

In this chapter Prof. Ali argues that the Imāmī Shī‘ī madhhab is a literary artifact as well as a historical reality. Taking this distinction as his point of departure, he examines how Imāmī Shī‘ī tradition was represented by a towering figure of the School of Ḥillah at the height of his career: al-‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī. The chapter revolves around the analysis of an ijāzah that al-‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī issued to five members of an important Imāmī Shī‘ī family in 723/1323, shortly before his death. The significance of the text, he argues, lies in the fact that it constructs a particular memory of the scholarly tradition for the community. As such, the authorities, anecdotes, and texts mentioned in the ijāzah furnish us with important insights into how the School of Ḥillah idealized a unique style of reasoning embedded in tradition. Key among these insights is an understanding of how Imāmī Shī‘ism was imagined vis-à-vis the Sunnī majority. Based on the fact that the ijāzah includes a wide selection of Sunnī and Mu‘tazilī material, he argues that al-‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī sought to represent himself as a Muslim authority and not simply an Imāmī Shī‘ī authority. In stark contrast to the parochial and sectarian image found in much of the scholarship on Imāmī Shī‘ism, the identity memorialized in this text reflects the aspirations of a minority that refused to be marginalized. This universalistic voice is one of the School of Ḥillah’s most significant contributions to Imāmī Shī‘ī tradition. The difference between literature and history notwithstanding, he concludes the chapter by arguing that literary artifacts shaped historical realities through idealized representation