

The Heritage of Scholars: A Review of Agha Buzurg al-Tihrani's al-Dharī'ah

One way of uncovering the intellectual depth of a community is to look at the scholarly works that community has produced since its inception. In the following detailed synopsis, Dr. Aun Hasan Ali explores a renowned work in bibliographical studies, al-Dharī'ah ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī'ah, by Aqā Buzurg Tihirānī, a unique and indispensable work that provides us a glimpse into the vast intellectual legacy of Shī'i scholarship.

Aqā Buzurg was born in 1293 A.H./1875 C.E. to a scholarly family in Tehran, Iran, and studied in Tehran, Najaf, and Samarrā under the most eminent scholars of his time, including Mīrzā Husayn Nūrī, Ākhūnd Muḥammad Kāẓim al-Khurāsānī, and Muḥammad Taqī al-Shīrāzī, all students of the famous Mīrzā Shīrāzī. ((For more information regarding Mīrzā Shīrāzī's life and personality, see [A Drop in the Sea: The Life and Character of Mīrzā al-Shīrāzī](#).) He died in the year 1389 A.H./1970 C.E., and is buried in his personal library in Najaf.

Al-Dharī'ah ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī'ah by Muḥammad Muḥsin, known as Āqā Buzurg Tihirānī (d. 1970), is a comprehensive bibliographical study of Imāmī Shī'i works written before its composition in 1958. The Beirut edition (1983) is comprised of 25 parts in 28 volumes. It contains 53,510 entries on a broad range of subjects, including Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, law, theology, science, history, poetry, and belles lettres. Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu titles are listed in alphabetical order.

But *al-Dharī'ah* is more than just a list of works. Āqā Buzurg added informative introductions to major topics and also discussed the history and transmission of texts. Works that are known by more than one title are cross-referenced, and the sources of references to works that are no longer extant are mentioned. Individual entries range in length from just a few lines to several pages. Many entries include a summary of the contents of the book and a list of manuscripts and printed editions. Volumes 9/1 to 9/4 contain material on poetry. Volume 16 and onward contain author indexes. A separate index of authors called *Mu'jam Mu'allifī al-Shī'ah* by 'Alī al-Fāḍil al-Qā'īnī was published in 1984. Volumes 17 onwards include titles of Ismā'īlī works listed in Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Rasūl's (d. 1769 or 70) *Fihrist al-Kutub wa-l-Rasā'il*, on which W. Ivanow based his *A Guide to Ismaili Literature*. In cases where the identity of an author is not clear, Āqā Buzurg reviews the evidence and at times offers his own valued opinion. However, some people have criticized the attribution of particular works. Āqā Buzurg's son 'Alī Naqī Munzavī has noted these criticisms in the entry on his father in *Ṭabaqāt A'lām al-Shī'ah*.

Al-Dharī'ah is said to have been written in response to *Ta'rīkh Ādāb al-Lughat al-'Arabīyah* by Jurjī Zaydān (d. 1914), which slighted the contribution of Shī'īs to Arabic literature. Āqā Buzurg began working on it in 1911 in Sāmarrā in Iraq. At the time of his death, twenty-four volumes had been

published. Volume 25 was published in 1978, and a supplement entitled *Mustadrakāt al-Mu'allif* was published in 1985. With the exception of volumes thirteen and fourteen, which were edited by Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-'Ulūm, the entire work was edited by Āqā Buzurg's sons, 'Alī Naqī and Aḥmad Munzavī. The contents of *al-Dharī'ah* are based on Āqā Buzurg's own research, his visits to private and public libraries all over the Middle East, and the catalogues of libraries in Europe, Turkey, and South Asia.

There are a number of mistakes in the published edition. Much of the responsibility for these mistakes falls on the shoulders of the editors, who made changes to the original manuscript. Recently, several scholars have undertaken the task of correcting these mistakes. Al-Sayyid 'Abd al-Azīz al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī al-Yazdī (d. 1995) wrote a supplement to *al-Dharī'ah* that has been published; al-Sayyid Sa'īd Akhtar al-Riḍawī al-Hindī (d. 2002) wrote *Takmilat al-Dharī'ah*, ((*Nuskhah Paṣūhī*, 2 (1426 A.H.): 537-93)) which includes works written after 1958, particularly works by South Asian '*ulamā*'; al-Sayyid al-Riḍawī also wrote *al-Ta'līqāt 'alā al-Dharī'ah*, ((*Nuskhah Paṣūhī* 3 (1427 A.H.): 627-82)) in which he corrected several titles and biographical details; and al-Sayyid Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī al-Ishkawārī made a number of corrections in '*Alā Hāmish al-Dharī'ah*', ((*Nuskhah Paṣūhī*, 3 (1427 A.H.): 597-661.))