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The Impact of Theological Beliefs on Historical Writings: A Comparative Study of the Historical Accounts of Shaykh al-Saduq and Ibn al-Athir

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ABSTRACT

Undoubtedly, human presence in history, as a small yet inseparable part of it, makes knowledge of the past essential for preparedness for the future. Islamic societies are no exception to this principle, and Islamic historiography has witnessed the emergence of prominent scholars such as Shaykh al-Saduq and Ibn al-Athir. Representing the Shi'a and Sunni theological traditions, respectively, these two scholars produced significant works such as *Uyun Akhbar al-Rida* and *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*. Accordingly, differences in their perspectives, chronological proximity to the formative period of Islam, scholarly, political, social, and cultural positions, as well as their methods of writing, comprehensiveness, and theological beliefs, are among the factors that shaped these two works and subjected them to different intellectual and contextual influences. Using a descriptive-analytical method, the present study comparatively examines the content of these two prominent works and identifies their similarities and differences in the manner of narrating transmitted traditions and historical accounts. In doing so, it seeks to provide a clearer understanding of the theological positions and historiographical approaches of Shaykh al-Saduq and Ibn al-Athir.

Keywords: *Historiography, Shaykh al-Saduq, Ibn al-Athir, theological beliefs, Uyun Akhbar al-Rida, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh.*

Introduction

Islamic historiography, as one of the most flourishing and systematic historical traditions in human civilization, has long attracted the attention of researchers and scholars. The written recording of history in Islam, drawing upon diverse sources and employing various methods, has succeeded in presenting a comprehensive picture of developments within Islamic civilization. In this context, comparative analysis of prominent historical works through diverse approaches and methodologies is essential for illuminating the less visible dimensions of historical events. The present study focuses on a comparative examination of two important historical texts: *Uyun Akhbar al-Rida* by Shaykh al-Saduq and *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* by Ibn al-Athir. Both works constitute valuable sources containing substantial historical information, yet they differ significantly in their perspectives, methods, and objectives. *Uyun Akhbar al-Rida*, as a Shi'a text, primarily focuses on the life, sayings, and extraordinary virtues of Imam al-Rida, the



eighth Shi'a Imam. Its principal objective is to record and disseminate religious teachings and emphasize the Imam's spiritual significance; accordingly, its narratives are often framed within a religious context and emphasize the Imam's virtues and individual role. Nevertheless, the work also contains numerous historical reports. By contrast, Ibn al-Athir's *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* provides a more comprehensive account of general Islamic history, covering a broader chronological span and incorporating a wider range of political, social, and military events. Ibn al-Athir, a Sunni historian, adopts a comparatively more analytical approach and attempts to provide a balanced account of historical developments.

The necessity of conducting a comparative study arises from the existence of differing and sometimes inconsistent perspectives and historical accounts. By comparing these two works, a more precise understanding can be obtained of their historical contexts, access to sources, political orientations, theological beliefs, and, in some instances, biases affecting the transmission of historical reports. For example, accounts concerning particular historical events may differ considerably between the two sources, reflecting ideological differences between their authors. At the same time, comparative analysis assists in identifying such differences and commonalities, critically evaluating the evidence, and constructing a more comprehensive historical picture. Therefore, a comparative analysis of the historical dimensions of works such as *Uyun Akhbar al-Rida* and *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, through appropriate analytical approaches, can contribute to revealing further dimensions of historical events. By acknowledging the perspectives and objectives underlying each text, researchers can move beyond simplistic interpretations and achieve a deeper understanding of the past. Such a critical and comparative approach is essential for developing a more informed and nuanced understanding of history.

Among the books and articles examined, no study has been identified that bears precisely the same title as the present research. Nevertheless, several works display thematic similarities, including *The Influence of Ibn al-Athir's Theological Beliefs on the Writing of Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* by Seyyed Rasul Mirashrafi; the dissertation *Shaykh al-Saduq's Historiography* by Mohammad Rajabi Zurabadi; *Ibn al-Athir's Historiography and Historical Perspective: A Critical Study of Al-Kamil* by Ali Salari-Shadi; *Shaykh al-Saduq* by Fawzieh Javanmardi and Nazem Azizi; and *The Truthful Hadith Scholar* by Alireza Mokhtarpour Qahroudi and Majid Maaref. Relevant articles include *An Examination of Two Historiographical Works of Shaykh al-Saduq* by Nematollah Safari Foroushani; *An Analytical Study of the Approach and Content of Sources on the History of the Imams: A Typological and Quantitative Study of Al-Kafi, Uyun Akhbar al-Rida, and Al-Irshad* by Ruhollah Tohidinia and Mohammad Mohammadifar; *Perspective and Method in Shaykh al-Saduq's Historiography: A Case Study of Uyun Akhbar al-Rida* by Ruhollah Tohidinia and Mohammad Ali Tohidinia; *An Examination of the Position of Shi'as in the Historiography of the Imams up to the End of the Ninth Century CE* by Maryam Saeidian Jazi; *The Historiographical Methods of Ibn al-Athir and al-Tabari* by Rasul Rabbani and Fathian Safaeinejad; *An Inquiry into Ibn al-Athir's Historiographical Method with Emphasis on Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* by Seyyed Javad Mousavi; *An Introduction to Ibn al-Athir's Historiography* by Abdollah Naseri Taheri; and *A Comparative Study of the Historiographical Methods of al-Tabari and Ibn al-Athir* by Seyyed Ahmadreza Khezri and Setareh Keramati.

Significance of the Study

Given the scholarly status of Shaykh al-Saduq as a Shi'a scholar and Ibn al-Athir as a respected Sunni scholar, together with the importance of their respective works, part of the significance of this subject lies in its engagement with both major Islamic intellectual traditions. At the same time, considering the similarities and differences among

the fundamental beliefs of Islamic denominations, the comparison of historical reports in these two works is particularly important. In some instances, historical events appear to have been altered, distorted, or partially omitted. Accordingly, examination of such cases possesses considerable scholarly value.

The examination of these two works is not merely a historical study; rather, it constitutes an analysis of the relationship between theological belief and historical narration. This issue is significant both for scholars of Islamic history and for those interested in historical analysis, because a historian may, under the influence of various factors, fail to transmit an account in its most accurate form. Comparative studies therefore contribute to identifying shortcomings and inconsistencies in historical reports.

Research Hypothesis

Among the numerous works that have recorded historical events, some have attracted considerable attention among both Shi'a and Sunni readers. The broad appeal of these works may stem from their comprehensiveness as well as from their methods of documenting historical reports. Nevertheless, when compared with other contemporary and earlier writings, these works often display inconsistencies in their narration of events. The present article is based on the hypothesis that discrepancies and alterations in transmitted events arise from a combination of factors, including the author's religious or political beliefs and the prevailing social conditions of the period. In other words, this analysis argues that although the author's intellectual background and social environment undoubtedly exert influence, other factors—including access to sources, the evolution of historiographical methods, the inherent difficulties of transmitting information across time and cultures, political orientations, and the historian's theological convictions—may constitute the most influential causes of the differences observed among historical reports.

Biographical Background and the Significance of Selecting the Two Works

Uyun Akhbar al-Rida was written by Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummi, known as Shaykh al-Saduq, who died in 991 CE, and is one of the authoritative Shi'a hadith sources. The work provides a comprehensive collection of traditions attributed to Imam al-Rida concerning jurisprudence, ethics, and theology, organized into 69 chapters. In addition to religious traditions, the book contains historical reports that contribute to understanding the historical context of Imam al-Rida's life. (1) The significance of *Uyun Akhbar al-Rida* becomes even more apparent in light of the numerous commentaries and explanations written on it and its substantial influence on Shi'a scholarship. Although Shaykh al-Saduq is not primarily renowned as a historian, he composed valuable works in various fields of historiography, including biography, prosopography, and historical chronicles. His writings in historical, theological, hadith, and jurisprudential disciplines granted him a distinguished position within Shi'ism and enabled him to make a substantial contribution to this intellectual tradition. His works in historical, theological, hadith, and jurisprudential fields likewise secured him a prominent position within Shi'a scholarship. His textualist approach generally prevented direct rational intervention in the transmission of reports. Accordingly, reports were transmitted primarily in hadith form, with chains of transmission playing an essential role in establishing their authority. It should nevertheless be noted that this textualist approach was accompanied by a critical attitude toward transmitted reports, which reduced the influence of extremist transmitters and fabricators. In certain instances, Shaykh al-Saduq also evaluated the authenticity or weakness of particular reports. (2)

Abu al-Hasan al-Shaybani, known as Ibn al-Athir, was a renowned Sunni historian who presented a comprehensive history of the Islamic world in his *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, completed around 1233 CE. The first part of the work constitutes a summary of al-Tabari's history supplemented by additional material, while the second part addresses events contemporary with the author. Because of its reliance on authoritative sources, broad coverage, and systematic presentation, *Al-Kamil* occupies a particularly important position among Sunni historians. Ibn al-Athir's critical approach to selecting and transmitting historical narratives has made *Al-Kamil* a valuable source for scholars of Islamic history. (3) In composing *Al-Kamil*, Ibn al-Athir also drew in certain cases upon other historians and scholars, including al-Baladhuri, al-Mubarrad, and Ibn al-Kalbi. (3) Among the features that contributed to the reception of *Al-Kamil* was the praise it received from historians and scholars belonging to various intellectual traditions. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, for example, observed that Ibn al-Athir recorded events in such a manner that the reader could imagine himself situated within the historical episode itself, reflecting Ibn al-Athir's precision and distinctive historical perspective. (4) (5) Ibn al-Athir's method in *Al-Kamil* consisted of collecting and organizing historical materials in such a way that readers would not need to consult numerous separate works. He also attempted to minimize the deficiencies of year-by-year historiography by presenting annual events in an organized chronological sequence, thereby enhancing the quality of the work. (3) Moreover, his collection, synthesis, and selection of reports produced a historiographical style distinct from that of al-Tabari by establishing connections among different narratives. (3) Ibn al-Athir also maintained that the transmission of an event should not depend upon its priority, status, or perceived significance, but that rational standards should function as the principal criterion for accepting a historical report. (6)

Accordingly, while *Uyun Akhbar al-Rida* offers a Shi'a perspective on the life and period of Imam al-Rida and emphasizes religious and ethical dimensions alongside historical narratives, *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* presents a broader historical narrative encompassing a much wider geographical and chronological range. (6) Within this research framework, the objective is to analyze the narratives presented in *Al-Kamil*, compare them carefully with the reports contained in *Uyun Akhbar al-Rida*, and examine corroborating evidence in other early sources. From this perspective, different analytical dimensions may be considered, including source-oriented evaluation with emphasis on the reliability of chains of transmission, completeness or reduction of narratives, and tendencies toward impartiality or partisanship among the authors. In other words, given the generally greater chronological proximity of earlier sources to the formative period of Islam, highlighting textual and source-critical similarities and differences between the two works and comparing them with contemporary or earlier sources may produce a more precise understanding of the events and personalities under consideration. By demonstrating continuity or discontinuity among the sources, the role of each work in understanding the relevant periods of Islamic history, as well as the intellectual and historical influence of both works, may be clarified, thereby generating a richer and more comprehensive picture of their historical and semantic contexts.

Comparative Examination of Historical Events

Comparative examination of historical events, particularly within Islamic history, constitutes an effective instrument for advancing knowledge and explaining events with greater precision. Comparison and critical analysis of the narratives transmitted by major historians such as Shaykh al-Saduq and Ibn al-Athir make it possible to attain a deeper understanding of historical developments. By examining similarities and differences between their accounts, this comparative approach establishes a suitable foundation for more precise interpretations of historical

events. Analysis of the motivations, perspectives, and sources employed by each author, alongside comparative investigation, produces a more comprehensive picture of the circumstances surrounding the formation and consequences of historical events. Accordingly, a comparative study of these two works by Shaykh al-Saduq and Ibn al-Athir not only promotes a better understanding of certain episodes in Islamic history but may also provide a basis for future research and the development of new perspectives in this field.

The Effective Role of Ali ibn Abi Talib in the Battle of Uhud

In the introduction to the first volume of *Uyun Akhbar al-Rida*, Ibn Babawayh reports:

In interpreting the Qur'anic verse, "Is he who stands upon a clear proof from his Lord and is followed by a witness from Him...", a tradition states that the "proof" refers to the Prophet himself and the "witness" who follows him refers to Amir al-Mu'minin Ali. This interpretation clearly demonstrates the elevated position of Imam Ali in accompanying and following the Prophet. Likewise, the prophetic tradition, "Obedience to Ali is obedience to me, and disobedience to him is disobedience to me," emphasizes the obligation of following him and the correspondence of Imam Ali's words and conduct with the Prophet's tradition. This tradition places obedience to Imam Ali on the same level as obedience to the Prophet and regards disobedience to him as disobedience to the Messenger of God. During the Battle of Uhud, when Gabriel witnessed the courage and self-sacrifice of Amir al-Mu'minin in defending the Prophet, he said: "O Muhammad, this is indeed the utmost form of support and assistance, in that he sacrifices his life for you." The Prophet replied: "He is from me, and I am from him." Gabriel then said: "And I am from both of you." (7)

Several other sources further report that during the Battle of Uhud, when many of the Prophet's followers were fleeing, the Prophet became deeply angered and saw no one beside him except Amir al-Mu'minin Ali. He then said: "On the day of Uhud, the people fled from around the Messenger of God, and the Prophet became intensely angry. Whenever he became angry, perspiration like pearls appeared upon his forehead. The Imam says: The Prophet looked around and saw Ali beside him and said: 'O Ali, why did you not join the sons of your father and flee?' Ali replied: 'O Messenger of God, I follow you.'" (8) (9) (10) (11) (12)

Against this account, Ibn al-Athir's report concerning the Battle of Uhud may be examined. The author of *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* limits his account to the following:

"When Ali killed the standard-bearers, the Prophet saw a group of polytheists fighting and said to Ali, 'Attack them.' Ali attacked them, killed some of them, and dispersed the rest. Gabriel said: 'O Messenger of God, this is true self-sacrifice.' The Prophet said: 'He is from me, and I am from him.' Gabriel then said: 'And I am from both of you.' Abu Rafi' said that a voice was heard proclaiming: 'There is no sword but Dhu al-Fiqar, and there is no valiant youth but Ali.'" (13)

Al-Tabari also transmits Ibn al-Athir's account of the Battle of Uhud with only slight differences. (14) The statement "There is no sword but Dhu al-Fiqar, and there is no valiant youth but Ali" is likewise associated with the day of the Battle of Uhud in *Nathr al-Durr*. (15) The author of *Kitab al-Aghani*, in addition to transmitting this statement, reports Imam Ali's combat against the standard-bearer of the polytheist army and describes the manner in which he defeated him. (16) Ibn Kathir even identifies Ali ibn Abi Talib as the bearer of the standard of Islam in this battle. (17) Differences among historical sources, particularly with respect to events from the formative period of Islam, are significant and require careful attention, because variation among transmitted propositions may undermine confidence in accepting a single isolated account. Examination of this particular episode suggests that Ibn al-Athir, a renowned historian, like certain other historians associated with the caliphal tradition, selectively transmitted

information. By focusing on a limited dimension of Imam Ali's military valor, he omits certain key details, including the name of the standard-bearer of the polytheist army, the Prophet's isolation on the battlefield, and the fact that Ali did not flee. Such silence appears meaningful. The inclusion of these details would undoubtedly constitute a significant virtue attributed to Ali. Since Ibn al-Athir belonged to this intellectual tradition, the transmission of such a virtue may have conflicted with his theological commitments. Accordingly, his selection of a more limited narrative may be interpreted as an attempt to diminish this virtue while preserving his broader doctrinal position toward Ali. Such an approach may indicate the influence of religious and political commitments upon the transmission and interpretation of historical events and further demonstrates the necessity of critically and comparatively examining different sources.

The Battle of Khaybar in 628–629 CE

The Battle of Khaybar was one of the major events of 628–629 CE. The battle ended in victory for the Muslim forces and included a series of historically significant episodes. The Muslim victory over the Jewish forces at Khaybar was associated with the courage displayed by several Muslim combatants. Shaykh al-Saduq reports that Ali stated: "On the day of Khaybar, the Messenger of God entrusted the standard to me, and I did not withdraw from battle until God opened the fortresses of Khaybar through my hands." (7) According to this report, Ali was commissioned by the Prophet to engage in battle, and the fighting continued until victory was achieved. Accordingly, the principal distinction and virtue associated with this victory are attributed to him. The account became so widely known and difficult to suppress that no earlier source appears to have transmitted a contrary version. Shaykh al-Tabarsi, citing Zurarah, provides additional details regarding the episode: Ali, through divine power, removed the gate of the fortress during the battle with the Jewish forces and used it as a shield while the Muslims passed across it. The gate was so heavy that Ali did not feel the movement of the people passing over it. After the Muslim army had crossed, he threw the gate aside. When news of the conquest reached the Prophet, he went to meet Imam Ali and declared that both God and the Prophet were pleased with his righteous deeds. Upon hearing this statement, Amir al-Mu'minin wept from joy and gratitude to God because he knew that his actions had been accepted by God and His Messenger. (8)

In light of the reports transmitted by early Shi'a sources, Ibn al-Athir's treatment of Khaybar is particularly noteworthy. In his account of the battle in 628–629 CE, Ibn al-Athir first attributes the killing of Marhab, the Jewish warrior, to Muhammad ibn Maslamah, but immediately afterwards employs the expression *qila* ("it has been said"), often used to introduce a weaker report, to attribute the act to Ali as well. The use of *qila* suggests that Ibn al-Athir, despite being aware of the widespread circulation of the latter tradition, presented it with an indication of uncertainty. (13) He subsequently transmits Abu Rafi's report that after Ali's shield fell during the battle, Ali used a gate torn from the fortress as his shield and continued fighting with it until the fortress was conquered. Abu Rafi' emphasizes that he and seven other men, despite their considerable efforts, were unable to move the gate. (13)

On the basis of the reports presented above, it is evident that the Battle of Khaybar constitutes a major event in the history of early Islam. Examination of the numerous narratives concerning the event permits a more precise appreciation of its historical significance. While Ibn al-Athir provides an account of Khaybar, works such as *Al-Tabaqat* (18), *Kashf al-Ghummah* (8), *Imta' al-Asma'* (19), *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah* (17), *Tadhkirat al-Khawass* (20), and *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq* (21), together with many other early and later sources, discuss the Battle of Khaybar and generally assign Ali a central role in the event. One such statement reads: "Then he said: 'Today I

shall certainly give the standard to a man who loves God and His Messenger; God will grant victory through him, and he is not one who flees.” (21) Thus, Ali is presented as the person whom the Prophet described as loving God and His Messenger, through whom victory would be achieved, and who would not flee. In this context, the author of *Subul al-Huda*, together with Ibn Kathir and other major Sunni authorities, attributes the killing of Marhab to Amir al-Mu'minin and reports that the fortress was conquered through him after his confrontation with the Jewish warriors. (22) (17) Al-Nawawi likewise explicitly attributes the killing of Marhab to Ali. (23) In light of reports from sources predating Ibn al-Athir, comparison of the historians' accounts of Khaybar suggests that Ibn al-Athir did not consistently transmit a complete account corresponding to the dominant earlier tradition. From the perspective adopted in the present study, the relative minimization of this virtue may be connected to Ibn al-Athir's theological commitments and his concern to protect the reputations of the early caliphs from unfavorable comparison, particularly because the first and second caliphs did not conquer the fortress before the Prophet ultimately entrusted the standard to Ali. At the same time, the widespread and well-established nature of Ali's role at Khaybar made complete omission difficult, leading Ibn al-Athir to include at least a limited version of the episode while reducing its emphasis.

The Farewell Pilgrimage and the Event of Ghadir Khumm

The importance of recording the Farewell Pilgrimage lies in the fact that this journey constituted the Prophet's final participation in the pilgrimage rituals, while the sermons delivered at Arafat, Mina, and Ghadir Khumm contain significant themes concerning succession to the Prophet. It is therefore particularly important to examine the similarities and differences between the accounts transmitted by Shaykh al-Saduq and Ibn al-Athir.

Shaykh al-Saduq refers to this tradition through several chains of transmission and discusses it in greater detail in *Kamal al-Din wa Tamam al-Ni'mah fi Ithbat al-Ghaybah wa Kashf al-Hayrah*. (24)

In a tradition transmitted by Tamim ibn Bahlul from Abd Allah ibn Abi al-Hudhayl, a question is raised concerning the nature of the Imamate and the characteristics by which an Imam may be recognized. The response states that the Imam is the proof of the Imamate, the authority for the believers, the one responsible for the affairs of Muslims, the spokesman of the Qur'an, the one knowledgeable about religious rulings, the brother of the Messenger of God, his successor over the community, his legatee, and his guardian. His relationship to the Prophet is comparable to that of Aaron to Moses, and obedience to him is obligatory, as God states in the Qur'an: "O you who believe, obey God, obey the Messenger, and those vested with authority among you." His description in the words of God is also expressed in the verse: "Your guardian is only God, His Messenger, and those who believe, who establish prayer and give alms while bowing." He is the one whose authority was proclaimed on the day of Ghadir Khumm and whose Imamate was established when the Messenger of God, speaking by command of his Lord, said: "Am I not closer to you than you are to yourselves?" The people replied: "Yes." He then said: "Whoever has me as his *mawla*, Ali is his *mawla*. O God, love whoever loves him, support whoever supports him, grant victory to whoever assists him, abandon whoever abandons him, and aid whoever aids him." Ali ibn Abi Talib is Amir al-Mu'minin and the Imam of the God-fearing, the leader of those whose limbs bear the signs of ablution, the most excellent of the legatees, and the best of all creation after the Messenger of God. (7)

The tradition further associates the Imamate with other Qur'anic verses, including the verse "Your guardian is only God," which refers to particular qualities of the Imam. The event of Ghadir Khumm is presented as a turning point in the establishment of Ali's Imamate, where the Prophet, by emphasizing Ali's authority, introduced him as

the *mawla* of the believers. Ultimately, the tradition identifies Ali ibn Abi Talib as Amir al-Mu'minin, Imam of the God-fearing, the most excellent of the Prophet's legatees, and the most eminent created being after the Prophet. The report therefore addresses not merely the nature of the Imamate but also presents Ali's distinctive position within Shi'a theological thought and emphasizes obedience to him as a divine obligation.

Ibn al-Athir, a prominent historian of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE, recorded major events of Islamic history in his celebrated work *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*. The second volume of this work addresses the events of 631–632 CE, among which the Farewell Pilgrimage occupies an important place. Ibn al-Athir describes the Prophet's departure from Medina toward Mecca, the large number of Muslims accompanying him, the pilgrimage rites, and various events that occurred during the journey. The substance of Ibn al-Athir's report may be summarized as follows:

The Prophet of Islam departed from Medina toward the end of Dhu al-Qa'dah intending to perform the pilgrimage. He traveled toward Mecca accompanied by a large number of Muslims. The Prophet instructed his companions to leave the state of ritual consecration after reaching Mecca, except those who had brought sacrificial animals with them. Ali also joined the Prophet in Mecca and, following his example, remained in the state of consecration. After offering the sacrifice, the Prophet taught the Muslims the rites of pilgrimage and delivered an important sermon at Arafat. In this sermon, he emphasized the inviolability of Muslim life and property, the abolition of usury, and the necessity of avoiding Satan. He also referred to the practice of *nasi'*, or altering and postponing the sacred months, and characterized it as an act of unbelief. The Prophet stopped at Arafat, Muzdalifah, and Mina and emphasized the importance of these locations in the performance of the pilgrimage rites. This pilgrimage became known as the "Farewell Pilgrimage" because it was the Prophet's final pilgrimage, during which he comprehensively taught Muslims the principles and rules of the pilgrimage. (13)

In contrast to Shaykh al-Saduq and numerous prominent Sunni scholars, Ibn al-Athir, the author of *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, does not mention the event of Ghadir Khumm when recounting one of the most significant episodes of 631–632 CE and confines his account of the Prophet's Farewell Pilgrimage to a comparatively limited narrative. He makes no reference to Ghadir Khumm or to the designation of Imam Ali as successor to the Prophet. This omission is particularly noteworthy because Ibn al-Athir's historiographical method elsewhere often includes relatively minor historical details, while he himself presents his work as one of the most comprehensive historical chronicles. Such a claim therefore requires critical examination, particularly where key and sensitive events in Islamic history are concerned. Ibn al-Athir's selection of material may have been influenced by factors such as limitations in his sources, the priorities governing the composition of the work, or intellectual orientations prevailing in his historical environment. At the same time, *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* must be understood as a historical work produced within a specific intellectual and chronological context. Accordingly, analysis of Ibn al-Athir's narratives requires attention to his perspectives and possible biases. Comparison of his account with other historical and hadith sources can therefore contribute to a more complete understanding of the Farewell Pilgrimage.

Ibn al-Athir's silence occurs despite the fact that numerous prominent Sunni scholars not only acknowledged the occurrence of the event but also emphasized its significance and implications. Al-Hakim al-Nishaburi (25), al-Nasa'i (26), and exegetes such as al-Suyuti (27) regarded the event of Ghadir as established and transmitted reports relating to the declaration concerning Amir al-Mu'minin on that day. Al-Suyuti additionally associates the revelation of the verse "Today I have perfected your religion for you" with this event. Ibn Kathir in *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* (28) and al-Haskani in *Shawahid al-Tanzil* (29) likewise transmit versions of the same report, with minor variations, while

agreeing upon the central occurrence and its connection with Ghadir Khumm during the Farewell Pilgrimage. Allamah Amini, in his important work *Al-Ghadir*, identifies 110 transmitters from Sunni sources who narrated the hadith of Ghadir. (30) He subsequently presents the names of these transmitters in order, including Companions, Successors, and later scholars, thereby documenting the extensive transmission history of the event. (30)

The question therefore arises as to why Ibn al-Athir, despite the extensive body of reports accepted within Sunni scholarship, omitted the event of Ghadir from his narrative. From the interpretive perspective advanced in this study, one possible explanation is the influence of Ibn al-Athir's theological commitments. Such commitments may have shaped his selection of material concerning an event of considerable significance for interpretations of the Prophet's mission and succession. The event was transmitted among Companions, Successors, and scholars belonging to different traditions, and therefore its absence from Ibn al-Athir's account merits critical attention. Ultimately, Ibn al-Athir's silence concerning Ghadir does not in itself diminish the historical significance attributed to the event in other sources. Rather, the contrast among the sources illustrates the extent to which theological commitments and confessional orientations may affect historiographical selection and representation. Within the argument developed here, acceptance of the event in the meaning attributed to it by Shi'a sources would have raised fundamental questions regarding the legitimacy of the first three caliphs following the Prophet's death, and this doctrinal implication may help explain the differing historiographical treatment of the event.

The Account of the Martyrdom of Imam al-Rida

In Chapters 61–63 of *Uyun Akhbar al-Rida*, Shaykh al-Saduq reports traditions concerning the manner of the eighth Imam's death. According to Shaykh al-Saduq, and on the basis of reports regarded as reliable among Sunni and Shi'a transmitters, Imam al-Rida died after being poisoned by the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun.

Shaykh al-Saduq's first report states that Ahmad al-Bayhaqi, through the chain of transmission mentioned in the text, transmitted from Ali ibn al-Husayn that al-Ma'mun ordered his servant to crush a particular substance in a vessel and then prevented him from washing his hands. The servant subsequently entered the presence of Imam al-Rida while the Imam was ill, and al-Ma'mun ordered him to separate the seeds of a pomegranate and prepare its juice for the Imam to drink. Ali ibn Musa al-Rida died the following day. His final reported words were the Qur'anic verses: "Say: Even if you had remained in your homes, those for whom killing had been decreed would have gone forth to the places of their death" (Qur'an 3:154), and "The command of God is a decree determined" (Qur'an 33:38). (7) Ibn Babawayh maintains that this report was accepted by Sunni hadith scholars. (7) Among Shaykh al-Saduq's recorded traditions are also reports transmitted through Shi'a chains. Ahmad ibn Ziyad ibn Ja'far al-Hamadani, transmitting from Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, reports that the Imam died after al-Ma'mun visited him and caused him to consume poisoned food. (7) Shaykh al-Mufid likewise reports in *Al-Irshad*, on the authority of Muhammad ibn al-Jahm, that Imam al-Rida was poisoned through grapes. (10) These narratives explicitly present Imam al-Rida's death as resulting from poisoned food given to him under al-Ma'mun's authority. Ibn al-Athir, the author of *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, also reports the event, and the manner in which he frames it is therefore particularly significant because his narration differs substantially from the Shi'a accounts. In recording the events of 818–819 CE, Ibn al-Athir, like al-Tabari, writes:

"In this year Ali ibn Musa al-Rida, peace be upon him, died. The cause of his death was that he ate grapes in excessive quantity and suddenly died. This occurred at the end of Safar in the city of Tus. Al-Ma'mun performed

the funeral prayer over him and buried him near the grave of his father al-Rashid.” (13) (14) Thus, according to this account, Ali ibn Musa al-Rida died after eating an excessive quantity of grapes.

Ibn al-Athir subsequently states:

“It has been said that al-Ma'mun poisoned him through grapes, and Ali was fond of grapes; but in my opinion this is unlikely.” (13)

Ibn al-Athir therefore considers the poisoning of Imam al-Rida by al-Ma'mun improbable. Other historical accounts, however, transmit a different version. Shaykh al-Mufid (31), al-Irbili (8), Ibn Shahrashub (32), Ibn al-Jawzi (20), and Gardizi (33) state that the Imam died as a consequence of poison administered under al-Ma'mun. Al-Ya'qubi (34), while differing somewhat in the details of the account, attributes the poisoning to Ali ibn Hisham without altering the basic description of death by poisoning. Other early Sunni historians, including al-Maqdisi and al-Bayhaqi, likewise report the Imam's death in connection with poisoning and the consumption of grapes. (35) (36)

In light of the sources presented above, the present study argues that Ibn al-Athir's treatment of historical events, particularly the death of Imam al-Rida, may reflect a partisan historiographical tendency comparable in certain respects to that found in al-Ya'qubi, especially insofar as his account minimizes the possibility of Abbasid responsibility. Ibn al-Athir either refrains from affirming al-Ma'mun's role in Imam al-Rida's death or explicitly regards such an interpretation as improbable, whereas prominent earlier scholars, including Shaykh al-Saduq, Shaykh al-Mufid, and others, report that the Imam was poisoned under al-Ma'mun. Within the analytical framework of this study, this difference may be related to Ibn al-Athir's generally favorable orientation toward the Abbasid caliphate and his tendency to preserve its political legitimacy, because explicit attribution of the Imam's death to al-Ma'mun could have damaged the historical reputation of the Abbasid rulers. Moreover, the attribution of the Imam's death to excessive consumption of grapes can be interpreted, from the perspective adopted here, as an account inconsistent with the elevated religious status attributed to Imam al-Rida in Shi'a theology. Taken together, these differences suggest that Ibn al-Athir's historiography cannot always be regarded as entirely detached from theological and political commitments and that such commitments may have influenced his representation of particular historical events.

Conclusion

This examination demonstrates that Islamic historiography exhibits considerable methodological diversity. *Uyun Akhbar al-Rida* records historical material through a hadith-based and theological approach, whereas *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* adopts a more analytical framework for the recording of general history, although its narratives may also reflect the author's confessional commitments. Comparative study of these two works indicates that Ibn al-Athir's historiography, notwithstanding its breadth of coverage and numerous strengths, may in certain instances reflect selective representation and alteration of historical material. According to the analysis advanced in this study, these differences cannot be explained solely by the chronological distance separating the author from the events; rather, theological, religious, and political affiliations, together with dependence upon earlier sources, may also have played a substantial role. By contrast, Shaykh al-Saduq's hadith-oriented approach, although possessing its own methodological limitations, benefits from his greater chronological proximity to the period of Imam al-Rida and from his emphasis on recording chains of transmission, which may strengthen the documentary basis of his reports.

The principal conclusion of this study is that evaluation of any historical report, particularly those contained in comprehensive chronicles such as *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh*, requires comparison with other sources and events,

together with critical examination of both chains of transmission and textual content. Such comparisons suggest that Ibn al-Athir's historiography may, in certain cases, have been shaped by the historical circumstances of composition and by the author's intellectual and theological orientations, resulting in selective modification or distortion in the representation of particular historical events.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

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Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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