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Abstract

This article explores the sources, transmission, context, content, and controversies of Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra. The ziyāra is a text in the collective memory of the Imāmī Shī‘ī milieu that has been the subject of many commentaries. Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra contains many cross-references to Quranic verses, Shī‘ī ḥadīth, and other du‘ā’ material. The transmission of the ziyāra has been the subject of criticism by some contemporary figures, but this article seeks to position this ziyāra in its appropriate historical context by demonstrating its intertextuality with established sources.

Keywords

Ziyāra, ghulū, excess, Imamology, rijāl, devotional, supplication, ḥadīth, identity.

A “visitation text” (*ziyāra*) is an Islamic liturgy that is recited in dedication to a deceased saint. It can be recited both at the graves of the Imams and from afar. A *ziyāra* usually acknowledges the station of a saint and their righteousness before God; whilst requesting the saint’s intercession. *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* (“The Major Comprehensive Visitation”) is a unique *ziyāra* because it can be recited in devotion to any of the late Imams of Twelver Shī‘ism. It has been the subject of several complete commentaries, including that of Aḥmad al-Aḥsā‘ī (d. 1826 CE), ‘Abdullāh b. Muḥammad Ridā Shubbar (d. 1826 CE), Muḥammad Taqī b. Muḥammad Bāqir Najafī Iṣfahānī (d. 1914 CE), and ‘Abdullāh Jawādī Āmulī. Other prominent scholars, like Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1699 CE), his father (d. 1660 CE), and Ni‘matullāh al-Jazā‘irī (d. 1701) have further written about parts of this *ziyāra*.

Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra was perhaps the most consequential theological contribution of the seldom-mentioned tenth Imam ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Hādī (d. 868 CE). It includes a long, detailed description of the station of the Imams. Because of its loaded Imamology, the *ziyāra* has garnered some criticism. The late Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlullāh said that the transmission of the *ziyāra* was “not pure and characterized by weakness.”¹ Ayatollah Madadī says that lengthier texts like *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* seem to be an amalgamation of different narrations with different origins.² This article³ is aimed at reinforcing the historicity of the text by investigating its transmission and its content.

¹ Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlullāh, https://www.shia-documents.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/IMG_7630.jpg (accessed June 9th 2020).

² Ayatollah Madadī, <http://www.ostadmadadi.ir/persian/lesson/8843/> (accessed June 28th 2020).

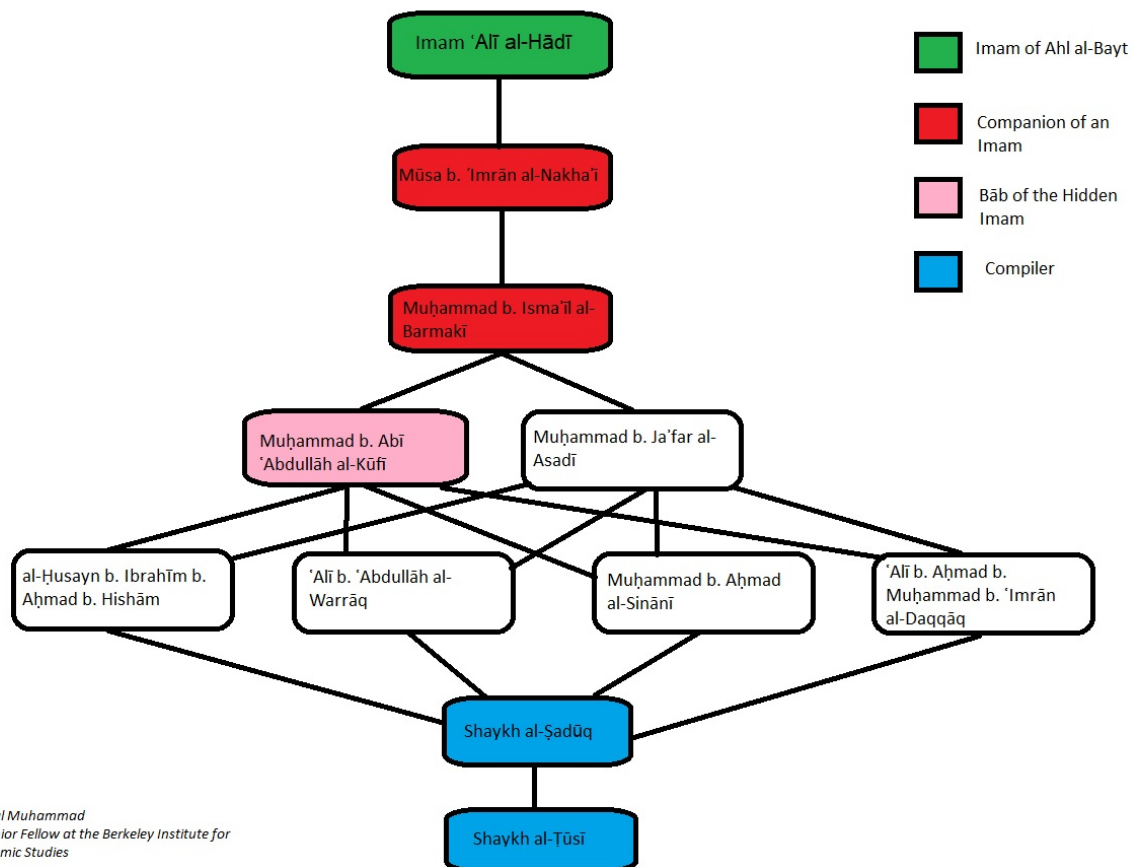
³ I would like to credit Yahya Seymour for reviewing parts of this paper and helping me understand the implications of this text’s inclusion in the works of Ṣadūq and Ṭūsī. I would also like to credit Sayyid Ali Imran for providing me references to Ayatollah Madadī’s view on the *ziyāra*. Thirdly, I would like to thank Idris Samawi Hamid for inspiring me to give this text more attention. Finally, I would like to credit Shaykh Vinay Khetia for his insights on the historicity of *Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*.

Sources

The earliest surviving book that contains *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* is the magnum opus *Man Lā Yaḥduruhu al-Faqīh* by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 991 CE).⁴ The *ziyāra* could also be found in Ṣadūq’s *‘Uyūn al-Akhhbār al-Riḍā’*.⁵ The same *ziyāra* was included with the same chain of transmission in *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, “the Shaykh of the Sect” (*Shaykh al-Ṭā’ifa*) (d. 1067).⁶ The presence of *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a* in two of the Four Books – which have a rich manuscript tradition – shows that the text was attested to by the earliest and greatest authorities of Twelver Shī‘ism.

Transmission

The *ziyāra* is transmitted to Ṣadūq through one chain of narrators:



Ṣadūq received this tradition from a group of his shaykhs, all of whom receive his blessing (*tarāḍdī*). This means that Ṣadūq often follows their names up with a prayer when they are mentioned in his

⁴ Ṣadūq, *Man Lā Yaḥduruhu al-Faqīh*, Vol. 2, 609 <http://www.yasoob.com/books/htm1/m012/09/no0992.html> (accessed June 8th 2020).

⁵ Ṣadūq, *‘Uyūn al-Akhhbār al-Riḍā’*, Vol. 1, 305 <http://www.yasoob.net/books/htm1/m012/09/no0997.html> (accessed June 8th 2020).

⁶ Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*, Vol. 6, 95 <http://www.yasoob.com/books/htm1/m012/10/no1020.html> (accessed June 8th 2020).

books. They, however, do not receive explicit endorsements from the traditional books of *rijāl*.⁷ This may be enough for some to cast doubt on the transmission of this *ziyāra*, but Ṣadūq says in *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, “I extracted different types of *ziyārat* from the Book of *Ziyārat* and the Book of the Killing of al-Ḥusayn.⁸ I extracted them for this book because they are the most authentic *ziyārāt* that I have in their *ṭarīq*.”⁹ ¹⁰ Since Ṣadūq was a scholar of *rijāl*, and since he appears to have considered this *ṭarīq* to be authentic, and since he gives his blessing to these four individuals, and since he includes the *ziyāra* in his most authoritative work, it is reasonable to assume that he trusted the transmission of this report. One must remember that Ṣadūq vouches for the reliability of his sources in the introduction to *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*.¹¹ The inclusion of *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* in Shaykh al-Ṭūsī’s *Tahdhīb* is a further attestation to its *ṭarīq* – him being a traditional scholar of *rijāl*.

According to the extant report, Ṣadūq’s four shaykhs receive this *ziyāra* from both Muḥammad b. Abī ‘Abdullāh al-Kūfī and Abu’l Ḥusayn al-Asadī. However, according to al-Najāshī (d. ~1075 CE), one of the most foremost authorities in traditional *rijāl*, these two are in fact the same person – their separation was probably a scribal error.¹² Muḥammad b. Abī ‘Abdullāh al-Kūfī not only receives the authentication of al-Najāshī, but Ṭūsī calls him a “gate” to the Twelfth Imam.¹³ This is because he lived during the time of the ambassadors¹⁴ in the minor occultation, and the letters of the Twelfth Imam would be referred to him before they went out to their intended audience.¹⁵ It is unknown whether or not this individual verified *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* with the Twelfth Imam or his ambassadors.

He transmitted this report from Muḥammad b. Isma‘īl al-Barmakī, a companion of Imam ‘Alī al-Hādī, who also receives the authentication of al-Najāshī.¹⁶ Al-Barmakī is included in the *rijāl* book of Ibn al-Ghaḍā‘irī (d. 1058-59). Ibn al-Ghaḍā‘irī calls Al-Barmakī a “hermit” (*ṣāhib al-sowma‘a*), but he weakens his reports without stating a reason. In traditional *rijāl*, the rulings of al-Najāshī take precedent over that of Ibn al-Ghaḍā‘irī; furthermore, the attribution of Ibn al-Ghaḍā‘irī’s text to its author is historically questionable. It is, similarly, not known whether he verified the *ziyāra* with Imam ‘Alī al-Hādī.

The primary narrator of *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* is Mūsa b. ‘Imrān al-Nakha‘ī, who Ṣadūq also calls Mūsa b. ‘Abdullāh al-Nakha‘ī. This companion of Imam ‘Alī al-Hādī is not validated by the *rijāl*

⁷ *Rijāl* (literally “men”) is the study of the veracity of narrators and transmitters of the Islamic oral tradition.

⁸ These books of Ṣadūq are no longer extant.

⁹ Ṣadūq, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, Vol. 2, 598 <http://www.yasoob.com/books/htm1/m012/09/no0992.html> (accessed June 8th 2020).

¹⁰ A *ṭarīq* is a chain of transmission from a primary source book to a compiler – in this case, Ṣadūq.

¹¹ Ṣadūq, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, Vol. 1, 3. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/htm1/m012/09/no0991.html> (accessed June 28th 2020).

¹² <http://al-milani.com/library/printer.php?booid=35&mid=425&pgid=5632> (accessed June 9th 2020)

¹³ al-Khū‘ī, *Mu‘jam al-Rijāl al-Hadith*, <https://www.al-khoei.us/books/?id=7797> (accessed June 9th 2020).

¹⁴ The ambassadors of the Twelfth Imam were his successive representatives during the 70-year period known as the Minor Occultation. The ambassador was the main channel of communication with the Imam. After the fourth ambassador died, this institution ceased.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ al-Khū‘ī, *Mu‘jam al-Rijāl al-Hadith* <https://www.al-khoei.us/books/?id=7785> (accessed June 9th 2020).

books of al-Najāshī, Ṭūsī, Ibn al-Ghaḍā‘irī, or al-Kashī, and thus his presence in the chain may be a cause of doubt. However, al-Nakha‘ī’s presence in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* and *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt* may be enough to validate his narrations. The attributed authors of *Tafsīr al-Qummī* and *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt* – ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. ~919 CE) and Ibn Qulawayh (d. ~978 CE) respectively – vouched for the reliability of their transmitters; and their dependence on these transmitters was taken as a precedent for their trustworthiness in the *Mu‘jam al-Rijāl* of Abu al-Qāsim al-Khū‘ī (d. 1002 CE).

Depending on one’s level of skepticism, the chain of transmission may not be considered perfect. However, there is enough demonstrable merit to the chain to reasonably assume that *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* was transmitted from Imam ‘Alī al-Hādī. The historicity of a text, of course, is not just determined by a traditionalist analysis of its chain. The text’s scholarly attestation, philology, collective memory,¹⁷ and corroboration with the content of other established sources may give it further legitimacy. As we will see, there are expressions in the *ziyāra* that can be found, almost word-for-word, in other sources of *du‘ā* and *ḥadīth*, which give certain phrases and ideas a widespread transmission in pre-Buyid and Buyid-era texts. *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* thus represents a comprehensive microcosm of a much wider phenomenon: the collective transmission of Imamology as understood, delineated, and practiced in the early Twelver Shī‘ī community.

Context

In the narration, al-Nakha‘ī says to Imam ‘Alī al-Hādī, “Teach me, O son of the Messenger of God, an expressive and absolute saying for when I visit one of you [Imams].”

Imam ‘Alī al-Hādī replies, “Once you reach the gate, then stop and recite the two testimonies after having bathed. When you enter and see the grave, then stand and say “God is the greatest (*Allāhu Akbar*)” thirty times. Then, walk a little with tranquility and piety, taking short strides, and say “God is the greatest” thirty times. Then, come close to the grave, and say “God is the greatest” forty times, totaling one hundred *takbīrāt*.¹⁸ Then say ... [the *ziyāra*].”¹⁹

Content

Like much of the *du‘ā* and *ziyāra* literature, *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* starts with extolling God. This is typical of this genre, as it is said that the Prophet Muḥammad advised people to begin all supplications with praising God and sending blessings upon His Messenger.²⁰

The *ziyāra* then details the status of the Imams. It does not just present the Imams as vicegerents of the Prophet or as sources of knowledge, but rather it gives them a principal role as the embodiment of

¹⁷ The presence of the *ziyāra* in two of the Four Books, the rich manuscript tradition of its sources, the presence of many scholarly commentaries, and the generational popularity of the *ziyāra* makes it an indispensable artifact of Shī‘ī identity, belief, and practice.

¹⁸ A *takbīrā* (literally “to make greater”) is the recitation or the exclamation of the saying “God is the Greatest” (*Allāhu akbar*) in Arabic.

¹⁹ Ṣadūq, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, Vol. 2, 609 <http://www.yasoob.com/books/htm1/m012/09/no0992.html> (accessed June 9th 2020).

²⁰ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, Vol. 6, 485. <https://bit.ly/2AmykoU> (accessed June 10th 2020).

God’s mercy, blessing, guidance, light, authority, and proof. It highlights their cosmological function as the “proofs of God over the people of this world, the Hereafter, and the primordial world”; who God first created as lights that encircled His Throne. Beyond their pre-existent *nūrānī* form,²¹ this *ziyāra* touches on many other themes that some may deem controversial: the immaculateness of the Imams, their second coming (*raj‘a*), their intimacy with the angels and the Holy Spirit, their possession of God’s secrets, and their status above the rest of creation. The supplicant then affirms that the Imams fulfilled all their duties before God.

After defining the greatness and purity of the Imams, the supplicant expresses his loyalty to them. This section offers a definition of what it means to be a true Shi‘ī: one who affirms the Imams’ position, follows them, befriends them, loves them, and visits their graves. In contrast, every other line defines the *nāṣibī*: one who denies the Imams, strays from their way, opposes them, hates them, usurps their position, doubts their status, rejects their rights, and is overall ignorant, wicked, and obstinate. The supplicant is made to repudiate the Imams’ enemies, and profess his full, sincere devotion.

In the second half of the *ziyāra*, the practitioner pledges his loyalty to the Imams by offering his father, mother, soul, kin, and property as a ransom. This is repeated five times throughout the text, with slight differences in wording, as demarcations of new sections. The first instance is followed by a pledge of sincerity; the second instance is followed by a description of the Imams’ primacy; the third instance is followed by a description of the Imams’ uniqueness; the fourth instance is followed by a description of the Imams’ marvel and salvific function; and the fifth instance is followed by a description of the Imams’ function as teachers, guides, and actors of the culmination of God’s religion. These oaths of sacrifice are designed to give gravity to the practitioner’s words in their devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt.

The supplicant’s request to God is finally made at the end of the *ziyāra*: a plea to be of those who recognize the Imams, receive their intercession, and to be granted the mercy of God.

Ṣadūq’s mere inclusion of the *ziyāra* may be an indicator to its veracity. The *ziyāra*’s explicitly high Imamology may ring alarm bells, as Ṣadūq was especially known to be careful of excess (*ghulū*). He is known for his scathing views on the Mufawwiḍa.²² He was also a student of the traditionalist of Qum Ibn al-Walīd (d. 954 CE), who famously argued that the denial of the Prophet’s forgetfulness (*sahu*) is the first degree of excess.²³ According to Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022), this was a common belief among the scholars of Qum, where Ṣadūq was from.²⁴ However, Ṣadūq included this *ziyāra*, which exalts the Ahl al-Bayt as immaculate, supernatural beings, whom God protected from “falter (or ‘slips’, or ‘erring’)” (*‘aṣamakum Allahu min al-zalal*). Such a statement may have alarmed some of Ṣadūq’s contemporaries, and thus it appears that Ṣadūq’s inclusion of this *ziyāra* reflects a tolerance (or even an endorsement) of the idea of the Imams’ complete infallibility.

²¹ Many Twelvers believe that the Ahl al-Bayt were beings of supernatural light prior to their birth in this world.

²² The Mufawwiḍa were an excessive sect that believed in a more Deistic God that created the Ahl al-Bayt and “delegated” (*tafwīd*) the creation and sustenance of the universe to them.

²³ Irfan Abdul Hamid, “*The Emendation of a Shi‘ite Creed by Shaykh al-Mufīd*”, Chapter 33, <https://www.al-islam.org/emendation-shiite-creed-shaykh-al-mufid/33-chapter-excess-and-delegation-al-ghuluww-wat-tafwid> (accessed July 17th, 2020).

²⁴ Ibid, Chapter 33, <https://www.al-islam.org/emendation-shiite-creed-shaykh-al-mufid/33-chapter-excess-and-delegation-al-ghuluww-wat-tafwid> (accessed July 17th, 2020).

Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra may be the most comprehensive Twelver teaching on the subject of Imamate. The fact that these concepts were relayed in the form of a devotional liturgy may tell us that its author(s) wanted its practitioners to repeat and digest the *ziyāra* from an adhering position. This would be in contrast with a simple sermon relaying the same points; the content of which may not be absorbed so affectionally by the practitioner.

Quranic cross-references

Like other supplications and visitation rites, *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* makes direct reference to verses of the Quran. This section will highlight and provide references for eleven passages that were included as part of the *ziyāra*.

In the last part of the *ziyāra*, the supplicant says, “Our Lord, we have believed in what have You revealed, and we have followed the Messenger, so register us among the witnesses.” This is the same prayer that was made by the apostles of Jesus in 3:53, except the name of Jesus is included in the Quranic verse. This comparison between the supplicant and the apostles may not be a coincidence, as it is reported in *al-Kāfi* that Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq said, “Surely, the apostles of Jesus were his Shī‘a, and surely, our Shī‘a are our apostles. The apostles of Jesus were not more obedient to him as our apostles are to us.”²⁵ The Shī‘a are thus believed to share this intimate role in supporting their Imam.

Another portion in the last part of *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* says, “Whomever obeys you has obeyed God, and whomever disobeys you has disobeyed God. Whomever loves you has loved God, and whomever hates you has hated God.” This is similar to the *āyah*, “He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed God; but those who turn away – We have not sent you over them as a guardian.” (4:80) After the Prophet, it is believed that the Imam inherits his seat as God’s vicegerent whose obedience and love is obligatory for adherents. The Imam, as the head of the Umma, becomes the human focal point of God’s authority on Earth. It is reported in *al-Kāfi* that Imam ‘Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā (d. 818 CE) said, “Since there is no prophet after Muḥammad – may the blessings and peace of God be upon him and his family – then from whence do these ignorant folk [arrogate the right to] select an Imam? Surely, Imamate is the position of the prophets and the inheritance of the deputies. Surely, Imamate is the viceregency (*khilāfa*) of God and the viceregency of the Messenger of God.”²⁶

In a section describing those who neglect their duties to the Imams, the *ziyāra* says, “Whoever denies you is a disbeliever, whoever wages war against you is a pagan, and whoever abandons you is in the lowest depths of Hell.” According to this passage, one who purposely neglects the Imams is a disbeliever (*kāfir*), and one who fights against them is a pagan (*mushrik*). Whilst the accusation of paganism (*shirk*) may seem significant or even peculiar, it is reported from Imam ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661 CE) that the Battle of Jamal was itself a quest for proper monotheism (*tawḥīd*).²⁷ Belief in the correct leader, whose orders are obeyed, is seen as a necessary component in one’s belief in God. Many other reports echo the same thought, as it is reported that Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq said, “Whoever dies

²⁵ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, Vol. 8, 268. <https://bit.ly/2XO74VE> (accessed June 10th 2020).

²⁶ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, Vol. 1, 200. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/htm1/m012/09/no0979.html> (accessed June 16th 2020).

²⁷ Ṣādūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 83. <https://bit.ly/2Y2IEb9> (accessed June 15th 2020).

without having an Imam has died the death of ignorance (*jāhiliyya*), disbelief (*kufṛ*), paganism (*shirk*), and deviance (*ḍalāla*).²⁸ As for the last statement in the above passage, it references the Quranic verse, “Surely, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the Fire.” (4:145) The use of this verse implies that those who turn away from the Imams after having followed them are considered hypocrites (*munāfiqīn*) and will suffer the worst punishment of all.

The next Quranic verse that makes an appearance is from Surat al-Mā’ida. The *ziyāra* says, regarding the Imams, “God has given you that which He has not given anyone among the worlds.” This is similar to 5:20 of the Quran, which is directed to the Children of Israel. This may seem to be an incongruity, but Shī‘ī sources are clear in saying that the Imams inherited the knowledge given to all the prophets and angels,²⁹ and even the Ark of the Covenant.³⁰ Whilst Moses admonishes the Children of Israel by saying that they were given more than other peoples, the *ziyāra* seems to assert that the Imams then superseded Israel in what was bestowed to them by God.

The *ziyāra* lists a group of persons that cannot attain the Imams’ status, including an “obstinate tyrant” (*jabbārūn ‘anīd*). This expression can be found in 11:59 in reference to the people of ‘Ād, who followed “every obstinate tyrant.” The same expression is found again in 14:15, speaking of those who rejected the messengers of God and reaped their place in Hell. Another person mentioned in this passage is a “rebellious devil” (*shayṭānin marīd*), which 22:3 of the Quran references as one who is followed by those who dispute about God without knowledge.

In a controversial passage, the Imams are identified as those through whom God holds up the heavens. It references the following verse: “And He restrains the sky from falling upon the earth, unless by His permission.” (22:65) We will return to the implications of this idea later.

The supplicant is also made to say, “And you have strived for God with the striving due to Him.” This is a fulfillment of the Quranic order, “And strive for God with the striving due to Him. He has chosen you and has not placed upon you any hardship in the religion. It is the religion of your father, Abraham. God named you ‘Muslims’ before and in this so that the Messenger may be a witness over you, and you may be witnesses over the people.” (22:78) The implication of this cross-reference may mean that the Imams were the intended audience of the verse as God’s chosen ones and His witnesses over the world. A narration in *al-Kāfī* corroborates this hypothesis – in it, Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 733 CE) interprets the above verse by saying, “We are the chosen ones ... The Messenger – may the blessings and peace of God be upon him and his family – is the witness over us in what he has told us from God the Most High; and we are the witnesses over the people on the Day of Resurrection. So, on the Day of Resurrection, we will validate whoever is truthful, and we will nullify whoever has lied.”³¹

The last references that we will discuss in this section deal with the Imams’ *nūrānī* nature. The *ziyāra* says, “God created you as lights, and He made you encircle His Throne, until he blessed us with you

²⁸ Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, Vol. 1, 440. <https://bit.ly/2MZGAKM> (accessed June 15th 2020).

²⁹ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, Vol. 1, 256. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/htm1/m012/09/no0979.html> (accessed June 15th 2020).

³⁰ Ibid, 238. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/htm1/m012/09/no0979.html> (accessed June 15th 2020).

³¹ Ibid, 191. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/htm1/m012/09/no0979.html> (accessed June 15th 2020).

and put you in houses that God permitted to be raised up and have His name mentioned therein.” The pre-existence of the Imams will be discussed later in more detail, but it must be noted that the last part of this passage is a reference to the verse, “In houses that God permitted to be raised up and have His name mentioned therein; exalting Him in the mornings and the evenings.” (24:36) This verse comes right after the famous Verse of Light (*Āyat al-Nūr*), in which the Quran says, “The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp; the lamp is within glass; the glass is as though it was a pearly star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. God guides to His light whomever He wills. And God presents similitudes for the people, and God is Knowing of all things.” (24:35) Shī‘ī exegeses of this verse have provided several layers of interpretation.

In one narration in Ṣadūq’s *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, the niche is the chest of the Prophet Muḥammad, the lamp is the light of knowledge, and the glass is the Imam that the knowledge is passed to.³² In another *ḥadīth* from the same collection, Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq says, “This is a similitude that God has presented about us. The Prophet and the Imams are the indicators to God and His signs by which one is guided to monotheism, the interests of the religion, the way (*sharī‘a*) of Islam, the traditions (*sunan*), and the obligations.”³³ In *al-Kāfi*, Fāṭima the daughter of Muḥammad is the niche, Imam al-Ḥasan is the lamp, and Imam al-Ḥusayn is the glass.³⁴ The *ziyāra* says that the pre-existent lights of Ahl al-Bayt were then put in houses that God has exalted – a concept we will return to later in this text. Another passage says, “And the Earth has been illuminated with your light”, which is a reference to the verse, “And the Earth will be illuminated with the light of its Lord, and the record will be placed, and the prophets and the witnesses will be brought, and it will be judged between them in truth, and they will not be wronged.” (39:69) This is an eschatological description that will also be discussed later.

Cross-references with *Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*

Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya (“The Scroll of Sajjād”) is a book of supplications attributed to the fourth Imam Zayn al-‘Abidīn. It was transmitted to numerous intermediaries through Yaḥya b. Zayd (d. 743 CE), the grandson of the Imam. *Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya* was transmitted to Ṭūsī and al-Najāshī by the eleventh century, and it has a rich manuscript tradition from then onwards.

Some lessons in theology can be gleaned from *Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, as many lines give emphasis to the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt. One particular supplication – “His Supplication for the Day of ‘Arafa” (not to be confused with the famous ‘Arafa supplication of Imam al-Ḥusayn) – has a few lines and expressions that are similar in wording to passages in *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra*. Conceptual parallels can also be made between the supplication and the visitation text, but for the sake of brevity, this section will deal only with the passages with the strongest resemblance.

³² Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 158. <http://www.yasoob.org/books/htm1/m012/10/no1001.html> (June 17th 2020).

³³ Ibid, 157. <http://www.yasoob.org/books/htm1/m012/10/no1001.html> (June 17th 2020).

³⁴ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, Vol. 1, 195. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/htm1/m012/09/no0979.html> (accessed June 17th 2020).

In lines 104-105 of *Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, in the edition produced by William Chittick,³⁵ the Prophet is described as “the distinguished, the chosen, the honoured, the brought nigh (*al-muntajab al-muṣṭafa al-mukarram al-muqarrab*)”. The *ziyāra* on the other hand uses the same “distinguished” to refer to the Prophet, but then uses “the honoured, the brought nigh” to refer to the Imams.

In lines 137-139, the supplication says, regarding the Imams, “[You] appointed the[m as] treasurers of Thy knowledge, the guardians of Thy religion, Thy vicegerents in Thy earth, and Thy arguments against Thy servants, purified from uncleanness and defilement through a purification by Thy desire (*ja‘altahum khazanata ‘ilmik, wa ḥafathata dīnik, wa khulafā’aka fī arḍik, wa ḥujjajaka ‘ala ‘ibādik, wa ṭahhartahum min al-rijs wa al-danas taṭhīran bi irādatik*)”. Many of these same expressions are used in different places in *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra*: the Imams are called the “treasurers of His knowledge (*khazanatan li ‘ilmih*)”, the “supporters of His religion (*ansāran li dīnih*)”, the “vicegerents in His Earth (*khulafā’ fī arḍih*)”, “His arguments against His beings (*ḥujjajan ‘ala barīyatih*)”, and those “purified from defilement (*taḥharakum min al-danas*)”. Both texts also include the oft-quoted Verse of Purification (33:33) from the Quran.

In lines 152-153, the supplication guarantees a perpetual “Imam whom Thou hast set up as a guidepost to Thy servants and a lighthouse in Thy lands (*bi imām aqamtahu ‘alaman li ‘ibādika wa mināran fī bilādik*).” An almost identical passage can be found in the *ziyāra*, where the Imams are called “guideposts to His servants and lighthouses in His lands (*a‘lāman li ibādih wa manāran fī bilādih*).”

Lastly, line 167 of the *du‘ā* asks God to help the Imam to “bring to life the guideposts of Thy religion, deadened by wrongdoers (*aḥyi bihi ma amātabu al-thālimīn min ma‘ālim dīnik*).” A similar role is given to the Imam in the *ziyāra*: the practitioner is made to say, “until God the Exalted brings his religion to life through you (*ḥata yuḥiyallahu ta‘āla dīnahu bikum*).”

Due to the potential early dating of *Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya*, one could thus say that components of *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* predate the transmission of the *ziyāra*.

Controversial Passages

Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra is characterized with a high Imamology. Much of the text however is corroborated by themes that are well-established in early Shī‘ī literature. This section will delve into several examples.

Earlier, we cited the Imams as being of the houses that God “permitted to be raised up.” (24:36) The verse right after it in the Quran would be consistent with the idea that this is a reference to men and not simply mosques. Several Shī‘ī sources indeed insist that this is, at least on some level, a reference to the Imams. In Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-Dīn*, he reports that Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir said, “The proof (*ḥujja*) is from the Family of Abraham, as God says, ‘We have given the Family of Abraham the Book and wisdom, and we have given them a great kingdom.’ (4:54) The proof are the prophets and their households until the Hour, because the Book of God says so. The deputation of God continued in

³⁵ William Chittick, *Al-Saḥīfa Al-Kamīla Al-Sajjādiyya*, Supplication 47. <http://www.duas.org/sajjadiya/s47.htm> (accessed June 27th 2020).

that thereafter – from the houses that God raised over the people ... and they are the houses of the messengers, the wisemen, and the Imams of Guidance.”³⁶ This tradition, and others, posit the houses of 24:36 as chosen families descending from prophets, culminating in the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt.

Returning to the Imams’ *nūrānī* nature: in eschatological terms, the Earth being illuminated by God’s light is a reference to the Mahdi’s Parousia. Ṭūsī reports that Imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq said, “When our Qā‘im rises, the Earth will be illuminated with the light of its Lord, and it will be sufficient for the people.”³⁷ Other renditions even say that the light of the Sun and the moon would no longer be necessary.³⁸ This is quite similar to Isaiah 60:19 in the Old Testament, which says, “The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.” The *ziyāra* repeatedly represents the Imams as the bearers of God’s light of guidance.

The idea that the pre-existent light of the Ahl al-Bayt would encircle the Throne can be found in the *Kitāb al-Ghayba* of Nu‘mānī (d. 971 CE), who records a tradition in which Imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq says, “We are the twelve that encircled the Throne of our Lord when He created us. The first of us is Muḥammad, the middle from us is Muḥammad, and the last of us is Muḥammad.”³⁹ Their light would presumably encircle the Throne with the angels of 39:75 in the Quran. One tradition says that, when the Ahl al-Bayt were lights circling the Throne, God created the angels, who then learned how to properly glorify God by imitating the Ahl al-Bayt.⁴⁰ Another *ḥadīth* puts their light to the right of the Throne,⁴¹ and yet another report puts them in the green shade of the Throne.⁴²

Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra maintains, “Your souls, your light, and your clay are one, refined and purified, and each part is of the other.” In the same narration cited earlier from Nu‘mānī’s book, Imam Ja‘far says, “We are from a tree that God created from one clay ... our form is one, our knowledge is one, our virtue is one, and we are all one to God.”⁴³ The pure clay of Ahl al-Bayt plays a prominent role in Imamology, because all of the Imams are said to have been created from the same elite substance. This may remind one of the famous prophetic sayings found even in Sunni collections, “Fāṭima is a part of me”,⁴⁴ “Alī is from me and I am from ‘Alī”,⁴⁵ and “Ḥusayn is from me and I am from Ḥusayn.”⁴⁶ The saying that the Prophet is likewise “from” these individuals alludes to these connections being much more than just lineal.

³⁶ Šadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, Vol. 1, 218.

<http://lib.eshia.ir/27045/1/218/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B3> (accessed June 18th 2020).

³⁷ Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 468. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/html/m013/11/no1187.html> (accessed June 17th 2020).

³⁸ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 56, 337. <https://bit.ly/2YbgbQj> (accessed June 17th 2020).

³⁹ Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, Vol. 1, 86. <https://bit.ly/37F2c8t> (accessed June 18th 2020).

⁴⁰ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 65, 21. <https://bit.ly/37KdmsE> (accessed June 19th 2020).

⁴¹ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, Vol. 2, 48. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/html/m012/09/no0980.html> (accessed June 18th 2020).

⁴² Ibid, Vol. 1, 441. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/html/m012/09/no0979.html> (accessed June 18th 2020).

⁴³ Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, Vol. 1, 86. <https://bit.ly/37F2c8t> (accessed June 18th 2020).

⁴⁴ Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 5, Book 57, Hadith 61. <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/62/64> (accessed June 18th 2020).

⁴⁵ Ibn Māja, *Sunan Ibn Māja*, Book 1, Hadith 124. <https://sunnah.com/urn/1251190> (accessed June 18th 2020).

⁴⁶ Ibid, Book 1, Hadith 149. <https://sunnah.com/urn/1251440> (accessed June 18th 2020).

In the outset of the *ziyāra*, it refers to the Ahl al-Bayt as “those frequently visited by angels (*mukhtalaf al-malā’ika*)”. Whilst the post-prophetic relationship between humans and angels is scant in Sunnī literature, Shi‘ī sources often have the angels interacting with the Imams. In several reports in *al-Kāfī*, the angels are said to lean on the cushions and furnishings of the Imams, leaving behind some of their fluff.⁴⁷ According to other narrations in the same book, the Imams could even hear the voices of angels, but without seeing their form.⁴⁸ The *ziyāra* says that God “supported you with His Spirit” in reference to the Holy Spirit (*ruḥ al-qudus*), which is said in several sources as well.⁴⁹

In a passage that has become the subject of several contemporary lectures,^{50 51} the practitioner is made to say, “With (or ‘by’) you, God began, and with (or ‘by’) you, He will seal.” One possible interpretation is offered in *al-Kāfī*, where Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq reportedly says, “The proof (*ḥujja*) is before the creation, with the creation, and after the creation”⁵² – thus saying that God begins and ends His creation *with* the Ahl al-Bayt, so that the creation would never be left without a *ḥujja*. Al-Majlisī’s commentary offers several possible interpretations: (1) God began goodness with the Ahl al-Bayt, (2) The spirits of the Ahl al-Bayt were the first creatures to be formed, (3) The universe was created for the sake of the Ahl al-Bayt, or (4) The Ahl al-Bayt are the mediums of divine emanation.⁵³ As for the “sealing”, Majlisī says that it refers either to God sealing this world with the Mahdi and the *raj‘a*, or the Ahl al-Bayt being the ultimate conveyors of all goodness.⁵⁴

Perhaps the most controversial passage⁵⁵ in *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* is the statement, “By (through; due to; with) you, He brings down rain, and by you, He restrains the sky from falling onto the Earth, except by His permission.” We discussed the earlier Quranic reference; this is important because Majlisī similarly uses a Quranic justification for this concept. He says that, according to 19:87-90, the sky is almost rent asunder at mere claim that God has begotten a son.⁵⁶ Hence, inversely, God restrains His chastisement due to the presence of believers – the Imams being the best of them. This is echoed in several early traditions. In Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-Dīn*, the Prophet reportedly tells ‘Alī that “the Imams from your descendants” are those “by whom my Umma will receive rain.”⁵⁷ Further, in *al-Ikhtisās* by Shaykh al-Mufid, he reports that the Prophet said, “From his (‘Alī) loins are the Imams of Guidance after me. By them, God the Exalted withholds chastisement from the people of the Earth, and [by

⁴⁷ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, Vol. 1, 393-394. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/html/m012/09/no0979.html> (accessed June 19th 2020).

⁴⁸ Ibid, Vol. 1, 176. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/html/m012/09/no0979.html> (accessed June 19th 2020).

⁴⁹ Ibid, Vol. 1, 273. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/html/m012/09/no0979.html> (accessed June 23rd 2020).

⁵⁰ (..سماحة الشيخ زهير الدروره الحسينية الهاشمية), بكم فتح الله وبكم يختم, September 18, 2019, YouTube video, 46:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBISaCRLOFU>

⁵¹ بكم فتح الله وبكم يختم - 6 ربيع الآخر ١٤٤١ هـ, الشيخ عبدالرؤوف القرقوش, February 18, 2020, YouTube video, 28:09, <https://youtu.be/PmONMbrHjZw>

⁵² Ibid, Vol. 1, 177. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/html/m012/09/no0979.html> (accessed June 26th 2020).

⁵³ Ahmad al-Aḥsā‘ī, *Sharḥ Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra*, Vol. 3, 315. <https://bit.ly/3dxWHde> (accessed June 27th 2020).

⁵⁴ Ibid, Vol. 3, 315. <https://bit.ly/3dxWHde> (accessed June 27th 2020).

⁵⁵ <http://www.almaaref.org/maarefdetails.php?id=16817&subcatid=2125&cid=715&supcat=6>

⁵⁶ Ibid, Vol. 3, 315. <https://bit.ly/3dxWHde> (accessed June 28th 2020).

⁵⁷ Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 206. <http://www.yasoob.org/books/html/m012/10/no1004.html> (accessed June 28th 2020).

them He] restraints the sky from falling onto the Earth, except by His permission.”⁵⁸ This station seems to even be extended to the believers, as one narration states that the people were given sustenance, help, and rain by the attendance of Salmān, Miqdād, Abu Dharr, and Ḥudhayfa at the funeral of Fāṭima.⁵⁹ In the second volume of *al-Kāfi*, Imam al-Bāqir reportedly says that God “defends the land against the enemies and sends down rain from the sky” due to those who “apply the medicine of the Quran to the wound of his heart” and keeps vigil.⁶⁰

There is indeed a plenitude of early, established narrations on how the Earth cannot be devoid of a *hujja* – an idea that becomes the cornerstone of Imāmī and Ismā‘īlī theology. The Imams, and possibly even the believers, are therefore given a cosmological role in the maintenance or the constitution of the world – without them, all would be lost. The Imam is also seen as the most crucial sign of God, without whom He would not be known, and truth would not be distinguishable from falsehood.⁶¹ Hence, without the Imam, the purpose of creation (the worship and recognition of God) would be naught.

A key passage that defends the text from possible accusations of excess is the following: “Your names are among the names, your bodies are among the bodies, your souls are among the souls, your spirits are among the spirits, your signs are among the signs, and your graves are among the graves.” This grounds the Ahl al-Bayt by emphasizing their humanity and their idiosyncratic normalcy. However, this is then followed by a passage that affirms their uniqueness: “But how sweet are your names, and how noble are your souls, and how great is your affair ...” According to the commentary of Shubbar, this section re-emphasizes the Imams’ “perfection of excellence, transcendence, highness, exaltedness, destiny, and status” relative to other humans.⁶²

Conclusions

As one of the most popular texts in its genre, *Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra* is unique in its detail; but it reverberates common themes that are found in some of the earliest and most established texts in Twelver Shi‘ism.

Visitation texts have garnered controversy in recent times due to their ritual devotion to saints. To some Muslims, these practices resemble prayer; and may put the saints in a deifying position. Whilst Twelver Shi‘ism has the richest *ziyāra* tradition, the practice of *ziyāra* historically has not been limited to the Shi‘a – Ghazālī (d. 1111) for example encouraged the visitation of Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, Zayn al-‘Abidīn, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq in his magnum opus *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*.⁶³ To most practitioners, the Imams have no power that is independent of God – much like how God gives life through the Spirit and causes death through an angel; God acts through the finite.

⁵⁸ Mufīd, *al-Ikhtisāṣ*, 224. <https://www.aqaed.com/book/332/gh-mram6-17.html>

⁵⁹ Ibid, 5. <https://bit.ly/2YD1TqO>.

⁶⁰ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, Vol. 2, 627. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/html/m012/09/no0980.html> (accessed June 28th 2020).

⁶¹ Ibid, Vol. 1, 178. <http://www.yasoob.com/books/html/m012/09/no0979.html> (accessed June 28th 2020).

⁶² Sayyid ‘Abdullāh Shubbar, *al-Anwār al-Lāmi‘a fī Sharḥ Ziyāra Jāmi‘a*, 188. https://books.rafed.net/view.php?type=c_fbook&b_id=2281 (accessed June 28th 2020).

⁶³ Mohammad Mahdi Al-Sharif, *The Revival of Islamic Sciences* (Dar Kutubul Ilmiyyah: Beirut 2011), Vol. 1, 499.

Whilst some may take issue with the text’s chain of transmission, its *ṭarīq* is vouched for by Ṣadūq, and it was included in the most important texts of Ṣadūq and Ṭūsī – who were both known to sift excessive ideas. Even its chain would be authenticated by those who accept the *taraḍḍi* of Ṣadūq and the authenticating authority (*tawthīq*) of *Tafsīr al-Qummī* and *Kāmil al-Zīyārāt*.

Ziyārat al-Jāmi‘a al-Kabīra appears consistent, almost word-for-word, with many verses of the Quran, lines of *Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādīyya*, and narrations from the Buyid and pre-Buyid period. Some may conclude that this is evidence that the *ziyāra* is simply an amalgamation of existing texts. While one cannot definitively prove or disprove this postulation, we suggest that a shared vocabulary and theology may instead indicate that the content came from the same mouths. The fact that the substance of the text is not solitary to it, nor is it alien to the Twelver Shī‘ī corpus, can give one more confidence in its legitimacy. Hence, it has been acclaimed by scholars both ancient and contemporary. It is a core resource in understanding Imamology as understood by the early Shī‘a, and perhaps by the Imams themselves.