

Recommended Reading for SHWEP Episode 221: More on the Development of the *Shī'a* and *Shī'ī* Esotericisms

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1 Primary Sources for Studying the Early *Shī'a*

For a summary of debates over the early sources which tries to find a path between utter minimalism and credulity, see Haider 2011 (cited section 2 below), Chapter 2. P. 36 gives a fuller list of early *shī'ī* sources, which the author then discusses in terms of usefulness and reliability.

Later Islamic writers on sects or schools of thought who discuss early *shī'ī* groups:

ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl al Ashʿarī. *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyin wa-ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*. Wiesbaden, 1980 [died 935 CE. The [Library of Arabic Literature](#) (NYU/Abu Dhabi) is apparently working on a full English translation.].

Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b Mūsā al Nawbakhtī. *Kitāb firaq al-Shīʿa*. Maṭbaʿat ad-daula, Istanbul, 1931 [fl. c. 910 CE].

The above is Ritter's critical edition. There is an English translation: al-Ḥasan ibn Mūsā' al Nawbakhtī. *Shī'a Sects: (Kitāb Firaq al-Shī'a)*. ICAS Press, London, 2007.

***Shī'ī* sources for early imamological thought**

Muhammad b. Ya'qub al Kulayni. *Uṣul min al-kāfī*. Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyya, Tehran, 1983 [a crucial early *shī'ī* work on traditions and theology. Al-Kulaynī died 329/940 CE. There is an [online English version](#), for which I cannot vouch].

Ṣaffār al Qummī. *Kitāb baṣāʾir al-darajāt* [the largest early compilation of imamological dogmatic traditions; al-Qummī was a contemporary of the 10th and 11th twelfth

imams and a noted disciple of Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. he died 290/903 CE].

The following English translation of al-Qummī exists; no translator is given, which is usually not a good sign: Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al Qummī. *Basair Al-Darajat, Vol. 1: The Degrees Of Ahle Muhammad: An English Translation*. Rare Shia Hadith Books, Translated To English. Imam’eh Mubeen Publications, 2025.

2 Useful Secondary Sources Relevant to the Early Shī‘ī Community

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi. Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (m. 290/902-3) et son Kitāb baṣā’ir al-darajāt. *Journal asiatique*, 280(3):221–50, 1992.

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi. *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*. State University of New York Press, Albany, NY/Köln, 1994.

Ron Buckley. On the Origins of Shi’i Hadith. *Muslim World*, 88:165–84, 1998.

Hichem Djait. *al-Kufa: naissance de la ville islamique*. Editions G.P. Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1986.

Najam Haider. *The Origins of the Shi’a: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfa*. Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization. The University Press, Cambridge, 2011.

Arzina Lalani. *Early Shi’i Thought*. I. B. Taurus, London, 2000.

Michael G. Morony. *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*. Princeton Studies on the Near East. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ/Guildford, 1984.

Andrew Newman. *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi’ism*. Curzon, Richmond, 2000.

William F. Tucker. *Mahdis and Millennarians: Shi’ite Extremists in early Muslim Iraq*. The University Press, Cambridge, 2009.