CHAPTER FIVE
THE SPREAD OF AKHBARISM AFTER ASTARĀBĀDĪ

The importance of Astarābādī’s critique of *ijtihād* found in *al-Fawā’id al-Madaniyya* was rapidly recognised in the intellectual world of Eleventh/Seventeenth Century Shi‘ism. I have already referred to the swift identification of Astarābādī with the foundation of a new (or revived) school of jurisprudence,1 termed *al-akhbāriyya* and challenging the established *Uṣūlī-mujtahid* juristic methodology of the day.2 In the subsequent two centuries and beyond, groups of Akhbārī scholars were evident throughout Safavid Iran, southern Iraq, eastern Arabia, Jabal ʿĀmil in southern Lebanon and India. This chapter outlines the probable routes whereby Astarābādī’s critique came to be known throughout the Shi‘i world, the growth of the school’s influence and the activities of the best known Akhbārīs who either identified themselves as such or were described as such by subsequent authors.3

1 The discussion of the emergence of legal schools (*madhhab*, pl. *madhāhib*) in early Islam has been developed by Makdisi (in particular in *The Rise*), and then, more specifically, by Melchert (The *Formation*). When one can say that a *madhhab* emerged is, of course, dependent upon one’s preferred criteria. Melchert (*The Formation*, p. xvi) argues that the term *madhhab* was used in a number of different (and often unconnected) ways in the biographical literature, but that the criteria for a school consists of the recognition of a chief scholar, the production of commentaries on standard legal works and the regular transmission of legal knowledge (delineated through an *ijāza* system), to which I might add the establishment of a relatively stable set of distinctive school doctrines. When these are present, a *madhhab* can be said to have come into existence. These criteria are used in this chapter in an oblique manner in order to propose a date of inception for the Akhbārī school. Stewart (*Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, pp. 175–208), however, has argued that the late classical Akhbāriyya cannot be considered a *madhhab* because they rejected the notion of consensus (and the discipline of *usūl al-fiqh* more generally). I have argued that the term *madhhab* was not only used within the Shi‘i tradition to refer to the Akhbāriyya, but also that the term “school” can be legitimately ascribed to them on the basis of Melchert’s criteria (see Gleave “Intra-madhhab ikhtilāf”). The biographical and *ijāza* evidence examined in this chapter enables us to date the formation of an Akhbārī school/madhhab according to these criteria.

2 See above, p. 47.

3 Of course, the identification of a scholar as an Akhbārī served, at times, a polemic purpose (to praise or denounce a scholar depending on the biographer’s perspective). Whether or not a scholar is best described as an Akhbārī is, in the absence of personal...
The manner in which Astarābādī’s ideas were developed, adapted and criticised by subsequent Akhbāris are described in the following chapters. Here I am concerned with establishing an (approximate) historical account of how Akhbāri ideas took root, beginning with Astarābādī’s teaching in Mecca and then spreading to most of the Twelver Shi‘ī world.

The most appropriate place to initiate an account of the spread of Astarābādī’s ideas is with scholars who are recorded as having studied under him. The terms used for these scholarly relationships are numerous, and are recorded in biographical works (tabaqāt/tarājim) and “licences to teach” (ijāzāt, sometimes as separate documents, often as passages recorded on manuscript copies). As I have outlined elsewhere, these lines of transmission (asānīd), which still today form an important part of an individual Shi‘ī scholar’s pedigree, serve to link the individual scholar/pupil to past scholarly tradition, through the teacher (whose own authority is, in turn, validated by his own lines of transmission).4 The multiple and multifarious Shi‘ī isnād chains found in ijāza documents generally present a unified and coherent tradition. The ijāza recipient (mujāz) is initiated through the granting of the ijāza by his teacher (mujīz). There was an irenic character to the ijāza isnāds, and debates which had often led to mutual deprecation and declaration of unbelief in the past were submerged by the overall objective of establishing the scholarly class (‘ulamā) as the preservers of the true message of the Shi‘ī Imams. The ‘ulamā’, through the ijāza system, demonstrate that it is they who hold primacy in the interpretation of religion and in the regulation of community life more generally. Sometimes the links may be tendentious, and relationships of both great intimacy and passing acquaintance are subsumed under an ijāza or in an isnād by the formula “so-and-so relates (yarwī) from his teacher, so-and-so”. Astarābādī features extensively in late Shi‘ī ijāzāt as a link in these isnāds. Other scholarly relationships are contained within entries in tabaqāt works which detail the achievements of Astarābādī and his pupils. It is these relationships which form the principal recorded avenues for the dissemination of

identification, admittedly problematic. In this chapter I take later identifications generally as sound. In subsequent chapters, I explore whether or not such identifications are justified. On the relatively late identification of some scholars as Akhbāris, see Newman, “Anti-Akhbāri Sentiments”, pp. 156–158.