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***The Socio-Political Aspect of Religious Terminologies in
Medieval Iran:
The Case of “Akḥbārī-uṣūlī” in Kitāb al-Naqḍ Written by
‘Abd al-Jalīl Qazwīnī Rāzī (d. 560/1165)***

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Abstract

The conflict between the Akḥbārīs and Uṣūlīs dates from the time of Mawlā Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (d. 1033/1624). However, limited usage of the two terms can be traced back to before that period. *Kitāb al-Naqḍ*, written by ‘Abd al-Jalīl Qazwīnī Rāzī (d. 560/1165), is one of the few Imāmī sources that contains a group of references to a similar conflict between the Shi‘a Uṣūlīyyah and Shi‘a Akḥbārīyyah. The former term, in particular, repeatedly appears in the book. The aim of this paper, adopting a conceptual approach to history, would be to demonstrate that the Akḥbārī/Uṣūlī terms in medieval Iran do not refer to a legal concept, nor to the dispute between the moderate/extremist Shi‘is in that context. Despite the first impression which the term conveys, it will be suggested that the term “uṣūlīyyah” does not have its roots in *uṣūl al-fiqh* (Islamic legal methodology), but rather, refers to some specific rational *uṣūl* (principles) usually applied to *uṣūl al-‘aqā’id* (Islamic theological principles). That is, “uṣūlīyyah,” according to Qazwīnī, refers to those whose religious knowledge has been based on rational principles. However, the Akḥbārī-Uṣūlī terminology introduced

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by Qazwīnī cannot be paired with the historical Shi‘i schools and figures of his period. If we consider the social and political pressures under which Iranian Imāmīs were living, it will appear that employment of such terms has had a strategic purpose. In this case, calling most of his contemporaries “uṣūlīs,” and attributing controversial Shi‘i beliefs to the Akhbārīs, Qazwīnī has attempted to exonerate Imāmīs from their accusations, and to improve their social position.

Keywords: *Kitāb al-Naqd*, Shi‘a Uṣūlīyyah, Shi‘a Akhbārīyyah, ‘Abd al-Jalīl Qazwīnī Rāzī, *uṣūl al-fiqh*.

Introduction

One of the invaluable Imāmī medieval works is *Ba‘d-u Mathālib al-Nawāṣib fī Naqd-i Ba‘d-i Faḍā’ih al-Rawāfiḍ*, which is usually abbreviated as *Kitāb al-Naqd*. The work, written in the Persian language, is a theological book produced in response to an intolerant Sunni scholar of Ray. According to some witnesses, Shahāb al-Dīn Tawārīkhī Shafī‘ī Rāzī, the aforementioned Sunni scholar, was the author of *Ba‘d-u Faḍā’ih al-Rawāfiḍ*, (Āqā Buzurg-e Tehrānī, 1403, vol. 24, p. 284) written in the year 555 AH/1160 CE (Urmawī, 1358, p. 21).

‘Abd al-Jalīl Qazwīnī Rāzī, the author of *Kitāb al-Naqd*, was an outstanding Imāmī theologian and scholar during the 12th century in Ray, and authored the book to meet the demands of Ab-ul-Faḍl Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Murtaḍā (Qazwīnī, 1358, p. 4). Although the book’s writing style is understandable by a layman, the author also addresses a more specialized reader (*ibid.*, p. 7). Qazwīnī was a zealous Imāmī preacher according to Muntajab al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. a. 553/1158) who remembered him as “al-shaikh al-wā‘id” (see: Muntajab al-Dīn Rāzī, 1366, vol. 3, p. 87; Afandī, 1401, p. 72; Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, 1362, vol. 2, p. 143; Baghdādī, 1413, vol. 5, p. 500). No reliable information exists regarding his birth and death date, but some evidence—suggests that he died after 560 AH/1165 CE (Urmawī, 1358, p. 23).

In his book, Qazwīnī repeatedly refers to a group of Imāmīs as “shi‘a uṣūlīyyah,” which is terminology rarely seen in other Shi‘i works around that time. The Shi‘a Uṣūlīyyah had been in confrontation with the

Akhbārīyyah and *hashwīyyah* (the literalists, who base theology only on the tradition) according to him. He affirms his affiliation with the Shi‘a Uṣūlīyyah as the pure representation of Imāmī thought, pointing out that they constituted as the majority during his time.

This paper investigates Qazwīnī’s *Kitāb al-Naqd* in detail to clarify to which groups the lesser-known Qazwīnī’s terminology refers. The hypothesis in this paper is that Qazwīnī’s arguments and the terms he uses to describe both Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs cannot be taken at face value. These terms must be situated within a socio-political framework. It will be argued that he aimed to improve the conditions of the community of Imāmīyyah and its scholars.

To that purpose, *Kitāb al-Naqd* will be the primary source of this study, in addition to other Islamic materials related to the subject or that period. After an overview of the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī conceptions from a historical perspective, this paper will discuss the semantic meaning of the term “uṣūlīyyah” to see whether the term, in Qazwīnī’s usage, refers to Uṣūl al-Fiqh or most likely relates to the *uṣūl al-‘aqā’id*. The next step will be to find the historical Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs to whom Qazwīnī has referred to. To understand Qazwīnī’s specific language in its historical context, his book will be studied in two ways. First, the main legal and theological standpoints of the Uṣūlīs will be extracted from the work to see if they can be paired with the known Imāmī schools of his period. Second, all of the direct references to the names of the Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs, within the book, will be studied.

This medieval Shi‘i terminology has not been thoroughly investigated by a conceptual approach to medieval Iran’s history. Several scholars who referred to Qazwīnī’s book (see: Madelung, 2011, par. 1; Kohlberg, 2014, par. 1; Stewart, 1998, pp. 202–207; Newman, 1992, p. 38, f.n. 6) have considered the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī terminology in *Kitāb al-Naqd* as the ground for the late Akhbārī-Uṣūlī conflict.

Significant Iranian/ Shi‘i scholars have found the usage of “akhbārī-uṣūlī” in the book as an attempt at moderation and rapprochement between faiths. According to them, Qazwīnī Rāzī was one of the first Shi‘i theorists to critically and logically address the integration of religions; his rationalist efforts encouraged this tolerance and

convergence (see: Dah Pahlawān, 1398, p. 55; Dādāshnezhād, 1394, p. 124; Ma'mūrī, 1382, pp. 85-86). Rasul Jafarian sees 'Abd-o l-Jalīl as an example of Ray's moderate Shi'i thought in the sixth century AH (Jafarian, 1371, p. 104).

Wilfred Madelung considered *Kitāb al-Naqd* a proof for the existence of an Akhbārī-Uṣūlī struggle since the 12th century. He points out that the conflict between the Uṣūllīyyah and Akhbārīyyah in Imamism is not a phenomenon originating in Safavid times, as is sometimes suggested. The conflict which centers on technical questions of the principles of law (Uṣūl al-fiqh) is rooted in the earlier broader conflict between supporters of speculative theology and traditionalist opponents or reasoning in religion (see: Madelung, 1985, VII, p. 21, f.n. 1).

Andrew Newman even traced this division to the 3rd/9th century, noting its political significance. In his Ph.D. dissertation, he has dedicated a separate section to the redefinition of the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī struggle. He sees the conflict as a discourse originating in early Imāmī schools, one which is the basis of his comprehensive discussion throughout the history of Shi'ism (see: Newman, 1986, p. 9; *id.*, 1992, pp. 250–53).

Robert Gleave has delved deeper into this question in the most extensive discussion so far on *Kitāb al-Naqd* (Gleave, 2007, pp. 16-25). He merely concluded that the relationship between the Astarābādī School and Qazwīnī's specific terminology could not be proven. Nonetheless, Gleave did not attempt to look at any other textual and historical sources to explain the meaning of Qazwīnī's specific references and his aims (see: *ibid.*, p. 25; *id.*, 2009, par. 2).

Akhbārī-Uṣūlī Conceptions from a Historical Perspective

Before the rise of Astarābādī's School, the uses of the term "akhbārī" had no affinity to the discourse established by him. The term "akhbārī" had different meanings in the early and medieval Islamic centuries. A quick look at the old Shi'i and Sunni sources reveals that the word "akhbārī" has had at least two other meanings before the 17th century (see: Gleave, 2009, par. 2).

The earliest meaning of the term was usually in relation to the *al-*

mu'arrikhūn wa-al-quṣṣāṣ (historians and storytellers). This usage was widespread from the end of the second Islamic century onward (Gleave, 2007, p. 14, f.n. 40). It appears that *Kitāb al-Rijāl*, written by Najāshī (d. ca. 450/1058), was the earliest Shi'i source in which the term "akhbārī" is used (Najāshī, 1373, p. 96); within Sunni works, seemingly, Aḥmad b. 'Abdullāh al-'Ijlī (d. 261/875) has used the term for the first time (Al-'Ijlī, 1405, p. 43). In the old bibliographical and biographical sources, the term "akhbārī" has appeared in a similar meaning to "aṣḥāb al-sīyar" (i.e., persons transmitting the history of the Prophet Muhammad) and in a different one to "muḥaddithūn" (traditionists). Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 438/1047) has dedicated a chapter, entitled "akhbārīyyūn wa aṣḥāb al-sīyar wa-al-aḥdāth," to the books written by both Akhbārīs and *aṣḥāb al-sīyar* (Ibn-e Nadīm, n.d., p. 4). In addition to the chapter's name, the books' titles therein confirm the understanding as mentioned above of the term. Elsewhere in his book, Ibn al-Nadīm mentions Aḥmad b. Zuhayr b. Ḥarb as "al-muḥaddith al-akhbārī" (*ibid.*, p. 286). The fact that he distinguishes between the two terms shows that the two had acquired separate and independent meanings in his opinion (Shahrzūrī, 1374, p. 175; also see: Khaṭīb-i Baghdādī, vol. 8, 1417, P. 375). Akhbārīs were also referred to by the term "ahl al-akhbār." *Al-Ghārāt*, written by Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad Thaqaḥfī (d. 283/896), is an early Shi'i source in which this second term can be found. Thaqaḥfī in his book uses the expression "ahl al-akhbār" in opposition to "ahl al-ḥadīth" (traditionists), one which clearly shows that the two terms did not have the same meaning (Thaqaḥfī, n.d., p. 914).

Historical statements show that from the early third Islamic century onward, the Ahl al-Hadīth was already a well-known group in the Islamic community (Ibn-e Bābūya, n.d., p. 117). Although they were criticized for adopting a superficial approach toward prophetic traditions (*ibid.*, p. 117), they had identified a distinct method for selecting and distinguishing certain and sound traditions from others, which clearly separated them from the Akhbārīs (Shāfi'ī, n.d., p. 139, 382; *id.*, vol. 1, 1403, p. 219, 294; *ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 201; al-Muzanī, n.d., p. 26). A significant sentence, in this regard, appeared in *al-Ghārāt*, namely, that "This tradition is narrated by the Ahl al-Akhbār; hence, it is not sound according to the standards of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth" (Thaqaḥfī, n.d., p. 914).

This vital sentence is one of such examples that effectively demonstrates the distinction between these two groups: “*hādihā-l-khabar-u min naql-i ahl al-akhbār lā yaṣiḥh-u ‘inda ahl al-ḥadīth* (see: Ḥafīd Mazzī, vol. 31, 1363, p. 159; Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, vol. 4, 1369, p. 1556). Taking into consideration this viewpoint can lead to a better understanding of some ambiguous statements within the early biographical works such as what Ibn al-Ghaḍā’irī (d. 411/1020) has mentioned concerning Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī (d. 274/887).¹ As such, Ibn al-Ghaḍā’irī’s criticism of al-Barqī was due to his support for the storytellers and historians, not traditionists.²

One can extract specific characteristics of these Akhbārīs or Ahl al-Akhbār from some primary sources’ fragmentary information. They were thought to have been careless in their usage of sources (Khurāsānī Karbāsī, 1382, p. 121). It seems that those who were called “akhbārīs” were also widely narrating the *Isrā’īlīyyāt* (stories taken from Jewish sources) (Dhahabī, vol. 20, 1407, p. 382). They are also described as *jāhil* (ignorant) and people of *ja’l* (fabrication); (Ibn Kathīr Damishqī, vol. 7, 1365, p. 251). It has also been mentioned that some of them, who later converted to Islam, had originated from Ahl al-Kitāb (Qāḍī ‘Ayāḍ, vol. 2, 1366, p. 163). In early Islamic discourse, the writings of the Akhbārīs have also been considered as running in opposition to the Qur’an and sunna (Abu Ḥayyān, vol. 6, 1379, p. 309).

As for the second usage of the term “akhbārī,” it was referring to a group that had adopted *naql* (*ḥadīth*) as the most reliable source of religious knowledge. This particular meaning appears to have emerged from the 12th century onward. Shahrīstānī (d. 548/1153) seems to have been the first to use the term “akhbārī” in relation to a kind of inclination toward traditions, rather than historiography. In *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, the Akhbārīs are mentioned in opposition to the Mu’tazilīs and the *ahl al-*

1. He states: “**Like the Ahl al-Akhbār, Barqī did not care about who the ḥadīth transmitters were.**” (see: ‘Allāmah Ḥillī, n.d., p. 63).

2. Accordingly, it appears that Modarresi’s opinion proposing that *maqābis al-anwār fī al-rad ‘alā ahl al-akhbār* (written by Shaikh Mufīd) was about the Ahl al-Ḥadīth is not in its position (see: Modarresi, 1368, p. 16; Najāshī, 1373, p. 401). For Mufīd, in his book *al-Jamal*, has used the term “ahl al-akhbār” as a synonym for the storytellers and historians (see: Mufīd, 1377, p. 68). Similarly, Sayyid Murtaḍā (d. 436/1045), the student and contemporary of Mufīd, has also used the term “ahl al-akhbār” in such a way (see: Sayyid Murtadā, 1410, vol. 2, p. 75).

‘*aql* (the people of reason); (Shahristānī, vol. 1, n.d., p. 172; cf. Gleave, 2007, p. 15). Following Shahristānī, from the 13th to the 15th centuries, several authors, including Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 683/1284), Qāḍī ‘Aḍud Ījī (d. 759/1358), and Ḥāfiẓ Rajab Bursī (d. a. 813/1411), have mentioned the Akhbārīs in opposition to the *ahl al-‘aql* or *ahl al-‘adl*¹ (see: Ibn ‘Arabī, vol. 2, n.d., p. 604; cf. ‘Aḍud al-Dīn Ījī, , vol. 3, 1374, p. 691; cf. Ḥafīd Bursī, 1376, p. 241).

When it comes to the third usage of the term “akhbārī,” it was tied to the emergence of the famous Akhbārī School through the teachings of Mawlā Muḥammad Amin Astarābādī in the 17th century. The usage of the term is also attributed to ‘Allāmah al-Hillī (d. 726/1326) in relation to Uṣūl al-Fiqh, which makes him the only Shi‘i scholar who used this term in this sense before Astarābādī.² More than merely possessing a theological or doctrinal nature, Astarābādī’s school had a legal character. Astarābādī was trying to confront the rise of Uṣūlī approaches to the law adopted by the Shi‘i scholars.³ In a recent article titled, “Shi‘i Jurisprudence, Sunnism and the Traditionist Thought (*akhbārī*) of Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626-7)” Rula Jurdi Abisaab argued that akhbārism maintained discursive ties to earlier trends within the Shi‘i and Sunni traditions. Still, she rejected the view that Astarabadi’s traditionism was a mere resumption of past leanings in legal, hadith, and *rijāl* scholarship (Abisaab, 2015, p. 18).

According to her, it went further in attacking *ijtihād*, which had developed only in the 13th century (*ibid.*, p.18). More importantly, she noted that “the meanings of *akhbārī* and *uṣūlī* changed over time and across genres and scholarly contexts;” but they carried a specific meaning in the late sixteenth century under the Safavids (*ibid.*, fn.

1. Those who take God’s justice, or ‘*adl*, as a fundamental principle upon which all beliefs should be justified.

2. Some Shi‘i scholars have attributed to him a statement, in his book *nihāyat al-uṣūl*, showing that he uses the terms in relation to the Uṣūl al-fiqh (see: Ibn Shahīd Thānī, n.d., p. 191; cf. Astarābādī, 1381, p. 97, p. 132).

3. There is an entire body of western studies on the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī conflict. However, much of the discussions are not regarding the meanings and usages of the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī terminology. The most recent scholarship on Astarābādī’s school is what Rula Jurdi Abisaab has written at length on the epistemology and legal methodology of Astarābādī (see: Abisaab, 2015; also see: Newman, 1992, Part 1; *id.*, 1986; Cole, 1985, vol. 18, no. 1; Gleave, 2000, vol. 12; *id.*, 2007; Kohlberg, 1987; *ibid.*, 2011; Algar, 1995; Madelung, 2011).

136,137).¹

Having encountered numerous contradictions in the traditional Islamic legal methodology, or Uṣūl al-Fiqh, he spent a significant time in Medina to revise and study prophetic traditions. This ultimately led him to compile his famous book, *al-Fawā'id al-Madanīyah* (Astarābādī, 2015, p. 27). Nevertheless, Astarābādī did not consider himself the founder of the Akhbārī School. Instead, he has stated that the methods used by the early Imāmīs to arrive at the *aḥkām* (legal rulings) differed from those used by the later Uṣūlīs (Ibid., pp. 91-92, p. 97, p. 104, p. 111, p. 136). It seems that he referred to the early Imāmī traditionalists by the term “akhbārīs” just to show that their approach was based on the usage of Aḥādīth. He considered himself the only adherent to this early school. This is probably why Astarābādī has often been introduced as the founder of the Akhbārī School (*ibid.*, p. 104).

The Semantic Meaning of "Uṣūliyyah" in *Kitāb Al-Naqḍ*

Kitāb al-Naqḍ is the earliest source where the term “uṣūlī” is used antonymously to “akhbārī” (Pākatchī, 1385, p. 169). Despite the first impression the term “uṣūlī” gives, this term does not seem to be related to any legal concept, which can be shown in two ways. First, Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 606/1210) attributed a similar confrontation between the Uṣūlīs and Akhbārīs, in *al-Maḥsūl*, to Imāmīs (Fakhr-e Rāzī, 1369, vol. 4, p. 384). It is historically the closest work, to *Kitāb al-Naqḍ*, that has used the term “uṣūlī” in a similar way.

Besides, both scholars originated in Ray, which was one of the most important cities for religious learning in that period. Therefore, Rāzī's conception of “uṣūlī” can be taken as the most reliable source to understand the term in *Kitāb al-Naqḍ*. Rāzī's statement in respect to the Uṣūlīs and Akhbārīs seems to be about a confrontation between traditionalism and rationalism. He states that earlier Imāmīs were Akhbārī, and describes them as those who based their Uṣūl al-'Aqā'id on *akhbār* (more information on this terminology in Rāzī's book, see:

1. She notes that "Ibn Abi 'Aqil is described as "*awwal-i kesī ast az mujtahidān-i Imāmiyya*" (one of the first Imami mujtahids) noting his emphasis on syllogistic reasoning even if he did not develop Shi'i *ijtihād* as we know it." She also says that "In *Rijal al-'Allama*, page 156, Muhammad b. Zakariyya b. Dinar (d. 298/910) is described as an "*akhbārī*" though distinguished from narrators of hadith."

Gleave, 2007, pp. 25-28). Second, even though the author repeatedly mentions the Uṣūlīs in his book, he focuses on their attributes, which tie in with Uṣūl al-‘Aqā’id (foundations of doctrine), rather than the Uṣūl al-Fiqh (See later in the paper).

It appears that the reference to an “Uṣūlī-Akhhbārī” struggle in *Kitāb al-Naqḍ*, does not relate to issues of Uṣūl al-Fiqh. Instead, it refers to a kind of confrontation between elements of rationalism and traditionalism in the area of doctrine. Therefore, the Uṣūlīs were those who established their religious knowledge on the basis of a set of rational principles (*uṣūl*). That is, despite the first impression the terms “uṣūlīyyah” and “akhhbārīyyah” give, it seems that the semantics of “uṣūlīyyah” is not rooted in “uṣūl al-fiqh,” but refers instead to general rational principles relating to doctrine, that is, “uṣūl al-‘aqā’id.” In the same vein, the “uṣūlīyyah,” refers to those who rely on rational-based proofs for religious knowledge. Thus, it seems that the Akhhbārī-Uṣūlī terminology in *Kitāb al-Naqḍ* implies a type of opposition between rationalism and traditionalism.

Who are the Uṣūlīs and Akhhbārīs in Qazwīnī’s Text?

In this section, It will be examined the scholars described by Qazwīnī as Akhhbārī and Uṣūlī and assess the accuracy of his depictions in two ways. First, the intellectual features of the Uṣūlī school will be extracted from the book to see if they can be paired with the information we have about the scholars affiliated with them. Second, any direct new references to the names of Akhhbārīs or Uṣūlīs will be assessed.

Was for the first task, it deserves to draw out Uṣūlīs’ legal thoughts at first. Qazwīnī mentions that he does not endorse the authority of traditions narrated by only one or few individuals, namely *al-akhhbār al-āḥād* (the single traditions). He believes that the Shi‘a Uṣūlīyyah do not recognize any certainty or obligation in *al-akhhbār al-āḥād* to conduct any practice: “*lā yūjib ‘ilm-an wa lā ‘amal-a*” (see: Qazwīnī, 1358, p. 26, p. 288, p. 394). This idea is the most fundamental legal one in the school introduced by Qazwīnī as “shi‘a uṣūlīyyah.” Before Qazwīnī, some Imāmī theologians of Baghdad such as Sayyid Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) and Shaikh Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) had the same attitude toward the single traditions (see: Pākatchī, vol. 9, 1379, pp. 299-300).

Qazwīnī has also upheld the authority of the *Ijmā'* (consensus) of the Shi'i scholars (Qazwīnī, 1358, p. 554, p. 585, p. 616). He mentions that the Shi'a Uṣūlīyyah consider the consensus of *ṭā'ifat-ul-muḥiqqah* (the true cult), who are Imāmī Shi'is to him, as one of the four-fold legal proofs (*ibid.*, p. 59). Qazwīnī's statement as mentioned above, which was in response to an objection raised by the Sunni scholar, reveals that the four-fold legal proof (*al-adillat-ul-arba'ah*) are the Qur'an, the sunna, the *Ijmā'*, and the *'aql* to him (*ibid.*, p. 58). It can be concluded that Qazwīnī, in addition to the *Ijmā'*, believes in the authority of reason (*'aql*) as a source for legal reasoning. Despite the well-known idea that Ibn Idrīs al-Hillī (d. 598/1202) was the first Imāmī scholar to incorporate the reason into the legal proofs, it appears that Qazwīnī had done this before him.¹

When it comes to his theological notions, first of all, despite the late Imāmī theological discourse which ranks the *Imāmah* doctrine (the Shi'i principle of spiritual leadership) as the fourth Shi'i fundamental belief, he has mentioned it as the third principle in the Shi'i faith. Qazwīnī's work shows that the Shi'i beliefs were being classified according to the so-called *uṣūl al-'aqā'id al-khamsah* (the five-fold principles of faith) discourse which is the main base in the late systematic Imāmī theology (*kalām*); (see: Qazwīnī, 1358, pp. 546-547; on the late Imāmī theological discourse, see: Kāshif al-Ghiṭā', 1425, passim).

In regards to *tawfīq* (God-given aid) and its counterpart *khidhlān* (withdrawal of God's help from man), Sunni scholar considers that the Imāmīyyah refuses to attribute them to God's will. In response, Qazwīnī states that this refusal is just upheld by the Shi'a Uṣūlīyyah and *'adlīyyah* (the people of the justice); (see: Qazwīnī, 1358, pp. 501-503, p. 489). This may be the only viewpoint that separates him from the traditional Imāmī thought concerning God's justice (See: Ibn-e Bābūya, n.d., p. 241; The group of authors, 1415, p. 139). For all of the Imāmī scholars, including Qumī traditionalists and Baghdādī theologians, had agreed that the *khidhlān* must be attributed to God's will. Regarding the *tahrīf* (falsification) of the Qur'an, Qazwīnī attributes it to the *ghulāt*

1. Pākatchī has referred to Ibn Idrīs as the first Imāmī scholar who incorporated reason (*'aql*) into the four-fold legal proofs. However, the statement as mentioned earlier indicates that Qazwīnī had previously mentioned it (see: Pākatchī, 1379, p. 301).

(extremists) and *hashwīyyah*, claiming that none of the Uṣūlīyyah admits the possibility of *zīyādah* (addition) or *nuqṣan* (omission) in the Qur'an (On Imāmī attitudes to the Qur'an, see: Kohlberg, 1972, passim; Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, 2009, introduction, pp. 30-45).

He has taken a somewhat different attitude toward 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the first Shi'ī Imam, in comparison to traditional Imāmī viewpoint. Qazwīnī believes that 'Alī's position was lower than that of the previous prophets, since they had been the bearers of the scriptures, laws, and God's mission; also, they suffered from certain hardships throughout their mission and career (Qazwīnī, 1358, pp. 528-529). According to Qazwīnī, although 'Alī's position was not better than that of the Prophet, he has undoubtedly gained the best place in the chain of Shi'ī imams, and it was due to his superiority over the angels" (*ibid.*, p. 318). Qazwīnī also shares with the early Imāmī scholars the idea that the *'Ilm al-ghaib* (the knowledge of the unseen) should not be included in the scope of the *al-'Im al-ladunnī* (i. e. God-given esoteric Imām's knowledge). He emphasizes that Imam 'Alī did not possess such knowledge (*ibid.*, p. 257; more information on the early Imāmī conception of 'Ilm al-Ghaib, see: Gerami, 1391, pp. 128-152; Bayhom-Daou, 1996, passim). He also does not believe in the *alast* (the world of pre-existence) and the *raj'ah* (the second coming to the world), the two famous traditional faiths of the Shi'a in that period (Qazwīnī, 1358, pp. 286-287). Qazwīnī considers that believing in the world of pre-existence will lead people to believe in *jabr* (determinism); (*ibid.*, p. 51, p. 186, p. 453, p. 431).¹

Further investigation of *Kitāb al-Naqd* leads us to the main distinction between the so-called Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs in Qazwīnī's book. Undoubtedly, the most prominent point of differentiation between them was the Uṣūlī's tolerant attitude toward the Prophet's companions and wives, who are usually victims of hatred in the Imāmī *barā'ah* (denouncing) principle. According to this famous theological principle, the Imāmī Shi'īs must hate some well-respected early Islam figures. However, Qazwīnī has distanced himself from the traditional Imāmī notion and adopted a very different viewpoint from that declared by the

1. It is well-known that the early Imāmī theologians denied the world of pre-existence to have existed before this world, while the Imāmī traditionalists believed in that (more details on this controversial issue, see: Gerami, 1391, pp. 213-230).

most Imāmīs. His non-traditional perspective was unacceptable to the mainstream to the extent that some later Imāmīs considered his statements as “extremely annoying” (see: Kuntūrī, 1409, p. 586).

Qazwīnī has declared that the Shi‘a do not believe in the heresy or *nifāq* (hypocrisy) of the Prophet’s companions. Instead, Imāmīs simply consider the priority of ‘Alī for as caliphate in comparison to the others (Qazwīnī, 1358, p. 257). He also believes that ‘Alī should be ranked as the most virtuous companion of the Prophet Muhammad, and that ‘Alī’s leadership had been held according to the *naṣ* (textual designation). In contrast, the caliphate for the other companions was just held by the public votes (*ibid.*, p. 178). Qazwīnī frequently refers to *Saqīfah*, the famous event in which Abū Bakr was chosen to lead the early Muslim community after the Prophet Muhammad. Narrating from the Sunni sources, Qazwīnī shows that even ‘Umar and Abū Bakr, the first two Islamic caliphs, had acknowledged the priority of ‘Alī over them to handle political affairs (*ibid.*, p. 59, pp. 288-289, p. 297, pp. 597-602).

Surprisingly, he has endorsed that Muḥassan, the youngest son of ‘Alī, was killed not long after the Prophet Muhammad (*ibid.*, p. 298). However, he strictly has stated that the insult and hatred toward these two caliphs were not in the creed of the Shi‘a Uṣūlīyyah (*ibid.*, pp. 415-416).

Ultimately, it seems that Qazwīnī confines the scope of Shi‘i *barā’ah* to the enemies of Ahl al-Bait, particularly ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. He explicitly mentions that the Shi‘a Uṣūlīyyah only consider the *khārijite* (*rebel*), the *nāṣibī* (anti-Shi‘a), and the *mujabbirah* (determinists) to have been included in the *barā’ah*. He thus criticizes Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) as being hostile toward ‘Alī, and considers that he should be included in the *barā’ah*. On the contrary, he has appreciated the dignity of Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767) and Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) for their friendly attitudes toward ‘Alī (*ibid.*, p. 482).

Having finished with the most important intellectual features of Shi‘a Uṣūlīyyah, it comes to put them under the measure of historical facts. It initially appears to the reader that some similarities may exist between the Shi‘a Uṣūlīyyah and some other Imami schools of that time,

including the so-called *maktab-e mutikallimān-e Baghdad*¹; on them, see: Gerami, 1391, pp. 99-104).

However, it is apparent that the most outstanding notion of the Shi'a Uṣūlīyah was their tolerant *barā'ah* viewpoint. Thus, *barā'ah* is the most reliable factor to examine whether the school introduced by Qazwīnī can be paired with historical facts and figures. In other words, it would be almost impossible to claim that the school presented by Qazwīnī has had an affinity with the different Shi'i currents of his period, if they had no such tolerant *barā'ah* standpoint. An in-depth historical study shows that it is not feasible to find this attribute among other Imāmī schools of his period.²

It is also impossible to claim that being few has led Uṣūlīs to be an unknown school in the history, since Qazwīnī explicitly mentions that the Shi'a Uṣūlīyah made up the majority of the Imāmīs (Qazwīnī, 1358, pp. 457-459).

Coming to the second way of historical investigation, *Kitāb al-Naqḍ* should be explored to find direct references to the names of Uṣūlīs or Akhbārīs. Qazwīnī has considered almost all of his contemporaries as Uṣūlīs (*ibid.*, pp. 457-459). Conversely, concerning the Akhbārīs or Ḥashwīs, Qazwīnī has not mentioned their names in all of the cases, which is an unparalleled and rare phenomenon in such polemical works which usually address the opposite side of their discussions. Instead, he simply states that the Akhbārīs had been extinct or at least a fragile group. Also, some important counterexamples, such as Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/992), strengthen that "akhbārī" in Qazwīnī's terminology has not been in accordance to the known historical cases.

Ibn Bābūya was the most prominent Imāmī traditionalist amongst those who affiliated with the School of Qum, and had been criticized by the rationalist Imāmī theologians of Baghdad such as Shaikh Muḥīd, more than others had (see: Muḥīd, 1414, p. 136). Therefore, it is expected

1. (The School of the Imāmī Theologians of Baghdad

2. Although some Imāmī scholars, such as Muntajab al-Dīn Rāzī and Abu al-Futūḥ Rāzī (d. ca. 525/1131), had similar tolerant attitudes toward the *barā'ah*, they are not as many as to constitute the school introduced by Qazwīnī, as the Uṣūlīs had included the central part of Imāmīs according to the book. On these figures, (see: Islāmīyih, 1384, vol. 13, pp. 368-372; Rāfi'ī Qazwīnī, 1987, vol. 3, p. 377).

that Qazwīnī would show his profound disagreement with Shaikh Ṣadūq as a prominent Akhbārī scholar. However, Qazwīnī's statements indicate that Ṣadūq had never been an Akhbārī scholar to him. In *al-Naqd*, he is referred to as a leading jurist alongside Shaikh Ṭūsī and Sayyid Murtaḍā who, according to Qazwīnī, the overthrow of the Akhbārīs was indebted to the efforts of them (Qazwīnī, 1358, p. 568; p. 29).

Shaikh Ṣadūq has been admired as an honorable scholar who was the great mentor of all later Imāmīs (*ibid.*, p. 191). Besides, Qazwīnī's information regarding the prevalent books of the Shi'a Uṣūlīyyah includes some of Ibn Bābūya's works such as *Man lā yaḥḍuruh-ul-faqīh* and *Ilal al-sharā'i* (*ibid.*, pp. 38-39).

Qazwīnī's Specific Terminology in Service of a Socio-Political Purpose

It has been discussed that Qazwīnī's Akhbārī-Uṣūlī terminology cannot be paired with the historical facts which are available to us from his period. Here, Qazwīnī's specific language's primary purpose will be investigated to shed light on his feelings and concerns when he authored his book. He has attempted, as much as possible, to attribute the Imāmī controversial beliefs to the Akhbārīs, the *ghulāt*, and the Ḥashwīs, the marginalized groups of the Shi'a during his time according to him. Qazwīnī has adopted this position while starting his book. He declares that most of the Sunni scholar's claims against Imāmīs are just the faiths of the aforementioned Shi'i minorities (*ibid.*, p. 3). Elsewhere in the book, Qazwīnī challenges the Sunni scholar for his inequity, as he has attributed the notions of the Ḥashwīs, the Akhbārīs, and the *ghulāt* to the Shi'a Uṣūlīyyah (*ibid.*, p. 235). Regarding the *barā'ah* and abuse of the Prophet's companions, Qazwīnī has linked them to the *ghulāt* and Ḥashwīs to exonerate the Shi'a Uṣūlīyyah (*Ibid.*, p. 236).¹ Besides, concerning the dignity of 'Alī b. Abī Tālib, Qazwīnī reports that just a few Akhbārīs believed in his superiority over the great prophets, a view which the Uṣūlīs ~~have~~ never adopted (*ibid.*, pp. 528-529).

1. The Sunni scholar names some famous Shi'i figures of his period, who abused the Prophet Muhammad's Companions (see: *ibid.*, p. 118, p. 142, p. 117). Even though such reports may be unreliable, as they have been issued by someone hostile toward the Imāmīyyah, it is difficult to claim that the Sunni scholar has attributed them to Imāmīs without any historical ground.

On the other hand, Qazwīnī expands the scope of the Uṣūlīs as much as possible, whereas he has presented the Akhbārīs as a group to which just a limited number of scholars belong. Also, he considers the Akhbārīs to be near extinction, except some people whom the Uṣūlīs overcame them in several topics, and do not dare to openly express their opinions (Ibid., pp. 568-569). To mention the regions and home cities of the Uṣūlīs, Qazwīnī has named all of the Iranian Shi‘i towns in that period, including Qum, Qāshān, Awih, Sabziwār, Gurgān, Ṭabaristān, Ray, and Qazwīn (ibid., pp. 457-459).

It also seems appropriate to look at the social and political pressures under which Imāmīs were living during the Qazwīnī’s period. *Kitāb al-Naqḍ*, itself, reflects on this problematic situation. According to the book, Sulṭān Malikshāh and his minister, Khājih Niẓām al-Mulk Ṭūsī, who had been the ruler before Qazwīnī, had rigorously cracked down on Imāmīs. Even though Qazwīnī has mostly attempted to ignore such repressive measures adopted by the Saljūqī rulers, several evidences exist in the book concerning such measures (see: Jafarain, 1386, p. 505), most of which have been committed by the Shāfi‘īs and Ḥanafīs. For instance, during Malikshāh’s rule, Imāmī scholars of Ray were forced to climb the *manābir* (pulpits) to be insulted. Besides, they were openly being called "enemies of Islam" due to their abuse of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (Qazwīnī, 1358, p. 11, p. 142).

Therefore, it is hardly possible to consider the Uṣūlī-Akhbarī terminology in *Kitāb al-Naqḍ* as the historical ground for the late Astarābādī School, the fact that seems to be only understood by R. Gleave (see: Gleave, 2007, p. 25; *id.*, 2009, par. 2). This paper suggests that such ambiguous terminology was released to improve the social position of Imāmīs within the intolerant Sunni-oriented society of Iran in the 12th century. Through his strategic purpose, Qazwīnī has exploited the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī conflict to exonerate the isolated Imāmī community from some controversial accusations attributed to them by the dominated Sunni community. Ascribing the controversial beliefs of the Imāmī to the extinct Akhbārīs, and exonerating the Uṣūlīs from these faiths, Qazwīnī has tried to improve the socio-political position of Imāmīs. This is why the majority of whom he has referred to were considered under the Uṣūlī group, and there is not even one reference to the names of Akhbārīs in his book.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the rare usage of Akhbārī-Uṣūlī terminology in medieval Shi‘ism. *Kitāb al-Naqḍ*, the most reliable source of such terminology, was chosen to conduct research on this terminology. As a preliminary discussion, a chronological perspective from the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī conceptions within the Islamic and Shi‘i literature was demonstrated. The usual and well-known usage of the term Akhbārī appeared in post-17th century when Mawlā Muḥammad Amin Astarābādī established his new reading of the legal methodology. However, it seems that the term “akhbārī” included two other meanings prior to his time. The earliest meaning of the term was about historians and storytellers. This usage was widespread from the end of the second Islamic century onward. The term’s second usage was related to those who adopted Aḥādīth as the most reliable religious knowledge source. This usage can be observed from the 12th century onward.

In the next step, the historicity of the Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs introduced by Qazwīnī was examined. Despite the initial impression which these two terms give, the Uṣūlī figures and their thoughts, presented by Qazwīnī, could not be paired with the historical Shi‘i schools and scholars at that time. Subsequently, considering the social and political pressures under which the Iranian Imāmīs were living, it was proposed that the usage of the terms in such a way has had a strategic purpose. It seems that the social conditions which had forced the Imāmīs to adopt a strict form of *taqīyyah* (cautious imitation) led Qazwīnī to exploit a particular terminology for socio-political purposes. Calling the majority of his contemporaries “uṣūlīs,” and attributing the controversial Shi‘i beliefs to the so-called Akhbārīs, he attempted to exonerate Imāmīs from their accusations in the medieval Iranian community.

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