

Lesson 2: General References

After having a general survey of some of the special references on the history of Shi'ism, we shall examine the general references for this history. The general references with respect to their subjects are as follows:

1. *Tarikh-e 'Umumi* {General History};
2. *Zendeginameh-ye Imaman ('a)* {Biography of the Imams ('a)};
3. *Kitab-ha-ye Fitān va Hurub* {Books on Revolts and Wars};
4. *Kitab-ha-ye Rijāl va Tabāqāt* {Books on *Rijāl* and Classes};
5. *Kitab-ha-ye Jughrafiya* {Books on Geography};
6. *Kitab-ha-ye Akhbar* {Books on Narrations};
7. *Kitab-ha-ye Nasab* {Books on Genealogy};
8. *Kitab-ha-ye Hadith* {Books on *Hadiths*};
9. *Kitab-ha-ye Milāl va Nihāl* {Books on Nations and Religions}.

1. General History

In this book's survey of the history of Shi'ism, the most widely used books are those relating to the general history of the first centuries *hijri* and the history of the caliphate, such as *Tarikh al-Ya'qubi*, *Murawwij adh-Dhahab*, *Tarikh at-Tabari*, *Al-Kamil fi't-Tarikh*, *Al-'Abr*, *Al-Imammah wa's-Siyasah*, *Tarikh al-Khulafa'*, *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah* of Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, including even the analytical history research and books written by contemporary writers. Among the general history books, I have used *Tarikh al-Ya'qubi* and *Murawwij adh-Dhahab* extensively.

In these two books, historical events and occurrences have been recorded fairly impartially and without any attempt at concealing the truth. Ya'qubi has expressed in detail the oppositions of Companions of the Prophet (S) with the caliphate of Abubakr, criticizing the groupings after the demise of the Prophet (S).^{[1](#)}

He has embarked, as far as he could, on mentioning the events relevant to the history of the Shi'ah such as the government of the Commander of the Faithful ('a),^{[2](#)} the peace treaty of Imam al-Hasan ('a),^{[3](#)} the martyrdom of Hujr ibn al-'Addi,^{[4](#)} 'Amru ibn Hamq^{[5](#)} and that of Imam al-Husayn ('a),^{[6](#)} more or less presenting the truth of the matter.

Mas'udi is also among the historians who had no intention of concealing the truth. Although he has only dealt in passing with the event of Saqifah in the books *Murawwij adh-Dhahab* and *At-Tanbiyyah wa'l-Ashraf*, he nevertheless has mentioned the differences of the Companions and the Banu Hashim's refusal to pay allegiance to Abubakr.^{[7](#)}

In another part of the first book, Mas'udi wrote the issue of Fadak^{[8](#)} and discussed in detail the events that took place during the caliphate of the Commander of the Faithful ('a) and the martyrdom of Imam al-Hasan ('a).^{[9](#)}

He has mentioned the names of the Shi'ah and their tribes as well as the enemies of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) in various parts of *Murawwij adh-Dhahab*.^{[10](#)} Also, in the years of the Holy Imams' ('a) demise, he has given a short account of their lives.^{[11](#)} He has, in particular, detailed the uprisings of the 'Alawis during the 2nd century *hijri*.^{[12](#)}

2. Biography of the Imams ('a)

Among the books relevant to the life accounts of the Imams ('a), the book, *Al-Irshad*, by Shaykh al-Mufid and *Tadhkirah al-Khawas* by Ibn al-Jawzi occupy (special) importance. *Al-Irshad* is the first and most important available Shi'ah reference authority on the life account of the twelve Imams ('a).

In view of the fact that part of 'Ali's ('a) life overlapped that of the life of the Prophet (S), the life account and conduct {*sirah*} of the Prophet (S) has also been included in this book, especially his battles in all of which 'Ali ('a) had been present, with the exception of the Tabuk expedition. Concerning the book, it is enough to say that no researcher on the history of Shi'ism and the biography of the infallible Imams ('a) is needless of it.

The *Tadhkirah al-Khawas* of Ibn al-Jawzi occupies special importance in the sense that the biography of the Shi'ah Imams ('a) has been expressed through the language of a Hanafi and non-Shi'ah person, but no sort of negligence of the truth and concealment of the reality has taken place.

3. Books on Revolts and Wars

These references deal particularly with the wars that have great importance in the historiography of Muslims. The *Waq'ah as-Siffin* of Nasr ibn Mazahim al-Munqari (born 212 AH), which deals with the event and confrontation at Siffin, can be regarded as the oldest among them.

This book contains valuable information regarding the correspondence between 'Ali ('a) and Mu'awiyah as well as the various sermons and speeches of the former. Valuable information concerning the opinion of the Companions of the Prophet (S) regarding 'Ali and the influence of Shi'ism among the different tribes can be acquired from the different parts of the book.

The book, *Al-Gharat*, written by Ibrahim Thaqafi al-Kufi (283 AH), is one of the other references written about this subject. This book is related to the events that occurred during the caliphate of the Commander of the Faithful ('a), and examines the plunders and pillages committed by Mu'awiyah's agents in the realm of 'Ali's ('a) government. The conditions and situations of the Commander of the Faithful's ('a) Shi'ah can be extracted from various sections of the book.

Al-Jamal or *Nusrah al-Jamal* of Shaykh al-Mufid, which examines the event of the Battle of Jamal (Camel) is yet another valuable references in this regard. As it is about the Commander of the Faithful's ('a) first battle during his caliphate, this book illustrates 'Ali's ('a) station among the people of Iraq prior to his arrival there.

4. Books on Rijal and Classes

'Ilm ar-Rijal is one of the sciences mentioned in relation to the science of *hadith*. Its utility is in the study of the chain of transmission of *hadith* through which it deals with the life account and background of the *hadith* narrators and on the rectification of the Companions of the Prophet (S).

In the Shi'ah *rijal*, apart from the Companions of the Prophet (S), the companions of the infallible Imams ('a) have also been discussed. The science of *rijal* started in the 2nd century *hijri* and continues to exist to the present, having acquired perfection with the passage of time.

Some of the most famous and reputable writings of the Ahl as-Sunnah in this context are *Al-Isti'ab fi Ma'rifah al-Ashab*, written by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr al-Qurtubi (463 AH); *Asad al-Ghabah fi Ma'rifah as-Sahabah*, authored by Ibn Athir al-Juzri (630 AH); *Tarikh Baghdad*, penned by Khatib al-Baghdadi (392–463 AH); and *Al-Isabah fi Ma'rifah as-Sahabah*, written by Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani.

Similarly, the most important Shi'ah *rijali* books are *Ikhtibar Ma'rifah ar-Rijal*, written by Shaykh at-Tusi (385–460 AH); *Rijal an-Najasi (Fihrist Asma' Musannif ash-Shi'ah)* better known as *Rijal*, *Kitab ar-Rijal*, and *Kitab al-Fihrist* of Shaykh at-Tusi (385–460 AH); *Rijal al-Burqa*, authored by Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khalid al-Burqa (280 AH); *Al-Mashaykhah* of Shaykh as-Saduq (381 AH).

Ma'alim al-'Ulama' of Ibn Shahr Ashub Mazandarani (488–588 AH); and *Rijal Ibn Dawud* of Taqi ad-Din Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Dawud al-Hilli (647–707 AH). Of course, the science of *rijal* has acquired greater perfection among the Shi'ah and has been divided into various branches.

Some books on *rijal* such as *Asad al-Ghabah*, *Fihrist Shaykh*, *Rijal an-Najashi*, and *Ma'alim al-'Ulama'* have been written in (Arabic) alphabetical order while some others such as *Rijal Shaykh* and *Rijal al-Burqa* have been arranged according to the classes of the Companions of the Prophet (S) and the Imams ('a).

There are other types of *rijal* books in which the people are surveyed according to various classifications, and the most important of them is the *Tabaqat* of Ibn Sa'd.

5. Books on Geography

Some of the geography books are travelogues most of which have been written after the third century *hijri*. Since in this book the history of Shi'ism has been examined in the first three centuries *hijri*, a number of them have not been used so much, but other geography books which have presented documents are among the references used in this research.

Among them, *Mu'jam al-Buldan* has been used most on account of its comprehensiveness. The writer of the book, *Yaqut al-Hamawi*, has treated the Shi'ah with bias; mentioning the names of the great families in Kufah, he has failed to mention any of the names of the great Shi'ah scholars and families.

6. Books on Narrations

What is meant by references and books on narrations {*akhbar*} is not the books on *hadith* that dealt on the lawful {*halal*} and the prohibited {*haram*}. They referred instead to history books based on the method of writing history during the period of Islam in which historical events and news have been mentioned in narrative form with the inclusion of the chain of narrators; that is, following the method of the people of *hadith* in recording and narrating historical events.

This kind of history writing has some salient features. Firstly, any set of news regarding isolated event is mentioned distinct from other events, and it is by itself complete without any link with other news and events. Secondly, literary characteristics can also be observed in it; that is, sometimes the writer makes use of poem, story and debate.

In most cases, this feature can be seen particularly in narrative works which were influenced by the form of *Ayyam al-'Arab* narrations. On account of this, some researchers have regarded the historiography of *khavar* {news, report, narration} to have originated from the *khavar* of the stories about the period prior to the advent of Islam.

Thirdly, the chain of narrators is mentioned. In reality, this method of history writing, particularly during

the first two centuries *hijri*, was in most cases the way of presenting the primary sources of history. Significant corpus of the written works of the Islamic period is through this method.

Among the books on narrations {*akhbar*}, *Al-Akhbar al-Mu'affaqiyyat* of Zubayr ibn Bakkar occupies special importance. The writer of this book, Zubayr ibn Bakkar, apart from being among the descendants of Zubayr who had ancient hostility to the *Ahl al-Bayt* of the Prophet (S), had good relations with Mutawakkil, the 'Abbasid caliph, who was a staunch enemy of the Commander of the Faithful ('a) and his descendants; the teacher of his children¹³ and had been appointed as the judge in Mecca.¹⁴ In spite of this, valuable information regarding the Companions of the Prophet's (S) protest against the caliphate of Abubakr has been recorded in this book. The narration of their poems, in particular, which contain their belief on the guardianship {*wasayah*} of 'Ali ('a), is an expression of these protests.

7. Books on Genealogy

Among the books on genealogy, *Ansab al-Ashraf* of Baladhuri, which is the best reference in this regard, has been used most. On the other hand, this book can be considered as among the books on (personal) backgrounds {*ahwal*}.

This is in spite of the fact that in terms of genealogical knowledge, the book *Jumharah Ansab al-'Arab* is the most comprehensive book, which has also presented a brief explanation of the description of some individuals.

The book, *Muntaqilah at-Talibiyyin*, has examined the migration of *sadat* (sing. *sayyid*) and descendants of the Prophet (S). By utilizing its subjects, the trend of Shi'ism during the first centuries *hijri* in the Muslim lands can be examined.

8. Books on Hadith

Another set of the references on the history of Shi'ism includes the books on *hadith*. *Hadith* in the Sunni usage refers to the Prophet's (S) sayings, actions and tacit approvals of others' actions, but the Shi'ah regards the infallible Imams ('a) as also attached to the Prophet (S), treating their sayings, actions and tacit approvals as proofs {*hujaj*} as well.

The *hadith* books of the Ahl as-Sunnah such as *As-Sahih* of al-Bukhari (194–256 AH), *Al-Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (164–241 AH), and *Al-Mustadrak 'ala's-Sahihayn* of Hakim an-Nayshaburi (d. 450 AH) are good references for the study of Shi'ism among the Companions and of the rightfulness of the Commander of the Faithful ('a) which is the basis of Shi'ism.

The Shi'ah books on *hadith* such as the "four books" {*kutub al-arba'ah*}, viz. *Al-Kafi* of al-Kulayni (d. 329 AH); *Man La Yahdhuruh al-Faqih* of Shaykh as-Saduq (d. 381 AH); and *Tahdhib al-Ahkam* and *Al-Istibsar* of Shaykh at-Tusi (d. 360 AH).

And other books such as *Al-Amali*, *Ghurar al-Fawa'id* and *Durar al-Qala'id* of Sayyid Murtada (355–436 AH); *Al-Ihtijaj* of at-Tabarsi (6th century *hijri*); and the bulky encyclopedia of *hadith*, *Bihar al-Anwar* of 'Allamah Majlisi (d. 1111 AH), apart from having the merit of the books of the Ahl as-Sunnah, can be utilized, by referring to the *hadiths* of the infallible Imams ('a), in knowing about the scattering of the Shi'ah, their resident places, their social relations, and their mode of communication with the infallible Imams ('a).

9. Books on Nations and Religions

One of the most important references and authorities in this regard is the book, *Al-Milal wa'n-Nihal* of Shahrastani (479–548 AH). In terms of comprehensiveness and oldness, this book is considered a good reference and as a reference authority of researchers and scholars.

This is in spite of the fact that the author has approached the subject with bias. In the beginning of the book, he has quoted the *hadith* on “73 sects” and introduced the Ahl as-Sunnah as the “saved sect”. As such, he tried his best to highlight the spread of “Shi'ah sects” so as to prove that the plentitude of the “Shi'ah sects” is a proof of the falsehood of this school of thought {*madhhab*}.

He has regarded the sects such as Mukhtariyyah, Baqiriyyah, Ja'fariyyah, Mufdhalah, Nu'maniyyah, Hishamiyyah, and Yunusiyyah as “Shi'ah” although these sects do not exist in reality. Similarly, in the book, *Khutat*, Maqrizi has said that the “Shi'ah sects” are 300 all in all, but at the time of enumerating them he failed to mention more than 20 sects.

Among the oldest and most important books on nations and religions are *Al-Maqalat wa'l-Firaq* of Ash'ari al-Qummi and *Firaq ash-Shi'ah* of Nawbakhti. Ash'ari al-Qummi and Nawbakhti are among the Shi'ah scholars who lived in the second half of the 3rd century *hijri*. The book, *Al-Maqalat wa'l-Firaq*, in terms of presenting information, is so extensive and has good comprehensiveness, but its subjects are diverse with any proper classification.

According to the views expressed by some researchers, the book, *Firaq ash-Shi'ah* of Nawbakhti is actually the same book as *Al-Maqalat wa'l-Firaq*.

Lesson 2: Summary

General references for the history of Shi'ism are the following:

- Books on general history, which have been written in the first centuries *hijri*, and among them *Murawwij adh-Dhahab* and *Tarikh al-Ya'qubi*, occupy special importance;
- Books on the biography of the Imams ('a) such as *Al-Irshad* of Shaykh al-Mufid;
- Books on revolts and wars such as *Waq'ah as-Siffin*;

- Books on *rijal* and classes as well as books written about (personal) backgrounds {*ahwal*};
- Books on geography such as travelogues and history of cities;
- Books on narrations which have been the same in form with the first history writing;
- Books on genealogy such as *Jumharah Ansab al-‘Arab*;
- Books on *hadith* as well as books on nations and religions.

Lesson 2: Questions

1. Among the books on general history, which of the earlier books that have dealt more with the history of Shi‘ism?
2. Briefly describe the books, *Al-Irshad* and *Tadhkirah al-Khawwas*.
3. Which type of books does *Waqi‘ah as-Siffin* belong to?
4. Briefly describe the books on *rijal*.
5. How many types do the books on geography have?
6. What are the salient features of the books on narrations {*akhbar*}?
7. Name two books on genealogy.
8. What is the relationship between the books on *hadith* and the history of Shi‘ism?
9. What is the title of one of the most important books written on nations and religions?

[1.](#) Ahmad ibn Abi Ya‘qub ibn Wadhih, *Tarikh al-Ya‘qubi* (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1414 AH), vol. 2, p. 123–126.

[2.](#) Ibid., pp. 178–179.

[3.](#) Ibid., pp. 214–215.

[4.](#) Ibid., pp. 230–231.

[5.](#) Ibid., pp. 231–232.

[6.](#) Ibid., pp. 243–246.

[7.](#) ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn Mas‘udi, *Murawwij adh-Dhahab* (Beirut: Manshurat Mu‘assasah al-A‘lami Li’l-Matbu‘at, 1411 AH), vol. 2, p. 316; At-Tanbiyyah wa’l-Ashraf (Cairo: Dar as-Sawi Li’t-Tab‘ wa’n-Nashr wa’t-Ta’lif, n.d.), p. 427.

[8.](#) *Murawwij adh-Dhahab*, vol. 3, p. 262.

[9.](#) Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 246–266.

[10.](#) Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 59, 74.

[11.](#) Ibid., pp. 180, 243, 313, 388.

[12.](#) Ibid., pp. 324–326, 358.

[13.](#) Al-Hafiz Abubakr Ahmad ibn ‘Ali Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad* (Egypt: Matba‘ah as-Sa‘adah, 1349 AH), vol. 8, p. 467.

[14.](#) Ibn Nadim, Al-Fihrist (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), p. 160.

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