



Discourse on "The Distinction between the Position of Imam and Caliph" Based on Historical Reports of *Aṣḡagh ibn Nubāta* from Imam Ali (AS)

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(received: July 2024, Accepted: September 2024).

DOI: 10.22034/hsr.2024.51478.1021

Abstract

Discourse analysis is an effective method in historical research that leads to a better understanding of the origins of a thought and the ups and downs associated with it. Ancient hadith data serves as a rich source for discovering earlier discourses. The present study, using the historical reports of *Aṣḡagh ibn Nubāta* as narrated by Imam Ali (AS), aims to uncover and extract the prominent discourse of this period. The research findings indicate that *Aṣḡagh ibn Nubāta*, as one of the close companions of Imam Ali (AS), was from the very beginning a crucial pillar in transmitting Shia-based discourses such as Imamate and *Wiṣāyat* (Caliphate and Succession), considering his personality traits and concerns. He distinguished between these two concepts based on Imam Ali's epistemological framework. Furthermore, the

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movement of Imam Ḥusayn (AS) also aimed to consolidate this discourse, and it can be stated that based on the theory of "Contradictory Voice of Bakhtin," the widespread reflection of the components of the succession concept in the historical reports of Aṣḥab and his significant attention to the discourse of Alawi *Wiṣāyat* was purposeful. It was formed in a dialectical interaction with the rival discourse that sought to institutionalize the theory of the *Saqīfa* Caliphate in society. In other words, Aṣḥab aimed to normalize the notion that Imamate is not equivalent to Caliphate; rather, succession is one of the important dimensions of Imamate.

Keywords: Discourse, Imam and Imamate, Caliph and Caliphate, Discourse of Imamate and Caliphate, Imamiyya Hadith, Aṣḥab ibn Nubāta.

Introduction

Today, some Western researchers engaged in Shia studies, such as Gleave, Madelung, and others; regard the Shia perspective on the leadership position as one of their main historical concerns, considering it to contain distinctive and identity-forming elements. They view this issue as a key and central topic for the conflicts among Shia groups (Gherami, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 56). Kufa, as a central gathering place for Shias and a suitable ground for producing and promoting Shia thoughts, especially concerning Imamate and leadership, has always been of interest to the Imams. The special companions of the Imams predominantly hailed from this city and contributed significantly to its cultural development.

One of the research methods that can provide a more accurate, clearer, and truly closer image of the cultural space of Shia in ancient historical contexts and the framework that facilitated the formation of

movements¹ and discourses is historical discourse analysis. In this method, discourse refers to what seeks to establish a belief and teaching within society; in other words, discourse is defined as the formation of a stable and effective movement regarding the analysis of a teaching (Rad, Ali; Ghazizadeh, Kazem, 2011 AD/1390 SH). According to Bakhtin's theory of "Contradictory Voice," discourse is not merely a collection of coherent propositions; rather, there are two processes concerning discourse: One that strives to propagate specific ideas and another that aims to establish boundaries between those propositions and others, preventing their proliferation (Salehizadeh, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 120).

Given this context, the main issue of the present study is the linguistic and content analysis of the historical reports of *Aṣḥab al-Nubāta*,² a close companion of Imam Ali (AS), to understand his primary concerns regarding concepts related to Imamate. 'Did he also pay attention to *Wiṣāyat*, Caliphate, and Succession?' 'Did he view them as different from the concept of Imamate?' 'What discourse was he trying to normalize through references to the verses of the Quran and the sayings of Imam Ali (AS)?'

1. Background

Numerous articles and works have been written on the topic of Imamate, but they lack the approach and perspective of discourse

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1. Consider the distinction among three historical realities: The essence of Shiism, Shia thought, and the Shia movement (Gherami, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 57-58).
 2. *Aṣḥab al-Nubāta Tamīmī Ḥanzalī* (d. 55 AH) was originally from Kufa and belonged to the lineage of *Mujāshī' ibn Dārim*.

analysis.¹ For instance, Hassan Bashir (2019 AD/1398 SH) addresses the major views presented in Imam *Riḡā*'s (AS) sermon regarding Imamate using discourse analysis; however, this work does not distinguish between the positions of Imamate and Caliphate.

In another article titled "The Concept of "Imam" over Time (Until the Mid-Second Century)," Mortaza Bahrami Khoshnoodi (History in the Mirror of Research, 2008 AD/1387 SH: No. 17) discusses the term Imam and its semantic components; however, the main issue of the present research is not addressed. A search of other research works, which primarily include earlier sources, indicates that none of them have paid attention to the discourse distinguishing the roles of the Imam and the Caliph, nor have they engaged with this issue. Therefore, the present paper aims to provide historical evidence and documentation to prove the existence of such discourse in the first century.

2. Research Methodology

Textual analyses lead to the discovery and extraction of frequently

1. From our perspective, discourse analysis differs from discourse mining. In the discourse mining method, we aim to discover and extract discourses, while discourse analysis, which is often conducted critically, typically involves one or more texts being analyzed at various levels based on well-known discourse theories such as that of Fairclough, among others. See for the difference between the terms "Historical discourse mining" and "Historical discourse analysis": Nasrawi, Mohammad (2015 AD/1394 SH), "An Introduction to Historical Discourse Mining: A Case Study of Zaynab's (AS) Sermon in Sham." Additionally, historical discourse mining differs from historical semantics (synchronic semantic) or the evolution of meaning of a word (for a sample of historical semantics of a word, cf. Mehrwash, Farhang, (2016 AD/1395 SH), "The History of the Concept of Dhikr in Islamic Culture," Studies in Quran and Hadith. Vol. 9, no. 1).

occurring linguistic actions. The goal is to achieve discourses that can be attributed to individuals; hence, the discourse must necessarily meet the condition of "Frequency." The nature of the discourses attributed to individuals is also of significant importance, meaning we need to determine whether the discourses are predominantly productive or if they emerge in response to representing the forgotten discourse of earlier eras for the purpose of defending against and responding to the opposing discourse in times of challenges and critical junctures. For instance, the discourse that can be attributed to *Aṣḡagh ibn Nubāta* is based on reports¹ that reflect his ideological psychology. The first challenge after the Prophet's (PBUH) passing, namely succession, which the Muslim community grappled with, also strongly suggests that the discourse attributed to *Aṣḡagh* is rooted in Shia beliefs and is organized based on certain components of appointment (*Wiṣāyat*) or Imamate. Part of this discourse revives a rooted discourse from the Prophetic era, while some aspects of it are also productive and foundational.

The method employed in this research is an interdisciplinary approach, as it is closely related to text analysis. By analyzing the text and discovering its linguistic relationships, it seeks to recognize the discourses prominent in its historical period; therefore, its discussions are connected with both linguistics and history.

In the field of linguistics, one of the methods for understanding

1. The initial or middle expressions of these reports indicate a close and sincere relationship between *Aṣḡagh* and the Imam; for examples of such examinations, cf. Marnisi, F. (n.d.). "Veiled Women and Armored Men." Tehran: Nashr-e Ney.

texts involves uncovering lexical relationships and also conceptual (or semantic) relations. Phenomena such as opposition, syntagmatic and paradigmatic, collocation, are parts of the conceptual relationships, while any type of relationship between words -including phonological (poetic metrics), structural (morphological changes), and syntactic relationships- falls under lexical relationships (Sharifi, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 55).

Of course, this method is not completely new, and its use has been prevalent in traditional methods. The difference is that the first method is somewhat more systematic and structured. In the traditional approach, the researcher goes through several stages¹, some of which are similar to the first method; however, overall, they will be able to gain a relatively good understanding of the text and its discourses. Therefore, many of the components referred to as "Historical Discourse Analysis" actually existed among scholars of *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* (Principles of Jurisprudence) and ancient interpreters as well.

The first stage in the "Historical Discourse Analysis" method is the extraction of concepts (thoughts, ideas)² through frequently occurring

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1. For details on the phases, cf. Shukrani, Reza; Moti', Mi; Sadegh Zadegan, H. (2011 AD/1390 SH). "An Examination of Discourse Mining Method and Its Application in Quranic Studies." *Ayyar Journal of Human Sciences*. Vol. 3, no. 1.
 2. The concept of "History of Concepts" is, in fact, a research approach that investigates the application and meaning of various concepts in different fields of human sciences within a historical context. Additionally, there is another term called intellectual history, which is a broader concept referring to the historiography of thought and ideas, where the history of concepts can serve as one of the tools for intellectual historiography (Gherami, S.M. H; Qandehari, M. (2013 AD/1392 SH). "Exploring the Relationship between Speech and Intellectual History in Shi'a Studies." *Islamic History Studies*. Vol. 5, no. 18).

linguistic actions. In this phase, which we call the first reading of the text, language (or text) functions as an element that represents the social environment or the context of the text's issuance,¹ guiding the audience towards the hidden implications of the text; in other words, it allows them to transition from the text's interior to its exterior.

After extracting the discourses, the next stage involves examining the changes in these discourses. This means assessing what stages they have undergone from normalization to ultimately reaching the phase of naturalization. If a concept reaches the stage of maturity or naturalization, it can produce other discourses (the second reading of the text), although this stage is currently outside the scope of this research. Ultimately, identifying the discourses and currents present in society based on the linguistic actions extracted from the text using the "Text-based" method described above will be the main focus of this writing.²

3. Tracing the Sources of Ancient Reports on *Aṣḥāgh ibn Nubūta*

The extraction of historical reports about *Aṣḥāgh* (identifying their positions in ancient early sources) reveals two components: Their

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1. This statement reflects the essence of Foucault's thinking in the discussion of discourse analysis, emphasizing that there is an interactive and dialectical relationship between text and context (Salehizadeh, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 123).
 2. Among recent studies that have simultaneously employed both methods to achieve a precise understanding of the discourses present during a historical period, one can refer to the article "An Introduction to Historical Discourse Mining: A Case Study of Zaynab's (AS) Sermon in Sham" by Mohammad Nasrawi, as well as his master's thesis on the discourse of Muhammad (PBUH) in the era of Imam Sajjad (AS).

frequency and distribution in the written heritage of hadith and interpretation following him—including compilations and early monographs up to the fifth century AH.

Given the limitations of writing in the first century and the limited heritage from this period, the existence of 100 historical reports for *Aṣḡagh*, who passed away in the middle years of this century, is considered a positive occurrence. Hence, it is possible to derive reasonable conclusions from the analysis of these reports. The distribution of *Aṣḡagh's* reports in the hadith and interpretative works of later periods indicates the importance of his statements. The list of works that have utilized his reports, wherein his name appears within the chains of narration, is as follows:

Table of the Historical Reflection of *Aṣḡagh's* Historical Reports in Later Works

2 nd Century	3 rd Century	4 th Century	5 th Century
Tafsir of Abū Ḥamza Thumālī	Muṣannaf ‘Abd al-Razzāq Ṣan‘ānī	al-Kāfī Kulaynī	Amālī Shaykh Mufid
	Maḥāsīn Barqī	Sharḥ al-Akḡbār Qāḡī Nu‘mān	Mi‘atu Manqabat Ibn Shādhān Qummī
	al-Gḡarāt Thaqaḡī Kūfī	al-Gḡaybah Nu‘mānī	al-Irshād Shaykh Mufid
	Baṣā‘ir al-Darajāt Ṣaffār	al-Faqīḡ Ṣadūq	Amālī Shaykh Ṭūsī
	Virtue of Imam Ali (AS)	Tuḡaf al-‘Uqūl Ḥarrānī	Kḡaṣā’iṣ al-A‘immah Sayyid Raḡī
	Tafsirs of ‘Ayyāshī, Qummī and Furāt Kūfī		Ma‘rifah al-Sunan wal Āthār Bayḡaqī

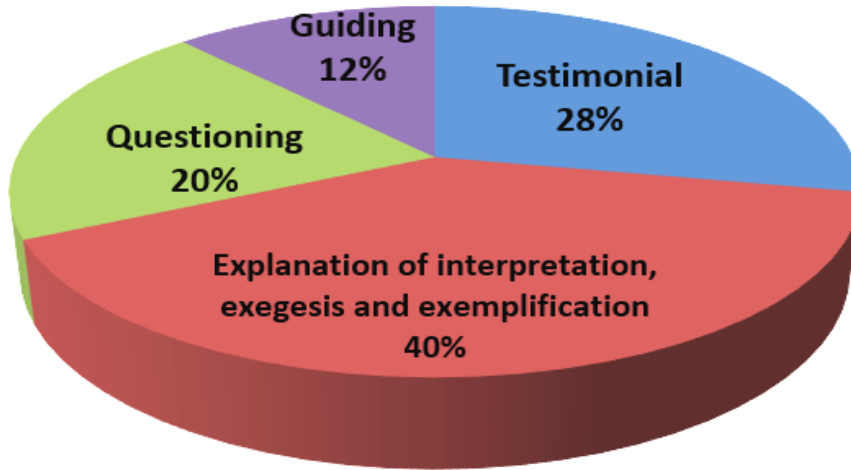
4. Typology of the Expressive Structures of *Aṣḥab*'s Historical Reports

Direct reports of *Aṣḥab* from Imam Ali (AS) have made the expressive structures of his narratives significant. Some of the narrations are of the type "Report" or "Quotation," which refer only to certain verses of the Quran either in the course of the statement or at its conclusion (Referential, 28). Others are explanations that *Aṣḥab* has provided from Imam Ali (AS) concerning specific verses, aimed at clarifying ambiguities, and the method of transmitting the hadith is indicated with phrases like (*Qāla* and *Sami'tu*) (He said and I heard) (explaining interpretation, exegesis, and verses' instances, 40). Another category includes inquiries from *Aṣḥab* himself (*Sa'altu*) or questions from others directed at the Imam (in the passive voice; *Su'ila 'an...*), specifically regarding some verses of the Quran (Questions, 20).¹

A number of other reports also utilize verses of the Quran for guiding and instructing the Shias or to encourage and commend them on a specific topic (Instructive, 12). Naturally, one must distinguish between each of these states, as each represents a special context for the issuance of the narration. Each of these categories contains subtle messages that require analysis, examination, and discovery, which will be further explored in the subsequent sections.

1 . See examples of questions narrations: Masoudi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 123-125.

Diagram of the Expressive Structures of Aṣḡagh's Historical Reports

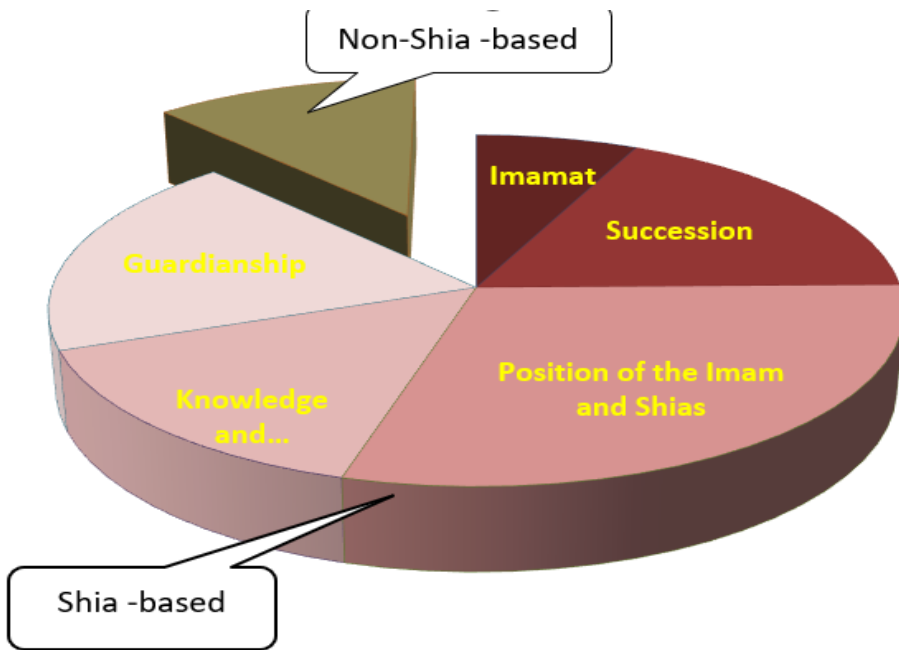


5. Linguistic and Content Analysis of Aṣḡagh's Historical Reports

Considering the main issue of the research and the abundance of reports from the Shia foundational figure Aṣḡagh ibn Nubātaḥ (cf. the diagram at the end of this section), we have focused our examination on this specific category of reports. The term "Shia-based" refers to that part of Shia beliefs that shapes its doctrinal foundations and underpinnings, serving as the basis for the forming an independent Shia identity that began during the time of Amir al-Mu'minin (AS) and reached fruition in the era of Imam Ṣādiq (AS). Here, we seek to discover 'Whether, through an analysis of Aṣḡagh's historical reports, the concept of Imamate can be attributed to him as a discourse, or the doctrine of succession?' 'What distinguishing characteristics exist

between the aforementioned discourses in his words?’ ‘Did he even make a distinction between these two concepts or not?’

Chart Classifying the Interpretational Narrations of the Quran by *Aṣḥab*, Based on Thematic Types



5.1. Linguistic Actions Related to Succession (*Wiṣāyat*)

As previously mentioned, paying attention to *Aṣḥab*'s belief psychology or, in other words, some of his personality traits can significantly familiarize us with the discourses attributed to him. The important term "*Shurṭatul Khamīs*" for him,¹ and his belief in the

1. The Title of Some of the Forces of Amir al-Mu'minin who had established this condition with him that they would remain loyal to him until the end and would never retreat (Kashshī, 1929 AD/1348 AH: 1, 103; Mufīd, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 65).

appointment of successors to the Prophet (PBUH),¹ provides a key to understanding him as someone who initiated the discourse on succession. Other expressions from him, such as "*Ana bihī Mūqin*" (I believe in him), concerning succession, demonstrate that Aṣḡagh was deeply concerned about this issue and even felt justified in his views. Quoting statements from Amir al-Mu'minin (AS) regarding the identification of the successor after the Prophet (PBUH)² adds another dimension that indicates the concept of succession in his mind had a particular clarity.

Aṣḡagh has two historical reports (one a direct narration from the Imam and the other a narration through *Ibn 'Abbās* from the Prophet (PBUH)) indicating that the earliest discussions about succession began during the time of the Prophet (PBUH). The content of both narrations (Ibn Shahr Āshūb, 1956 AD/1376 AH: 1, 244; Mufīd, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 224) is the question about the Imams after the Prophet (PBUH) and their number; however, Shaykh Mufīd's narration (Mufīd, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 224) refers not only to the number of successors but also to some of their characteristics. For various reasons, we refrain from attributing these two narrations to Aṣḡagh; however, similar to both previous narrations, they are also present in

1. Nāshī' Akbar, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 183.

2. Both of these reports aim to highlight the role of Imam Ḥasan in the succession of Imam Ali and likewise Imam Ḥusayn in succeeding their noble brother. The expressions articulated by these two esteemed Imams seek to produce and create the discourse of "Attributing their succession to the Prophet and Imam Ali." (Hāshimī Khuṭ, n.d.: 17, 310; Burūjirdī, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 13, 214; Qummī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 79)

Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni‘mah by *Shaykh Ṣadūq* (Ibn Bābawayh, 1975 AD/1395 AH: 1, 259-260), based on which we can ascribe the narration regarding the number of Imams to *Aṣḥbagh* and demonstrate the rootedness of the discourse on succession during the time of the Prophet (PBUH) in *Aṣḥbagh's* interpretation.¹

In addition to these two narrations, *Aṣḥbagh* has also warned about the alteration of the Sunnah of the Messenger of God (PBUH) and the deviation from his successor. In these narrations, the association of the phrases (alteration of the Sunnah and deviation from the successor) with (the descent of punishment) and the contrast between punishment and blessing creates precise and significant semantic relationships. The mentions of succession among other historical reports of *Aṣḥbagh* can be organized in the following components related to succession:

5.1.1. The Necessity of the Existence of a Successor for the Prophet

In the historical reports of *Aṣḥbagh*, the necessity of the existence of a successor after the Prophet (PBUH) is not explicitly stated; however, considering the conceptual conjunctions that we previously included in the stages of understanding the text and uncovering the underlying discourses, this issue can be somewhat established through implied reasoning. Most of these reports are presented in the form of tripartite conjunctions of God, the Prophet, and the Successor (‘Ayyāshī, n.d.: 2, 41), which sometimes contain evaluative judgments regarding the

1. Several good articles on the number of Imams have been published, including: "Two ‘Amrs and a Twelver Hadith," by Mohammad Reza Lavasani, pp. 108, as well as the article "Investigating the Antiquity of the Hadiths of the Twelve Imams in al-Kāfī," by Reza Ghorbani Zarrin, *Imam Research*. No. 12.

successor; one narration even explicitly mentions the name of Ali (AS).¹

5.1.2. The Knowledge and Expertise of the Successor and Its Quality

After clarifying the fundamental necessity of succession after the Prophet (PBUH) as the first component of the identity of succession, another identity-forming component can be seen as the knowledge and expertise of the successor. This is evident from the conjunction of the two concepts of knowledge and succession in some of the questioning narrations of *Aṣḡagh* (the questioner being *Ibn Kawwā'*)². On the other hand, attributing this knowledge to God and the Messenger can also indicate the divine nature of the position and status of succession, establishing it as a high rank of the Imams. The structure of these narrations is based on mentioning specific instances that center on the condemnation of concealing the knowledge of the successors and opposing them (Baḡrānī, n.d.: 5, 595).

5.1.3. The Complexity of the Concept of Succession in Terms of "Understanding" and "Acceptance"

In explaining this phrase, it should be noted that the inability to grasp

1 . (Qummī, 1967 AD/1387 AH: 2, 417; Ḥuwayzī, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 5, 555). In another instance, *Aṣḡagh* narrates from Salmān that the Messenger of God (PBUH) said: "O! Ali; indeed you and the successors after me, or he said: After you—are [as stated in] A'rāf." (Baḡrānī, n.d.: 2, 550)

2 . Among the historical reports of *Aṣḡagh*, there are multiple instances where *Ibn Kawwā'* (a leader of the *Khawārij* in *Ḥarūrā'* and a notable figure from Kufa) questions the Imam about verses of the Quran, and it is evident that most of his questions are more intended to trouble the Imam than for understanding. For information about his character, see the Encyclopaedia of Islam, entry on *Ibn Kawwā'*, pp. 529-530.

all the aspects and the true nature of succession leads to a natural challenge to its general public acceptability. Considering a number of historical reports from *Aṣḥab* and a similar approach observed in the narrations of other Shia narrators, this aspect can be counted among the identity-forming components of succession.

In this section, three reports from *Aṣḥab* were found that indicate the mentioned complexity based on the specific expressions used in them. The first two narrations are questions that begin with phrases using the word "Secret." Noting the beginning and end of both narrations reveals the connection between the secret and the concept of succession. The intermediate content in these beginning and ending parts demonstrate the special concern of the Imams in explaining some of their statuses through references to the verses of the Quran. In the first narration, reference is made to verse 23 of Surah *al-Shūrā*, known as the verse of Affection (*Mawaddat*), which, if mentioned in later exegetical heritage, suggests that the discourse of love for the Prophet's (PBUH) family is among the prevalent themes in Shia interpretation.

In the third narration, "*Inna Ḥadīthanā Ahlul Bayti Ṣa'bun Mustaṣ'ab*," the Imam, while referencing verse 30 of Surah *al-Baqarah*, suggests that presenting specific instances does not negate the uneven perceptions of his words. He attempts to connect the prevailing spirit of the narration to another issue related to the concept of guardianship as a form of succession. References to the "*Hadith of Ghadīr*" and the explanation of its connection to the believer along with the mentioned characteristic (*Qad Imtaḥana Allāhu Qalbahū lil*

Īmān) all indicate the complexity of the concept of succession in its various dimensions and it shows that only these individuals truly understood the words of the Prophet (PBUH), and thus, in the Imam's words, they distinguished themselves by something that all the angels, all the prophets, and even all the believers had not comprehended (Furāt Kūfī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 54-56).

Summary of the Discourse on *Wiṣāyat* (Caliphate and Succession)

Based on the analysis of historical reports from *Aṣḡagh*, several points of interest emerge in the discussion of succession that can be counted among the identity-forming components of this concept. The most important of these is the necessity of establishing a successor after the Prophet (PBUH), which seems to be articulated in its initial context through the triadic conjunction of God, the Prophet, and the Successor. This idea is supported and upheld by references to verses from the Quran. A related point is the specification of "Immediacy," which, according to the theological presuppositions of Imamiyyah, although not explicitly stated in the texts of the narrations regarding succession, seems to indicate that the inseparable conjunctions mentioned provide at least evidence for the continuity and lack of separation of the successor after the Prophet (PBUH) from him. This is especially true as some reports explicitly refer to Ali (AS) as the successor after the Prophet (PBUH).

Another point is the knowledge and expertise of the successor and the affirmation of its divine origin, which is corroborated by the conjunction of God and the Messenger. Additionally, the relatively

frequent actions (knowledge, guidance, and faith) reflect the close relationship of these attributes with the status of succession and leadership. A very significant component is the complexity and difficulty of understanding the concept of succession and identifying its instances, which naturally invites questions. Therefore, it can be said that the interpretative discourse attributed to *Aṣḥbagh* in the realm of succession possesses an initiating and non-questioning aspect concerning the components of "Necessity" and "Knowledge and expertise." However, when it comes to implications and instances, questioning transforms it into the representation of the discourse prevalent in the prophetic era.

Even among those reports by *Aṣḥbagh* that focus on questions about specific companions of the Prophet (PBUH), there is a possibility that these individuals, especially given the positive descriptions provided by the Prophet (PBUH) regarding them, were accused and defamed by opposing factions due to their belief in the legitimacy of Alawi's succession (the rightful successor to the Prophet (PBUH)). Therefore, *Aṣḥbagh* also seeks to counteract or at least moderate this faction in light of the representation of the discourse of Alawi's succession.

5.2. Linguistic Actions Related to Imamate

5.2.1. The Status of the Imam

Considering the famous narration "Lanā Karā'imul Qurān" (Qāḍī Nu'mān, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 2, 353; Mufīd, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 25; 'Ayyāshī, n.d.: 1, 9 and 16; Furāt Kūfī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 17 and 47), it must be said that the true meaning of this phrase is that the most

distinguished verses of the divine book and the most decisive expressions of the Almighty God concern the family of the Prophet. The common message of all these verses emphasizes the necessity for the Islamic community to follow the leaders of this family (Reyshahri, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 14-15).

Accordingly, many narrations regarding this type of verse can be observed that reflect the virtues and specific status of the Imams. Most of these narrations serve as examples of the verses and establish a conceptual relationship of intertwined and close connections among the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), the Prophet (PBUH) himself, and God, indicating the alignment of the guiding path of the Prophet and the Imam, ultimately affirming its oneness.

These narrations can be discussed in two categories:

A) Non-questioning narrations, where *Aṣḡagh* seeks to select and narrate them to highlight the foremost and most crucial gap in the discourse of Imamate (status), which he has rightly understood, so that the surrounding society may also recognize it;

B) Questioning narrations, where the Imam, in response to a question or request from the audience, guides them to the Quranic status of the Imam.

In explaining the first category, it should be noted that some of these narrations apply only to Imam Ali (AS), while others encompass all Imams. The narrations concerning Imam Ali (AS) often focus on the faith-based and guiding dimensions of his character.

Especially noteworthy is a narration where the Imam uses the term

174 "*Ana Anful Īmāni Ana Anful Hudā wa ‘Aynāhu.*" This seems to

address any doubts from non-specialists regarding his firmness on the path of guidance. Further, if we consider the continuation of the Imam's statement, "*Ayyuhannās lā Tastawḥishū fī Ṭarīqil Hudā li Qillati man Salakah*," we find that he refers to himself as the embodiment of "*Ṭarīqil Hudā*," as he had previously introduced himself with the term "*Anḥul Hudā*." (Nu'mānī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 35)

From the analysis and review of other cases relating to the status of the other Imams, it cannot be necessarily concluded in a unified manner, although among them, there is one instance where the guide is applied to the Imams in a verse of the Quran (Sayyid ibn Ṭāwūs, 1992 AD/1413 AH: 489).

In accordance with the mentioned instances, there are examples where *Aṣḥab* himself is either the questioner or he conveys information in response to a specific question or request from the Imam. Both situations could reflect the doubts and challenges raised in the Shia community regarding the identity aspects of Imamate.

A careful look at the opening passages of narrations, where the questioner is someone other than *Aṣḥab*, indicates the presence of an unresolved issue in the mind of the questioner. This individual seems to be struggling to align it with their own mental findings and even the realities of society, prompting them to present it to the Imam in search of an answer to their ambiguous thoughts. The expressions used at the beginning of both narrations suggest a sympathetic position from the questioner. Nonetheless, it seems that the question is asked with the aim of dispelling doubts and uncertainties and attaining a higher knowledge (Certainty), thus completing their understanding of the

status of the Imamate, which appears to have some deficiencies in their thought system.

In response to the first question, the Imam clarifies his own status and that of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt to the audience by referencing the verses from Surah *al-Nūr* (Furāt Kūfī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 285-286). In response to the second question, before referring to the Quranic verse, he tries to guide the questioner step by step toward the answer in a different manner. The Imam then references verse 253 of Surah *al-Baqarah*, stating: Despite the similarities (which can cause confusion), whenever a disagreement arises, we are more entitled to God, His religion, and His Prophet, as well as to the Book and the Truth. We are indeed the believers, while they are the disbelievers (referring to the phrase "*Fa minhum man Āmana wa minhum man Kafar*" in the verse), and our fighting against them is by the will, command, and intention of God (Ṭabrisī, 1966 AD/1386 AH: 1, 248; Mufid, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 102; Ṭūsī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 197; Burūjirdī, 1978 AD/1399 AH: 13, 85; Ibn Shahr Āshūb, 1956 AD/1376 AH: 3, 19; Ibn Abil Ḥadīd, 1956 AD/1378 AH: 5, 258).

According to these narrations, *Aṣḡagh's* questions are derived from Quranic verses that are worthy of reflection. In response to the first question, the Imam applies the phrase "*Rijāl*" to the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and introduces the grounds for entering Paradise and Hell as being the support or the animosity (Denial) of others toward them. Based on the intertextual relations of the text, *Aṣḡagh's* narration from Salmān regarding the Prophet (PBUH), "*Yā Ali Innaka wal Awṣiyā' min Ba'dī aw Qāla min Ba'dika A'rāf*" can also be seen as a context and

background for the discussion of this topic during the time of Imam Ali (P̄BUH) (Furāt Kūfī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 144; Ṭabrisī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 4, 261-262; Ibn Shahr Āshūb, 1956 AD/1376 AH: 3, 31; Ṭabrisī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 1, 660; Majlisī, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 24, 249; Zarkishī, n.d.: 2, 549; Hā'irī Ṭihirānī, 1918 AD/1337 AH: 4, 335).

The Imam's response to *Aṣḡagh's* second question begins with the expression that "No one has asked about this verse before you; I also asked the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), and he replied with the information from Gabriel." Such expressions indicate the expectation of the Imam for others to ask questions; it seems that he anticipated that other individuals would inquire about this verse, yet it appears that this did not occur. Ultimately, in Gabriel's response, the conjunction of the terms Ahl al-Bayt, wilāyah (guardianship), Shia, love of Ahl al-Bayt, and specifically the mention of *Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib* (AS) stands out, as all of these together constitute the elements of Shia identity, which, according to Gabriel, are the ones who will be safe from the great terror on the Day of Judgment (Furāt Kūfī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 311-312; Majlisī, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 7, 241).

Other verses that serve as the basis for non-question-based narrations of *Aṣḡagh* actually encompass the status of those other than the Imams; that is, the companions and followers of the Imams, who are highlighted in the narrations through specific linguistic actions such as "Shia," "Companions," and "*Anṣār*." The main narrations from this group are of the type that specifies examples. What stands out in these kinds of narrations is the defensive and corrective nature of the Imam's reaction when faced with questions that reflect the

perspectives attributed to his companions. For instance, in response to *Ibn Kawwā*'s question, "Indeed, some of your companions claim that..." the Imam says: "Speak of what you have heard, and do not add to the words from what (he) said to them." (Majlisī, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 53, 73; Fayḡ Kāshānī, 1995 AD/1416 AH: 4, 76-78; Baḡrānī, n.d.: 1, 221-222)

Hence, it becomes clear that, firstly, challenging the claims of the Imam's companions and even considering them incorrect, as indicated by "They claim," and secondly, adding embellishments to their words, along with failing to convey them accurately and explicitly—whatever the motivation—exists, and the Imam seeks to correct such thinking by referring to the verses of the Quran and applying concepts from it to the Shia, while also revealing other dimensions of a Shia's personality.

5.2.2. Knowledge and Learning

One of the points mentioned in our narrations is the continuity of divine teachings until the end of times in the form of inheritance.¹ The term "‘Ālim" (scholar) in the Imami narrations has a specific connotation, and as long as there is no evidence to suggest otherwise, it refers to the impeccable Imam. In these narrations, two key aspects are evident:

A) The scholarly nature of Amir al-Mu'minin and the Imams (AS) after him;

1. Previously, the article related to this topic was mentioned under the title "Review of Two Theories about the Chosen Heirs of the Qur'an."

B) The continuity of knowledge (the ongoing presence of humans in elucidating the teachings of Islam).

Among the narrations that *Aṣḥāb* initiates, it appears that he has selected and transmitted the narrations with a specific perspective. Therefore, certain specific components of the Imam's knowledge¹ can be identified, which will be mentioned below.

A) Reference to the depth of knowledge and its root and source (knowledge that comes directly from God); the necessity of knowledge for the evolving discourse of Imamate is reflected in a report where Amir al-Mu'minin (AS) states: "The Prophet (PBUH) revealed to me a thousand hadiths, each containing a thousand chapters, and for each chapter, there were a thousand keys." He then refers to the verse 71 of Surah *al-Isrā'*: "On the Day We will call forth every people with their Imam" (Mufid, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 283; Rāwandī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 2, 746; Ibn Shahr Āshūb, 1956 AD/1376 AH: 2, 98; Baḥrānī, n.d.: 3, 556);

B) The breadth of the Imam's knowledge; according to the historical reports of *Aṣḥāb*, it encompasses a wide range—from the Imam's scientific mastery of the sacred texts of previous religions to the Quran. Initially, the discussion regarding the Quran focuses on the apparent meanings of its verses, and at subsequent levels, it includes knowledge of the deeper implications and awareness of future events. Numerous examples report the Imam's absolute knowledge of all heavenly books and illustrate concrete instances of this knowledge.

1 . cf. the article: The place of Imam Ali (AS) in the publication of religious sciences in the scientific centers of the Islamic society of the first century, pp. 28-7.

The structure of these types of narrations indicates that these statements and the ensuing questions and answers have intentionally taken place in public spaces, such as mosques and pulpits; thus, the reactions of the addressed audience and their questions are noteworthy. The reactions to the Imam's statements, such as: "O! Amir al-Mu'minin, what is the verse that was revealed about you...", firstly, demonstrates that their interest in promoting the discourse of "Verses of the Quran revealed about individuals" has borne fruit, prompting people to search for instances of it. Secondly, it practically references them to verses of the Quran that are related to introducing the scope of his knowledge (Hūd: 17; cf. Ṣaffār, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 152; al-Ra'd: 39; cf. Ṭabrisī, 1966 AD/1386 AH: 1, 385; al-Ḥāqqah: 12; cf. 'Ayyāshī, n.d.: 1, 14; Ṭabrisī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 3, 367; Ṭabrisī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 9, 169). In some of these transmissions, the addition of "The Messenger of Allah" and its association with the term "Inheritance" not only proves the divine connection between the Messenger and, consequently, Ali (AS) with God, but it also reflects the inherited nature of the Imam's divine knowledge. Some of the Imam's responses, corresponding to the questions posed, as previously mentioned, indicate the Imam's knowledge of the deeper meanings of the Quranic verses and future events. An example of this is when the Imam interprets certain verses of the Quran (al-Isrā': 6; Saba': 51; al-Anbīyā': 15) as pertaining to the advent of Imam al-Mahdī (AS) and elaborates on the events that will occur on that day (Qabbānjī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 7, 407);

historical reports of *Aṣḥab*, there are narrations that fundamentally express another level of the Imam's knowledge regarding the Quran. However, since these have a practical aspect and the Imam's intention in referencing them is to bring the Quran into tangible and sensory realms of human life to safeguard against disasters and dangers (al-A'raf: 196; al-Zumar: 67; Āli 'Imrān: 83; al-Tawbah: 128-129; al-Nūr: 40; al-Isrā': 110-111), provide healing (Kulaynī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 2, 624; Majlisī, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 40, 184), invalidate magic, and resolve problems, we have presented them separately. In these narrations, the Imam highlights the authenticity of his knowledge by considering various factors, including the legitimacy of the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) and the veneration of his household by God. Thus, through linguistic actions that establish the identity of the Ahl al-Bayt (just as the family of the Prophet is integral), and by linking this to the Prophet (PBUH), the Imam seeks to solidify the foundations of his scientific status for the audience;

D) The Imam's guidance and instruction regarding his scientific authority: Naturally, anything related to the domain of knowledge, even if it does not explicitly mention the Imam's knowledge, can be categorized under the title of scientific authority since the Imam is the reference for that knowledge. For example, all topics that appear prominently in the historical reports of *Aṣḥab*, such as the attributes of God, faith and disbelief, the relationship between action and its quality with the two, the soul and angels, and the connection to *Laylatul Qadr*, etc., can be seen as linked to the components of Imamate. The Imam aims to clarify that we are the reference for

understanding righteous action, the attributes of God, and so forth. This can be understood as part of the Imam's guidance and instruction regarding his scientific authority.¹

5.2.3. *Wilāyah* and *Barā'ah* (Disassociation)

Just as the Imam, by virtue of his guiding status from God, is tasked with leading the legislative guidance of humanity to fruition, he is also responsible for his intrinsic authority; thus, we see that many of the historical reports of *Aṣḡagh* contain teachings relevant to *Wilāyah* and its identity-forming components, which can be categorized in the following types:

A) Emphasis on understanding the factors shaping authority: The historical reports of *Aṣḡagh* emphasize the unity between the authority of the Prophet (PBUH) and the authority of Imam Ali (AS), as well as the unity in obedience to both. The cited verses mentioned in these reports (al-Baqarah: 256, Luqmān: 22, al-Mā'idah: 56) also address the implications of authority in various ways. For example, the necessity of adhering to the authority of Ali (AS) is likened to holding fast to the "‘Urwatul Wuthqā"², understanding Ali's (AS) role as a

1 . For more information about the topic of monotheism and its relationship with Imamate, cf. Imamate Research interview with Mohammad Sanad Baḡrānī, no. 2, year 1, summer 1390.

2 . The fact that in many interpretations, the Imam is referred to as the argument (Ḥujjat), the path (Ṣirāṭ), the door (Bāb), the strong handhold (‘Urwatul Wuthqā), the ultimate example (al-Mathal al-A'lā), the great sign (al-Āyat al-Kubrā), and so on, indicates that the Imams are the means of introducing the cognitive aspect of God (the action of God, not His essence) to the people. In this case, understanding the truth of the Imam means recognizing what is to be known about God (Mu‘izzī, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 645-646).

legitimate authority after the Prophet (PBUH) requires knowledge and recognition of him, and the necessity of loving God and His Messenger (PBUH) is linked to following Ali (AS) after the Prophet (PBUH) and the Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (PBUH), who are the repositories of the Prophet's knowledge. Ultimately, the recognition of the greatness and depth of *Laylatul Qadr* is presented as fundamental to living in accordance with authority;

B) The scope of authority: It is God's will that the world be governed through intermediaries, and one of the most important and a significant mediator of divine grace in the realm of creation and legislation is the Imam, who also has authority over the realm of creation. Therefore, the existential authority of the Imam is understood as his control over creation with God's permission. Among the historical reports of *Aṣḥab*, there are themes that can be indicative of this existential authority; in one narration, Imam Ali (AS) addresses *‘Abdullāh ibn Jundab* and states, "Binā Fataḥa Allāhu al-Dīna wa binā Yakhtimuhū wa binā Aṭ‘amakumu Allāhu ‘Ashbal Arḍi wa binā manna Allāu ‘Alaykum minal Gharaqī wa binā Yunqīdhukumū Allāhu fī Ḥayātikum wa fī Qubūrikum wa fī Maḥsharikum wa ‘inda al-Ṣirāṭi wal Mīzāni wa ‘inda Wurūdil Janāni." He further applies verse 35 of Surah *al-Nūr* to himself and his Ahl al-Bayt (Furāt Kūfī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 285-286);

C) The function of authority concerning practical realms of "Deviation, denial, and adherence": Among the historical reports of *Aṣḥab*, the verses addressing the issue of departing from authority and denying it largely serve to illustrate examples rather than posing

questions. The connection between the "Nākibūn"¹ and deviating from the authority of the Ahl al-Bayt (Qāḡī Nu‘mān, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 1, 233; Ḥākīm Ḥaskānī, 1990 AD/1411 AH: 1, 524), as well as the Jews and the issue of recognizing Muhammad (PBUH) and authority, as highlighted in the Torah, where the conscious denial of these leads to the loss of faith in the "*Aṣḡāb al-Mash‘amah*" (Jews and Christians) (denial of prophethood and authority = absence of faith), serves as prominent examples of this theme (Baḡrānī, n.d.: 4, 138). According to such reports, there are narrations that present the effects of adhering to the view of authority (*Wilāyah*) within the ideological framework of *Aṣḡagh*, citing the Imam's reference to verse 70 of Surah *al-Furqān* to illustrate its impact on the forgiveness of sins (Furāt Kūfī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 293; Mufīd, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 65). The historical reports of *Aṣḡagh* that indicate the existence of a specific question and pertain to both the realm of deviation from authority and adherence to it generally fall under the category of interpretation and illustrative examples.² Given the compound phrase "The door of God," which indicates the attribution of the Ahl al-Bayt to God, it can be said based on the theory of "Contradictory sounds" that there was likely a common notion that the intended "Doors" in this verse referred to

1 . al-Mu‘minūn: 74; *Nakiba ‘anhu*: ‘Adl means deviation from something; ‘an al-Ḥaqq Ankabu (Farāḡīdī, 5, 385).

2. "And enter houses through their doors." (al-Baqarah: 189) In response to Ibn Kawwā's question, "Tell me about this verse," he guides him towards its inner meaning and states, "We are the door of God." (Ibn Shādhān Qummī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 71; Qāḡī Nu‘mān Maghribī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 2, 34; Baḡrānī, n.d.: 1, 408)

individuals other than the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet (PBUH). If this notion existed, it could be connected to the phenomenon of deviation from the rightful successor and the topic of Imamate, as entering through an incorrect opening clearly reflects a loss of the way and path.

Summary of the Discourse on "Imamate"

As previously mentioned, the main concern of *Aṣḥabgh ibn Nubātah* and what engages the symbolic system of his mind are concepts related to Imamate, including its position, knowledge, authority, and dissociation (*Barā'ah*). After the Prophet (PBUH), his primary concern has been about which complete human being would take hold of this helm. For this reason, his selection of historical accounts regarding Imam Ali (AS) is entirely purposeful and carefully executed to achieve this goal. If the position of the Imam is clarified and the scope of his knowledge and guardianship is determined, the status of guidance, which is the primary and fundamental function of the Imam, will be established.

The tripartite associations (of God, the Messenger, and Ali) (of the Ahl al-Bayt, the progeny, and the Imams from the lineage of Ali and the descendants of the Prophet) in *Aṣḥabgh's* historical accounts convey an important message, indicating that the Prophet (PBUH) is connected to the unique origin of existence, namely God. On the other hand, the association of Ali (AS) as the first guiding human being with the Prophet and ultimately with God signifies the exclusivity of the position of Imamate within the family of the Messenger of God (PBUH) and its divine nature.

In the expressions related to authority (*Wilāyah*), what holds significant importance is the reality of the authority of the Messenger and the Imam, which in some cases is illustrated by the mention of Ali (AS) as a model, indicating his priority and suitability for succession. Another important point is the association between the terms "*Wilāyah*" and "Faith," which demonstrates a reciprocal and dual connection between *Wilāyah* and faith, the latter being certain knowledge. This means that a lack of understanding regarding authority diminishes the spirit of faith and influences it.

Conclusion

The linguistic and content analysis of the historical accounts of *Aṣḡagh* demonstrates that the most frequently used terms by him relate to the discourses of Imamate and succession (*Wiṣāyah*). This is a result of the symbolic system governing his mind and proves that, in terms of personality and social context, issues related to Imamate and succession have always been one of his main concerns.

Based on the theory of "Bakhtin's Contradictory Voices" or "The Central Factor of Rejection" in discursive discussions, it can be said that the establishment and promotion of such discourses by the students of the Imams were, in fact, a political-social reaction to opposing groups that denied the status of the Imam or had an ambiguous perception of it. They believed that the leader of the community held merely the position of caliphate and succession, thereby reducing the status of the Imam to that of a mere successor or caliph. There is evidence to support this claim, indicating that the

nature of people's interactions with Imam Ali (AS) was very ordinary, treating him as a regular human. The practical behaviors of the audiences suggest that they were not aware of the dimensions of Imamate and were vacant of knowledge regarding the foundational meaning of the concept of Imamate. They did not realize that this position is a divine one, thus perceiving the Imam as an ordinary individual.

For this reason, we believe that a person like *Aṣḥāb ibn Nubātah* had both a grasp of the concept of Imamate and the notion of succession (*Wiṣāyah*). While his discourses on Imamate are more prominent, due to the better-known and more comprehensible nature of the discourse of succession, he has sought to present it within the context of the discourse of Imamate to cover both concepts. In fact, through this type of discourse, he sought to indicate that Imamate is not equivalent to succession; rather, succession is merely one aspect of it, albeit an important one. There is evidence to highlight the better-known concept of succession; for example, the statements of Amir al-Mu'minin (AS) at "*Dhī Qār*," which reflect the social atmosphere of Kufa during his arrival in that city, can serve as strong testimony to this assertion.

In other words, the primary concern of *Aṣḥāb ibn Nubātah* has been to elucidate 'Who is the Imam?' and 'What is the nature of Imamate?' Alongside this important discussion, he has also pursued another significant truth, which is the issue of succession and leadership. Therefore, it seems that the establishment of the discourse on Imamate has been his main focus, while he has also strived to

ensure that the discourse of succession and leadership is not neglected in order to bring it to a state of normalization and naturalization, consistently emphasizing the differences and distinctions between it and Imamate. This is the void that seems to occupy an individual like *Aṣḡagh* because of his crucial mission and role, as well as his personal characteristics and interests. He has sought to fill this void from the early stages, with the goal of ensuring that the essence of Imamate is not misunderstood and that the issue of succession does not become marginalized. One noteworthy point in the discourse of succession is the element of "Text" (Naṣṣ), which was previously mentioned as a code for recognizing the discourse of succession in the historical reports of *Aṣḡagh*.

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