness does not obligate the judge to issue a verdict, a single testimony affirming the uprightness of a given narrator does not establish that the narrator in question is upright. He acknowledges that two testimonies do not necessarily and conclusively prove a narrator’s uprightness. However, because certain precepts in the Qur’an (e.g., 2:282, 5:106, 65:2) and hadith set the minimum number of court witnesses at two, this number is sufficient. See al-Shaykh Ḥasan, Muntaqā, 136–23; idem, Maʿālim, 281–284. On al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s position and responses to it by his counterparts, see al-Ṭurayḥī, Jāmiʿ al-maqāl, 22–27.
by at least two persons of recognized uprightness. According to the second standard, a hadith is authentic if the uprightness of the narrators is confirmed by at least one person of recognized uprightness. In both cases, the chain of transmission must be continuous. Whereas al-Shaykh Ḥasan applied the first standard, nearly all of his contemporaries and predecessors applied the second standard.

Compared to others who used the fourfold verification method, al-Shaykh Ḥasan's criteria undermined the reliability of a greater number of hadiths in the Four Books. Like al-Shahīd 11, he rejects the authority of mursal hadiths irrespective of the prominence of their transmitters (e.g., Ibn Abī ‘Umayr). Likewise, he rejects the authority of hadiths transmitted by upright non-Imami narrators. As mentioned in § 2, Ibn Abī Jumhūr endorsed acting on mursal and muwaththaq hadiths when they are supported by corroborating indicants. Al-Shaykh Ḥasan's strict adherence to the fourfold method resulted in rejecting the reliability of numerous hadiths. Apart from a few exceptions, his contemporaries rejected al-Shaykh Ḥasan's approach to the fourfold verification method. Their disagreements with him pertained either to the details of the method or its application. A key representative of a critical stance toward al-Shaykh Ḥasan was his contemporary, Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-‘Āmīlī, better known as al-Shaykh al-Bahāʾī.

6 Al-Bahāʾī and the Four Central Books

Al-Bahāʾī was born in 953/1547 in Baalbek, Lebanon. He began his studies under the supervision of his father al-Ḥārithī. Because of the ongoing

133 Al-Shaykh Ḥasan, Muntaqā, 1:22.
134 Ibid., 1:22–23.
135 For example, al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s chapter on the “call to ritual prayer” in his Muntaqā contains 42 hadiths that satisfy his criteria of authenticity. Recall that Muntaqā contains his hadith selections from the Four Books. Al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī’s compendium, al-Wāfi, brings together all the hadiths transmitted in the Four Books while excluding the repeated hadiths. He transmits 174 hadiths under the topic of the “call to ritual prayer”. Al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s selection, therefore, represents 24% of the hadiths found in the Four Books on this topic. This pattern is nearly observed for other topics covered in Muntaqā, where the hadiths that pass al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s criteria of authenticity count for about a fifth of the number of hadiths transmitted in the Four Books, repeated hadiths excluded.
136 Al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s small circle of followers included two prominent scholars from his own family. The first was Muḥammad al-Ｍūsawī al-‘Āmīlī (d. 1600), his nephew and a grandson of al-Shahīd 11, the author of Madārik al-ahkām fi sharḥ sharāʾiʿ al-islām. In this and his other work major work, Nihāyat al-marām, al-Ｍūsawī bases his legal views solely
persecution of the Shi’is of Jabal ‘Āmil by the Ottoman authorities, al-Bahāʾī emigrated to Iraq and then to Iran with his father. He progressed rapidly in his studies and at the age of thirty received a royal decree to serve as the shaykh al-islām of Herat and, subsequently, of Esfahan, the Safavid capital. A polymath, he wrote on an array of topics including law, jurisprudence, hadith, adab, grammar, and astronomy. Al-Bahāʾī’s oeuvre points to his preoccupation with hadith. He composed hadith compilations, wrote commentaries and glosses, and was active in training students in hadith sciences. He also wrote on hadith criticism, chiefly in response to the verification principles advocated in al-Shāhīd ii’s al-Riʿāya and particularly in al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s Muntaqa and Maʿālim. Al-Bahāʾī died in 1031/1621, nineteen years after al-Shaykh Ḥasan. His criticisms of these two figures – mild in tone and consequential in content – were decisive in orienting most Imami thinkers toward less stringent versions of the fourfold method.


In 1007/1599, shortly after al-Shaykh Ḥasan had completed Muntaqa, al-Bahāʾī finished writing Ḥabl al-matīn fī ʿibām ahkām al-dīn. This work contains his selection and commentary on approximately 1,000 hadiths from the Four Books pertaining to ritual purity and daily prayers. Three years later (1010/1602) he composed al-Wajīza, a short treatise on hadith criticism intended as a preface to Ḥabl al-matīn. Discussions of hadith authenticity are also found in his popular book on jurisprudence, Zubdat al-uṣūl (1018/1609). His other book on hadith is Mashriq al-shamsayn wa iksīr al-saʿādatayn (1015/1607). Written eight years after Ḥabl al-matīn, it includes hadiths selected from the Four Books on the topic of ritual purity. By contrast to the former, however, in Mashriq he relies only on those hadiths he considers “authentic” (ṣaḥīḥ). Prior to these two collections, he had composed al-Arbaʿūn ḥadithan (995/1587), a collection of forty hadith with accompanying commentary.
these four compilations in several of his writings, including his brief treatise on hadith criticism entitled *al-Wajīza*.

All of our hadiths – except in rare cases – are transmitted on the authority of our twelve imams (God's peace be on them all) and they transmit on the authority of the Prophet (peace be on him and his family) since their knowledge is obtained from that niche...our early hadith scholars (God be pleased with them) collected the hadiths of our imams (God's peace be on them all) that reached them in 400 books called the *uṣūl*. Subsequently, a group of later scholars (may God reward them for their effort) embarked upon collecting and arranging those books, so that they might be conveniently disseminated and made accessible to the seekers of those [hadith] reports. They compiled comprehensive and well-organized books and accurate and refined sources encompassing transmission chains that lead to the infallibles [i.e., the Prophet and the imams] (God's peace be on them). These books include *al-Kāfī, Man lā yaḥḍuruhu l-faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, al-Istībār, Madīnat al-ʿilm, al-Khiṣāl, al-Amālī, ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, and others. The first are the Four Sources, which form the pivot point in these times.

Al-Bahāʾī, like al-Shahīd ii, traces the origins of the Four Books to the “400 sources” and, like al-Shaykh Ḥasan, he notes that part of what distinguishes these four compilations from others is their predominant status as sources of legal hadiths in his time. He remarks that the derivation of the majority of legal rulings revolves around the pivot point formed by the Four Books. This characterization of the Four Books also appears in al-Bahāʾī’s hadith collection and commentary, *Mashriq al-shamsayn*. In the preface, after describing

139 As with *al-Faqīh*, Ibn Bābawayh is the compiler of the last four titles mentioned in this passage, namely, *Madīnat al-ʿilm, al-Khiṣāl, al-Amālī*, and *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*. Like al-Ḥārithī, al-Bahāʾī mentions *Madīnat al-ʿilm* as a major Imami hadith compilation, but does not include it in his list of the foremost compilations, which he limits to the Four Books.

140 Al-Bahāʾī, *al-Wajīza*, in *Ḥabl al-matīn fī iḥkām aḥkām al-dīn*, ed. S. B. al-Ḥusaynī, 2 vols. (Mashhad: Majmaʿ al-Buḥūth al-Islāmīyah, 1429), 129–30. A more literal translation of the last line – *al-uṣūl al-arbaʿa al-uwal hiya allatī ʿalayhā l-madār fī hādhihi l-aʿṣār* – would be: “The first are the Four Sources, which constitute the pivot point in these times”. In one of his transmission licenses, al-Bahāʾī makes clear that he regards the Four Books as the pivot point of Imami hadith: *al-uṣūl al-arbaʿa al-uwal ʿalayhā l-madār fi hādhihi l-aṣār* – would be: “The first are the Four Sources, which constitute the pivot point in these times”. In one of his transmission licenses, al-Bahāʾī makes clear that he regards the Four Books as the pivot point of Imami hadith: *al-uṣūl al-arbaʿa allatī ʿalayhā l-madār fi hādhihi l-aṣār*. As noted in § 5, al-Shaykh Ḥasan used the word *madār* in a similar context, stating that “in these times the derivation of the majority of legal rulings revolves around the pivot point of hadith and the [scholars’] legal responsa in most issues are traced back to it” (see page x, n. 109).
al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhib, al-Istibṣār as the pivots of Imami hadith, al-Bahāʾī writes that he relies only on the “authentic” hadiths transmitted in the Four Books that pertain to religious precepts. In this way, he states, his book stands as “a criterion (qānūn) for the men of religion of the saved Imami sect and an edict (dustūr) upon which legal experts rely for deriving substantive legal matters.” He proceeds to elaborate the factors that render a hadith authentic.

Like al-Shahīd ii and al-Shaykh Ḥasan before him, al-Bahāʾī draws attention to the different standards of hadith authenticity prevalent among earlier and later scholars. He points out that later scholars replaced the earlier twofold division with a fourfold division. In his view, this new development was due to changing circumstance that deprived later scholars, with damaging effects, of the sources of information that were available to the early scholars. According to al-Bahāʾī, because of the fear of persecution, Shiʿis were often unable to freely disseminate and preserve their textual hadith heritage. This led to the gradual disappearance of many reliable texts; as a result, hadiths from reliable and unreliable sources were mixed together. Furthermore, many of the corroborating indicants that were available to the early scholars and aided them in verifying the authenticity of numerous hadiths were lost to their successors. As a result, later scholars perceived the need to devise a “criterion” for

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141 Al-Bahāʾī was keen to describe the Four Books as the “hiya allatī ʿalayhā l-madār fī hādhihi l-aʿṣār”, a phrase that appears frequently in his transmission licenses (see al-Majlisī, Bihār, 25:269, 271, 273). This characterization of the Four Books was widely repeated after him. See ibid., 282, 287, 316, 322, 332, 345. It also appears in the only Persian jāza included in Bihār al-anwār: “Oṣūl-e arbaʿa keh dar in zamān madār bar ān ast” (ibid., 274). Also see al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, al-Wāfī, 14; al-Fāḍil al-Tūnī, al-WāFYA fī usūl al-fiqh, ed. M. Ḥ. al-Raḍawī al-Kishmīrī (Qom: Majmaʿ al-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1424), 277. The Qajar scholar, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī modifies this phrase by changing "in these times" to "in all times”. See al-Khwānsārī, Rawḥāt al-jamāt, 6:136. Al-Bahāʾī also referred collectively to al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhib, and al-Istibṣār by referring to their compilers as the “three Muḥammads” (al-Muḥammadūn al-thalātha) – al-Kulaynī, Ibn Bābawayh, and al-Ṭūsī were all named Muḥammad. See, for instance, al-Bahāʾī, al-Wajīza, 30; also see al-Bahāʾī’s transmission license issued in 1018/1609 (Gholami-Moqaddam, Ejāzāt-e ʿolamāʾ, 132). The phrase “the three Muḥammads” becomes increasingly popular after al-Bahāʾī. See al-Majlisī, Bihār, 25:270, 271, 274, 282, 294–5, 308, 311, 316, 322, and 345. The phrase “the three Muḥammads” becomes increasingly popular after al-Bahāʾī. See al-Majlisī, Bihār, 25:270, 271, 274, 282, 294–5, 308, 311, 316, 322, and 345.


143 Ibid., 24–26. Compared to his predecessors, al-Bahāʾī provides a more detailed outline of the corroborating indicants, which, in his view, were utilized by early scholars as a means of ascertaining a hadith’s reliability (see ibid., 26–30).
distinguishing unreliable from reliable hadiths. “They”, he writes, “devised this new terminology – may God reward them for their effort – and in doing so brought us closer to the distant past”. This new terminology is the division of hadiths into \(\text{sahîh, hasan, muwaththaq, and daʿîf}\). He notes that the first Shi‘i scholar to introduce this new approach was Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī\(^\text{144}\).

Al-Bahā‘ī argues that the introduction of the new verification method did not entirely efface the twofold division. Later scholars, despite the adoption of the fourfold method, would sometimes use the early scholars’ criteria and take into consideration factors other than the chain of transmission to determine a hadith’s reliability. For instance, later scholars treat the \text{mursal} reports of figures such as Ibn Abī ῸUmayr and Ṣafwān ibn Ḥiyā (d. ca. 210/825) as authentic even though their defective transmission chains suggest that these hadiths are weak. As another example, al-Bahā‘ī refers to certain non-Imami narrators whose hadiths are regarded as authentic even though the definition of authenticity adopted by later scholars would downgrade the status of such hadiths.\(^\text{145}\) Hence, he argues, even later scholars such as al-Ḥillī who adhere to the fourfold method, would “at times” allow for exceptions and determine a hadith’s reliability through means other than its chain of transmission.\(^\text{146}\) What is “at times” for al-Ḥillī, however, becomes most of the time for al-Bahā‘ī.

Despite his approval of the fourfold method, and his remark that the twofold division is no longer tenable, in practice al-Bahā‘ī largely adopts the early scholars’ approach to hadith verification.\(^\text{147}\) The crux of his disagreement with al-Shahīd II and al-Shaykh Ḥasan revolves around whether it is justified to rely on any indicants other than the chain of transmission to verify a hadith’s reliability. Al-Bahā‘ī is among those scholars who put a strong emphasis on non-\text{sanad} indicants and, as a result, assign reliability to numerous hadiths with defects in their transmission chains.\(^\text{148}\) A few examples highlight his differences in this regard with al-Shahīd II and his followers.

One of al-Bahā‘ī’s departures from al-Shahīd II’s approach to hadith verification is his position regarding a contested concept in Imami \text{rijāl} scholarship

\(^{144}\) Ibid., 30–32.
\(^{145}\) As support for this position, al-Bahā‘ī points to al-Ḥillī who, despite being the first Imami scholar to systematically use the fourfold method, in his book \text{Mukhtalaf al-shī‘a} lends credence to a hadith narrated by a non-Imami (Ibid., 34–35).
\(^{146}\) Ibid., 31–35.
\(^{147}\) Pakatchi notes al-Bahā‘ī’s departure from strict observance of the fourfold method of hadith verification and his tendency to use the pre-Ḥillī scholars’ criteria of hadith authenticity. See A. Pakatchi, “Naqīd-e mo‘tadel bar oṣūlīyyeh nazd-e Shaykh Bahā‘ī”, in idem, \text{Tā‘amolātī dar mabāheth-e farhang-e eslāmī} (Tehran: Dāneshgāh-e Imām Ṣādiq, 1392 sh.), 161–187.
known as *aṣḥāb al-ijmāʿ*. This phrase refers to a group of the companions of the fifth to the eight imams who are considered, based on a reported consensus, to be among the most credible hadith narrators. The earliest reference to these companions is found in the *Rijāl* of al-Kashshī (d. ca. 340/951), who writes that there is a consensus regarding their credibility. Al-Kashshī mentions the names of 18 individuals under the *aṣḥāb al-ijmāʿ*. He remarks, however, that there are some disagreements between scholars over who should be included in the category of *aṣḥāb al-ijmāʿ*. While all scholars include 16 out of the 18 individuals mentioned by al-Kashshī, they disagree over six other individuals. As a result, the names of twenty-two individuals are associated with the *aṣḥāb al-ijmāʿ*.

There is no precedent for al-Kashshī’s remark concerning the community’s consensus regarding these companions’ credibility in the surviving works of his predecessors and contemporaries. In fact, the phrase “*aṣḥāb al-ijmāʿ*” was not coined by al-Kashshī, and even after him, there was no explicit mention of it for over two centuries. Discussions concerning *aṣḥāb al-ijmāʿ* gained traction after Ibn Shahrāshūb’s (d. 588/1192) reference to them in *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*. Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Hilli was the first major scholar to discuss this consensus in some detail. He argued that al-Kashshī’s statement indicates the credibility of these companions as hadith narrators even though some of them belonged to “deviant” Shi’i sects (i.e., non-Twelver) such as the Faṭḥiyya and the Nāwūsiyya. A few decades later, Ibn Makkī proposed a different perspective. In his assessment, the consensus regarding these companions, in addition to their credibility as narrators, establishes two further points: the reliability of

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150 For a list of these companions, see al-Kashshī, *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, ed. S. A. al-Ḥusaynī (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-ʿĀlami li-l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1430), 174, 270, 394. Some major Imami narrators, such as ʿUsayn ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥwāzī, Sahl b. Ziyād al-Adamī, and ʿIbrahīm ibn Hāshim al-Qummī, are absent from this list.
their *mursal* hadiths and the credibility of those individuals from whom they have narrated their hadiths. This position had been rejected or received a tepid reception until al-Bahāʾī.

In *Habl al-matīn* and *Mashriq al-shamsayn*, al-Bahāʾī invokes al-Kashshī’s statement on these companions and accepts the reported consensus regarding their credibility as a legitimate means of giving credence to their hadiths, irrespective of any defects in their transmission chains. Hence, he argues, even if a hadith’s transmission chain contains missing links or narrators with questionable status, the hadith would still be acceptable since it has been transmitted by one of *aṣḥāb al-ijmāʿ*. In al-Bahāʾī’s view, the companion’s narration indicates that the hadith is reliable, since otherwise he would not have narrated it to others. As noted, al-Bahāʾī also maintains that early scholars would regard a hadith as authentic if it appeared in a source with a well-attested attribution to an individual whose veracity was a matter of consensus; likewise, they would consider a hadith authentic if it was affirmed as such by an individual whose veracity was a matter of consensus. The examples he provides of such individuals are all mentioned in al-Kashshī’s list of twenty-two companions.

It is noteworthy that al-Shahīd II, unlike al-Ḥillī and Ibn Makkī, does not assign any privileged status to the hadiths that have *aṣḥāb al-ijmāʿ* in their transmission chains. He considers a hadith authentic when the transmission chains are unbroken and the narrators are all upright Imamis. Al-Bahāʾī’s incorporation of non-*sanad* verification methods is not confined to *aṣḥāb al-ijmāʿ*. Unlike al-Shaykh Ḥasan, he justifies the reliability of a large number of *mursal* hadiths by relying on indicants other than a hadith’s transmission chain. For instance, he argues that the *mursal* reports of Ibn

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153 In examining the reliability of a hadith narrated by Abū al-Rabīʿ al-Shāmī, Ibn Makkī cites al-Kashshī’s statement as support for its reliability. In his view, this hadith must be regarded as reliable because it is narrated by al-Ḥasan ibn Maḥbūb (via Khālid ibn Jarīr), one of the companions on al-Kashshī’s list concerning whose credibility Imamis have a consensus. Had Khālid not been a credible narrator, Ibn Maḥbūb would not have transmitted the hadith from him. Khālid’s credibility in turn establishes the credibility of Abū al-Rabīʿ. See Ibn Makkī, *Ghāyat al-murād fī sharḥ al-nukat al-irshād*, in *Mawsūʿat al-Shahīd al-Awwal*, 238–39 (also see 2307).
Bābawayh, like those of Ibn Abī ‘Umayr, should be assigned the same status as *musnad* hadiths.159 In his commentary on *al-Faqīh*, al-Bahāʾī states that 2,050 of Ibn Bābawayh’s 5,963 hadiths are *mursal*. Nevertheless, he maintains that the *mursal* hadiths of credible narrators are authoritative and should not be disregarded simply due to their defective transmission chains.160 According to this view, Ibn Bābawayh, who is a credible narrator, would not transmit hadiths from anyone unless he considered the narrator to be credible. The corroborating indicant in this case is the reports that assert Ibn Bābawayh’s credibility as a transmitter.161 Although this argument had already been put forward with regard to Ibn Abī ‘Umayr, al-Bahāʾī seems to be the first person who explicitly justifies relying on Ibn Bābawayh’s *mursal* hadiths and treating them as if they were *musnad*.162

Al-Bahāʾī also accepts a hadith’s prevalent status (*shuhra*) as an indication of its reliability. This approach has significant implications for the number of hadiths regarded as acceptable: a hadith’s prevalence is invoked to compensate for defects in its chain of transmission that would otherwise render it unreliable. Al-Bahāʾī’s position on this issue is similar to that of Ibn Abī Jumhūr and represents another divergence from al-Shahīd ii and al-Shaykh Ḥasan. As mentioned, according to the latter two, the status of a hadith depends on its transmission chain, not on its widespread narration or the jurists’ widespread reliance on its content. For them, a hadith’s prevalence does not compensate for its defective transmission chain. Al-Bahāʾī disagrees and considers prevalence as a critical factor in determining a hadith’s reliability, irrespective of its transmission chain.

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157 Since these twenty-two companions appear in the transmission chains of numerous hadiths in the Four Books, one’s position on the consensus claimed for their credibility has consequences on the reliability status of the Four Books. Husayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1320/1902), aware of these consequences, remarks that discussions concerning *aṣḥāb al-ijmāʿ* is one of the most important topics in the discipline of *rijāl*. In many instances, he notes, thousands of hadiths that otherwise would not be included in the authentic category either enter this category or are considered as such through their transmission via these companions. See al-Nūrī al-Ṭabrisī, *Khātimat mustadrak al-wasāʾil*, 9 vols. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat Āl al-Bayt, 1429), 77.

158 For al-Ṭūsī’s view on the verification of *mursal* hadiths, see his *Uddat al-uṣūl*, 1354–155.


161 Mir Dāmād, a contemporary of al-Bahāʾī’s, provides the same argument in Ibn Bābawayh’s defense (*al-Rawāshiḥ*, 255).

Al-Bahāʾī also departs from some major *rijāl* principles of his predecessors and, as a result, widens the range of what he considers to be reliable hadiths in the Four Books. An example of al-Bahāʾī’s *rijāl* approach is his view regarding the status of Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥāshim al-Qummī, whose veracity as a narrator is not explicitly mentioned in the early *rijāl* literature. One’s position on Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥāshim has a significant implication for the status of the hadiths quoted in the Four Books since he appears in 6,414 transmission chains. How do al-Bahāʾī and others justify Ibrāhīm’s credibility? They note that in *rijāl* works, Ibrāhīm is described as “the first person to promulgate hadiths of the Kufans in Qom”. In their view, this description accords the highest status of credibility to Ibrāhīm as a transmitter. Al-Shahīd ii, however, challenged Ibrāhīm’s hadiths on the grounds that a transmitter should be considered credible once he is described as such in the *rijāl* literature. In that literature, however, Ibrāhīm is characterized as “praiseworthy” (*mamdūḥ*) but not explicitly described as “credible” (*muwaththaq*). Hence, al-Shahīd ii concluded, Ibrāhīm’s hadiths must be downgraded from the authentic to the sound category.

Al-Bahāʾī also disagrees with al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s criterion for determining a transmitter’s reliability, namely, that a transmitter’s uprightness is established once it is corroborated by the testimony of at least two upright witnesses (see § 5). Al-Bahāʾī rejects this position. On the one hand, he argues, al-Shaykh Hasan requires the testimony of at least two witnesses before confirming a

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165 This description – “the first person to promulgate hadiths of the Kufans in Qom” – is found in al-Najāshī, *Rijāl* (# 17); al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl* (# 30). In his *rijāl* work, *Tanqīḥ al-maqāl*, al-Māmaqānī (d. 1351/1933) explains why some scholars have found this description significant. He notes that according to many early sources, at the time of Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥāshim, scholars in Qom were widely known to have stringent criteria for hadith authenticity. If they encountered a narrator who transmitted hadiths from a discredited (*ḍaʿīf*) individual, they would cease to trust him and, in some cases, would banish the narrator from the city in order to prevent the spread of fabricated or unreliable hadiths in the community. He concludes that Ibrāhīm’s reputation as the first person to promulgate hadiths of the Kufans in Qom establishes his credibility as a transmitter even if he is not explicitly described as ‘upright’ and ‘credible’ by *rijāl* scholars. See ʿAbdullāh al-Māmaqānī, *Tanqīḥ al-maqāl fi ‘ism al-rijāl*, ed. M. al-Māmaqānī, 40 vols. (Qom: Muʿassasat Āl al-Bayt, 1424), 5:72–101, particularly at 92–95. Mir Dāmād also argued for Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥāshim’s credibility as a hadith narrator (*al-Rawāshiḥ*, 82–85). Also see al-Khūʾī, *Muʿjam al-rijāl*, 1:289–322.
transmitter’s uprightness. On the other hand, however, he relies on the information given in the *rijāl* literature to make such confirmations. Reliance on the *rijāl* literature, al-Bahāʾī argues, conflicts with al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s two-witness criterion.

You are aware that the *rijāl* scholars whose books have reached us at this time all transmit the information contained in their books regarding the uprightness of most transmitters from other sources [i.e., they did not personally meet the transmitters concerning whose status they pass judgment]. Hence, if two of them agree about the uprightness of a particular transmitter, this is of no use in determining the authenticity of a hadith unless it is also established that the authors of these *rijāl* books refrained from considering a transmitter to be reliable on the basis of one upright person. This, however, is very difficult to establish. Indeed, the opposite appears to be true: al-ʿAllāma [al-Ḥillī] in his books on jurisprudence explicitly mentions that the assertion of a single individual is sufficient [for establishing a transmitter’s uprightness]. One may also glean from the statements of al-Kashshī, al-Najāshī, al-Shaykh [al-Ṭūsī], Ibn Ṭāwūs, and others that they rely upon the testimony of one individual to assess whether a transmitter is upright or not. This is evident to anyone who is acquainted with their books.167

Hence, al-Bahāʾī argues, if one accepts the two-witness criterion, the *rijāl* books do not provide a firm basis for determining the uprightness of the narrators who appear in a hadith’s transmission chain, even if two or more *rijāl* scholars agree about the narrators’ uprightness. This is because, he argues, there is no guarantee that when the *rijāl* scholars composed their books, they required the testimony of two truthful individuals before stating that a transmitter is reliable or unreliable. In al-Bahāʾī’s view, the reverse is the case. As a result, compared to al-Shaykh Ḥasan, his criterion establishes a larger number of hadiths as authentic.168

Al-Bahāʾī plays an instrumental role in reorienting discussions on hadith verification away from an almost exclusive reliance on transmission chains and towards incorporating corroborating indicants such as prevalence (shuhra). Unlike al-Shahīd II and al-Shaykh Ḥasan, but like Ibn Abī Jumhūr, he does not restrict the means of determining a hadith’s status to the information provided in the transmission chains. He accepts a hadith with a defective narrator (e.g., non-Imamis) or a defective transmission chain (e.g., mursal) so long as it is accompanied by corroborating indicants that attest to its reliability. Al-Bahāʾī’s modifications of the fourfold verification method result in giving credence to a greater number of hadiths. By widening the range of hadiths deemed reliable as sources to be used for legal rulings, he restrains the scope of a jurist’s independent reasoning that otherwise would have been given a greater authority in determining the outcome of a ruling in the absence of reliable hadiths. In doing so, al-Bahāʾī further elevates the authority of the Four Books as the central sources of Imami law.

168 For instance, on the topic of the “call to ritual prayer”, al-Bahāʾī quotes 42 hadiths in Ḥabl al-matīn that satisfy his authenticity criterion. Of these, 26 hadiths satisfy al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s authenticity criterion. Cf. al-Bahāʾī, Ḥabl al-matīn, 2:263–302; al-Shaykh Ḥasan, Muntaqā, 1502–520.

169 Consensus (ijmāʿ) and prevalence (shuhra) feature prominently among the indicants that early scholars, according to al-Bahāʾī, utilized to evaluate a hadith’s reliability. For instance, he maintains that they would consider a hadith authentic if it appeared in a source with a widely-recognized attribution to an individual whose veracity is a matter of consensus among the Imami community; or if there is a consensus that certain individuals affirm it as such; or if there is a consensus that sanctions relying on the hadiths transmitted by certain individuals. He adds that early scholars would accept a hadith as authentic if they found it quoted in any of the books that were widely considered credible and relied upon by their predecessors, regardless of whether or not the compilers of these books were Imamis. See al-Bahāʾī, Mashriq, 27–29.

170 In Ḥabl al-matīn and in his other writings, al-Bahāʾī quotes and relies on muwaththaq hadiths, a departure from al-Shahid II and al-Shaykh Ḥasan who, in principle, do not consider such hadiths reliable. As Pakatchi observes, one of al-Bahāʾī’s arguments against a categorical rejection of muwaththaq hadiths pertains to the narrators’ conversion to Imami Shi’ism from another sect and vice versa. He argues that although certain narrators are described as non-Imamis in the rijāl books, some of the hadiths they transmitted may be from the period before their conversion; in that case, the status of their hadiths should not automatically be downgraded to muwaththaq. Similarly, a narrator may have been a non-Imami at the time of receiving (taḥammul) the hadiths but later became an Imami. According to al-Bahāʾī, one must determine whether the narrator was an Imami at the time of delivering (adāʾ) the hadith and not at the time he first received the hadith. See Pakatchi, “Naqd-e moʿtadel”, 179–180. For al-Bahāʾī’s discussion on this topic, see his Mashriq, 56–67.
7.1 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, so far as the available historical data suggests, coined the phrase ‘the four sources’ (al-uṣūl al-arbaʿa) in his brief treatise on legal reasoning, Kāshifat al-ḥāl (888/1483), where he identifies al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār as the sufficient sources of legal hadith. Approximately seventy years later, al-Shahīd II provided a more elaborate explanation regarding the stature and sufficiency of these four compilations as sources of legal knowledge. He was the first scholar, thus far identified, to use the phrase the ‘four books’ (al-kutub al-arbaʿa). He traces the genesis of the Four Books to al-uṣūl al-arbaʿumīʾa (the “400 sources”), reportedly compiled by companions of the imams who heard the hadiths from them and recorded them in writing. According to al-Shahīd II, these sources were incorporated into abridged collections and formed the corpus on which al-Kulaynī, Ibn Bābawayh, and al-Ṭūsī relied on to compile al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār. Like Ibn Abī Jumhūr, he discusses the Four Books in relation to the law and avers that when issuing legal rulings, jurists are not obligated to search for any hadith sources besides these four. Al-Shahīd II’s foremost disciple, al-Ḥārithī, agreed albeit with a caveat. In his view, the representative sources of Imami hadith were gathered in five compilations, the Four Books plus a now lost compendium, Madīnat al-ʿilm, attributed to Ibn Bābawayh.

Al-Shaykh Ḥasan was the next major figure who played an important role in the consolidation of the Four Books. Whereas Ibn Abī Jumhūr and al-Shahīd II singled out the Four Books as sufficient sources of legal hadiths, he described them as the preferred compilations of later scholars. For him, these four works were different from the rest due to the widespread recognition they had received from Imami scholars. Al-Shaykh Ḥasan added that the Four Books display another unique feature: they were the only available hadith books whose attribution to their respective compilers was generally conclusive and for which there were circumstantial indicants that their contents were reliably transmitted over the centuries. Hence, nothing had been lost or added to these books that their compilers had not intended. This view played a decisive role in the consolidation of the Four Books as the most authoritative corpus of Imami hadith. After al-Shaykh Ḥasan, the Four Books’ manuscript transmission is increasingly presented as uniquely reliable. While he found this feature significant, it had no bearing for him with regard to the authenticity of the hadiths quoted in the Four Books.
Like Ibn Abi Jumhûr and his successors, al-Bahâ’î accorded a privileged status to the Four Books. Following al-Shahîd II’s historical narrative, he asserted that al-Kulaynî, Ibn Bâbawayh, and al-Ţûsî compiled the Four Books based on the materials available to them from the “400 sources”. He often described the Four Books as the sources that constitute the focal point of Imami law. Al-Bahâ’î’s enduring impact on the discourse surrounding the Four Books pertains to his delineation of methodologies for accepting and discounting their hadiths.

7.2
Long before scholars referred to al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibšâr collectively as the Four Books, they had identified each as a pivotal source of hadith. First among those who assigned a special status to these compilations were the compilers themselves. Al-Kulaynî regarded his al-Kāfī as a sufficient source of religious knowledge; Ibn Bâbawayh described al-Faqīh as a comprehensive guide for those without access to a jurist; and according to al-Ţûsî, al-Tahdhīb and al-Ististbâr, together with al-Nihāya, eliminated the need to consult any other book of law. Many of their successors concurred with these assessments. Nearly all major Imami jurists active during the four centuries between al-Ţûsî and Ibn Abi Jumhûr relied on al-Kåfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibšâr when formulating their legal opinions. These include influential figures such as al-Muḥaqiq al-Hilli, Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, and Ibn Makkî. Although each of these four compilations was widely used prior to the introduction of the term the “Four Books”, the collective reference to them as the “Four Books” contributed to their consolidation.

171 Emphasis on the manuscript integrity of the Four Books is evident, for instance, in the transmission licenses issued by eminent scholars succeeding al-Shaykh Ḥasan, including Majlîsî I (d. 1660) and Ḥusayn al-Khwânsârî (d. 1687). See, for example, al-Majlîsî, Biḥâr, 25:312, 318; al-Dhârimi, Man qula yahduruhu l-faqîh, 1:2–3. Among these four compilations, al-Kāfî was particularly held in high esteem. For an overview of Imami scholars’ positive receptions of al-Kulaynî and his al-Kāfî, see H. Ansari, “Jâygâh-e al-Kāfî dar miyân-e emâmîyyeh”, online: https://ansari.kateban.com/post/842 (accessed 10 February, 2021).
as the most authoritative sources of Imami hadith. This process is evident in transmission licenses issued by scholars who characterize the Four Books as the “most central” (akbad),177 “most renowned” (ashhar),178 and “chief” (al-‘umad)179 hadiths sources, which serve as “reference” (marji’)180 works for Imami jurists.

7.3
One must not readily assume that the Four Books were selected from a large number of hadith compilations. They may be nearly everything that was available to Ibn Abī Jumhūr or al-Shahīd 11. As noted in § 3, according to al-Shahīd 11, jurists are not required to search for hadith sources other than the Four Books when formulating their rulings. This suggests that in his view no major book of legal hadith was compiled after al-Ṭūsī or, if such a work was compiled, it was no longer extant. In fact, very few legal hadith books181 are available from the period between the death of al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), who compiled the last two of the Four Books, and that of al-Shahīd 11 (d. 965/1558).182 Thus, it seems that Ibn Abī Jumhūr and al-Shahīd 11 did not select al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār as the representative sources of Imami hadith from a list that included other hadith compilations. It remains to be further investigated whether the Four Books were, as some of the figures examined in this article contended, the “most renowned” and “chief” hadith sources or perhaps the only major extant compilations of legal hadith.183

Some might argue that al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār may in fact have been the “most renowned” or “chief” hadith sources even if many other compilations were in circulation. Did the five jurists examined in this study have access to other major compilations of legal hadith? And, after

176 Ibn Makkī, for instance, recommends that those who wish to learn more about Shi‘i hadith should study Ibn Bābawayh’s hadith collections, including al-Faqīh, along with al-Kulaynī’s al-Kāfī and al-Ṭūsī’s Tahdhīb and al-Istibṣār (Dhikrā al-shī‘a, 22–23). Earlier in the book he had also mentioned al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, and al-Tahdhīb as unique compilations (ibid., 7–8).
177 See Ibn Abī Jāmiʿ al-ʿĀmilī’s (d. 1005/1597) transmission license, quoted in Gholami-Moqaddam, Ejāzāt-e ʿolamā’, 1:47.
178 See al-Bahāʾī’s transmission license, quoted in Gholami-Moqaddam, Ejāzāt-e ʿolamā’, 1:52.
179 See al-Bahāʾī’s transmission license, quoted in al-Majlisī, Biḥār, 25:269.
180 See al-Shūlistānī’s (d. ca. 1060/1650) transmission license, quoted in al-Majlisī, Biḥār, 25:294.
181 The most noteworthy example is Ibn Idrīs al-Ḥillī (d. 598/1201) who, in the final part of his al-Sarāʾir known as Mustaṭrafāt, provides a collection of legal hadiths from several early works predating al-Kāfī.
studying them, did they judge them to be unreliable or not sufficiently comprehensive to be mentioned along with the Four Books as the most authoritative sources of Imami hadith? At present, there is no strong supporting evidence that this was the case. It is clear, however, that the consolidation of the Four Books as the most authoritative sources of hadith was a major factor in stimulating discussions regarding the status of individual hadiths contained in them. In a period of less than sixty years, several theories were developed to explain the special status of these compilations, while either restricting or expanding the probative force (ḥujjīyya) of their individual hadiths.

7.4
Neither the compilers themselves nor successive generations of Shiʿi scholars considered all of the hadiths quoted in the Four Books to be authentic. It is noteworthy that none of the four books in this hadith quartet has the word ṣaḥīḥ (authentic) in its title. By contrast, in the Sunni tradition six hadith compilations came to be referred to collectively as the Six Authentic Books (al-ṣiḥāḥ al-sitta). Of these six, the collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim are explicitly called ṣaḥīḥ. In the Shiʿi tradition, the term ṣaḥīḥ was not applied to al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, or al-Istibṣār – either before or after the phrase ‘the four books’ was coined – and, more importantly, there is no consensus on their authenticity. Despite their awareness of the Six Sunni Books, prior to Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Shiʿi scholars were not keen to set a specific number for the hadith sources they considered authoritative, although they sometimes specify the compilations they consider significant and compare these with the Six Books. Ibn Makkī (d. 786/1384), for instance, remarks that al-Kāfī alone has more hadiths than these six Sunni compilations combined and that the same is nearly the case for al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār. After the phrase

183 In the extant legal works composed during the period between al-Ṭūsī and Ibn Abī Jumhūr, there are abundant references to the hadiths transmitted in al-Kāfī, al-Faqīh, al-Tahdhīb, and al-Istibṣār. Except for rare references to Madīnat al-ʿīlm which, as mentioned in § 4, has been lost for at least four centuries, no other compilation features prominently in the legal literature of the period. A thorough study of the jīza literature may particularly be helpful in substantiating whether other major compilations besides those by al-Kulaynī, Ibn Bābawayh, and al-Ṭūsī were in wide circulation. At present, many of the extant jīzasāt are still in manuscript form and are yet to become available for detailed examination.

184 On al-ṣiḥāḥ al-sitta, see EI3, s.v. “Canon and canonisation of ḥadīth” (S. Aerts).

185 On the canonization of these two hadith collections, see J. Brown, The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunni Ḥadīth Canon (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

186 The lack of consensus among Imamis concerning the reliability of the Four Books contrasts with the Sunni tradition, where a consensus eventually was claimed for the
‘the four books’ was coined, it became common to compare the Six Authentic Books with the Four Books. Al-Bahāʾī, for example, asserted that Shiʿi compilations contain more hadiths than the Six Authentic Books and noted that the Four Books constitute the central sources of Shiʿi hadith. Eventually, the consolidation of the Four Books as the central corpus of hadith led a small group of Imami scholars to treat every hadith in the Four Books as either authentic or, at the least, as sufficiently reliable sources of legal knowledge (see § 7.5). Before this pivot to canonization, most Imami scholars primarily discussed methods of hadith authentication rather than authenticating any specific compilation.

7.5
The discourse on the reliability of the Four Books developed chiefly in the context of law and jurisprudence. This is due to the juristic contention that the actions of believers must as much as possible be based on the Qurʾan and hadith. Since the Qurʾan contains relatively few verses with explicit ‘legal’ content, most jurists rely on hadith as their primary scriptural source. According to Shiʿi scholars, nearly all extant hadiths are inconclusive (non-mutawātir) in their transmission, and their authenticity is contested. This has led them to sift through the teachings attributed to the Prophet and the imams to distinguish authentic accounts of their sayings and deeds from spurious ones. To this end, scholars endeavored to develop methods of hadith verification. These endeavors gradually resulted in determining a hadith’s authenticity by one or more of the following means:

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reliability of the collections by al-Bukhārī and Muslim. See Brown, *Canonization*, index, s.v. “consensus”.


189 Compared to legal matters, with regard to creedal doctrines, the majority of Shiʿi scholars adopted more rigorous standards of hadith verification because, in their view, doctrinal matters either must be established through reason or are sufficiently addressed in the Qurʾan and the mutawātir hadiths of the Prophet and the imams. As mentioned in the Introduction, three of the Four Books contain only legal hadiths, as does the greater part of *al-Kāfī*. By contrast, while the Six Books of Sunni hadith contain mostly legal hadiths, they also include numerous hadiths pertaining to other topics.

190 Of the 6,235 verses in the Qurʾan, scholars often consider the number of legal verses to be about 500. See, for instance, al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-qurʾān* (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risāla, 1429), 668. Although these numbers suggest that the legal verses comprise around eight percent of the Qurʾan, two factors must be taken into consideration: (1) the length of verses in the Qurʾan vary from a single word to several lines; (2) among the 500 legal verses there are some repetitions.
1. Claiming consensus for the credibility (thiqa) of certain transmitters, whether it be an individual, such as Ibn Abi ‘Umayr, or a group, such as aṣḥāb al-ʾijmāʿ. Once a hadith was known to have been transmitted by any such transmitter, its authenticity was established and questions regarding its defective transmission chain dissolved. Closely related to this is the necessity of reliance on certain privileged biographical dictionaries, which record the status of narrators. These include the riṭāl compilations of al-Kashshī, al-Najāshī, al-Ṭūsī, Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥillī and Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī. Recall, for instance, that Ibn Abi Jumhūr required that the Four Books must be read in conjunction with the riṭāl books.192

2. Demarcating a historical period – often the first three centuries AH – and considering certain texts, verification methods, and scholarly practices from this period as authoritative. Examples include the “400 sources” – reportedly compiled by the imams’ disciples – from which the Four Books reportedly were drawn; to give credence to the twofold verification scheme claimed to have been employed by ‘early scholars’ (qudamāʾ); to accord a privileged status to prevalent (mashhūr) practices of the early jurists, such as their legal opinions or their widespread transmission of a hadith. For instance, if numerous early jurists issued rulings on the basis of a particular hadith, the hadith would be treated as reliable even if its extant version has a defective transmission chain. This verification approach assumes that early scholars who were either contemporaries of the imams or active shortly thereafter would not issue a legal ruling based on a hadith they knew to be unreliable. Those who take this verification approach likewise treat the widely circulating hadiths during the early period as reliable regardless of any defects in their narrators or transmission chains. In both these cases, a hadith’s prevalent status compensates for any defects in its transmission chain.

3. Upholding certain methods as the sole legitimate means of hadith verification (e.g., the fourfold method).

4. Designating categorical authenticity to an entire compilation or a textual corpus. For advocates of this approach, the Four Books, for example, are authentic in their entirety.

191 See, for example, al-Shahīd al-Thānī, al-Riʿāya, 37–41. As mentioned in § 2, reports that are not mutawātīr are regarded as āḥād. While mutawātīr reports leave no questions or doubts in the recipient regarding their authenticity, the authenticity status of non-mutawātīr reports remains inconclusive.

As discussed throughout this article, these four methods sometimes overlap with each other.

Beginning with Ibn Abī Jumhūr, who is the first known scholar to coin the phrase, no major Imami scholar has disputed the privileged status accorded to the Four Books; instead, scholars disagreed over the verification methods used to ascertain the reliability of the hadiths quoted in them. All the figures examined in this study adhered to the fourfold verification method, albeit with disagreements concerning its application. Discussions about the authority of the Four Books, along with the defence, modification, and rejection of the fourfold verification method, dominated the Imami hadith discourse during the sixteenth century. Two contrasting approaches to the fourfold method and the Four Books resulted from these discussions. The key issue was whether, and to what extent, other means of hadith verification may be utilized to determine the reliability of the hadiths transmitted in the Four Books.

While Ibn Abī Jumhūr and al-Bahāʾī were keen to accommodate exceptions to the fourfold method and used other means of hadith verification, al-Shahīd II and, especially, al-Shaykh Ḥasan were reluctant to give credence to any indicants external to a hadith's transmission chain. In Muntaqa, al-Shaykh Ḥasan criticized those who, while using the fourfold method, maintained that a hadith is authentic if its transmission has no features that would discredit it (even if its transmission chain has some defects). In his view, it is reasonable for those who use the twofold method to argue this point but unreasonable for those who use the fourfold method. Some scholars would suspend the fourfold method on certain occasions, such as giving credence to the hadiths transmitted by Ibn Abī ʿUmayr despite defects in their transmission chains. Al-Shaykh Ḥasan, like al-Shahīd II, found this position flawed; in his view, to concede to it would render the fourfold division redundant. The fourfold verification method is used in order to distinguish authentic from non-authentic hadiths, based on the reliability of their transmission chains. If in certain cases authenticity can be attributed to hadiths with defective transmission chains, the fourfold division becomes superfluous. According to al-Shaykh Ḥasan, such an approach goes against the very reason for which the fourfold division was designed. Hence, he rejected mursal hadiths even if they were transmitted by the most credible narrators. In addition to requiring strict observance of the fourfold method, he stipulated that a hadith is authentic only when the uprightness of the narrators in its transmission chain is confirmed by at least two individuals of recognized uprightness. In this way, while upholding the
privileged status of the Four Books, al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s verification method renders the majority of their hadiths unreliable.

Al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s proposed standards fueled extensive criticisms and elicited several responses over the course of the next century (ca. 11th/17th). For example, disregarding al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s call for a vigilant observance of the fourfold framework, al-Bahāʾī expanded the methods of hadith verification beyond sanad analysis. While upholding the fourfold method, he asserted that in addition to the transmission chain, it is legitimate to take into consideration factors that may corroborate a hadith’s reliability even if the hadith fails to meet the standards of the fourfold verification method. Although this approach was not unprecedented among Imami scholars, al-Bahāʾī expanded its scope and presented it in a more systematic manner. Al-Bahāʾī also disagreed with al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s criterion of hadith authenticity and rejected his requirement of (at a minimum) two witnesses of recognized uprightness for establishing a narrator’s uprightness as hadith transmitter. Like most Imami scholars before and after al-Shaykh Ḥasan, he considered the testimony of one upright witness to be sufficient.

Despite these differences, al-Bahāʾī did not regard every single hadith in the Four Books as an acceptable source of law. In his view, many hadiths not only had defective transmission chains, but also lacked any corroborating indicant that might justify their reliability. Nevertheless, al-Bahāʾī’s criticisms of al-Shahīd II’s and al-Shaykh Ḥasan’s verification methods were widely accepted. His promotion of non-sanad corroborating indicants to determine a hadith’s reliability undermined their demand for strict observance of the fourfold method as the only viable method of hadith verification; eventually it was al-Bahāʾī’s position that found favor among the majority of Imami scholars.

Perhaps unwittingly, al-Bahāʾī’s undermining of the methods advocated by al-Shahīd II and his followers contributed to the rise of their antithesis in the thought of Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626) and the Akhbārī
movement he inspired. Al-Astarābādī and his followers have been the subject of several studies in the past three decades. It suffices for our purposes to note that al-Astarābādī took his predecessors’ discussions on hadith authenticity in an entirely new direction. In his *al-Fawāʾid al-madaniyya* (1031/1622), al-Astarābādī characterizes the Four Books not just as the “chief” or “most renowned” compilations but rather as “authentic” sources of Imami hadith. He rejected the fourfold verification method, which had remained unchallenged for three centuries, characterizing it as a heretical innovation adopted from Sunni hadith scholarship. This sharp break from his predecessors represented a decisive attempt to canonize the Four Books. Writing 140 years after Abī Jumhūr recommended the Four Books as sufficient hadith sources for aspiring jurists, al-Astarābādī argued in favor of their categorical authenticity. In contrast to his predecessors, al-Astarābādī focused on the status of the Four Books as compilations rather than on articulating a method for ascertaining the reliability of specific hadiths. In the 17th and 18th centuries, al-Astarābādī’s followers elaborated on his ideas, making waves that rippled widely across the Shi‘i world. These waves ultimately failed to bring the Four Books to the shore of indisputability.

Contestations over the authenticity and the interpretation of the hadiths transmitted in the Four Books have persisted down to the present. Unlike the Qur’an, the Four Books are not considered a sealed scriptural canon and efforts to restrict their authority or to expand the hadith corpus beyond them are still ongoing. Nonetheless, the reception history of the Four Books indicates that they have rarely been perceived as a mere corpus. These four compilations have been widely disseminated, subjected to numerous commentaries and glosses, translated to other languages, and held in high esteem among scholars regardless of theological and jurisprudential orientations. Indeed, there is hardly a major book of law that does not contain numerous citations

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196 Some of al-Bahā’ī’s views on hadith verification were noted and favorably quoted by al-Astarābādī. For example, see al-Astarābādī, *al-Fawāʾid*, 123.


198 See, for example, al-Astarābādī, *al-Fawāʾid*, 524, 529, 131.


200 On the canonization of the Qur’an, see C. Gilliot, “Creation of a Fixed Text”, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an*, ed. J. D. McAuliffe (Cambridge, 2006), 41–58; H.
from the Four Books. The consolidation of *al-Kāfī*, *al-Faqīh*, *al-Tahdhib*, and *al-Istibṣār* into the Four Books did not place them beyond reproach; neither did it resolve debate regarding their status. While the overwhelming majority of Imami jurists regard the Four Books as indispensable sources of legal hadiths, they do not consider the reliability of the hadiths transmitted in them to be indisputable.

**Acknowledgment**

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Appendix

Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s Recommended Reading List for Aspiring Jurists

As mentioned in § 2, *Kāshifat al-ḥāl* contains Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s book recommendations in nine essential and three complementary disciplines.\(^{201}\) In his view, reading these books will provide the uninitiated with sufficient grounding in the linguistic, rational, and scriptural sciences, and thereby enable them to fruitfully engage in legal reasoning. This reasoning, he remarks, is undertaken with the aim of attaining knowledge of religious precepts, which, in turn, must guide one’s conduct. Ibn Abī Jumhūr organizes his recommended books, thirty-four in total, under twelve disciplines. Twenty-three books are listed under the three essential sciences (each science is divided into three disciplines); the remaining eleven books are listed under the three complementary disciplines. He informs readers that he does not require them to master all the texts mentioned under a given discipline. In most cases, familiarity with any one of the recommended books will be sufficient. This appendix lists Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s recommendations. These will serve to outline his conception of a Shi‘i legal education and to draw attention to the role of the Four Books therein.

The Three Essential Sciences

1. Linguistic Sciences

1.1 Lexicography (*lugha*)

*al-Sīḥāḥ*  
*al-Jamhara fī l-*lugha*  
*al-Jawharī* (d. ca. 400/1010)  
*Ibn Durayd* (d. 321/933)

1.2 Morphology (*ṣarf*)

*al-Shāfī’ya*  
*al-Taṣrīf al-ʿIzzī*  
*Ibn Ḥājib* (d. 646/1249)  
*al-Zanjānī* (d. 654/1257)

1.3 Grammar (*nahw*)

*al-Kāfiya*  
*al-Lubāb fī ‘ilm al-iʿrāb*  
*Ibn Ḥājib* (d. 646/1249)  
*al-Isfarā‘īnī* (d. 684/1285)

2. **Rational Sciences**

2.1. **Logic** (*maṭṭiq*)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Maʿārij al-fahm fī sharḥ al-naẓm</em></td>
<td>al-Kātibī</td>
<td>d. 675/1276</td>
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2.2. **Theology** (*kalām*)

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<th>Work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Nahj al-mustarshidin fi usūl al-dīn</em></td>
<td>Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥilli</td>
<td>d. 726/1325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sharḥ Naẓm al-barāhīn fi usūl al-dīn</em></td>
<td>Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥilli</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Manāhiṣ al-yaqīn fi usūl al-dīn</em></td>
<td>Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥilli</td>
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2.3. **Jurisprudence** (*usūl al-fiqh*)

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<tr>
<td><em>Mabādī al-wuṣūl ilā ʿilm al-usūl</em></td>
<td>Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥilli</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Tahdhīb tariq al-wuṣūl ilā ʿilm al-usūl</em></td>
<td>Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥilli</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Muntahā al-wuṣūl</em></td>
<td>Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥilli</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Nhāyat al-wuṣūl</em></td>
<td>Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥilli</td>
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3. **Scriptural Sciences**

3.1. **Exegesis** (*tafsīr*)

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<tr>
<td><em>Fiqh al-qrūʿān</em></td>
<td>al-Rāwandi</td>
<td>d. 573/1177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Minhāj al-hidāya</em></td>
<td>Ibn al-Mutawwaj</td>
<td>d. ca. 836/1432</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Kanz al-ʿirfān fī fiqh al-qrūʿān</em></td>
<td>al-Miqdād al-Suyūrī</td>
<td>d. 826/1423</td>
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3.2. **Hadith**

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<tr>
<td><em>al-Kāfī fī ʿilm al-dīn</em></td>
<td>al-Kulaynī</td>
<td>d. 329/941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Man lā yaḥḍuruhu l-faqīh</em></td>
<td>Ibn Bābawayh</td>
<td>d. 381/991</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Tahdhīb al-ʾahkām</em></td>
<td>al-Ṭūsī</td>
<td>d. 460/1067</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>al-Istibṣār</em></td>
<td>al-Ṭūsī</td>
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3.3. **Rijāl**

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<tr>
<td><em>al-Rijāl</em></td>
<td>Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥilli</td>
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**The Three Complementary Disciplines**

1. **Rhetoric** (*al-maʿānī wa-l-bayān*)

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<tr>
<td><em>Talkhīṣ al-miftāḥ fī al-maʿānī wa-l-bayān</em></td>
<td>al-Qazwinī</td>
<td>d. 739/1338</td>
</tr>
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202 This work is chiefly known as *Maʿārij al-fāhm fī sharḥ al-naẓm*. 

EHTESHAMI
2. **Comparative Law** *(wifāq wa-l-khilaf)*

- **Mukhtalaf al-shī‘a**
- **al-Muhadhdhab al-bāri‘**
- **al-Tanqīḥ al-rā‘i‘ li-mukhtasār al-sharā‘i‘**
- **Īḍāḥ al-fawā‘id fī sharḥ ishkālāt al-qawā‘id**  
  
  - Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī  
  - Ibn Fahd al-Ḥillī (d. 841/1437)  
  - al-Miqdād al-Suyūrī (d. 826/1423)  
  - Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d. 771/1369)

3. **Law** *(fiqh)*

- **Sharā‘i‘ al-islām**
- **Qawā‘id al-aḥkām**
- **al-Nihāya**
- **al-Mabsūṭ**
- **al-Durūs al-shar‘iyya fī fiqh al-imāmiyya**
- **Dhikrā al-shī‘a**

  - al-Muḥaqiq al-Ḥillī (d. 676/1277)  
  - Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī  
  - al-Ṭūsī  
  - Ibn Makkī (d. 786/1384)  
  - Ibn Makkī