

Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays revisited

For Professor Hawting

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Abstract

Kitāb Sulaym is possibly the earliest Shī'ī work in existence and analysis of its constituent reports could shed light on aspects of early Shī'ī thought and doctrine. This paper examines one of its reports on the subject of *ikhtilāf* in Prophetic *ḥadīth* between the Shī'a and their opponents, and the related subjects of the status of the Companions of the Prophet and the Prophet's transmission of his knowledge to 'Alī. It suggests dates and contexts for the composition of the report and the updating it seems to have undergone. It shows that the report reflects moderate Imāmī attitudes and doctrines similar to those attested for other leading pre-*ghayba* Imāmīs.

Keywords: Shī'ī *Ḥadīth*, Quran, *Tafsīr*, *Ikhtilāf*, Status of the Companions, Knowledge of the imāms, 'Iṣma, Pre-*ghayba* Imāmism

The Shī'ī work known as the *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays* is widely recognized among modern scholars as pseudepigraphic, and the very existence of Sulaym, a disciple of the first imām 'Alī according to Shī'ī tradition, is thought to be doubtful.¹ Nevertheless, the work is possibly the oldest Shī'ī work in existence and has recently been receiving some attention due to its potential to shed light on aspects of early Shī'ī thought and doctrine.

Hossein Modarressi has suggested that the book has an original core that comes from the reign of the Umayyad caliph Hishām ibn 'Abd al-Malik (r.105–125/724–743), mainly on the basis of its repeated references to the twelve unjust rulers who usurped the caliphate after the Prophet. He has characterized the work as anti-Umayyad, pro-Ḥusaynid, Kufan, eschatological in its language, primitive in its beliefs and given to exaggerations of the usual Kaysānī kind. Modarressi believes that an original core is identifiable since later accretions “seem always to have been in the form of insertions and additions rather than replacements and alterations”, the later accretions being mostly anachronistic and/or contrary to other statements and views expressed elsewhere in the work.²

Patricia Crone has examined Sulaym's account of Mu'āwiya's letter to his governor of Iraq Ziyād ibn Abīh that shows the caliph as following a discriminatory policy against non-Arabs. Her analysis shows that the author of the account was probably a Hāshimite Shī'ī, who presented the 'Abbāsīd revolution

- 1 See, for example, Moktar Djebli, “Sulaym b. Qays”, in *Encyclopedia of Islam (EI)*, second ed.
- 2 Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shī'ite Literature* (Oxford, 2003), I, 82–6.

as a fulfilment of 'Alī's hopes with no sign of disappointment that it had led to the accession of an 'Abbāsīd rather than an 'Alid caliph. On that basis, Crone has suggested a date for the report just before the revolt of the 'Alid al-Nafs al-Zakiyya in 145/762, before the anti-'Alid policies of the 'Abbāsīds had split Hāshimite ranks, and in any case not after the 780s when Hāshimite Shī'ism had died out.³

Crone's analysis would suggest that the work is more composite than Modarressi believes, in the sense that whole reports, originating from different periods and representing different Shī'ī currents and developments, are likely to have been incorporated into this work at various stages of its transmission.⁴ In other words, we may have there more substantial additions to an original text than the mere updating of its reports by means of simple and identifiable accretions. One also cannot rule out the possibility that the work in hand came into existence as a result of the compilation of traditions attributed to Sulaym extracted from various works.⁵

Analysis of its individual reports could shed a better light on the history of the text. In what follows I shall revisit a report from Sulaym on the subject of *ikhtilāf* concerning Prophetic *ḥadīth*, between the Shī'a and their opponents, and the transmission of knowledge of the revelation from the Prophet to 'Alī.⁶ The report was included by Kulīnī in his *Kāfī* and has minor variations only from the report as it appears in the Beirut edition of *Kitāb Sulaym*.⁷ I shall suggest

- 3 P. Crone, "Mawālī and the Prophet's family: an early Shī'ite view", in M. Bernards and J. Nawas (eds), *Patronage and Patronage in Early and Classical Islam* (Leiden and Boston, 2005), 167–94.
- 4 This may also be suggested by the fact that the available manuscripts vary in length and the number of traditions they include. For an account of the available manuscripts, the tradition on the transmission of the work and tables of contents following the three-volume edition by M.B. al-Anṣārī (Qumm, 1415/1995), see the article by M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Note bibliographique sur le *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, le plus ancien ouvrage shī'ite existant", in *Le shī'isme imāmīte quarante ans après: Hommage à Etan Kohlberg* (Turnhout, 2009), 33–48.
- 5 As far as I know, the earliest references to Sulaym as the author of a book are in Mas'ūdī (d. 346/957), *K. al-Tanbīh wa'l-Ishrāf* (Beirut, 1388/1968), 198; al-Nu'mānī (d. 360/970), *Kitāb al-ghayba* (Tehran, 1318/1900), 47; Kashshī (d. 368/978), in M. Mostafavi (ed.), *Ikhtiyār ma'rifat al-rijāl* (Mashhad, 1348/1929), 104; Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990) in Riḍā Tajaddud (ed.), *al-Fihrist* (Tehran, 1971), 275.
- 6 I analysed this report in the last chapter of my PhD thesis, "The Imāmī Shī'ī conception of the knowledge of the Imām and the sources of religious doctrine in the formative period: from Hishām b. al-Ḥakam to Kulīnī", London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1996, 182–221 (200–9 for the report from Sulaym), where I tried to show that much of Kulīnī's traditions on Imāmī legal theory and the imām's knowledge preserve earlier conceptions and that some material had undergone updating in order to bring it into line with current Imāmī thought. Here, the analysis will be expanded: it will cover the report's attitude to the Companions of the Prophet and transmitters of his *ḥadīth*, and suggestions regarding the dates of the report and its constituent parts will be made.
- 7 *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays al-Kūfī*, ed. al-'Alawī al-Ḥasanī al-Najafī (Beirut, 1414/1994), 94–6. This edition, like the first edition published in Najaf in 1361/1942, is based on a manuscript that once belonged to al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī (d. 1104/1693). See also Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulīnī, in Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (ed.), *al-Kāfī* (Beirut, 1401/1980), fourth ed., 8 vols, I, 62–4.

a context and date for the composition of the report in its original form (or in something approaching its original form), and another context (or other contexts) and date(s) for the updating it seems to have undergone.

The report is related by Abān⁸ from Sulaym:

A.

I said: O Commander of the Faithful. I had heard from Salmān [al-Fārisī], al-Miqdād and Abī Dharr something of the interpretation (*tafsīr*) of the Quran and narrations (*riwāya*) about the Prophet, then I heard from you confirmation of what I had heard from them. And I came across many things in the hands of the people (*al-nās*, namely non-Shī'īs or *'āmmīs*) concerning the interpretation of the Quran and *ḥadīths* about the Prophet which are contrary to what I had heard from you, and you claim that this (non-Shī'ī *ḥadīth*) is false. So do you think that they (the people) deliberately ascribe falsehoods to the Prophet and interpret the Quran according to their own opinions?

'Alī replies:

B.

O Sulaym . . . In the hands of the people there is truth and falsehood, veracity and lying, abrogating and abrogated, general and particular, unambiguous and ambiguous, and [strict] preservation/memorization (*ḥifẓ*) and misinterpretation (*wahm*). . . .

'Alī goes on to justify his refutation of the traditions of non-Shī'īs and his authentication of the traditions of Shī'īs. He says that *ḥadīth* from the Prophet was transmitted by four kinds of persons only:

C.

- A hypocrite (*munāfiq*) who would display faith outwardly and affect Islam, who would not find it sinful or objectionable to lie deliberately about the Prophet. So if Muslims had known that he was a lying hypocrite, they would not have accepted (*ḥadīth*) from him or believed him. But they would say that the man was a companion of the Messenger of God who had seen him and heard from him and so he would not lie or find it licit to lie about the Messenger of God
- And a man who would hear (*ḥadīth*) from the Messenger of God but would not memorize it as it was and would misinterpret it, not intending to lie. He would transmit it and act in accordance with it, saying: I have heard it from the Messenger of God. So if Muslims had known it was a misinterpretation they would not have accepted it, and had he known it was a misinterpretation, he would have rejected it.
- A third man would hear from the Messenger of God something he had commanded and then prohibited, but he would not know (that the Messenger had prohibited it), or he would hear him prohibit something and later command it

8 He is Abān ibn Abī 'Ayyāsh (d. c.138/755), said to have been a disciple of three of the imāms: 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn, M. al-Bāqir and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. On his role as the transmitter to whom Sulaym is said to have entrusted his whole work, see *Kitāb Sulaym*, 58–60. See also, al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 104; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 275; Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 85f.

and he would not know (that the Messenger had commanded it). He would remember the abrogated and would not remember the abrogating, and had he known it was abrogated he would have rejected it, and had the Muslims known it was abrogated they would have rejected it.

- A fourth man would not lie about God or the Messenger of God, hateful of lying, fearful of God and exalting His Messenger, and he would not misinterpret but would memorize what he had heard as it was, and so he would transmit it as he had heard it and without adding to it or deleting from it, and he would memorize the abrogating and the abrogated and act upon the abrogating and reject the abrogated.

This is followed by a passage which describes the hermeneutic categories of (non-exegetical) *ḥadīth*:

D.

For the commanding (*amr*) of the Prophet and his prohibiting (*nahy*) are like the Quran, abrogating and abrogated, general and particular, and unambiguous and ambiguous. The speech (*kalām*) of the Prophet could have had two aspects, general speech and particular speech, like the Quran, heard by those who did not know what God had meant or what His Apostle had meant. And not all the Companions of the Prophet who used to ask him would understand [his replies]

....

The report goes on to describe the circumstances in which ‘Alī is said to have acquired his perfect knowledge of the revelation to the Prophet. The relevant section is divided here into numbered paragraphs for ease of reference:

E.

1. ... for there did not come down upon him any verse of the Quran except that he instructed me in its reciting (*aqra’ anīhā*) and dictated it to me (*amlāhā ‘alayya*), so I wrote it down in my handwriting.
2. And he prayed to God that He may make me understand it and memorize it. So I did not forget any verse from the Book of God ever since I memorized it.
3. And he taught me its *ta’wīl*, so I memorized it, and he dictated it to me, so I wrote it down.
4. He did not leave anything that God had taught him of the permitted and the prohibited, of command and prohibition, or of obedience and disobedience, that has been or will be until the Day of Judgement, except that he taught it to me, so I memorized it and did not forget a single letter of it.
5. He then put his hand on my chest and prayed to God to fill my heart with knowledge (*‘ilm*) and understanding (*fahm*), with comprehension (*fiqh*) and judgement (*ḥukm*) and light (*nūr*), and to teach me so that I would not be ignorant and make me memorize so that I would not forget.
6. So I said to him one day: O Prophet of God, since the day you prayed to God for me what you prayed, I have not forgotten anything of what you had taught me, so why do you dictate it to me and order me to write it down? Do you fear for me forgetfulness? He said: O my brother, I do not fear for you forgetfulness or ignorance ...
7. for God has informed me that He has answered (my prayer) concerning you and your partners (the imāms) who will come after you.

The report has two main parts, A–D and E, which may well have originated as two separate reports. Since they deal with aspects of the same question, namely the superiority of Imāmī knowledge/*ḥadīth*, combining them into one would have been a straightforward matter for a redactor.

Ikhtilāf* and the status of Imāmī *ḥadīth

The first point to observe is that while the report is concerned with *ikhtilāf* in *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* that existed between the Shīʿa and the rest of the community (the people, *al-nās*), and while it assumes the existence of divergent *ḥadīths* among the latter group (this being due to the misunderstanding, lying and/or ignorance of its transmitters), there is no reference to or awareness of the problem of divergent *ḥadīth* (whether Prophetic or imāmī) within Imāmism, that later generations of Imāmī scholars, such as Kulīnī, had to deal with.⁹ In this respect, the report is pre-classical, possibly originating as early as the late second/eighth century when the Imāmī imāmate began to be promoted as the answer to *ikhtilāf*, as is attested for Hishām b. al-Ḥakam.¹⁰

Sections A to D are about the superior status of Shīʿī *ḥadīth* from the Prophet and the probity of its early transmitters Salmān, Abū Dharr and al-Miqdād. According to the Shīʿī tradition, these Companions of the Prophet (together with ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir) were the earliest supporters of ʿAlī and among the very few men who paid allegiance to him at the time of Abū Bakr’s accession to the caliphate.¹¹ In other words, they were the earliest true Shīʿīs.

ʿAlī classifies the non-Shīʿī transmitters into three types and describes the reasons for their defective knowledge: they were either hypocrites who did not refrain from ascribing false *ḥadīths* deliberately to the Prophet, or people who had actually heard from the Prophet but misinterpreted what they had heard and related these misinterpretations inadvertently. Other non-Shīʿī transmitters who related from the Prophet are said by ʿAlī to have been unaware of superseding prescriptions (or not to have known that what they had heard from him had been superseded by other prescriptions). The defective knowledge of the three categories of ʿammī transmitters is then contrasted with the sound knowledge of truthful and competent (Shīʿī) transmitters, who were averse to lying about God and the Prophet, who did not forget or misinterpret *ḥadīths* they had heard from the Prophet but memorized them well and transmitted them without adding to them or omitting from them, and who transmitted the abrogating (*ḥadīths*) and discarded the abrogated (section C).

The three figures mentioned in this report are also highly regarded in the mainstream tradition as Companions of the Prophet, who played important roles in early Islam. Abū Dharr and al-Miqdād appear in Sunnī biographical sources as reliable transmitters of Prophetic *ḥadīth*. Salmān is depicted as the first Persian convert to Islam and the Prophet is said to have declared him a member of the *ahl al-bayt* and predicted to him that his people will become

9 On Kulīnī and the problem of *ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth*, see my “Imāmī Shīʿī conception”, 200–9.

10 Kulīnī, *al-Kāfī*, I, 173.

11 Al-Ḥasan ibn Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, in Hellmut Ritter (ed.), *Firaq al-Shīʿa* (Istanbul, 1931), 16; *Kitāb Sulaym*, 72f.

part of the Muslim nation.¹² Thus, in polemical exchanges about the imāmate and possession of authoritative knowledge the testimony of such figures would have been important to support the Imāmī position and to counter the objections of opponents. Sulaym says that he had heard things from ‘Alī similar to and confirming the statements and transmissions of the three Companions (section A).¹³ In fact, the notion of mutually corroborative statements by ‘Alī and those Companions is a common occurrence in *Kitāb Sulaym*.¹⁴

The role of Sulaym himself is to provide a direct link to that era and its figures and written testimony and, thereby, to enhance the Imāmī version of events. A direct link and documentary evidence would have been particularly important in circumstances where claims about the Imāmī imāmate and the knowledge of the imāms were being questioned by outsiders on the grounds that ‘Alī was not known in the tradition to have received comprehensive knowledge from the Prophet or to have been favoured over the other Companions with particular knowledge. We shall return later to the question of when those claims are likely to have begun to be made.

The status of the Companions

In addition to the question of *ikhtilāf* and authenticity of Prophetic *ḥadīth*, our report seems to reflect a concern to deny the charge that Imāmism advocated *takfīr al-ṣaḥāba* or accusing the Companions of the Prophet of *kufīr* or unbelief. Imāmīs were often accused of claiming that all the *ṣaḥāba* – except for a few who were loyal to ‘Alī, and not only the first three caliphs who usurped ‘Alī’s position – had gone astray and were guilty of grave sin (*fiṣq*) or unbelief (*kufīr*).¹⁵ In fact, and as observed by Kohlberg, Sunnī and Mu‘tazilī sources tended to present the negative attitude to the *ṣaḥāba* as one of the hallmarks of the Imāmiyya.¹⁶ Zaydī Shī‘īs, on the other hand, are presented as having

12 *EP*², s.vv. “Abū Dharr”, “Salmān al-Fārisī”, “al-Miḥdād b. ‘Amr”.

13 I see this as the main role of the three Companions in this report. In his excellent article on the report’s conception of the hermeneutics of Prophetic *ḥadīth*, also in this volume, Robert Gleave sees in it evidence for pre-*ghayba* attempts to establish scholarly authority as an alternative to that of the imāms. His main argument is that (the first part of) the report does not contain a straightforward statement to the effect that only those *ḥadīths* transmitted through ‘Alī were valid. However, for Sulaym the *ḥadīths* of the three Companions (and presumably of any other transmitters) require confirmation by *ḥadīths* from ‘Alī to acquire validity; see the next note. Moreover, the second part of the report (which Gleave does not tackle) is unambiguous in that the ability to transmit perfectly is exclusively held by ‘Alī and the imāms due to their comprehensive knowledge being derived from personal instruction by the Prophet and to being granted immunity against forgetfulness, distortion of meaning, etc.

14 For example, 58ff. (on the status of the *ahl al-bayt* and their Shī‘a), 61 (on the doctrine of *raǰ‘a*), 84f. (on the Prophet describing ‘Alī as the most excellent of men), 164 (on the Prophet honouring ‘Alī and defending him against ‘Ā’isha’s criticism).

15 Abū’l-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāt, in H. Nyberg (ed.), *Kitāb al-intiṣār wa’l-radd ‘alā Ibn al-Rāwandī al-mulḥid* (Baghdad, 2010), 68, 104; Abū’l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, in Hellmut Ritter (ed.), *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, second ed. (Wiesbaden, 1963), 16, 57; see also note 22 below.

16 Etan Kohlberg, “Some Imāmī Shī‘ī views on the *ṣaḥāba*”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 5, 1984, 143–75, esp. 144.

held more moderate views. According to one of the arguments of the Zaydī Batriyya, the Companions did in fact recognize ‘Alī’s superiority, but since his designation by the Prophet was implicit only (*naṣṣ khafī*), they had to rely on individual reasoning (*ijtihād*), an admissible method in the choice of the Prophet’s successors, and (for various reasons) chose Abū Bakr instead and later ‘Umar. As such, the Companions were not guilty of any sin.¹⁷ We shall see, however, that especially in the early stages of development of the Imāmiyya, its attitude to the Companions did not conform to its picture in Sunnī and Mu‘tazilī sources and was in fact relatively moderate and similar to the attitude reflected in our report.

A related issue was the authority of the Companions as transmitters of *ḥadīth* from the Prophet. In Zaydī Shī‘ism there were two main positions on this issue: the early Jārūdī position which regarded the imāms and all the other descendants of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (the *ahl al-bayt*) as the only reliable authorities, and rejected the authority of the Companions; and the position of the Batriyya who regarded knowledge of the Prophetic tradition as dispersed among the *ahl al-bayt* and the rest of the people, thus recognizing transmission from the Companions as equally valid.¹⁸

In Imāmī Shī‘ism, authority was deemed to be concentrated in the persons of the infallible imāms who possessed the only true version of the Prophetic tradition. The rest of the community derived their knowledge from unreliable and fallible sources, with the result that their *ḥadīth* often diverged from that of the imāms and their followers. As our report suggests, the question arose as to whether it is possible that *all* the Companions were in error and responsible for this divergence and, if so, what made them transmit false reports from the Prophet. The question is put to ‘Alī as to whether all the Companions (with the exception of the three named in the report) deliberately spread lies about the Prophet (section A). In reply ‘Alī says that only some of the Companions were guilty of deliberate lying in the transmission of Prophetic *ḥadīth*, and he brands them as hypocrites (*munāfiq*) who exhibited belief outwardly. We note that ‘Alī does not resort to the charge of *kufir* or unbelief against those who “lie deliberately about the Prophet” and instead accuses them of the lesser charge of hypocrisy (*nifāq*).¹⁹ He also exonerates the rest who narrated false *ḥadīth* from the Prophet on the grounds that they did so inadvertently as a result of their failure to understand or to remember accurately what they had heard from him (sections B–D).

Thus, it would seem that one purpose of the report is to rebut the charge of *takfir al-ṣaḥāba*. This it does by suggesting that while the Imāmiyya recognizes the Prophetic tradition only as transmitted on the authority of ‘Alī and the other infallible imāms, and does not recognize the Companions as having been qualified to preserve and pass on the Prophet’s legacy, it does not follow that it regards all the Companions (and the non-Shī‘ī Muslims who transmitted from

17 Etan Kohlberg, “Some Zaydī views on the companions of the Prophet”, *BSOAS*, 39, 1976, 91–8, esp. 92.

18 Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī‘a*, 48–50.

19 On the believing sinner as a *munāfiq* who occupies a middle position between a believer and an unbeliever, see J. van Ess, “*al-Manzila bayn al-manzilatayn*”, in *EF*².

them²⁰) as guilty of sin. Only those who knowingly transmitted false *ḥadīth* are classed as sinners, but they are deemed hypocrites not unbelievers.

There is reason to believe that a lenient attitude towards the Companions, such as the one reflected in our report, was not unique in early Imāmism and that it may well have been advocated by Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795), despite the claims of opponents to the contrary. The Mu‘tazilī author al-Khayyāt (writing after 269/882)²¹ accuses Hishām, whom he calls *shaykh al-rāfiḍa*, of annulling Muḥammad’s message by claiming that the whole community apostatized after his death, changed his decisions and removed his successor from his rightful position.²² Al-Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024) accuses Hishām of advocating dissociation (*barā’a*) from the first three caliphs and the other Companions, and of having admitted that he was the first to have introduced the idea that the three caliphs had usurped ‘Alī’s rightful position.²³

We happen to have first-hand evidence of Hishām’s attitude to the Companions from his work on the early Muslim sects, evidence which would contradict claims such as those made by, among others, the above-mentioned Mu‘tazilī scholars. As is typical of much of his work, Hishām tends to ascribe Shī‘ī doctrines that he disapproves of to other non-Imāmī sects and groups, often to ones that had ceased to exist or to have had any adherents in his time.²⁴ On the matter of the Shī‘ī attitude to the *ṣaḥāba*, he dissociates the Imāmiyya from *taḳfīr* by ascribing it to other sects. Thus, ‘Abdallāh ibn Saba’, the alleged founder of the Saba’iyya, is said to have slandered (*ta‘n*) the first three caliphs and the *ṣaḥāba* and dissociated (*barā’a*) from them.²⁵ The Zaydī Jārūdiyya are said to have ascribed unbelief (*kufr*) to those (caliphs) who usurped ‘Alī’s position and to the (whole early) community who abandoned paying allegiance to him.²⁶ Similarly, Kaysān, the alleged founder of the Kaysāniyya, whom our author describes as having been excessive in his beliefs, is said to have charged with *kufr* those who preceded ‘Alī (that is, the first three caliphs) and ‘Alī’s opponents at the battles of Ṣiffīn and the Camel.²⁷ In his description of his own sect, the Imāmiyya, on the other hand, Hishām says they believed that paying

20 Exonerating non-Shī‘ī Muslims who transmitted false or erroneous *ḥadīth* from the Companions on the grounds of not knowing that it was fabricated, a misinterpretation, or abrogated appears in connection with three of the four categories of transmitters described in section C and is expressed by statements such as “if Muslims had known it was a misinterpretation they would not have accepted it”.

21 W. Madelung, “Imāmism and Mu‘tazilite theology” in T. Fahd (ed.), *Le Shī‘isme imāmīte* (Paris, 1979), 14, n. 2.

22 Khayyāt, *al-Intisār*, 104.

23 ‘Abd al-Jabbār, in ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān (ed.), *Tathbūt dalā’ al-nubuwwa* (Beirut, 1966), I, 223–5, II, 447–8.

24 On the work of Hishām as the basis of the first part of Nawbakhtī’s work, see Wilferd Madelung, “Bemerkungen zur imamitischen Firaq-Literatur”, *Der Islam*, 43, 1967, 37–52; English translation: “Some remarks on the Imāmī *firaq* literature”, in E. Kohlberg (ed.), *Shī‘ism* (Aldershot, 2003), 153–67. See also the author’s “Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795) and his doctrine of the imām’s knowledge”, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 48/1, 2003, 71–108.

25 Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī‘a*, 19.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 21.

allegiance to ‘Alī and obedience to him were religious duties imposed by the Prophet himself; but he nowhere associates them with *takfīr al-ṣaḥāba* or any other related doctrine.²⁸

The Mu‘tazilī author, pseudo-Nāshī’, who appears to have had access to Hishām’s work and used some of his material in the composition of his own work on *firaq*, portrays the dispute over the status of ‘Alī’s opponents and whether they were guilty of *kufīr* or of some other error as having arisen among the sects of the Zaydiyya.²⁹ He too is not aware of a position (or positions) taken on this subject among the Imāmiyya.³⁰

It is not hard to see that the Imāmī doctrine of the imāmate, with its concepts of a clear designation (*naṣṣ*) of ‘Alī by the Prophet and of right guidance and knowledge of the Prophet’s legacy being concentrated in and restricted to a succession of imāms, would have given rise to accusations against Imāmism of *takfīr al-ṣaḥāba*. For if a “clear designation” was true and the mainstream tradition was not aware of it or denied it, this could imply that the Companions had conspired to conceal and/or misinterpret the Prophet’s wishes and, as such, were guilty of error or sin. But as evidence of our report and of Hishām’s views indicate, such a position was not necessarily or always held in Imāmism and was at times strongly denied.

Although *rafḍ*, which entailed rejection of the first caliphs as usurpers (and possibly as unbelievers), may have already arisen by the end of the Umayyad period,³¹ the rejection of all the Companions as transmitters of Prophetic *ḥadīth* and the notion of their *takfīr* would not have become issues between the Shī‘a and their opponents before the crystallization of the Imāmī and Zaydī doctrines of the imāmate and the claim that the imāms had exclusive knowledge of Prophetic *ḥadīth* (in the case of Imāmism), or that this knowledge was the preserve of all the descendants of ‘Alī and Fāṭima (in the case of Jārūdī Zaydism). The indications are that this crystallization did not take place until the latter part of the second/eighth century.³²

28 Ibid., 16. Later on in that passage (17, lines 8–9) the Imāmiyya are said to charge with *kufīr* (unbelief), *ḍalāl* (misguidance) and *shirk* (polytheism) all those who oppose ‘Alī’s successors and take other imāms. I would suggest that this is probably a later interpolation (possibly by Nawbakhtī himself) as it does not fit in with the view, which we find in other sections, of how and by whom the Shī‘ī *takfīr* of opponents came about. It does not make sense that in presenting the Imāmī position Hishām would be reluctant to charge with *kufīr* those who refused to recognize ‘Alī and would ascribe *takfīr* to other non-Imāmī followers of ‘Alī, but then go on to charge with *kufīr* the opponents of all the other Imāmī imāms. On other evidence of Nawbakhtī’s updating of Hishām, see Bayhom-Daou, “Hishām b. al-Ḥakam”.

29 Pseudo-Nāshī’, “Uṣūl al-niḥal” in Josef van Ess (ed.), *Frühe mu‘tazilitische Häresiographie. Zwei Werke des Nāshī’ al-akbar* (Beirut, 1971), 42–4.

30 Ibid., 22, 24, 25.

31 Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh, 2004), 73–5.

32 On the Zaydiyya, see Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert der Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols (Berlin and New York, 1991–5), I, 239–72. Although specific ideas about the knowledge of Āl Muḥammad are sometimes attributed to Abū l-Jārūd (d.c.150/767), the eponymous founder of the Jārūdī Zaydiyya, it is more likely that those ideas were formulated by his Jārūdī successors and against the Imāmī thesis that the Prophet’s knowledge was handed down within a hereditary line of imāms; see W. Madelung, “Abu’l-Jārūd

Thus, on the basis that the report is rebutting a charge against the Imāmiyya, which is not likely to have arisen before the formulation of the doctrine of the imām's knowledge in the late second/eighth century, we may date the report at the earliest to that same time.

Prophetic *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth*

Sulaym asks 'Alī about the divergence that existed between the Shī'a and their opponents in Prophetic *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* (or *riwāya*), and whether "the people" lie deliberately about the Prophet and interpret the Quran according to their *ra'y*. From 'Alī's reply as it stands, it may appear as though the validity of the Sunna (or non-exegetical Prophetic *ḥadīth*) is taken for granted. 'Alī begins his reply by mentioning three pairs of hermeneutic concepts. These are attested in third/ninth-century writings on *uṣūl al-fiqh*,³³ and late third/ninth century Imāmī *tafsīr* works are familiar with them.³⁴ According to 'Alī's reply, these concepts were confusing to the vast majority of transmitters from the Prophet. 'Alī does not repeat the questioner's collocation of *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth*. However, in section D he goes on to explain that the Sunna of the Prophet (referred to here as his commands and prohibitions (*amruhu wa-nahyuhu*) and his speech (*kalāmuhu*)), is like the Quran, subject to the same principles of exegesis and not well understood by most of the Companions who used to hear him speak. In other words, the reasons for error and divergence in the transmission of Prophetic Sunna do not differ from those in the transmission of Prophetic *tafsīr*. But since both Sunna and *tafsīr* were transmitted in the form of *ḥadīth* and the point at issue was *ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth*, that explanation would appear to be entirely fortuitous.

There is reason to believe a redactor had found that the report was about exegetical *ḥadīth* from the Prophet and did not cover (or recognize) extra-Quranic

Hamdānī" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*; ps.-Nāshī', "Uṣūl al-niḥāl", 43; cf. Nawbakhtī (from Hishām), *Firaq al-Shī'a*, 48–50, where those ideas are attributed to the Sarḥūbiyya (namely Jārūdiyya) and not to a particular figure among them.

For a perceptive interpretation and the argument that the formation of Imāmism did not take place until the time of Mūsā al-Kāzīm (d. 183/799), see Crone, *Political Thought*, 110–18. Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam was active during al-Kāzīm's time and, as evidence suggests, he was responsible for formulating much of the early Imāmī doctrine of the imāmate: Bayhom-Daou, "Hishām b. al-Ḥakam".

33 It used to be widely accepted that these hermeneutic categories were known since the time of Shāfi'ī. However, Norman Calder has argued in favour of redating Shāfi'ī's work to c. 300 A.H. on the basis that later Sunnī discussions of *uṣūl* were not familiar with much of Shāfi'ī's arguments, including his *'amm/khāṣṣ* principle; see his *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1993). The debate is ongoing with Melchert in favour of redating, and Lowry in favour of the traditional dating of Shāfi'ī's work; Ch. Melchert, "Qur'ānic abrogation across the ninth century: Shāfi'ī, Abū 'Ubayd, Muḥāsibī and Ibn Qutaybah", in Bernard G. Weiss (ed.), *Studies in Islamic Legal Theory* (Leiden, 2002), 75–98; Joseph Lowry, "The legal hermeneutics of al-Shāfi'ī and Ibn Qutayba: a reconsideration", *Islamic Law and Society*, 11/1, 2004, 1–41.

34 For example, "Ayyāshī Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Sulamī al-Samarqandī", in Ḥashim al-Rasūlī al-Maḥallāfī (ed.), *Tafsīr* (Beirut, 1411/1991), reprint of Qumm 1380 A.H. I, 22–3.

Sunna or non-exegetical *ḥadīth* and, hence, saw it fit to add that paragraph (section D). That paragraph and the references to *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* in collocation serve to emphasize the point that ‘Alī (and the imāms after him) had perfect knowledge of extra-Quranic Sunna and not just of Prophetic *tafsīr*. The aim would have been to update the report so as to take account of development in Imāmī legal theory from a pre-classical position which held that the imāms’ teachings were based solely on the Quran and its transmitted interpretation. As I have tried to show elsewhere, the development is attested and found clear expression in the work of Kulīnī and may be related to the elaboration of Imāmī law and theology at the hands of the scholars in the period after the disappearance of the twelfth imām, and along lines similar to the compilation of Sunnī *muṣannaḥ* works. The development may also be related to the effective recognition of the official Quran and the abandonment of the notion that the ‘Alid codex contained additional revelations. The changing position on the Quran would have meant that Imāmīs could no longer maintain that the teachings of the imāms that had no basis in the Quran as we know it were based on additional revelations to the Prophet, known only to them. The solution lay in recognizing the validity of Prophetic Sunna as a revealed extra-Quranic source and the claim that (like Prophetic *tafsīr*) it was represented by *ḥadīths* of the imāms.³⁵

On the basis of the foregoing, it may be said that the parts of our report which serve to underline the validity of non-exegetical *ḥadīth/sunna* are secondary and date from after the *ghayba*. The fact that the redactor of the report seems to eschew the term *sunna*, and instead refers to it as the *amr* and *nahy* of the Prophet and his *kalām*, may be an indication that he was working before the adoption of the term and concept of Sunna in its classical sense, such as in Kulīnī’s *Kāfi*, and not long after the *ghayba* in 260/874, when the early Imāmī conception of the Prophet’s *sunna* as totally embodied in his interpretation of the Quran would not yet have been discarded or forgotten.³⁶

The source and nature of the imām’s knowledge

Examination of section E shows that another main aim of the report is to explain the Imāmī position on the question of the imāms’ knowledge and in what sense and why it was superior to the knowledge in the hands of the rest of the community.

The report tells us that ‘Alī was the recipient of special and comprehensive knowledge transmitted to him directly from the Prophet, and he was granted divine protection from error. As such he was the only Companion who was authorized to transmit his legacy. It is not only that the Shī‘ī transmitters (Salmān, al-Miqdād and Abū Dharr) were more competent and truthful in the transmission of Prophetic *ḥadīth* than non-Shī‘īs. ‘Alī was given access to a perfect and complete version of the revelation. The report relates how the Prophet would convey

35 Daou, “Imāmī Shī‘ī conception”, 182–221. See also Bayhom-Daou, “The imam’s knowledge and the Quran according to al-Faḍl ibn Shādhān al-Nīsābūrī (d. 260 A.H./874 A.D.)”, *BSOAS*, 64/2, 2001, 188–207.

36 Bayhom-Daou, “al-Faḍl b. Shādhān”, 194f.

to ‘Alī his teachings in their own homes, in total privacy or (if in ‘Alī’s home) in the presence of Fāṭima and their children.

What did these teachings consist of? This section (E) shows more clearly than the previous sections (A–D) that in an earlier version the knowledge passed on to ‘Alī was thought to consist of the Quran and its interpretation. Even paragraph 4, with its references to “all the knowledge that God had revealed to the Prophet” and a complete law including “all legal problems that had arisen or may still arise before the Day of Resurrection”, may be taken as a reference to the Quran and its interpretation. These same phrases are used in early Imāmī sources to describe the perfection and completion of the Quran as a source and were part of the early Imāmī self-definition.³⁷

The mode of transmission and *‘iṣma*

We have in this report an allusion to the ‘Alid codex which, according to some Imāmī traditions, was much longer than the ‘Uthmānic version.³⁸ Its completeness and perfection are underlined by the claim that it was composed by the Prophet, dictating all of its verses to ‘Alī as and when they were revealed to him.

‘Alī was also taught the correct way of reading/reciting every verse (para. 1). Similarly, the *ta’wīl* of every verse: the Prophet would teach it to ‘Alī and dictate it to him and ‘Alī would also memorize it (para. 3). That ‘Alī was able to memorize and remember everything he had been taught was due to the Prophet praying to God to grant him (and the imāms after him) immunity from forgetfulness (paras 2, 5, 6, 7). Although the term *‘iṣma* does not occur in this passage, the concept is reflected in the ritual of *du‘ā* by the Prophet on behalf of ‘Alī and his successors.

Although the emphasis would seem to be on both written and oral transmission, the two ideas are in some tension in this report: the need for the imām to be granted God-given immunity from forgetfulness (paras 3, 4, 5) works well with the concept of oral transmission but not with the notion of dictated *‘ilm/tafsīr* (in the case of ‘Alī) or *‘ilm* based on written sources (in the case of his successors; paras 1, 3). The discrepancy seems to have been sensed by a redactor who adds the following explanation in an attempt to resolve it: after the Prophet’s praying that God endow ‘Alī with immunity from forgetfulness ‘Alī would no longer forget anything of what the Prophet had taught him and so he wondered why the Prophet still continues to dictate things to him and to insist that he write everything down. He asks the Prophet if he feared forgetfulness for him and the Prophet says he doesn’t (para. 6), perhaps implying that written transmission was important for another reason. The parallel version in *al-Kāfī* attempts to resolve the discrepancy by recourse to the further idea that after becoming endowed with immunity ‘Alī would write down from memory everything that he had heard from the Prophet on previous occasions. This is not satisfactory either, for why would ‘Alī want or need to write down that knowledge from memory if the Prophet continued to insist on dictating everything to him.³⁹

37 Bayhom-Daou, “al-Faḍl b. Shādhān”, 194–8.

38 Ibid.

39 Kulīnī, *al-Kāfī*, I, 64.

Thus, it would seem that, according to an earlier version of this report, 'Alī's knowledge of the interpretation of the Quran was based on oral transmission from the Prophet, and 'iṣma is conceived merely as a divinely instilled ability to remember that knowledge, preserve it intact and pass it down to the next imām. The work of a redactor is evident in the attempt to introduce the idea of written transmission as the basis of the imām's knowledge of *tafsīr* resulting in some confusion as to the function of the imām's immunity against forgetfulness. It is also likely that a redactor was responsible for the phrases indicating that the function of 'iṣma was not just the preservation (*hiḏz*) of the contents of the revelation but also the perfect understanding (*fahm*) of its true meaning (paras 2, 5). Such a reformulation would have become necessary because the notion of written transmission may have been seen to dispense with the function of *hiḏz*, or the imām's ability to preserve that knowledge in memory and to transmit it orally. The notion of comprehensive knowledge in written form and derived directly from the Prophet could have also undermined the Imāmī argument for the necessity of the imāmate. But with additional functions such as *fahm*, the 'iṣma of the imām would remain an essential element for justifying the Imāmī imāmate and its role in the preservation of the Prophet's legacy.

It must be emphasized, however, that this view of the function of 'iṣma does not entail admission that the imām had an independent interpretative role or was authorized to derive doctrine based on his knowledge of the Prophet's legacy. As we have seen, the purpose of the report is to establish the superiority of the Imāmī tradition by showing that it was based on infallible transmission of the Prophetic revelation which, according to the present form of the report, included the Quran, its interpretation and non-exegetical *ḥadīth*, but according to an earlier version, only the Quran and its interpretation. Unlike the classical Imāmī position, the report does not perceive the attribute of 'iṣma as a corollary to the imām's inspiration but as a guarantee for perfect transmission of a perfect law; the validity of inspiration as an additional source or means of interpreting the Quran is implicitly denied.

This conception of the imām's knowledge and 'iṣma, which according to our analysis was more clearly reflected in the original version of this report, is the same as that attested for Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam and among other leading pre-*ghayba* Imāmīs.⁴⁰ The report in its original form may thus be dated to the latter part of the second century at the earliest.

As for the shift of emphasis from oral to written transmission of *tafsīr*, which is reflected in the discrepancies arising from a redactor's attempts to take account of that change, the most plausible explanation for it is that written transmission became important with the recognition of a particular line of imāms, some of whom were minors when their fathers died. Imāmī sources report an inner Imāmī controversy concerning the possibility of children acceding to the imāmate, how they acquired their knowledge and whether they had written sources at their disposal. The sources date the controversy to the early third century, in the aftermath of the death of the eighth imām 'Alī al-Riḏā (203/818),

40 Bayhom-Daou, "Hishām b. al-Ḥakam"; Bayhom-Daou, "al-Faḏl b. Shādhān"; Daou, "Imāmī Shī'ī conception", ch. 3, for the views of Yūnus ibn 'Abd al-Rahmān (d. 208/823).

whose only surviving son was a minor. As examined evidence indicates, the problem posed to Imāmīs was initially resolved by the idea that the imāms' knowledge of the Prophet's legacy was acquired at maturity from written sources in their possession. Or at least this was the case for the legalists among them. The idea of written sources enabled those Imāmīs to continue to claim transmission as the sole basis of the imāms' knowledge and to refute the possibility of inspiration due to its association with the concept of continuing prophecy and its undermining the perfection of the Islamic revelation.⁴¹

We may thus suggest that the idea of written transmission of *tafsīr* was incorporated into our report sometime between the early third century and the early *ghayba* period and before the idea of divine inspiration gained wide acceptance and became part of the classical Imāmī belief system and legal theory.⁴² It is possible that the same redactor was responsible for the additional passage and phrases which allude to the independent status of Prophetic Sunna and the imāms' knowledge of it, but it is also possible that the additions were made in two stages.

Conclusions

The report analysed here reflects the early stages of development of the Imāmī doctrine of the imāmate and legal theory. It conveys concepts and beliefs similar to those attested for leading pre-*ghayba* Imāmī figures. It also contains evidence of updating and possibly more than one stage in the process of redaction.

The first part of the report contains a veiled attempt to explain that while Imāmīs recognize the Prophetic tradition as transmitted on the authority of 'Alī (and the imāms) only, it does not follow that they advocate *takfīr al-ṣahāba* or the accusation of unbelief to all the other Companions who, in their view, transmitted false or unreliable traditions from the Prophet. A similar concern to rebut the charge is found in the work of Hishām b. al-Ḥakam. The report also implies that *ikhtilāf* in *ḥadīth* exists only between Imāmism and its opponents and among its opponents; unlike later Imāmī works it does not recognize its existence within Imāmism. It is therefore likely to have come from a time when the Imāmī imāmate was still being promoted as the answer to *ikhtilāf*, which is also attested for Hishām. On the basis of these two indications, the report may be dated to the latter part of the second/eighth century at the earliest.

Analysis also shows that the parts of the report which serve to highlight the independent status of Prophetic *sunna*, as a source additional to the Quran and its exegesis, are secondary additions; they reflect development in Imāmī legal theory from a previously held scripturalist position where only the Quran and

41 Daou, "Imāmī Shī'ī conception", ch. 3, 113–36.

42 Acceptance of inspiration would have made the emphasis on transmission appear less important if not altogether redundant, as an imām could then be said to acquire all the knowledge he needs directly from divine sources. Two of the disputing groups in the child-imām controversy are said to have held such a view of the function of inspiration and proposed it as a solution to the problem of child-imāms, whereas others proposed the idea of written transmission; Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī'a*, 74–6.

its exegesis as transmitted by the imāms were regarded as valid sources. I have suggested that the development may be related to two other occurrences in early Imāmism: the elaboration of Imāmī law and theology at the hands of the scholars in the period after the *ghayba*; and the effective recognition of the official Quran and the abandonment of the notion that the ‘Alid codex contained additional revelations. Both of these developments would have made it difficult for Imāmī scholars to continue to uphold the claim that all Imāmī doctrine has a basis in the Quran and its exegesis.

On the subject of the sources and nature of the imām’s knowledge, analysis shows that an earlier version of this report expressed views well attested to in pre-*ghayba* Imāmism: the ‘Alid codex comes into existence by the Prophet dictating every verse to ‘Alī; ‘Alī acquires his perfect knowledge of the interpretation of the Quran by the Prophet instructing him orally on the meaning of every verse as and when it was revealed to him; and ‘Alī is granted immunity from forgetfulness. In other words, the imām’s knowledge of *tafsīr* is based on oral transmission from the Prophet, and he is endowed with an ability to preserve that knowledge perfectly (and to pass it on to his successors); here divine protection (or *iṣma*, although the term is not used in our passage) is not, as it later became, a corollary to divine inspiration – a concept which is also absent from our report.

Finally, the work of a redactor is evident in the attempt to introduce the idea of written transmission of Prophetic *tafsīr*, resulting in discrepancies and some confusion in the report as to the function of *iṣma*. The emergence in Imāmism of the idea of written transmission of the imām’s knowledge may be related to the recognition of a particular line of imāms, some of whom were minors when their fathers died, and to the ensuing difficulty of defending the claim that the Prophet’s *tafsīr* was handed down orally from one imām to the next. Imāmī sources indicate that the problem of how religious knowledge could have been passed on to a minor arose soon after the death of al-Riḍā, whose only surviving son was a child. The problem seems to have been resolved (at least temporarily) by the idea that this knowledge was acquired by the imām at maturity from written sources. On the basis of such information, I have suggested that the idea that ‘Alī (and the imāms after him) possessed a written version of the Prophet’s *tafsīr* was incorporated into our report at some stage between the early third/ninth century and the early *ghayba* period and before the idea of divine inspiration gained wide acceptance and became part of the classical Imāmī belief system.