
One may argue that the major ideological divide at present in the field of Islamic studies is not between Orientalists and their opponents, but rather between skeptics and theirs. Skeptics such as Wansbrough, Calder, and others radically mistrust what the Islamic tradition has to say about itself, particularly its historical claims, deny the early dating of material, doubt the attribution of early texts, and hold that it is impossible to retrieve something approaching historical truth regarding the early centuries of Islamic history from the sources available. The skeptics have in some cases entered into an unholy alliance of sorts with Muslim apologists, who claim that knowledge in the early centuries of Islam was transmitted mostly orally and aurally, rather than through the medium of texts. Fuat Sezgin presented a strong if not decisive critique of the skeptical view in his work on the sources of al-Bukhārī’s Ṣaḥīḥ, Buhārī’ın Kaynaklari (Ankara, 1956), in which he demonstrated that al-Bukhārī did not work primarily from oral traditions that he had collected during years of travels throughout the Near East, but rather relied on many written sources, chief among them the Muwatṭa’ of Mālik b. Anas, which he cut up and pasted into his own work. Modarressi’s work presents a similar collection of material for the Shi‘ites, though he does not mention Sezgin’s study, and the material he presents supports the conclusion that many of the “oral” sources used to compile later Shi‘ite hadith collections and other works were actually written sources recorded already in the 2nd/8th century.

The work under review is the first of a two-volume survey covering the period up to 329/941; this first volume covers up to 198/813. The emphasis is on the Imāmī or Twelver tradition, but Zaydī and Ismā‘īlī works are addressed, as well as authors who belonged to splinter groups such as the Kaysāniyah, Faḍḥiyah, and Wāqifah. It is divided into three chronological sections of unequal length. The first, presenting notices on ʿAlī and his personal associates, has six entries; the second, on Kufan Shi‘ism in the Umayyad period, has thirteen entries, and the third, on the period of persecution (136/753-198/813) has 234 entries. The second volume will cover the period 199-329 AH and include a general essay on Shi‘ite literature over the entire period. Tradition and Survival promises to be a major new resource for the study of Shi‘ite works from the earliest sources until the end of the Minor Occultation in 329/941. It goes beyond the methods of Brockelmann and Sezgin, listing not only works that are extant in manuscript or have been published but also works that are known through quotations in later texts. As in Brockelmann’s and Sezgin’s works, each entry gives brief biographical information about the author, followed by a list of his works. Then, under each title, Modarressi provides a list of passages from the work in question which are quoted in later texts. Considering that the account of Shi‘ite works in Sezgin’s Geschichte der arabischen Schrifttums ends with the year 436/1044 and is only
twenty-nine pages, this work represents a great leap forward for the field of Shi’ite studies and is the most important reference work since the publication of Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī’s *al-Dharīʿah ilā taṣānīf al-shīʿah*. Modarressi also provides valuable discussions of false and dubious attributions of works, and he identifies and dates later interpolations. His work paves the way for further study of the history of Shi’ism, as well as of Islamic religious and intellectual history in general in the period before 329/941, and it constitutes a fundamental step toward the reconstruction of many early Shi’ite works.

*Tradition and Survival* delivers a major blow to the skeptics. The Twelver Shi’ites have often defended the authenticity of their canonical ḥadīth collections (al-Kulaynī’s [d. 329/941] *al-Kāfī*, Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī’s [d. 381/991] *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, and al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī’s [d. 460/1067] *Taḥdīb al-abkām* and *al-İstibṣār*). They argue both against Sunnī opponents who noted the embarrassingly late date of these collections, and against those Shi’ites who impugned the reliability of many of the ḥadīths contained in them, that the application of ḥadīth criticism makes it clear that the ḥadīths in these collections were actually set down in 400 notebooks (*uṣūl*) recorded by the disciples of the Imams and preserved in the community. This claim, which one might dismiss as an anachronistic back-projection typical of sacred histories, seems increasingly likely to be true. Sixteen of these *aṣl*-works have been published in Iran, and while they may not have numbered exactly 400, it seems that many such works did indeed exist, and many may be attributed with some degree of certainty to the Imam’s immediate disciples. A great many of the works listed in this volume are these notebooks of the Imams’ reports, termed *aṣl*, *kitāb*, *nuskhah*, etc. There are also a number of legal works based on traditions—Shi’ite legal compendia arranged according to the well-known legal chapters had already appeared in the 2nd/8th century. In addition, there are treatises on aspects of the Imamate and other theological topics, works of Qur’ānic interpretation, collections of prayers, and the like.

A reconstructive project of this nature certainly faces significant methodological challenges. In many cases, the passages do not identify the works from which they derive, and often do not name an author, but are merely presented with an *isnād*, as if quoted from an oral source. Modarressi has engaged in a great deal of educated guesswork to assign passages to specific works, in many cases matching the ostensible topic of the passage with a title of a work known from later bibliographical sources such as the catalogues of al-Ṭūsī and al-Najashi. In other cases, he has identified the latest common link in parallel *isnāds* and, as Sezgin did with the material from al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, posited that this represented a written source, usually one of the many *uṣūl* or note-books in which early Shi’ites collected ḥadīth reports of the Imams. Neither of these procedures is immune to error, and some of Modarressi’s conclusions may be revised. In the future, computerized disks may also prove to be a valuable tool for locating additional quotations that Modarressi’s survey did not retrieve. In most cases, however, I suspect that Modarressi’s educated guesses will be vindicated. The picture that emerges from the material he has as-