RESEARCH ARTICLE

Epistemic value of transmitted reports (hadiths) in Shiʹism

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Abstract: Unit-report (al-khabar al-wahid/pl. al-akhbar al-ahad) constitute almost all transmitted reports (hadiths) compendiums in Islam. Still, there are numerous arguments about the scope of their authenticity among Muslim scholars ('ulama). The present paper focusing on Shi'ism (Imamism) first addresses the doctrines of the significant theologians and jurists of the school of Baghdad in the early centuries of Shi'a-Islam, the school of Hilla in the middle centuries, and 14th century Shi'a scholars on the epistemological status of al-akhbar al-ahad. It then will explore the central importance of 'certitude' (yaqin) in setting up the criteria of the authenticity of the hadiths among the early Imami scholars. This topic is naturally involved with the historical dispute of Usuli jurists and Akhbari. After examining the rationale of the authenticity of unit-report in the legal process and jurisprudence, the paper will deal with a substantial question: was the unit-report among the founder of Imami's doctrines an authentic and reliable source in other sciences like kalam, divine metaphysics, experimental sciences, e.g. medicine (tibb), economic, sociology, politics and astronomy, or in the issues like the creation of the universe and ontological status of Prophet and Imams?

Keywords: certitude, unit-report ((al-khabar al-wahid), concurrent report (al-akhbar al-mutawatir), consensus (ijma'), informed opinion (zann)

1 Introduction

Muslim theologians, jurists, and the scholars of hadith (*ahl al-hadith*) from the early time generally accepted transmitted reports and narrations (*hadiths*) as a reliable source of knowledge only if it had been so widely transmitted that there would be no doubt about its authenticity and no possibility of collusion by its transmitters to fabricate a lie, so the entire community of the faithful would accept its validity. (Shaykh Ansari, chapter of hujiyyat al-khabar, 1428H).

This sort of report is what the theologian, Wasil Ibn 'Ata (d. 131/748), called *khabar mujma'un 'alayha;* a report that everybody has accepted (Abu Hilal al-'Askari, 1981, vol 2, p.134. Based on this description of certainty (*yaqin*) in religious knowledge, the early Imami theologians -mostly known as the School of Baghdad- defined 'consensus' (*ijma'*) and suggested that the religious norms 'can only be proved after the Prophet through consensus, so whatever is quoted from him by 'individuals' [i.e., not by the entire community] cannot be accepted' (Shahrastani, 1990, vol. 1, p. 103; Ibn Idris al-Hilli, 1410- 12H/1990-91, vol. 1, p. 46; Nashi', 1971, p. 69).

The above statement is important because it sheds light on the original perceptions of the three concepts of consensus (*ijma'*)*,* concurrent report (*al-khabar al-mutawatir*)*,* and unit- report (*al-khabar al-wahid*). For *al-khabar al-wahid*, here I use 'unit-report' against 'concurrent report', a translation suggested by Aron Zysow (2013), but there are other translations for it, such as 'individual report or hadith' and 'isolated report' by R. Gleave (2007), or 'solitary narration' by N. Virjee in her translation of H. al-Fadli's *Usul al-Hadith* (2002) or 'virtually unique' and 'single tradition', by A Sachedina (1988); however many English works used the very Arabic term of *al-khabar al-wahid* and *al-mutawatir* after a sentence explanation for this technical term (H. Modarressi, 1993; O. Leaman and K. Ali, 2008).

Later, the old definition of *mutawatir* (consensus of the entire community of the faithful) was reduced to a 'report related by countless individuals in each generation,' a description that some later theologians and jurists maintained that such a report are scarce and some believed they never existed in Islam (Abd al-Shakur Bahari, 1326H/1908, vol. 2, p. 87).

The concept of *al-khabar al-wahid* consequently changed its meaning from 'what is reported by individuals as against the entire community' to report that one or very few individuals relate (Shaykh Mufid, n.d, vol.1, p. 60; al-Fadli, 2002, p. 93; Mubarrad, 1956, p. 84; Modarressi, 1993, p. 128).

There are different opinions about determining the reliability of *al-khabar al-wahid-* as defined above- among Sunni and Shi'a scholars. According to the classical science of hadith, there are two primary ways to determine its reliability: by measuring the untrustworthiness of the transmitters (known as *rawi/* pl. *ruwat*) of the report; by carefully scrutinizing the individual transmitters of the hadith (*'ilm al-rijal*) and the continuity of their chains of transmission (al-Fadli, 2002; D. Brown, 1996).

From another angle, concerning the authenticity of the 'reliable report,' there are different opinions tied to the underlying notion that: for the religious subject matters of belief (*i'tiqad, usul al-din*), the reports need to be established with certainty based on indubitable indicators, whilst valid reports on legal issues used in jurisprudence only require informed opinion (*zann*) which are analysed by jurist as the legally competent expert (*mujtahid*).

2   The doctrine of early Imami ʹUlama on certitude and authenticity of unit-report

The argument on narrations (*akhbar/ sg. kabar*) and their validity as an authentic binding force (*hujja*) in law was essentially an epistemological discussion that formed the main idea of theological as well as jurisprudential methodology among Imami's scholars such as al- Shakh al-Mufid (d. 413 H /1022), al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 436 H/1044), Shaykh Abu Ja'far Muhammad Tusi (d. 460 H/1067), Ibn Shahr al-Ashub (d. 588 H/1192) and Ibn Idris al-Hilli (d. 598 H/1201).

Tusi, who had studied under al-Mufid and al-Sharif al-Murtada, performed a crucial task of reinstating unit-report after his two eminent teachers confirmed their opinion by claiming that there was a 'consensus among all generations of Imamite scholars regarding the "prohibition to rely" on *al-khabar al-wahid* in deducing law.' Tusi argued against al-Sharif al- Murtada for general rejecting the admission of unit-report as authoritative evidence in the derivation of law (jurisprudence) and claimed a 'consensus' among Imamites that allowed it.

There are many efforts in hadith literature to reconcile the two above opposite consensuses by relocating Murtada and Tusi's dispute on the authenticity of unit-report into a disagreement on criteria of external or textual indicatory pieces of evidence (*al-qara'in al- mahfufa*). Indicatory evidence (*qarina/ pl. qara'in*) is a piece of external evidence such as reason or consensus of 'ulama linked to a report that proves the authenticity of the report. This shows that their disagreement had been on standards for indicatory evidence, not unit- report *per se*. What is important for our study in this paper is that both agreed on the necessity of 'certainty' (*yaqin*) in sciences (including religious subject matters) and jurisprudence whilst holding the view of invalidity of unit-report that have no external piece of evidence (See, for example, Shirazi, 1403H, p. 211; Hubllah, 2006, pp. 111-129).

In his *al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an,* Tusi says: 'We should use sound rational and transmitted proofs such as common consensus of our companions or concurrent report *(al-akhbar al-mutawatir)*, so the unit-report in these cases [commentary of the Qur'an and kalami issue] is not a valid source' (Tusi, 1957-63*,* vol. 1, pp. 6-7).

In response to the question 'if we reject the unit-reports, we will not have enough sources in Islamic knowledge,' Murtada says: 'Due to the existence of infallible Imams, Imamiyya have enough indubitable indicators which make them [unit-reports] reliable' (al-Sharif al- Murtada, n.d., vol. 1, p. 204; vol. 2, p. 117; vol. 3, pp. 312-3).

If we accept the above reconciliation, then Tusi's arguments for the authenticity of unit-report may have been in the same paradigm with his teachers, Murtada and Mufid; 'the unit-report would be authentic if it would bring about certainty and this would be possible only if it accompanies with indubitable indicators'.

Tusi is the first Shi'i scholar who suggested the means of indications (*al-qara'in*) which later 'ulama implemented in finding valid narrations. In his standards for a valid report, Tusi offered more accessible and practical hints to include more traditions in order to reduce the necessity of other sources such as the practical principle of ijtihad *(al-usul al-'amaliyya).* Practical principles provide a rational solution to deduce a verdict that could not be found explicitly in the Qur'an or a narration (Tusi, 1996, vol. 1, p. 135; idem, 1986, vol. 1, p. 3).

Tusi is known as a person who suggested contradictory opinions on unit-report. In his two first books, *al-Istibsar* and *al-'Udda*, Tusi primarily supports unit-report, still, in his last books, *al-I'tiqad*, he rejects their authenticity and tends toward his teachers Mufid and Murtada. Therefore, we can understand his final view from *al-I'tiqad* in the sections where he discusses the conditions of indicator evidence. In this book, he rejects the authenticity of the reports if they have no indicators, but when he defends their authenticity, he refers to the ones that benefit from indubitable indicators that he has already settled in their standards.

Tusi also narrowed the scope of unit-report and disqualified those hadiths that deal with the human's life (*blood/dima'*). In the interpretation of the verse of al-Naba', in *al-'Udda*, Tusi says: 'In the legal decision concerning the execution of apostate (*murtad*) which is about the life of a human being, one cannot issue such verdict merely through a unit-report, even if it is reached us by a reliable chain of transmitters' (Tusi, vol. 1, pp. 112-3).

Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ardabili (d. 993 H/1585) in *Sharh Irshad al-Adhhan* follows Tusi on this matter and says: 'The matter of human life is crucial, and the Lawgiver (*Shari'*) pays special attention to it, because life is the locus of obedience of God and happiness, so they [*fuqaha*] have made it obligatory to preserve it to the extent that one is not allowed to put himself and others in possible danger and to lose life or kill a person to save his own life. All the consideration about this verdict is approved by common sense, so it is generally worth taking all precautions in this matter' (Ardabili, *Sharh Irshad,* 1379 Sh, vol 13, p. 190).

Some secondary studies on the dispute about the authenticity of unit-report suggest the idea that their authenticity in the name of certainty -as against Tusi- is rejected entirely; namely in both religious subject matters of belief (including theology and divine metaphysics, etc.) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) by not only al-Mufid and his student al-Sharif al- Murtada, but also by series of prominent Imami jurists like Ibn al-Barraj (d. 481 H/1088), Ibn al-Zuhra (d. 585 H/1189), al-Fadl al-Tabarsi (d. 548–552/1153–1158), and Ibn Idris al-Hilli (Subhani, 1389, vol. III, pp. 259-60; Gleave, pp. 26, 28, 30; Zysow, p. 283).

Based on the above understanding, they have divided Shi'i scholars into two groups: those who supported Tusi's opinion in the matter of unit-report and implicitly regarded the authority of traditions in juridical methodology as necessary to ensure uniformity in jurisprudence; and those who reinforced al-Sharif al-Murtada's rejection of unit-report in both jurisprudence and religious subject matters of belief (Sachedina, p. 72). However, there is implicit evidence that the second group also accepted the authenticity of unit-report in jurisprudence, although, like Tusi, as explained above, they denied their authenticity if they are not accompanied by indubitable indicators lead to a level of certainty. Al-Sharif al- Murtada, for example, believed that a reliable source of knowledge in jurisprudence is available through unit-report:

'You may ask, if you stop using *al-akhbar al-ahad*, then what would be your source in jurisprudence? We would answer, there would be no solution for us if we deny both analogy (*qiyas*) [accepted in Sunni jurisprudence] and *al-akhbar al-ahad*' (al-Sharif al-Murtada, n.d., vol. 3, p. 312).

In explanation of the above statement, Shaykh Murtada Ansari (d. 1243 H/1827) says:

'If we accept that there is no source in the jurisprudence in case we put aside *al-akhbar al-ahad*, then it is necessary to rely on them even if we do not have a solid transmitted proof (*dalil al-naqli*) in favour of their authenticity. So, this necessity *per se* would be the best reason to use them because we do not have any right to set aside the rules of Shari'a' (Ansari, 1328H, vol. 1, p. 187). Many other eminent Imami jurists and scholars have the same arguments (For instance, see Tusi, 1996*, vol 1, p. 131; Hilli, 1390H/1970, p. 211; for the discourse among contemporary jurists, see Jannati, 1370Sh, pp. 105-6).

One must always consider the point when approaching al-Murtada is that he did accept the 'unit-report' as authentic only if it had external indicatory evidence to provide a level of common consensus (*ijma'*). According to al-Murtada, many fabricated hadiths exist, nevertheless, Imamiyya has enough authentic unit-report accompanied by indubitable indicators thanks to infallible Imams (al-Sharif al-Murtada, n.d., vol. 1, p. 204)

3   The gate of certitude is shut – the school of Hilla

The dispute over the 'certain knowledge' (*'ilm al-yaqini*) and its standards continued in later centuries among the jurists of the school of Hilla in the tenth/sixth century and between Usuli and Akhbari in eleventh/ seventeen century, when it was no longer possible to claim, as had Murtada, Mufid and Tusi, that Imami have enough hadiths accompanied by indications (*qara'in*) that elevated them above informed opinion (*zann*) (Vahid Behbahani, n.d., p. 71; I'timadi, 1377Sh/1957, p. 311).

Ibn Idris al-Hilli, the leader of the Hilla school, saw behind Tusi's opinion a potential danger to jurisprudence. Tusi's idea of having numerous reliable traditions was convincing for himself because, in his time, there were many reports whose authenticity could be established by his proposed method of external and textual indications. In the tenth century, the circumstances of Shi'i scholars were changed because the same amount of indubitable indicators probably was not available to them anymore. Therefore the jurists of Hilla school prepared to reduce their standard of authentic narrations and openly spoke of the authenticity of informed opinion (*zann*) in jurisprudence.

According to this generation of jurists, the knowledge gained from the report brings certainty when it is narrated frequently through numerous different chains (*mutawatir*). Still, if it is a unit-report*,* it rationally does not entail more than informed opinion (*zann*). However, this zann is an uncertain proof analysed by the legally competent expert, authenticated by the Lawgiver (*Shari'*).

Shahid Thani (d. 966 H/1559), the famous jurist of Hilla school in his *Dirayah,* said: 'Unit-report [accepted in law] is a hadith that is not reported through concurrent transmitter whether its reporters are many or few in number' ('Amili, Shahid Thani, n.d., p. 15). 'Amili suggests the exact definition (1983, p. 342; al-Fadli, 2002, p. 104).

Based on the above definition of unit-report, in his *al-Maqasid al-'Illiyya*, after confirming the authenticity of the unit-report, he says: 'Accepting these narrations is not a general duty, even if they have a sound chain of narration, because they do not provide more than zann. Our companioning (*ashabuna*) have disputes in using them in the legal process, let alone in other sciences' (al-Shahid al-Thani, 1420H, vol. 1, p. 45; Ansari, 1328H, vol. 1, 556).

In another place, Shahid Thani says: 'Jurist aims to give fatwa to the followers in charge (*mukallafin*) to practice their obligations (*taklif*), whilst the goal of theologians is to achieve certainty in belief. For this reason, zann cannot be effective in religious subject matters' (al-Shahid al-Thani, 1420H, p. 45).

The consciousness of an informed opinion (*zann*) in jurisprudence was, in fact, a requirement for the circumstance in which certain knowledge (*'ilm al-yaqini*) for deducing all subject matters of law was no longer attainable, and the 'gate of knowledge was shut' (*insidad bab al-'ilm*). This was a turning point made by these jurists known as Usuli, which set up new criteria for sound narrations (*hadith al-sahih*) in fiqh in contrast to Akhbari in later centuries who believed that the gate to the knowledge is open, and all narrations can be used in fiqh and any other sciences (Vahid Behbahani, n.d., p. 16).

According to the Hilla school, the rationale behind the authenticity of unit-report in the legal process was that it is impossible for the Lawgiver (*Shari'*) to deprive the Muslim of an alternative source of knowledge in jurisprudence when the infallible Imams are not available. The source of this kind of knowledge was called *dalil al-'ilmi*' as opposed to '*dalil al-'ilm*.' (Muzaffar, 1405, vol. 2, pp. 26-7; Meshkini, 1386, p. 161). The jurists of this generation suggested many proofs in favour of the authenticity of unit-report from the Qur'an and traditions (see for example, 'Amili , 1983, p. 215; Qumi, 1303/1885-86, vol. 1, p. 432).

4 Akhbari – Usuli dispute

The theological discussion about the authenticity of the main body of hadiths, i.e. unit- reports in fiqh between the two schools of Baghdad and Hilla, faced an unprecedented challenge in the eleventh/seventeenth century by new doctrines on the criteria of certainty through which the two schools of Akhbarism and Usulism emerged. Muhammad Amin Astarabadi (d. 1036/1626-7), known as the founder of Akhbarism, was the first person who divided 'ulama into Akhbari against Usuli. Therefore the jurists of Baghdad school like al-Shayk al-Tusi and even the traditionalists (*muhaddithin*) like M. Ya'qub al-Kulayni and al- Shaykh al-Saduq cannot be considered Akhbari in its 11 H/17th-century meaning. The standard for certainty (*yaqin*) in religious knowledge and the concept of external and textual indications of reports theorised and practised by Tusi shows the differences between early Shi'i traditionalists and Akhbaris (sg. Akhbari) in the eleventh/seventeenth century.

Usulis (sg. Usuli) were characterised as having stressed recourse to a rational approach to the Qur'an and hadiths to find the meaning of the Qur'an and hadiths. They also have a coherent standard for the soundness of the chain of hadiths and the indication of content (*dalalat*) in hadiths (*akhbar*). Akhbaris, in contrast, has been portrayed mainly in negative terms as having forbidden recourse to speculative reasoning in favour of relying solely on the literal meaning of the sacred texts. For them, reports -unlike many of the verses of the Qur'an- have evident exoteric significations (*qat'i al-dalala*) and can be a sufficient source for the religious and legal life of Muslims which was a suggestion to return to the more original and straightforward method of legal reasoning (For more on Akhbari and Usuli, see Newman, 1992; Cole, 1985, pp. 3-34; Stewart, 2003).

More important than the indications of the reports, it was the issue of the soundness of the chains of their narrators (*ruwat*). This was particularly the case in those matters where transmitted reports are *al-akhbar al-ahad* that could not provide the indubitable documentation necessary for incorporating some of the reports into legal practice and Islamic sciences. In this respect, Usulis and Akhbaris disagreed sharply on the validity of unit- reports. The criteria to ascertain a report for Akhbari and Usuli are different; for Akhbaris, all reports in the Imami four

main hadith collections are sound (*sahih*) in the sense that they contain the words of the Imams. The Usulis did not share this view (For more on the criteria of a sound hadith in law and the difference between Akhbaris and Usulis, see Kho'ei, 1413H; Kohlberg, 1987).

Usulis had problems accepting the general authority of unit-reports, so they had less opportunity for finding valid proof. They called this 'the gate to indubitable source of knowledge is closed.' For this reason and to find a practical solution, they suggested informed opinion (*zann*) as introduced above. The Akhbaris denied such closing of the gate of knowledge ever. They believed relying on zann in Shari'a was prohibited. The famous Akhbari, Muhammad Karim-Khan al-Kirmani (d. 1288H/1870) said: 'One who knows the history of the Shi'a in early and modern times, knows that the family of Muhammad (*ahl al-bayt*) [Imams] has taught us that relying on zann in jurisprudence is as much prohibited as wine, pork, and gambling (*maysir*), even seventy times more so and that this is the difference between the Shi'ism and the Sunnis' (Kirmani, 1389H, p. 295).

For Akhbaris, using zanni proofs in the legal process is a betrayal of the prophetic legacy (Hashimi Shahrudi, 1398 Sh, vol. 1, p. 329). They held that any sound report (*hadith al-sahih* against *da'if*) could be reliable proof not only in fiqh but in all Islamic knowledge. Of course, their criteria for a sound report are much less than Usuli's.

The theologians and Usulis rejected Akhbaris' claim on the widespread validity of *akhbar al- ahad* to cover all sciences. With the same argument, Usulis denied the narrations in the four Shi'a hadith collections (*kutub al-arba'a*) to be all sound and valid. This epistemological dispute, which began in the 11/17th century, continued and later spread to different countries by eminent Akhbari such as Khalil Ibn Ghazi al-Qazvini (d. 1089 H/1678), Muhammad Tahir al-Qummi (d. 1098 H/1687), Yusuf al-Bahrani (d. 1186 H/1772) and Muhammad al-Akhbari (d. 1232 H/1817) and Sayyid Ni'matullah al-Jaza'iri (d. 1112 H/1700), a pupil of Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. 1110 H/1698) who also showed a solid tendency to Akhbarism.

However, the emergence of Akhbari extremism that was adopted -with modifications- by the nineteenth Shaykhi sect of Iran and continued later in the Qajar period by the Babiyya and Baha'iyya turned the Usuli scholars into a brutal and consistent fight against Akhbarism (For Shaykhism, see Corbin, 1971–72; Momen, 2003). One of the most prominent Usuli who had much success against Akhbari was Muhammad Baqir Vahid Behbahani (d. 1205 H/1791). Along with his theoretical arguments against Akhbarism and in favour of ijtihad, Behbahani took practical measures against Akhbari as well. For example, he issued a fatwa, according to which it was illegitimate to say prayers led by al-Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani. Due to such theoretical and practical struggles, Usuli scholars overtook the power and dominance in Shi'a regions (For the reasons of Akhbari's decline and the role of Behbahani, see R. Gleave, 2000, pp. 300-3).

After Vahid Behbahani, Shaykh Murtada Ansari (d. 1281 H/1864), one of the most prominent jurists titled as the seal of jurists and jurisprudents (*khatam al-fuqaha wa al- mujtahidin*), laid the foundations of modern Twelver jurisprudence and their rational method more than any other classical scholars. Through a historical development of logical devices in jurisprudence, Ansari against Akhbaris implicitly supported the doctrines of the school of Hilla on the necessities of a certain knowledge (*'ilm al-yaqini*) in Islamic sciences and presented strong arguments for the authenticity of zann in the legal process (Ansari, 1328H, vol. 1, p. 29).

Ansari established the dominance of the Usuli position against the neo- Akhbari and completed the work started by Behbahani in this regard. His new path in Islamic legal principles has been adopted and followed by all the subsequent Shi'i Jurists and his two magnum opus works, *Fara'id al-Usul*, known as *al- Rasa'il* in jurisprudence and *al-Makasib* in fiqh are an inalienable part of the curriculum in modern seminary (*Hawzas*).

Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i (d. 1360Sh/1981) in his *al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an,* suggested similar epistemology and said: '*Al-khabar al-wahid* is not an authorised proof as long as it is not supported by an external or textual indicatory evidence resulted in a certainty. This epistemic requirement is applied in sciences like theology, history, and the hadiths transmitted on the virtuous of the infallible Imams (known as *al-akhbar al-fada'il*), however, it is not required in jurisprudence' (Tabataba'i, 1378Sh, vol. 8, p. 148).

Concerning the importance of certainty (*yaqin*) in human life, Tabataba'i has reminded us that everyone innately avoids uncertain knowledge and baseless opinion, especially if uncertainty causes a possible threat to life. One usually does not build one's life based on doubt or zann, so inevitably, obedience and devotedness have no room in the affairs of human life (Tabataba'i, 1378Sh, vol. 13, 92)

Confirming the above epistemological point with different wording, Tabataba'i says that it has become 'self-evident' (*badihiyyan*) that the unit-report in Islamic knowledge such as theology, metaphysics, medicine and astronomy is not valid, as the 'ulama had realised from the beginning to present day this vital epistemological point (Tabataba'i, 1378Sh, vol. 14, 134). Regarding the interpretation of the Qur'an, following Shaykh Tusi, Murtada, Mufid and other

early Imami 'ulama, Tabataba'i says: 'According to theologians and jurists, *al-akhbar al-ahad* in interpretation of the Qur'an are valid only if they are ascertained with indicatory pieces of evidence (*qara'in*). Unit-reports are authentic (*hujjat*) only in fiqh, so the narrations on the historical events and the interpretation of the verses are not binding proofs (*hujja*)' (Tabataba'i, 1378Sh, vol. 8, p. 141).

Among contemporary jurists, Sayyed Ahmad Khansari (d. 1363 Sh/1984) has developed Shaykh Tusi's view on narrowing the authenticity of unit-report in some chapters of jurisprudence. In his *Jami' al-Madarik*, (For the importance of Khansari's *Jami' al-Madarik*, see Hadi Ma'rifat, 1378Sh; Muhammad Baqir Sadr, 1375Sh). Khansari says: 'We do not believe in the authenticity of *al-akhbar al-ahad* in theology and other religious subject matters, as we do not believe in their authenticity in legal rules relating to human life like legal punishments and penalties (*hudud*), although *hudud* are part of jurisprudence' (Khansari, 1364 Sh, vol. 7, p. 35).

Khansari believes that human wisdom does not rely on *al-akhbar al-ahad* in sensitive legal issues: 'A wise person cannot rely on *al-akhbar al-ahad* on matters related to human life or any other sensitive issues, even if they are narrated through reliable transmitters because they do not yet provide us with certain knowledge (*al-'ilm al-yaqini*) anyway. Do not you see wise people decide about their important business if they only get information about it from a unit-report?' (Khansari 1364 Sh, vol. 7, p. 35). Due to the above views on the authenticity of unit-report, Khansari rejected all those hadiths that the advocates of *wilayat al-faqih* have used to support jurist's political authority. Khansari is the most significant opponent of political theories that Rurullah Khomeini, the leader of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, founded.

5   Akhbarism in modern time

The rational method of Usulis and their doctrine on 'certainty' came to dominate Shi'a theological and legal culture from the 14th century onward in Iran and Iraq; nevertheless, Akhbarism is still alive. Nowadays, Shi'a preachers, researchers in seminaries and universities, and even many scholars -some of which with ideological or political aims- practice Akhbari's method of using unit-report as an authentic source in theology and all the sciences of humanity.

Here, as an instance, I examine the arguments of Muhammad Sanad (b. 1382 H/1962), a contemporary pro-Akhbarism who supports the idea of general authenticity of unit-report. He says: 'The nature of certainty in Islamic belief is not the same as a logical and philosophical certainty, because belief or faith means submitting the heart to something and acknowledging it, and this is a voluntary act, which is of the type of practical wisdom (*hikmat al-'amali*) not theoretical. In addition, it is true that unit-report on a particular issue may not give us more than zann; still, it provides us with a group of narrations on a subject relating to a similar issue, so our knowledge may rise from informed opinion to a level of certainty. The soundness of narration can also be ascertained by indicatory evidence (*qarina*) from the Qur'an, which in turn raises the possibility of issuance (*imkan al-sudur*) of the report from the Prophet or Imams which bring about certainty or at least confidence' (Sanad al-Bahrani, 1382 Sh, pp. 34-56).

One may question Sanad's arguments that faith as 'a devotion of the heart to something' does not entail that it is merely of the type of practical wisdom and something that can willingly submit our heart to it because faith has the prerequisite of the cognitive affirmation by theoretical knowledge which again cannot be fulfilled without certainty. In addition, faithful or simple-minded people may easily reach the state of certainty through any narrations in hadith collections, but scholars who are supposed to deal with theoretical knowledge usually do not get the shape of confidence merely through unit-report.

The indicatory evidence that Sanad speaks of, as mentioned above, was first formulated by early and middle age Imami 'ulama, Shaykh Tusi and Allama Hilli; still, they believed that there are not enough such indicatory pieces of evidence for all unit-reports, while at the time they lived, they had much more chance to find external indicatory evidence than us. For such reasons, the jurists of the school of Hilla clearly announced that religious certain knowledge through hadiths is no longer attainable and the 'gate of certainty (*yaqin*) is shut.'

Proponents of the general authenticity of *al-akhbar al-ahad* have also argued for a report from Imam Rida narrated by Abdul Aziz Ibn Muhtadi. The narrator relates: 'I told Abu al-Hassan, Imam Rida, that you are not available to me because of the far distance between us. Is Yunus Ibn Abd al-Rahman a trustworthy man to learn what I need to know about my religion from him? The Imam said: Yes' (al-Hurr al-Amili , 1409H, vol. 27, p. 147).

The way to argue with the above hadith is that unit-reports in all areas of religious knowledge, including law, theology, and other Islamic sciences, are valid sources because the question was about all sciences. However, one may challenge the above argument and say the proofs in favour of invalidity of *al-akhbar al-ahad* include this report as well, so this report has already been

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invalidated. We may explain the above and similar hadiths that the Imams' permission to narrate their hadiths is based on the rationale that their sayings are merely a source of knowledge like other sources. This means that in the above narration, the Imam's response is not an obligatory command (*al-amr al-mulawi*); instead, it is an advisory recommendation (*al-amr al-irshadi*).

6 Conclusion

In this paper, we presented historical and contextual evidence that, according to the early Imami 'ulama, as long as a report is not supported by external or textual indubitable indicators leading to 'certainty,' it would not be a binding source (*hujja*) in the sciences. This epistemic view on transmitted reports, in our case study of *akhbar al-ahad*, has the most critical implications in Islamic studies. Here I address only two implications; one of them is concerning the phenomenon of Islamization of sciences. The movement of Islamization of sciences since the 20th century in many Muslim countries like Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran consider natural and social sciences loaded with western interests, secularism, values and culture, and considered modernism as a threat to religious belief and spirituality. The Attempts to apply Islamic principles to Western sciences were explored by many contemporary Muslim scholars, like Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, Sayed Naquib al-Attas and Mahdi Golshani, who philosophically formulated plans and actions for the Islamization of sciences. Using the theoretical and philosophical formulation for Islamization of sciences, Totalitarian governments turned the idea of Islamization into the project of sanctifying of knowledge and sciences to impose their own ideological hermeneutic of the religious texts in favour of their political benefits. To this aim, relying on *akhbar al-ahad*, many governmental institutions with huge budgets are compiling teaching texts at schools and universities levels in various fields of sciences of humanity such as economy, banking, medicine (*al-tibb al-Islami*), psychology, etc.

Another implication is concerning the theology of political Islam; most Muslim thinkers perceive the Prophet Muhammad -besides being a messenger- as a political leader with divine authority and saw his religion as the socio-political program for this worldly life. The theology behind this political religion becomes a powerful tool for the heirs of the Prophet - the caliphs, kings, and jurists in later centuries- to sanctify their political authority and link it to a divine right. Muslim thinkers have had a central role in theorizing this theology. They made an effort to demonstrate the ontic superiority of the Prophet through the idea of *al- 'aql al-awwal* as the First Creation – inherited from Aristotelian, the Neo-Platonic and Hellenistic's prophetic philosophy – which they associated with political authority in Islam. The Islamization of this idea was mainly accomplished by the transmitted reports recognized as genuine that introduce Muhammadan as the First Creation and report an especial relation of God with the Prophet and his true heirs. At the same time, there is a common consensus that these reports are not more than *akhbar al-ahad*.

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