



Similarities and Differences in the Conditions of an Ideal Ruler from the Perspective of the Imamiyyah and Sunni Schools

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Abstract

This comparative study examines the “conditions of an ideal ruler” in two Islamic legal traditions: The Imamiyyah and the Sunni schools. It aims to provide an integrated view of the similarities and divergences in the requirements for leadership as found in linguistic, jurisprudential, and theological texts. The research employs a descriptive-analytical approach based on library studies. First, the meaning of “ruler” is clarified in its dual usage (judge or governor), and then the conditions are categorized and compared as “general” and “specific.” The findings indicate that both traditions emphasize common traits such as Islam, reason, maturity, manhood, sound senses and faculties, courage, trustworthiness, and insight or political competence. In contrast, meaningful differences emerge regarding justice, ijтиhad, Quraysh lineage, faith in the more specific sense (Imamiyyah affiliation), and purity of lineage: justice is a prerequisite for the validity and continuity of authority in the Imamiyyah, while in some Sunni sources it is considered a condition of perfection or non-essential; ijтиhad is obligatory in the Imamiyyah, whereas among some Sunnis, knowledge combined with the possibility of consultation suffices; Quraysh lineage is important in many Sunni sources but not considered relevant in the Imamiyyah during the Occultation; and faith in the specific sense and purity of lineage are prominent conditions in Imamiyyah literature. The study ultimately presents a matrix of “minimum common requirements” and “maximum doctrinal criteria,” which may serve as a guide for designing constitutional frameworks and contemporary policy-making in the Islamic world, clarifying the relationship between legitimacy, acceptance, and effectiveness in leadership models.

Keywords: Ideal Ruler; Guardianship of the Jurist; Imamate; Justice; Ijtihad; Political Competence

Introduction

1. Problem Statement

The fundamental question, “Who has the right and authority to govern, and with which attributes?”, has been at the core of political thought in Islam since its inception. However, answers in jurisprudential (fiqh) and theological (kalam) sources are scattered, sometimes appearing under terms

such as “*Imamah*”, “*Caliphate*”, “*Qada*” (judiciary), or “*Wilayat al-Faqih*”. The term “*ruler*” itself is used in two distinct senses: either as a *judge who executes rulings* or as a *leader who administers the affairs of the community*. This conceptual duality, combined with the plurality of jurisprudential schools, has made it challenging to depict a *cohesive framework* of the conditions for leadership. Meanwhile, modern nation-states require a precise formulation of leadership qualifications to define legitimacy, acceptance, and effectiveness in constitutional governance, political participation, security, and optimal administration.

A review of the literature indicates that many studies either focus on the *powers of the ruler* or examine only one or a few qualifications separately. Few comparative studies provide a comprehensive picture of the *ideal ruler's conditions* in both the Imami and Sunni traditions, and even fewer translate these insights into a practical framework for contemporary institutional design. Furthermore, some sources do not clearly distinguish between *identity–belief conditions* (e.g., specific faith or Quraysh lineage) and *ethical–functional conditions* (e.g., justice, trustworthiness, courage, political competence), nor do they clarify each condition's relation to *legitimacy, continuity or removal, and merit or priority*.

This study seeks to fill three gaps by clarifying the meaning of “*ruler*” (as a political leader rather than a judge), categorizing conditions as *general* or *specific*, and employing a descriptive–analytical method with an examination of rational and transmitted evidence for each condition:

1. To systematically extract conditions from Imami and Sunni sources and organize them into a matrix of “*minimum commonalities and maximum school-specific requirements*”;
2. To explain the function of each condition across three levels: *legitimacy, continuity or removal, and preference*;
3. To show the institutional implications of these conditions for mechanisms of legitimacy (appointment, allegiance, or election), the division of power (council, judiciary, leadership), and the regulation of religion–state relations in Muslim societies.

Based on preliminary evidence, the guiding hypothesis is that natural and ethical conditions (Islam, intellect, maturity, masculinity, soundness, trustworthiness, courage, insight) exhibit high convergence across both traditions, whereas identity and institutional conditions (justice as a disqualifying criterion, ijтиhad, Quraysh lineage, specific faith, and purity of origin) are central points of divergence, rooted in Imamate or Caliphate doctrines as well as historical contingencies. A refined response to the two main questions—*similarities* and *differences*—can both strengthen jurisprudential dialogue across schools through actionable commonalities and assist policymakers in designing constitutional and administrative frameworks compatible with Islamic tradition and contemporary governance requirements. Therefore, the *similarities and differences in the conditions of the ideal ruler from both perspectives* constitute the primary research question.

2. Literature Review

To date, no study has been found that directly addresses the present topic in a comprehensive manner. However, research has been conducted on individual variables of this subject, namely the qualifications and conditions of a ruler. A few representative studies that the author has accessed are briefly summarized below.

A book entitled “*Limits of the Ruler's Authority in Islamic Criminal Law*” by Hamid Masjed-Sarai and Soheil Kabiri examines the powers of an Islamic ruler in enforcing *Hudud* (fixed punishments) and *Ta'zir* (discretionary punishments) according to the Imami jurisprudence. While informative, this work focuses primarily on legal enforcement, whereas the ruler's authority extends to broad social, political, and economic domains, which require more comprehensive analysis and research.

A master's thesis titled "*The Scope of Authority of the Islamic Ruler in Shia and Sunni Fiqh*" by Mehdi Fahimi addresses the ruler's authority primarily in the context of *matters of Hisbah* (public accountability). However, the structure of the discussion differs significantly: the thesis does not systematically organize the examples of *Hisbah* matters, instead largely relying on citations of jurists' statements, leaving many examples unexamined. In contrast, the present research arranges the conditions of the ideal ruler in a structured manner, systematically distinguishing political, judicial, economic, and social domains, each discussed separately and thoroughly.

Another thesis, "*Characteristics of the Ruler in Shia and Sunni Political Fiqh*" by Ali Elmi, focuses on the qualifications of a ruler but does not address the scope of authority and powers of an Islamic ruler.

The most influential work for this research has been the book *Dirasat fi Wilayat al-Faqih* by the late Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri. Nevertheless, the structure of Montazeri's book differs from the present study, and some topics regarding the scope of the ruler's authority are not discussed therein.

Theoretical Framework

1. The Concept of the Ruler

To clarify the lexical and technical meaning of the term "*ideal ruler*", we first discuss the individual meanings of "*ruler*" and "*ideal*", and then consider their combined meaning.

According to the conducted review, the word *hākim* (حاكم) has been used in multiple lexical senses. Some lexicographers define it as follows: "*al-hākim: one appointed to judge among people*" (Mustafa, 1989, Vol. 1, p. 190). That is, a ruler is someone appointed to adjudicate among people. However, many linguists derive *hākim* from the root *h-k-m* (حكم) meaning "to restrain," interpreting a ruler accordingly. Raghib al-Isfahani writes under the entry *h-k-m*: "*The origin of the word 'hukm' is 'restraint' for the sake of reform. Hence, the bridle of animals is called hikmah. And the one who judges among people is called hākim or hukkām*" (Raghib al-Isfahani, 1412 AH, p. 248).

Ibn Athir comments on the term *hukm*: "*It is one of the names of God and, here, is used to mean a ruler. The intended meaning of 'ruler' is a judge, and the reason for naming the ruler as such is to prevent the tyrant from wrongdoing*" (Ibn Athir, 1367 AH, Vol. 1, p. 420). It should be noted that if the role of a ruler as a judge is defined by preventing oppression, then the leader or head of society also shares this position. Therefore, the term *hākim* must be understood as having a dual meaning. Some consider a ruler as the implementer of judgment (Ibn Manzur, 1425 AH, Vol. 12, p. 142).

Due to the sensitivity of the term *hākim* in Islamic sources, such as the report of Umar ibn Hanzalah in which Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) says: "*I have appointed him as a ruler over you*" (Al-Kulayni, 1407 AH, Vol. 1, p. 67), scholars have debated the intended meaning of *hākim* in this and other narrations. Since many jurists consider this narration as the strongest evidence for the legitimacy of the Islamic ruler's authority, most Imami scholars interpret the *hākim* as the jurist who fulfills all conditions for issuing legal verdicts. As Shahid Thani asserts, "*Whenever the term hākim is used in fiqh chapters without specification, consensus holds that it refers to a jurist possessing full qualifications for issuing legal rulings*" (Shahid Thani, 1413 AH, Vol. 4, p. 162). Others argue that the term *hākim* applies both to a judge and to the leader of society (Mousavi Khomeini, 1421 AH, Vol. 2, p. 641).

In Sunni fiqh sources, the term *hākim* has also been used both for caliphs and governors as well as for judges. As explicitly stated in *Al-Mawsū'ah al-Fiqhiyyah*: "*In technical fiqh terminology, the word hākim includes the caliph, the governor, and the judge. There is no disagreement among Muslims on this point*" (Ibn Najim, 1420 AH, Vol. 1, p. 155).

Thus, it can be concluded that the Imami and Sunni jurists do not significantly differ regarding the technical meaning of *hākim*. In many fiqh texts, the term has been used both to refer to judges and to the Imam, the caliph, or the leader of society.

The author's preferred view aligns with this dual usage. The term *hākim* is applied both to judges and to Islamic rulers because:

1. The connection between the lexical and technical meanings is preserved. In Arabic, *hākim* literally means “restraint for the sake of reform,” a function shared by both the Islamic ruler and the judge.
2. Many jurists, being native Arabic speakers or having full mastery of the language, were precise in their use of terms, employing *hākim* in both senses.
3. The term *hākim* has historically been used in everyday discourse in both meanings.

However, in the present study, the term *hākim* primarily refers to the leader and head of society who manages and administers the community.

2. The Concept of “Ideal”

The term *maṭlūb* (مطلوب) is the passive participle derived from the root *t-l-b* (طلب), which in Arabic refers to the desire to attain something for which effort and striving are made. *Maṭlūb* thus literally means “that which is sought or desired,” whether by God or otherwise (Al-Bustani, 1987, p. 55).

In the valuable *Dehkhoda Dictionary*, under the entry *maṭlūb*, it is defined as: “requested, sought, agreeable, and desirable; something intended according to purpose or will” (Dehkhoda, 1339 SH, Vol. 45, p. 636).

According to a survey of fiqh literature, no distinct technical definition for *maṭlūb* has been recorded, perhaps because the term's meaning was clear to jurists, rendering explicit definition unnecessary. It is likely influenced by its lexical meaning and generally refers to something commendable and desirable, possessing goodness and benefit. In fiqh texts, the term is used approximately in this sense.

The combined term *hākim maṭlūb* (*ideal ruler*) refers to a person who, in addition to possessing praiseworthy traits, enjoys divine legitimacy or popular selection. As one author notes:

“There is no doubt that a jurist possessing full qualifications, endowed with knowledge, justice, courage, administrative ability, and other attributes required for a worthy ruler, is the closest person to the infallible Imam. Reason also dictates that such a person deserves appointment by God” (Heydari, 1424 AH, p. 223).

In Sunni fiqh, the term *ideal ruler* similarly applies to a person who, besides having the general and specific qualifications for leadership, has received allegiance from the people. In cases where it is impossible for all people to pledge allegiance, the pledge of the representatives (*ahl al-hall wa'l-'aqd*) on behalf of the people suffices (Zuhayli, 1418 AH, Vol. 8, p. 264).

In conclusion, based on Islamic fiqh sources, the *ideal ruler* refers to an individual who either possesses near-infallible human qualities or is close to the infallible, effectively manages society, enjoys the consent and acceptance of the people, and is either divinely appointed or popularly elected.

3. The Necessity of an Ideal Ruler from the Perspective of the Two Sects

Historical studies indicate that the existence of a ruler in human social life is an undeniable fact. For further clarification and analysis, the necessity of an *ideal ruler* is examined separately from the viewpoints of Imami and Sunni jurists.

3.1. The Necessity of an Ideal Ruler from the Imami Perspective

Since Islam, as the final religion, carries a sacred mission, the realization of this mission is impossible without the presence of a competent and ideal ruler. Therefore, the implementation of Islamic laws and the protection of Islamic boundaries necessitate a capable and ideal ruler. Many Imami jurists consider the existence of an *ideal ruler* both a rational and religious necessity, citing various evidences.

One prominent Shia jurist, Imam Khomeini, discusses the necessity of an ideal ruler:

"What need or necessity is greater than the necessity to appoint a ruler who can administer and manage the affairs of the people and protect the Muslim cities? In truth, there is no necessity higher than that of the presence of an ideal ruler."

He emphasizes that the office of Wilayah (leadership) and Caliphate is not for everyone. According to the Imami school, after the Prophet ﷺ, leadership is vested in the infallible Imams who inherit the same universal authority of the Prophet. However, during the Occultation, leadership and societal supervision are entrusted to a just jurist (*faqih 'adl*). From Imam Khomeini's perspective, not everyone can hold authority over Muslims; the best and most desirable leaders during the Prophet's era were the infallible Imams, and during the Occultation, a just jurist is necessary, as the ruler must possess justice and juristic competence (Mousavi Khomeini, 1421 AH, p. 621).

The renowned jurist Hossein Ali Montazeri extensively discusses the necessity of an *ideal ruler*, considering it agreed upon by both Imami and Sunni scholars. He asserts:

"Among Imami and Sunni jurists, there is unanimous agreement that the existence of a competent, qualified, and capable ruler in the Islamic world is necessary to manage the affairs of Muslims optimally, and this is a religious imperative." (Montazeri, 1409 AH, Vol. 1, p. 457)

Elsewhere, he adds:

"The best and most desirable representatives of the Hidden Imam (Imam Mahdi, may Allah hasten his reappearance) during the Occultation are the jurists." (Montazeri, 1409 AH, Vol. 1, p. 395)

Hence, according to Ayatollah Montazeri, the ideal and competent rulers during the Occultation are the qualified jurists.

3.2. The Necessity of a Desirable Ruler from the Sunni Perspective

In Sunni jurisprudence, the necessity of selecting a desirable ruler is considered a matter of consensus. It is believed that the community has a religious duty not to remain indifferent to the fate of the people. Upon the death of an Imam, a person who meets the conditions of Imamate must be chosen as Imam and ruler to manage the affairs of the people. According to Sunni scholars, the Imam and ruler must possess specific qualifications, including knowledge, justice, courage, and sound judgment (Abu Ya'la al-Farra, 1421, p. 20).

The selection of a desirable ruler is regarded as the duty of the people, who are religiously obligated to appoint the Imam. Taftazani writes in *al-Maqasid*: "Among us and most of the Mu'tazila, appointing an Imam by the people is a religious duty, while some Mu'tazila consider it a rational

obligation. For the Shia, however, appointing the Imam is a duty of God" (Taftazani, 1401, Vol. 5, p. 235).

Shawkani, to emphasize the necessity of the Imam, cites a hadith of Abu Huraira stating that if three people are traveling together, they must appoint one of them as a leader and obey his commands to avoid discord. Therefore, if this rule applies during travel, it is all the more obligatory in towns and villages with larger populations, as the presence of a ruler and governor is necessary for protecting the rights of the oppressed and resolving disputes. Muslims are thus required to appoint a qualified individual as ruler and Imam. While most scholars agree on the principle of the necessity of an Imam and ruler, they differ regarding the nature of the obligation: some consider it a rational duty, others a religious one (Shawkani, 1425, Vol. 9, p. 128).

Abdullah ibn Umar Suleiman Damiji asserts that the necessity of the Imam and the establishment of an Islamic government is a fundamental and indisputable requirement of Islamic law, supported by all relevant verses concerning Hudud, Qisas, enjoining good, and forbidding evil. Rashid Rida, a prominent Sunni theorist, emphasizes that appointing an Imam over the Muslims is a religious duty rather than a rational one, and that this principle has been unanimously accepted among the early generations of the Sunni community (Mahmoud Saad & Mahmoud Mahdi, 1425, p. 184). He further notes that those entrusted with the appointment of the ruler (*ahl al-hal wa'l-'aqd*) must choose the most competent individual, and appointing someone unqualified constitutes a betrayal of God, the Prophet, and the believers, regardless of whether the failure stems from negligence or personal desire (Mahmoud Saad & Mahmoud Mahdi, 1425, p. 371).

Therefore, the necessity of having a competent and desirable Imam and ruler is considered a matter of consensus among Sunni scholars. Undoubtedly, both Shia and Sunni jurists agree on the principle and necessity of a desirable ruler: after the passing of the Prophet (peace be upon him), the community requires a capable and suitable ruler to guide society, manage both religious and worldly affairs, and maintain order, based on rational and textual evidence.

Points of Similarity in the Conditions of the Ideal Ruler from the Perspective of the Imamiyyah and Sunni Schools of Thought

Based on a thorough review of the Imami and Sunni jurisprudential texts, it is evident that in many aspects of the qualifications for a desirable ruler—both general and specific—the views of Imami jurists largely converge with those of Sunni scholars. However, some differences of opinion also exist. Therefore, this comparative study first examines the conditions upon which there is consensus and subsequently addresses the areas of disagreement.

In matters of governance, both Imami and Sunni jurists agree that a desirable ruler must possess specific qualifications to effectively manage the affairs of the Muslim community. Some of the most important shared conditions are discussed below:

1. Islam

The ruler must be a Muslim, a condition unanimously agreed upon by all Islamic scholars. Allama Hilli considers the condition of Islam to be based on consensus, referencing Qur'an 4:141, which prohibits non-Muslims from governing Muslims (Allama Hilli, 1414, Vol. 5, p. 277). Similarly, Sunni scholars, including Rashid Rida and Abdulrahman Jazairi, concur that a ruler must be Muslim to ensure the welfare of Islam and the Muslim community (Mahmoud Saad & Mahmoud Mahdi, 1425, p. 323; Jazairi, 1425, p. 1363).

2. Intellect ('Aql)

Possessing sound intellect is essential for an Islamic ruler, and this condition is also a matter of consensus. Some scholars argue that complete intellectual maturity is required for governance, as the ruler must solve complex social and political problems (Montazeri, 1409, Vol. 1, p. 286; Zuhaili, 1418, Vol. 8, p. 6179). Sunni scholars likewise agree that rational competence is indispensable for leadership (Jazairi, 1425, p. 366).

3. Maturity (Bulugh)

Maturity is a necessary condition, as a minor cannot assume authority over others due to dependency and lack of accountability. Imami scholars, including Montazeri, Allama Jawahir, and Mousavi Ardabili, argue that while prophets and infallible Imams may assume authority as children by divine decree, in ordinary governance, maturity is essential (Montazeri, 1409, Vol. 1, p. 370; Najafi, 1266, Vol. 40, p. 12; Mousavi Ardabili, 1423, Vol. 1, p. 17). Sunni jurists, such as Abdulrahman Jazairi and 'Iji, also recognize maturity as a necessary condition (Jazairi, 1425, p. 1363; 'Iji, 1997, Vol. 3, p. 585).

4. Manhood (Rujuliyyah)

Both Imami and Sunni scholars unanimously agree that the ruler must be male. Allama Jawahir, Khorasani, and Qurtubi affirm this consensus, noting that women historically have not held the office of caliphate, and the responsibilities require qualities traditionally attributed to men (Najafi, 1266, Vol. 40, p. 12; Zuhaili, 1418, Vol. 8, p. 6179; Qurtubi, 1364, Vol. 1, p. 270).

5. Physical Health

The ruler must be physically sound, as disabilities such as blindness or paralysis could hinder the execution of duties. Both Imami and Sunni scholars agree that the ruler must have intact senses and limbs to perform essential governance and judicial functions (Allama Hilli, 1414, Vol. 9, p. 394; Mawardi, 1427, p. 19; Ibn Khaldun, 1425, p. 98; Jazairi, 1425, p. 1364).

6. Courage (Shaja‘ah)

Courage is a necessary attribute, as leadership entails defending the state, maintaining security, and countering internal and external threats. Scholars from both schools, including Tusi, Allama Hilli, Montazeri, and Zuhaili, emphasize that a coward cannot adequately fulfill these responsibilities (Tusi, 1405, p. 430; Zuhaili, 1418, Vol. 8, p. 6180).

7. Trustworthiness (Amanah)

Trustworthiness is essential for governance. Imam Ali (peace be upon him) instructed Malik al-Ashtar to select officials based on their integrity (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 53). Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him) affirmed that all prophets were sent with honesty and trustworthiness (Al-Kulayni, Vol. 2, p. 104). Sunni scholars, including Ibn Taymiyya and Zuhaili, similarly stress that the ruler must be trustworthy in addition to being capable (Al-Jassas, 1425, Vol. 3, p. 173; Zuhaili, 1418, Vol. 8, p. 6179).

8. Political Insight and Foresight (Basirah)

Possessing political insight is necessary for sound governance. Imami scholars, including Montazeri, Kafsh al-Ghita, and Sobhani, assert that the ruler must understand social, economic, and political realities to guide society effectively (Montazeri, 1417, Vol. 1, p. 9; Sobhani, 1362, p. 230). Sunni scholars, including Amidi, Baqalani, Zuhaili, and Ibn Khaldun, similarly consider political foresight a critical condition for leadership (Amidi, 1424, Vol. 3, p. 484; Baqalani, 1407, p. 471; Ibn Khaldun, 1425, p. 370).

In conclusion, the examination of the desired qualifications for a ruler demonstrates a substantial convergence between the Imami and Sunni schools. This shared understanding provides a foundation for unity and cohesion within the Islamic community.

Section 4: Points of Divergence in the Conditions of an Ideal Ruler from the Perspective of Imami Shi'ism and Sunni Schools

Certain conditions for an ideal ruler have been subject to scholarly disagreement. Below, the most significant differences are outlined.

1. Justice

Among Imami scholars, the most important condition for an ideal ruler is the possession of justice. The absence of this attribute not only undermines suitability but also delegitimizes authority. As Imam Khomeini states:

“If the ruler of an Islamic state commits a violation, Islam mandates his removal; if he oppresses or strikes someone, he loses his qualification for governance.”

From Sheikh Mufid to contemporary scholars, there is consensus that an ideal ruler must possess justice. Sheikh Mufid asserts:

“If a just sultan (or Imam) is unavailable, the responsibility for governance falls upon just scholars who can act in his stead regarding the matters of governance.” (Sheikh Mufid, 1413, p. 675)

Similarly, Abu Salah Halabi, Sheikh Tusi, and contemporary scholars, including Yazuf Bahrani and the author of *Jawaher*, emphasize the requirement of high-level justice for the ruler (Abu Salah Halabi, 1403, p. 421; Tusi, 1400, p. 607; Najafi, 1266, vol. 13, p. 301).

In contrast, many Sunni scholars, especially among Hanafis, do not consider justice as an absolute prerequisite. For instance, Abu al-Tha'ah al-Maturidi argues that injustice does not invalidate the caliphate, analogous to how a judge retains authority despite personal misconduct (Maturidi, 1425, p. 152). Other Sunni authorities, including Ibn Najim and Nasafi, support this view (Ibn Najim, 1422, vol. 6, p. 375; Nasafi, 1432, vol. 2, p. 101).

2. Ijtihad (Jurisprudential Competence)

Imami scholars unanimously agree that an Islamic ruler must be a mujtahid (qualified jurist) to derive and implement Islamic rulings. Sheikh Mufid and Sheikh Tusi explicitly require jurisprudential competence for governance in the absence of an infallible Imam (Sheikh Mufid, 1413, p. 675; Tusi, 1400, p. 607). Shaykh Tusi, Shahid Thani, and *Jawaher* confirm this consensus (Shahid Thani, 1413, vol. 3, p. 108; Najafi, 1266, vol. 40, p. 15).

Among Sunni scholars, two positions exist: the majority consider ijtihad necessary, while others hold that general knowledge suffices and rulers may rely on the fatwas of qualified scholars (Kasani, 1425, vol. 7, p. 6; Ghazali, 1422, p. 191). Abu Ya'la reports from Ahmad ibn Hanbal that rulers often assumed authority without full scholarly expertise (Abu Ya'la, 1421, p. 20).

3. Qurayshi Lineage

Regarding the requirement of Qurayshi descent, prophetic traditions (hadith) mention that all twelve caliphs would be from Quraysh (Muslim, 2008, p. 520).

Imami scholars interpret this condition as applicable exclusively to the infallible Imams. During the occultation, however, this requirement is not enforced. For example, Malik Ashtar was appointed governor of Egypt despite not being Qurayshi (Montazeri, 1409, vol. 1, p. 374).

In Sunni thought, most scholars consider Qurayshi descent obligatory (Mawardi, 1427, p. 6; Abu Ya'la, 1421, p. 20), while some, such as Ibn Khaldun and Abdul-Razzaq Sanhuri, argue that lineage is secondary to political strength and social acceptability (Ibn Khaldun, 1425, p. 375; Sanhuri, 1422, p. 115).

4. Faith / Imami Belief

Imami scholars regard adherence to Twelver Shi'ism as a prerequisite for a ruler. The term *iman* (faith) is used in a restricted sense to signify Twelver Shi'ism (Mar'ashi Najafi, 1415, vol. 1, p. 260; Iraqi, 1380, p. 40; Khwansari, 1405, vol. 6, p. 4). References from the Qur'an (4:141) and narrations from the Imams emphasize this point (Muzahiri, 1428, vol. 1, p. 244).

In Sunni sources, the term *Islam* is generally used, and faith in the broader sense suffices; specific sectarian affiliation is not mandated.

5. Legitimate Birth

Imami jurists have identified legitimate birth as a fundamental condition for an Islamic ruler. They assert that both the Imam and the ruler must be born from lawful marriages. For instance, Montazeri explicitly states that one of the essential qualifications for a governor (*wali*) is purity of lineage (Montazeri, 1409, vol. 1, p. 369). Similarly, in *Miftah al-Karama*, legitimate birth is listed as a prerequisite for acting as a deputy, with the author rejecting any contrary opinion (Amili, 1425, vol. 8, p. 299).

Mohaghegh Sabzevari considers this requirement to be unanimously accepted in the context of judicial authority (Mohaghegh Sabzevari, 1425, vol. 2, p. 660). Some scholars apply this condition specifically to the Imam leading the community, arguing that such positions are of exceptional value and sanctity; therefore, individuals with defective lineage are deemed ineligible. Allameh Helli notes in his narration that the offspring of illicit relationships carry threefold harm, and thus critical positions of leadership should not be entrusted to them (Allameh Helli, 1414, vol. 2, p. 435).

In contrast, Sunni jurisprudence does not explicitly mention legitimate birth as a condition for ruler ship.

Conclusion

In the discussion of the conditions of an ideal ruler, it was observed that, while there is broad agreement among the jurists of the Imami and Sunni schools on many conditions, significant differences also exist. For example, followers of the Hanafi school do not consider justice as an essential and necessary condition for a ruler; rather, they regard it as commendable but not obligatory. According to this view, even if an Islamic ruler lacks justice, their legitimacy remains intact, and the absence of justice does not compromise the validity of their leadership. In contrast, in Imami jurisprudence, justice is the most important and fundamental criterion for the legitimacy of a ruler; without it, the ruler loses authority and legitimacy.

Similarly, some Sunni jurists do not consider *ijtihad* (juridical reasoning) as a necessary condition for the ruler, maintaining that mere knowledge is sufficient and that the ruler can consult other jurists to derive legal rulings. By contrast, Imami jurists unanimously agree that an ideal ruler must possess *ijtihad* to independently deduce rulings from the sources.

Regarding lineage, Sunni jurisprudence emphasizes the requirement of Quraysh descent for the ruler, whereas Imami jurists do not consider it mandatory. Moreover, legitimate birth (*halal-born*) is highlighted as a condition for an ideal ruler in Imami fiqh, while Sunni sources do not mention this requirement. Additionally, the requirement of being a Twelver Shi'a is explicitly noted in Imami jurisprudence as a condition for rulership, but this condition does not appear in Sunni jurisprudence.

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