



KAŠŠI, ABU 'AMR MOḤAMMAD

KAŠŠI, ABU 'AMR MOḤAMMAD b. 'Omar (d. 367/ 978), an Imami traditionist and an important figure in Shi'ite biographical literature (*rejāl*). Kašši lived in the first half of the 10th century. Though his place of origin is not mentioned, he was probably born in Kešš, a city in medieval Transoxania, since most of the informants from whom he transmitted were from there or other towns in the neighboring regions. His *nesba* thus should be read as Kešši, though traditionally it was later read Kašši. He studied in Samarqand under Moḥammad b. Mas'ud 'Ayyāši (n.d.), an important Shi'ite scholar and disseminator of Shi'ite traditions in Transoxania in the early 10th century. Kašši probably visited and met Shi'ite transmitters in Iraq, since he related directly from some Iraqi transmitters. In addition, some Shi'ite scholars in Baghdad transmitted his book directly from him (Takim, 2007).

His seminal work on the disciples of the Imams, titled *Ketāb ma'refat al-nāqelin 'an al-a'emma al-šādeqin*, has survived only through an abridged version, called *Eḳtiār ma'refat al-rejāl*, made by Shaikh Abu Ja'far Moḥammad Ṭusi (d. 460/1067). Kašši's work is considered one of the four main Shi'ite biographical works, along with the *Ketāb al-rejāl* and the *Ketāb fehrest kotob al-Ši'a* of Shaikh Ṭusi and the *Ketāb al-rejāl* of Aḥmad Najaši.

Kašši's literary depiction of the disciples of the Imams (also called the *rejāl*) stands in contrast to the works of Ṭusi and Najaši. The significance of Kašši's work lies in the fact that, unlike Ṭusi and Najaši, he did not provide a standard appraisal of some of the closest companions of the Imams. Rather than restricting his work to enumerating the literary compositions and assessing



the reliability or otherwise of the rejāl that he considers, Kašši reconstructs the social and religious milieu of the associates of the Imams. Beginning with the companions of **Imam 'Ali b. Abi Ṭaleb**, Kašši cites reports on them, most of which are in the form of comments allegedly uttered by an Imam or a contemporary figure. He sometimes includes reports on the disciples' alleged supernatural abilities, their literary and other activities, and the views that they espoused. Rarely does he directly authenticate a person. It is in these anecdotes that Kašši gives concrete forms to ideals like loyalty, commitment to faith, and the proper understanding and transmission of the Imams' teachings (Ṭusi, 1969, p. 20; Takim, 2006, Chaps. 3, 5).

Within Shi'ite circles, his work is considered controversial, as it includes reports that link some of the major companions of the Imams, like Salmān Fāresi (d. 644- 47), the Shi'ite traditionist Jāber al-Jo'fi (d. 128/745), and Mofazzal b. 'Omar (d. 180/796), with extremist groups (Ṭusi, 1969, p. 323). Kašši is also considered controversial because he cites both laudatory and pejorative remarks, which reportedly were uttered by the Imams, concerning some of their most eminent disciples, such as Zorara b. A'yan (d. 150/767), Moḥammad b. Moslem Ṭaqafi (d. 150/767), Yunos b. 'Abd-al-Raḥmān (d. 208/823), and others. These reports are juxtaposed with the social reality of the disciples' often strained relationship with the Imams and the latter's attempts at limiting the authority and restricting the activities of their disciples (Takim, 2006, Chap. 3).

Kašši based his biographical profiles on discrete components that he found in various genres of literature. The texts he used in defining the rejāl and depicting their functions in the Shi'ite community ranged from erstwhile Shi'ite autobiographical fragments and doctrinal works to polemical discourses and juridical compilations. He also used reports contained in various Sunni polemical, biographical, and heresiographical tracts. These accounts were supplemented with oral narratives transmitted by the Shi'ite community (Ṭusi, 1969, p. 604).

It was probably due to the inclusion of the contradictory and disparaging remarks against some prominent disciples that Najāši (p. 263), a prominent scholar in Shi'ite biographical literature, considered Kašši's work to be full of errors caused by his reporting from "weak" transmitters. Nonetheless, the details contained in his text make Kašši's work indispensable for comprehending the construction of and struggle for authority within the Shi'ite community. It is also an invaluable source for comprehending the



relationship between the Imams and the *rejāl*, and the struggle to legitimize the disciples' claim to authority. Another distinctive feature of his work is that Kašši had access to books composed by *rejāl* scholars who lived during the times of the tenth and eleventh Shi'ite Imams. For example, he quotes the views of 'Ali b. Ḥasan Faẓẓal and Faẓl b. Šāḍān (d. 259/873) on several occasions. At one point, Kašši states that Moḥammad b. Mas'ud 'Ayyāši (n.d.), his teacher, had asked Ebn al-Faẓẓal about the status of 'Ali b. Ḥasan. Kašši also states that he had earlier biographical texts at his disposal. At one point in his work, he quotes the book of Moḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Bandar Qomi (n. d.) in a profile of a disciple (Ṭusi, 1969, p. 604). He says in another profile, "I have found [a book] in the handwriting of Jebril b. Aḥmad" (Ṭusi, 1969, pp. 300, 393). Kašši's work is indispensable for assessing the characteristics and structural framework of the biographical literature on the *rejāl*. His text is also important for constructing a coherent picture of the authority that the *rejāl* wielded in the Shi'ite community during the times of the Imams.

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