SemantJournals

The American Journal of Religious, Culture, and Archaeological Studies 2997-948X, Vol 03, No. 11, 2026

Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's Methodology in Presenting and Interpreting Hadith Narrations In (Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh)

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Abstract: This study examines Shaykh al-Saduq's (d. 381 AH) methodology for presenting and interpreting hadith reports in Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, focusing on the relationship between hadith selection, legal construction, and the interpretive treatment of reports. It investigates the extent to which al-Saduq moves beyond transmission to determine a report's meaning, scope, and practical legal implications. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, supported by selective textual induction and comparison, drawing on examples from all four volumes of the work and from the chapters on ritual purity, fasting, adjudication, transactions, and wills. The findings show that al-Saduq's method extends beyond selecting reports to employing several interpretive procedures, including lexical explanation, specification of the subject matter, qualification, reconciliation of reports, preference, and interpreting an ambiguous report in light of an explanatory one. Comparison with some of his other works also reveals that a report's function and use may vary according to the purpose of each compilation. The study proposes a critical framework for assessing the strength of attributing an interpretive position to al-Saduq, comprising three levels: explicit authorial statement, interpretation supported by multiple indicators, and probabilistic inference. This framework distinguishes the transmitted report, the compiler's position, and subsequent analytical inference, thereby contributing to a more precise account of al-Saduq's hadith and legal methodology.

Keywords: Shaykh al-Saduq; Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh; hadith interpretation; conflicting reports; Islamic legal reasoning.

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Introduction

The compilation of hadith and the reports transmitted from the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt constituted a fundamental stage in the development of the Islamic sciences. Hadith scholarship was not confined

to collecting reports; it was also concerned with selecting and arranging them and determining how they could be used in legal and exegetical reasoning.

Shaykh al-Saduq's (d. 381 AH) Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh is a prominent example of this approach. Its author stated that he did not intend to include every report, but selected those on which he issued legal opinions, whose soundness he affirmed, and whose probative authority he accepted. This statement reveals a close relationship between hadith selection and legal choice, and raises the question of how al-Saduq interpreted reports after selecting them.

In this study, "interpretation of a report" refers to any explicit intervention by al-Saduq, or one supported by strong textual indicators, that affects the determination of a report's meaning, subject matter, field of application, relationship to other reports, or standing in the context of issuing a legal opinion. The mere inclusion of a report does not fall within this definition unless it is accompanied by an indication of a semantic or legal choice.

The importance of examining this aspect is reinforced by al-Saduq's scholarly standing. Al-Tusi described him as a preserver of hadith, knowledgeable about transmitters, and a critic of reports, while al-Najashi regarded him as one of the leading jurists and authors of his period.

Accordingly, this study analyses selected examples from the four volumes of Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, distinguishing between the transmitted report, the interpretation attributable to al-Saduq, and the inference added by the researcher. Its aim is to clarify the relationship between hadith selection, semantic interpretation, and legal choice.

1. Research Problem

The research problem arises from the fact that Shaykh al-Saduq's selection and adoption of a report do not necessarily mean that he accepts all its apparent implications. He may qualify its meaning, identify the circumstances to which it applies, reconcile it with another report, or prefer a different report. This is particularly evident where he explicitly states the basis of a legal opinion or explains how differing reports should be understood.

The central problem, therefore, is to identify the principles governing al-Saduq's selection of reports, the mechanisms he employed to interpret their implications, and the effect of those mechanisms on the formation of his legal positions in Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh.

2. Research Questions

What hadith-related and legal principles governed al-Saduq's selection, presentation, classification, and abridgement of reports' chains of transmission?

What are his principal mechanisms for interpreting reports, particularly lexical explanation, qualification, reconciliation, preference, and interpreting an ambiguous report in light of an explanatory one?

How did these mechanisms affect the determination of legal rulings, and how strong is the evidence for attributing each type of interpretation to al-Saduq?

3. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its examination of the relationship between hadith selection, semantic interpretation, and legal reasoning in the work of Shaykh al-Saduq. It contributes to understanding his role as a compiler who did not merely transmit reports but sometimes determined how they should be applied.

The study also proposes criteria for distinguishing the compiler's own statements from implications inferred from the arrangement and classification of reports, and from the researcher's subsequent analysis. This helps prevent opinions from being attributed to al-Saduq without sufficient evidence.

Its practical significance derives from the use of examples drawn from all four volumes of Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, making it possible to identify varied interpretive procedures across different areas of jurisprudence.

4. Objectives

To identify the principles governing al-Saduq's selection and presentation of reports and his abridgement of their chains of transmission.

To identify the principal mechanisms for interpreting reports, including lexical explanation, qualification, reconciliation, preference, and interpreting the ambiguous through the explanatory.

To clarify the effect of these mechanisms on the determination of legal rulings and the practical application of reports.

To develop a critical criterion distinguishing explicit interpretation, interpretation supported by contextual indicators, and probabilistic inference.

To test this criterion against examples drawn from all four volumes of the work.

5. Methodology and Scope

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical method to identify al-Saduq's procedures for presenting reports and analysing their implications. It employs selective induction to choose representative examples from the four volumes of Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, together with textual comparison where a report or its content appears in more than one of al-Saduq's works, particularly ʿIlal al-Sharāʾiʿ.

Each example is analysed according to the following elements: the location of the report; the nature of its interpretive difficulty; al-Saduq's position; the type of interpretive procedure used; its effect on the legal ruling; and an assessment of the strength of attributing that interpretation to him.

The study relies on the second edition of Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, edited by ʿAli Akbar al-Ghaffari, published in 1404 AH. Volume, page, and report numbers are specified in the applied discussions.

The scope is limited to selected examples from the chapters on ritual purity, fasting, adjudication, transactions, and wills. It does not seek to examine every report in the work or to undertake a comprehensive biographical evaluation of all chains of transmission. Rather, it focuses on passages that clearly reveal the mechanisms used to present and interpret reports.

6. Previous Studies and the Scholarly Contribution

Previous studies have addressed several aspects of Shaykh al-Saduq's methodology and his work Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh. Thaʾir ʿAbd al-Zahra Muhsin al-Mūsawi examined al-Saduq's hadith contributions, sources, and methodological characteristics in compilation and transmission in his book Shaykh al-Saduq and His Hadith Contributions: Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh as a Model. This work provides a general foundation for understanding al-Saduq's hadith methodology. [1]

A study by Mashriq Sabah Kazim, Fatimah Dast-Ranj, and Alireza Tabibi examined legal rulings and their evidentiary foundations in Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh through applied jurisprudential examples, focusing on the work's evidentiary dimension. [2]

In the field of Qur'anic exegesis, Mahmoud ʿAbd al-Husayn ʿAbd ʿAli al-Thaʿalibi studied reports from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir concerning verses of legal rulings in Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, demonstrating the presence of exegetical reports and their relationship to legal rulings. [3]

Despite their importance, these studies did not make al-Saduq's own mechanisms for interpreting reports an independent analytical focus, nor did they distinguish the degrees of evidentiary strength involved in attributing such interpretations to him. The present study's contribution is therefore its analysis of interpretive tools—including lexical explanation, specification of subject matter, qualification, reconciliation, preference, and construing the ambiguous in light of the explanatory—

while classifying the strength of attribution as explicit statement, multiple indicators, or probabilistic inference.

Chapter One: Methodological Foundations for Selecting and Presenting Reports in Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh

Al-Saduq's method of interpreting reports cannot be understood independently of the principles governing the composition of his book, since the way a report is selected, documented, and arranged affects the context in which its meaning is understood. This chapter therefore considers hadith selection as a basis for legal reliance, the abridgement of chains and its relationship to transmission sources, and classification and lexical explanation as tools for organizing meaning.

1. Hadith Selection and Its Relationship to Probative Authority and Legal Choice

Hadith selection is a fundamental point of entry for understanding Shaykh al-Saduq's method in Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh. In the book's introduction, he states that he did not intend to include everything transmitted, but selected reports on which he issued legal opinions, whose soundness he affirmed, and whose authority he accepted. This statement indicates that the book was built from the outset around a deliberate legal selection of hadith material rather than the mere collection of reports. [4]

Studies of the work's methodology have observed that al-Saduq abridged chains of transmission and selected reports from sources he regarded as reliable, in keeping with the practical purpose for which the book was compiled. Nevertheless, accepting and including a report does not necessarily entail adopting every meaning its apparent wording might bear. The examples show that the compiler sometimes intervened to determine the scope within which a report should be applied. [5]

This is evident in the rulings on breaking the fast during Ramadan. Al-Saduq cites reports concerning expiation, then distinguishes between breaking the fast through a permissible act and doing so through a prohibited act, explicitly adopting the report that requires three expiations in the latter case. This comment constitutes an explicit interpretation of the report's field of application: the compiler does not merely transmit it but identifies the circumstances in which he considers the ruling applicable. [6]

An even clearer position appears in the chapter on appointing two people as executors of a will. Al-Saduq cites a report and comments: "I do not issue a fatwa on the basis of this report," preferring another report on which he relies for his legal opinion. This example establishes that the mere presence of a report in the book does not place it on an equal footing with all others in practical legal authority; al-Saduq may transmit a report and then explicitly state his critical position toward it. [7]

This practice is consistent with recent research highlighting the evidentiary dimension of Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh. Its contents are not limited to preserving reports; they are also connected with deriving legal rulings and identifying ways in which textual evidence may be used. [8]

These examples indicate that selection operates at more than one level in al-Saduq's work. It begins with choosing a report and may proceed to determining its subject matter, field of application, or status in legal reasoning. It is therefore necessary to distinguish mere transmission, interpretation inferred from contextual indicators, and explicit interpretation stated by the compiler himself. This distinction prevents every implication of a report from being attributed to al-Saduq merely because he included it, while also revealing the interaction between his hadith methodology and jurisprudential practice.

2. Abridgement of Chains and Sources of Reports: Facilitating Presentation and Hadith Verification

The abridgement of chains of transmission is one of the prominent methodological features of Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, and cannot be separated from the purpose for which Shaykh al-Saduq composed the work. In his introduction, he explains that he omitted the chains so that the routes of

transmission would not become excessive, while preserving the information readers need in order to understand legal rulings. This statement reveals a deliberate editorial choice: to present the legal text in an accessible form without cancelling the value of the chain or dispensing with verification of the report's route of transmission. [9]

The book's mashyakha (the section listing the author's transmission routes) is therefore particularly important. At the end of the work, al-Saduq provides his routes to a number of transmitters whose names appear at the beginnings of abridged chains, making it possible to reconnect some reports with their sources and transmitters. Researchers have noted that al-Saduq abridged the beginnings of chains throughout the book and then used the mashyakha to identify his routes to those from whom he transmitted. It consequently plays a major role in assessing the continuity of the book's chains. [10]

An applied example appears where al-Saduq gives his route to Ahmad ibn Abi ʿAbd Allah al-Barqi, stating that what he has transmitted from him reaches him through his own teachers. This formula shows that abridging the chain in the body of the book does not mean that the route has disappeared altogether; rather, it has been moved from the location of the report to a separate section at the end of the book. Assessing a report therefore requires combining its location in the main text with the route recorded in the mashyakha. [11]

The presence of a route in the mashyakha, however, is not by itself sufficient to establish the soundness of every report transmitted from a particular narrator. Hadith verification requires examination of the transmitters in the route itself and of whether that route applies to the specific report under consideration. Biographical studies have noted that the routes in the mashyakha do not perform an identical function in every instance, and that the continuity of each route in relation to particular reports must be examined independently. [12]

Early bibliographical works confirm the importance of al-Saduq's sources and his standing as a transmitter. Al-Tusi described him as "a preserver of hadith, knowledgeable about transmitters, and a critic of reports," and stated that he had approximately three hundred works, indicating the breadth of his hadith material and the diversity of his sources. Al-Najashi also provided an extensive biographical entry and listed many of his works, revealing the scholarly environment in which al-Saduq operated and his broad engagement with the compilations and source-books circulating in his period. [13] [14]

This context helps explain al-Saduq's use of abridgement. An author with an extensive network of sources and transmission routes can separate the place where a ruling is presented from the place where its route is documented. The omission of the beginnings of chains should therefore not be treated as a merely formal deficiency, but understood within the book's overall structure.

The same point is evident in reports presented in abbreviated form in the chapters on ritual purity, including reports concerning the quantity of water required for ablution and ritual washing. The legal content is presented directly without repeating lengthy transmission chains. The book thereby fulfils its practical function, while evaluation of the chain remains a separate task requiring reference to the mashyakha and biographical sources. [15]

Abridgement of chains in al-Saduq's work thus represents a redistribution of isnad material within the book more than its elimination: the main text focuses on the ruling, while the mashyakha preserves part of the network of transmission routes. This structure requires researchers not to conflate three distinct matters: the existence of a route, the soundness of that route, and the soundness of the particular report. The first is established through the mashyakha; the second requires evaluation of the transmitters; and the third requires a combined study of the route, text, and contextual indicators.

The methodological value of the mashyakha lies in making the abridged chain open to review. It does not, however, turn every report in the book into a fully authoritative narration merely because a general route to the narrator exists. This shows that al-Saduq's method of presenting isnads differs

from his method of evaluating reports: the former concerns the structure of the compilation, whereas the latter concerns criteria of acceptance and reliance.

3. Classification and Lexical Explanation in Organizing Juristic Meaning

Classification in Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh is not merely an organizational device that facilitates access to reports. It also helps determine the context in which reports are read and distinguish those addressing the basis of a ruling from those dealing with its application, limits, or rationale. This is evident in the chapters on ablution, where al-Saduq distributes reports among topics such as the manner of performing ablution, its limits, sequence, reward, and rationale. This arrangement reveals that reports concerning the same general subject may perform different semantic functions. [16]

The importance of this organization lies in the fact that a report describing how a ruling is performed does not serve the same function as a report explaining its rationale or merit. It is therefore inappropriate to treat all reports in a jurisprudential chapter as having the same evidentiary status. Contemporary studies have noted that the nature of Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh as an evidentiary legal work makes the organization of hadith material relevant to reaching a legal ruling, rather than simply collecting reports on a common subject. [17]

Al-Saduq's role in constructing meaning, however, goes beyond classification to direct lexical explanation. A clear example appears in volume three, in the chapter "The Ruling Concerning the Enclosure between Two Houses." He transmits two reports concerning adjudication in favour of the owner of the side toward which the qamaṭ is located, then explains the terms khaṣṣ and qamaṭ. He states that the khaṣṣ is a structure situated between houses, while qamaṭ relates to the tying of a rope, and he also mentions another interpretation of qimāṭ. [18]

This explanation is not a linguistic digression unrelated to the ruling. Understanding the meaning of qamaṭ determines the observable indicator on which the judicial decision is based. The term is therefore part of the subject matter of the ruling, and explaining it narrows the possible interpretations of the report and identifies the factual situation to which it applies.

Muhammad Taqi al-Majlisi elaborates on this passage in his commentary, explaining the use of khaṣṣ and the knots of qamaṭ, their relationship to the side from which the sign of ownership appears, and the connection between the lexical meaning and the indicator relied upon in the judicial ruling. This comparison shows that al-Saduq's brief comment provides the basis for understanding the report's implication, while later commentaries expand on its jurisprudential foundation. [19]

Another form of interpretation appears in the report concerning the testimony of an enslaved person. Al-Saduq cites a report stating that such testimony is accepted after emancipation if the judge had not previously rejected it. He then explains that the judge's rejection means rejecting the testimony because of manifest moral corruption or some other defect affecting probity, not merely because the witness was enslaved. Unlike the explanation of khaṣṣ and qamaṭ, this interpretation does not concern an unfamiliar word; it identifies the intended meaning of a qualification within the report, and this determination directly affects the ruling. [20]

This practice gains further significance when compared with Shaykh al-Tusi's treatment of the same report in Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām. Al-Tusi also interprets the phrase "if the judge had not rejected it" as referring to rejection because of moral corruption or a defect undermining testimony, rather than because of enslavement. He likewise interprets the non-acceptance of the testimony of someone emancipated for the purpose of testifying as referring to emancipation so that the person could testify in favour of the former owner. The agreement between the two interpretations shows that explaining the qualification was not merely a lexical clarification, but a jurisprudential response intended to eliminate an unintended implication of the report's apparent wording. [21]

Three functions can therefore be distinguished in al-Saduq's presentation: classification, which establishes the general context; lexical explanation, which clarifies the meaning of a word that

affects how the factual situation is understood; and legal interpretation, which identifies the intended meaning of a qualification within a report.

These examples show that al-Saduq's contribution to constructing meaning varies according to the type of indicator. Chapter headings and the arrangement of reports constitute contextual indications that require support from the content of the reports. By contrast, his explanation of khaṣṣ and qamaṭ and his comment on the qualification concerning rejection of an enslaved person's testimony are explicit interpretations that can be directly attributed to him. Classification and lexical explanation are thus not separate mechanisms, but complementary stages in determining the subject matter of a report and the scope of the ruling's application.

The methodological value of this distinction is that it prevents chapter headings from being made to bear more than they can support, while giving greater weight to the compiler's explicit comments. Research into al-Saduq's interpretive method should therefore begin with explicit statements and then turn to classification and arrangement as supporting indicators, not the reverse.

Chapter Two: Mechanisms for Interpreting Reports and Their Effect on Juristic Reasoning

The distinctive features of Shaykh al-Saduq's method become clearer when the analysis moves from the selection and presentation of reports to the tools he uses to determine their implications. He may cite a report to explain a Qur'anic ruling, clarify a word that affects its meaning, reconcile two reports by specifying the subject matter of each, prefer one report over another, or interpret an ambiguous report in light of an explanatory one. These practices reveal a variety of interpretive mechanisms, each of which must be studied in its textual context without assuming that the compiler applied one uniform rule in every instance.

1. Qur'anic Interpretation and Prophetic/Imamic Reports in Determining Legal Rulings

The relationship between the Qur'an and hadith is an important field for identifying the function of transmitted explanation in Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh. The Qur'anic text may establish the basis of a ruling, while a report explains how it is to be fulfilled, interprets some of its wording, or determines its practical timing and limits. It is therefore necessary to distinguish a report that directly interprets the Qur'anic text, one that provides a practical application of the ruling, and one that offers a causal or detailed explanation.

The first applied example concerns the verse on ablution: "O you who believe, when you rise to perform prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, and [wash] your feet up to the ankles" (Qur'an 5:6). Al-Saduq cites a report from Imam al-Baqir describing the ablution of the Messenger of God, including washing the face and hands and wiping the head and feet. The report performs an applied explanatory function: it translates the general formulation of the Qur'anic ruling into a practical form that clarifies how it is to be fulfilled. [22]

This interpretation is supported by reports from Zurara and Bukayr cited by Shaykh al-Tusi in Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām, describing the ablution of the Messenger of God and including the washing of the face and hands and the wiping of the head and feet, while connecting the procedure to the Qur'anic verse. The comparison indicates that the transmitted explanation was not detached from the meaning of the Qur'anic text; rather, it served to determine how that text is enacted. [23]

Al-Saduq also cites a report from Imam al-Sadiq concerning the limits of wiping, thereby distinguishing wiping from washing in practical application. This report serves a different function from the preceding one: the first describes the practical form of ablution, whereas the second helps define the limits of the act through which the religious obligation is fulfilled. [24]

The report concerning the Prophet's wiping over his sandals requires methodological caution, since al-Saduq includes it among the reports on ablution. Al-Hurr al-ʿAmili places this report in a chapter concerning the impermissibility of wiping over leather socks and cites alongside it reports indicating that the intended wiping does not entail covering the required area in a way that prevents direct contact of the hand. This comparison shows that a report should not be interpreted solely on the

basis of its isolated apparent wording; it must be read in light of the full body of texts relating to the issue. [25] [26]

A clearer example of direct Qur'anic interpretation appears in the rulings on fasting, in relation to the verse: "Eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black thread at dawn" (Qur'an 2:187). Al-Saduq transmits the interpretation that the "white thread" and "black thread" refer to the brightness of day and the darkness of night, and then cites reports specifying the effect of the appearance of dawn on the permissibility of eating and drinking and the obligation to abstain. Here the report does not merely apply an already established ruling; it directly interprets the Qur'anic expression by identifying its intended meaning. [27]

Shaykh al-Tusi presents the same meaning in Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām among reports concerning the time at which fasting begins, confirming that identifying the meaning of the "white thread" and "black thread" is directly related to determining the beginning of the fasting period. Al-Thaʿalibi's study also discusses this report among the verses of legal rulings transmitted by al-Saduq and notes the connection between the verse's interpretation and the legal determination of the time for abstention. [28] [29]

This example reveals an important distinction between two types of explanation. In the case of ablution, the report serves an applied function by clarifying how the Qur'anic ruling is performed. In the fasting verse, the report performs a direct exegetical function by identifying the meaning of the Qur'anic expression. This interpretation has an immediate legal consequence in determining the temporal boundary at which abstention from acts that invalidate the fast begins.

Al-Saduq's transmission of these interpretations does not mean that every explanation contained in a report is his own personal interpretation. A distinction must be made between an interpretation transmitted from an Imam and al-Saduq's choice to include the report in a particular legal context. The former is attributed to the source of the report, whereas the latter reveals how the compiler deploys the text within his legal construction.

The relationship between the Qur'an and reports in Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh thus operates on several levels. A report may directly interpret a Qur'anic expression, provide practical guidance on how to fulfil a ruling, or determine the limits and consequences of that ruling. The mere presence of a verse and a report on the same subject is therefore insufficient to establish "Qur'anic interpretation"; the nature of their semantic relationship must be specified.

The strength of attributing an interpretation to al-Saduq also varies according to the evidence. If his role is limited to transmitting an Imam's interpretation, the interpretation itself should not be attributed to al-Saduq; rather, what may be attributed to him is his selection of the report and the context in which he uses it. If he adds a comment, reconciles reports, or specifies the scope of a ruling, the interpretation moves from transmission to direct authorial intervention. This distinction is essential to avoid confusing the explanation contained in a report with al-Saduq's own method of using it.

Accordingly, the Qur'an-related explanatory reports in the book may be classified into three principal types: exegetical explanation, which identifies the meaning of a Qur'anic expression; applied explanation, which clarifies how a ruling is fulfilled; and legal explanation, which identifies the practical effect of the text in a particular case.

2. Reconciling Divergent Reports through Specification of Subject Matter, Reconciliation, and Preference

Divergent reports provide a clear test of Shaykh al-Saduq's method of interpretation. Multiple texts on one issue may appear contradictory, although the source of their difference may be a variation in subject matter, a qualification, or a shift in the semantic referent of a word. It is therefore necessary to distinguish semantic reconciliation, which preserves the possibility of acting upon both reports,

from preference, which gives priority to one report when reconciliation is impossible or when a stronger indicator supports it.

The first level appears in the chapter on the nullifiers of ablution. Al-Saduq cites a report identifying the nullifiers as substances discharged from the two passages and sleep that removes awareness. He then cites a report concerning the discharge of pumpkin seeds and small worms, which states that this does not invalidate ablution. He comments that non-invalidation applies only when they are discharged without fecal matter; if fecal matter accompanies them, cleansing and ablution are required. The interpretation does not discard either report; it specifies the subject matter of each ruling. [30]

This understanding is supported by Shaykh al-Tusi's treatment of the same reports. He interprets the report requiring ablution when pumpkin seeds are discharged as applying when they are soiled with excrement, relying on another report that explicitly distinguishes between their being discharged clean and their being soiled. The comparison shows that the apparent divergence is resolved by identifying the qualification that affects the ruling, rather than by preferring one chain of transmission over another. [31]

A clearer example of reconciliation appears in volume three of Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh concerning the sale of an enslaved person who possesses property. Al-Saduq cites a report stating that the property belongs to the seller unless the purchaser stipulates otherwise, followed by another report assigning the property to the purchaser if the seller knew of its existence. He explicitly comments: "These two reports are in agreement and do not conflict," and then distributes the ruling across the possible cases according to the seller's knowledge and the purchaser's stipulation. [32]

The importance of this passage lies in the fact that the reconciliation is not inferred from the arrangement of the reports; it is an explicit statement by the compiler. Knowledge of the property and the existence of a contractual stipulation become the two controlling factors in determining the scope of each report. If neither knowledge nor stipulation is present, the property remains with the seller; if the seller knew of the property and did not exclude it, the ruling tends toward assigning it to the purchaser.

The same reports appear in Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām in the chapter on purchasing animals: first, the report assigning the property to the seller if the purchaser did not stipulate it, and then the report linking its transfer to the seller's knowledge. The comparison confirms that the distinctive feature of al-Saduq's text is not merely the transmission of both reports, but his explicit comment, which reconstructs the relationship between them and removes the appearance of contradiction. [33]

Interpretation moves to another level in reports concerning a bequest of a "share" of property. Al-Saduq cites one report defining the share as one-eighth, based on the eight categories of zakat recipients in Qur'an 9:60, and another defining it as one-sixth. He reconciles them by explaining that the share is one-eighth if it refers to one of the shares of zakat, and one-sixth if it refers to a share of inheritance. The execution of the bequest, he explains, depends on what appears to have been intended by the testator. [34]

The view that this reconciliation reflects a consistent tendency in al-Saduq's thought is reinforced by his treatment of the issue in Maʿānī al-Akhbār. There he cites both reports concerning the meaning of "share" and makes the difference in amount dependent on understanding the testator's intention and the type of shares intended. This is methodologically important because it provides evidence from another work by al-Saduq that the interpretation in Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh is not merely an incidental arrangement within that book. [35]

Shaykh al-Tusi, by contrast, presents the reports in al-Istibṣār, citing the report that specifies one-eighth and then discussing another report that makes the share one-tenth, for which he proposes possible reconciliations. The comparison reveals agreement on the basic principle of attempting to resolve differences before discarding reports, while showing differences in the way each report is interpreted. [36]

Al-Saduq does not, however, reconcile reports in every instance. He may instead choose the report he regards as stronger in the context of issuing a legal opinion. A prominent example appears in the chapter on two persons appointed as executors of a will. He cites a written directive indicating that the two executors should not act contrary to the deceased's instructions, then transmits another report permitting one of them to act independently with respect to half the estate. He comments: "I do not issue a fatwa on the basis of this report; rather, I issue a fatwa on the basis of what I have in the handwriting of al-Hasan ibn ʿAli, peace be upon him." [37]

This example differs from the preceding cases because al-Saduq does not merely distribute the two reports across two circumstances; he explicitly states his legal position and identifies the report on which he relies. He further adds that, if both reports were sound, he would consider acting on the later one obligatory. This passage represents the strongest level of attribution to the compiler, since his position is stated in wording that requires no inference by the researcher.

Al-Tusi also cites the same written directive in Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām and discusses the two reports in al-Istibṣār. His approach to resolving the apparent conflict differs from al-Saduq's: he attempts to interpret the second report in a way that removes its contradiction with the directive, rather than abandoning action on its apparent meaning. This comparison demonstrates that the same reports may be treated through different mechanisms depending on the compiler's method. [38]

The examples above show that al-Saduq's treatment of divergent reports cannot be reduced to a single term. In the report about pumpkin seeds, the solution was to specify the subject matter of the ruling; in the case of the enslaved person's property, reconciliation depended on knowledge and contractual stipulation; in the bequest of a share, it depended on identifying the semantic referent of the word in light of the testator's intention; and in the appointment of two executors, al-Saduq moved to an explicit legal preference.

Al-Saduq's treatment of divergent reports can thus be classified into four levels: difference in subject matter, difference in qualification, difference in meaning or referent, and a conflict requiring selection of the report adopted in practice. This classification is derived from the examples themselves and avoids imposing the label "preference" or "reconciliation" uniformly on all texts.

The degrees of evidentiary strength in attributing interpretation to al-Saduq are also clear in this section. His comments, "These two reports are in agreement and do not conflict" and "I do not issue a fatwa on the basis of this report," constitute explicit first-level interpretations. By contrast, some forms of reconciliation inferred from the order of reports require additional indicators before they can be attributed to him with certainty.

3. Construing the Ambiguous in Light of the Explanatory and the Limits of Hadith-Based Causal Explanation

The relationship between ambiguous and explanatory texts is one of the clearest contexts in which Shaykh al-Saduq's intervention in interpreting reports becomes visible. A report may allow more than one meaning, after which another report specifies its subject matter or restricts its field of application. This method appears explicitly in reports on wills. Al-Saduq cites reports indicating that a person may dispose of his property, then restricts the meaning of some of them to the case in which the person has no heir, relying on another report that explains the circumstances to which the ruling applies. He comments: "This is an explanatory report, and the explanatory governs the ambiguous." [39]

This statement is particularly significant because it is not merely a reconciliation of two reports; it reveals a practical interpretive principle through which al-Saduq orders the relative semantic force of texts. The explanatory report does not cancel the ambiguous one; rather, it identifies its intended meaning and prevents it from being understood as having an unrestricted scope wider than its proper context.

This procedure differs from the preference discussed above. Here al-Saduq does not advance one report in order to discard another; instead, he makes one report the key to understanding the other. The relationship between the two texts is therefore one of clarification and interpretation, not conflict and selection.

Al-Majlisi discusses this passage in his commentary on Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, explaining that the explanatory report restricts the bequest of the entire estate to the case in which the testator has no heir, thereby removing the apparent unrestricted meaning of the earlier report. This reading confirms that al-Saduq's statement performs a genuine semantic function rather than serving as an incidental comment. [40]

Construing the ambiguous in light of the explanatory differs from hadith-based causal explanation. The former determines the meaning of a ruling or the scope of its application, whereas the latter seeks to explain the wisdom or rationale for which a ruling was prescribed. This is evident in the chapter on the rationale for ablution. Al-Saduq cites a report linking the washing of the four limbs to the story of Adam, peace be upon him, and then cites a letter from Imam al-Rida to Muhammad ibn Sinan, in which the rationale for washing the face and hands and wiping the head and feet is connected to the servant standing before God and facing Him with his outward limbs. [41]

Al-Saduq thus brings together two forms of causal explanation. The first has a narrative structure, linking the limbs involved in ablution to the event of Adam. The second offers a devotional rationale, connecting ablution with the servant's function in prayer and submission before God. The difference between these explanations does not necessarily entail a contradiction, since one ruling may be associated with more than one wisdom or explanatory aspect.

This example becomes more significant when compared with ʿIlal al-Sharāʾiʿ. Al-Saduq includes the report concerning the rationale for ablution in a separate chapter devoted to legal rationales and repeats the substance of Imam al-Rida's letter explaining the reason for washing and wiping the limbs. The difference in placement reveals that a report's function may vary according to the purpose of the compilation: in Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh it appears in the context of explaining a practical ruling, whereas in ʿIlal al-Sharāʾiʿ it forms part of a distinct project investigating the rationales of legislation. [42]

The same point is supported by the appearance of this explanation in ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā, where al-Saduq transmits Imam al-Rida's response concerning the rationale for ablution. This indicates that the same hadith material is preserved in more than one of his works. The comparison is important because it shows that the use of explanatory reports in al-Faqīh is not isolated from his broader method of preserving reports concerning the rationales of legal rulings. [43]

Another example concerns the rationale for the major ritual bath (ghusl al-janābah). In Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, al-Saduq cites a report distinguishing major ritual impurity from urination and defecation, then transmits from Imam al-Rida that the rationale for the major ritual bath is cleanliness and purification of the entire body, whereas the concession concerning urination and defecation is related to their frequency and the hardship they would otherwise cause. [44]

Al-Saduq presents the same meaning in ʿIlal al-Sharāʾiʿ, where he records Imam al-Rida's report concerning the rationale for the major ritual bath and also cites the earlier report relating to the emergence of the cause of major ritual impurity from the entire body. This comparison suggests that explanatory reports may recur across his works with their essential content preserved, while their function changes according to their location in each book. [45]

Al-Majlisi discusses these reports in Biḥār al-Anwār, distinguishing several explanatory aspects, including cleanliness, the frequency of causes requiring ablution, and the hardship associated with repeated urination and defecation. This reading shows that the plurality of explanations mentioned in a report does not require treating each one as an independent legal cause from which analogy may be constructed or the ruling altered. [46]

This section reveals two different levels of interpretation in al-Saduq's method. The first is semantic and exegetical, as in his statement that "the explanatory governs the ambiguous"; this is a direct intervention in determining the intended meaning of the text and affects the scope of the ruling. The second is hadith-based causal explanation, which identifies an aspect of the wisdom or rationale of legislation, as in the reports on ablution and ritual bathing.

It is therefore necessary to avoid equating transmitted wisdom with a technically defined legal cause. The appearance of a reason or wisdom in a report is not, by itself, sufficient to establish that the ruling may be generalized or restricted on that basis. Causal explanation may serve an exegetical, educational, or devotional function without automatically becoming an independent criterion for changing the ruling.

The comparison between Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, ʿIlal al-Sharāʾiʿ, and ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā shows that al-Saduq redeploys hadith material according to the purpose of each compilation. A text that appears in al-Faqīh as part of the construction of a legal ruling may appear in ʿIlal al-Sharāʾiʿ or al-ʿUyūn as evidence of the wisdom or rationale of legislation. This comparison is among the strongest reasons for studying a report within the context of the book in which it appears, rather than separating it from its authorial function.

It may therefore be concluded that the degree of explanation, the nature of the text, and the function of causal reasoning are three distinct criteria for understanding how al-Saduq moves from transmission to legal interpretation. Keeping them distinct prevents confusion between interpreting a text's meaning and explaining the wisdom behind a ruling.

Conclusion

This study has shown that examining Shaykh al-Saduq's methodology in Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh requires moving beyond the view of the work as a collection of selected reports and analysing how each report is situated within the jurisprudential context constructed by the compiler. The examples examined demonstrate that al-Saduq's position cannot be inferred merely from the presence of a report in the book; rather, it must be assessed in light of the surrounding indicators, including classification, commentary, arrangement, and comparison with other reports.

The study has also shown that the methodological value of the work lies in the interaction of its hadith, jurisprudential, and semantic dimensions, while maintaining a distinction between the wording of the report, al-Saduq's position toward it, and the contribution of subsequent analytical reading. The criterion for assessing the strength of attribution therefore emerges as an essential tool for controlling claims made about the compiler and for offering a more precise account of his method of dealing with reports and using them as evidence.

1. Findings

The study has shown that Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh is based on hadith selection directed toward a jurisprudential purpose. The inclusion of a report does not necessarily mean that all its apparent implications are adopted; al-Saduq may intervene to determine its meaning or scope of application.

The abridgement of chains and the classification of reports form part of the book's compositional structure. The mashyakha preserves some of the transmission routes, while classification helps determine the context and function of a report; neither, however, is independently sufficient to establish the compiler's position.

The applied examples show that al-Saduq interprets reports through several mechanisms, most notably lexical explanation, specification of subject matter, qualification, reconciliation, preference, and construing the ambiguous in light of the explanatory.

Al-Saduq's treatment of divergent reports does not rely on a single mechanism. He may resolve a difference by specifying the subject matter, qualification, or semantic referent, or he may select a particular report and explicitly state that he does not issue a legal opinion on the basis of another.

The study demonstrates the need to distinguish an explanatory report from a report offering a rationale. The former determines the meaning and scope of a ruling, whereas the latter identifies an aspect of legislative wisdom; a transmitted wisdom does not necessarily become an independent technical legal cause.

The study concludes that the strength of attributing an interpretation to al-Saduq ranges from explicit statement, through interpretation supported by multiple indicators, to probabilistic inference. Comparison between Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh and some of his other works also demonstrates that the purpose of a compilation affects the function and use of a report.

2. Recommendations

Expand the inductive examination to include all explicit comments by al-Saduq across the four volumes of Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, and prepare an analytical index classifying them by type of interpretation and strength of attribution.

Extend textual comparison between Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh, ʿIlal al-Sharāʾiʿ, Maʿānī al-Akhbār, and al-Saduq's other works to identify the effect of differing authorial purposes on the presentation and function of reports.

Conduct an independent isnad study of the mashyakha and the principal transmission routes, carefully distinguishing the wording of the report, al-Saduq's own statements, and the comments of editors and commentators.

Test the proposed three-level criterion for attributing interpretation against other hadith compilations to assess its suitability as a tool for comparing the methodologies of hadith scholars.

tools.

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