Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

_____   _____

Abbas Barzegar   November 19, 2010

Remembering Community:

Historical Narrative in the Formation of Sunni Islam

By

Abbas Barzegar

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion

West and South Asian Religions

_____

Dr. Devin Stewart

Advisor

_____

Dr. Richard Martin

Committee Member

_____

Dr. Gordon Newby

Committee Member

Accepted:

_____

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D. Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____

Date

Remembering Community:
Historical Narrative in the Formation of Sunni Islam

By

Abbas Barzegar

B.A., University of Colorado at Boulder
M.A., University of Colorado at Boulder

Advisor: Devin Stewart, Ph.D.

An abstract of

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the

James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion

West and South Asian Religions

2010

Abstract

Remembering Community:
Historical Narrative in the Formation of Sunni Islam

By Abbas Barzegar

As a study in the formation of Islamic sectarianism, this project focuses on the relationship between historical discourse and collective identity in the development of Sunni Islam as an imagined community. By analyzing the construction of conventional Sunni narratives surrounding the early history of the Muslim community, particularly its discord in the first civil (656-661) war and its reconstitution under the Umayyad dynasty (661-750), this project argues that these seemingly inconsequential narratives—often taken as neutral versions of factual events from which other versions deviate—in fact provide a considerable amount of ideological support to the construction and maintenance of authority, authenticity, and orthodoxy in Sunni Islam. In order to make this argument, this study approaches Islamic historical discourse whether represented in the recorded sayings of Muḥammad (*ḥadīth*), historical chronicles (*akhbār*), or apologetic literature, through narrative analysis. In doing so, the development of putative Sunni historical categories such as the Community (*al-Jamāʿa*), the Prophet's Companions (*al-Ṣaḥāba*), and the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*al-Khulafāʾ al-Rāshidūn*) is shown to have taken place along the political backdrop of the early Abbasid Dynasty's (750-945) attempts to mitigate competing religious ideological forces in its realm, namely the ongoing strife between Shiite and Umayyad parties. In this context, the political implications embedded in the hagiographic representations of ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib, Sunni Islam's fourth Caliph and Shiite Islam's first Imām, and Muʿāwiya b. Abū Sufyan, the founding father of the Umayyad Dynasty, are also revealed. In conclusion, this study calls for a reexamination of the dynamics of authority in the study of Islam that prioritizes the discourses of collective identity and historical memory over those of law (*sharīʿa*) and theology (*kalam*).

Remembering Community:
Historical Narrative in the Formation of Sunni Islam

By

Abbas Barzegar

B.A., University of Colorado at Boulder

M.A., University of Colorado at Boulder

Advisor: Devin Stewart, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the

James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion

West and South Asian Religions

2010

For my father,
Mohammad Hassan Barzegar Bafroe'i
And his,
Hajj Abbas Barzegar Bafroe'i

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor Devin J. Stewart for his guidance and support throughout this project. From inspiring the preliminary stages of this study to overseeing the final moments of its completion, his dedication and selflessness to his students sets a rare standard for higher education. I also would like to express my deep gratitude to Richard Martin for mentoring me through my professional and scholarly development over the last six years, as well as placing a generous amount of trust in me at such an early stage in my career. In that regard, the nurturing and constructive environment of the Graduate Division of Religion and the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies also deserve general recognition. In particular Gordon Newby and Joyce Flueckiger have been especially helpful for their willingness to keep their doors and schedules open for a number of conversations, both professional and personal.

Material support for the inception of this project was provided by a fellowship from the Institute of Critical and International Studies (ICIS) at Emory University in 2007. The intellectual community created through ICIS's seminars and conferences under the direction of Bruce Knauft, Gyan Pandey, and Vincent Cornell helped shape this project in distinct, if not entirely transparent, ways. In addition, the Andrew C. Mellon Foundation and American Council of Learned Societies Dissertation Completion Fellowship provided the support necessary for its completion.

Of course, the most deserved of recognition for her support and encouragement of my indulgence in this endeavor is Ruba Alhenawi who, alone, knows what this effort has entailed.

Table of Contents

I

Introduction

On January 12th, 2008 the *Wall Street Journal* featured a front-page article and accompanying image of an open Qurʾān entitled, "The Lost Archive: Missing for a half century, a cache of photos spurs sensitive research on Islam's holy text."[1] The story chronicled the troubled fate of a lost and then found collection of photos of early Qurʾān manuscripts compiled by the German scholars Gotthelf Bergsträsser (1886-1933) and Otto Pretzl (1893-1941). The photos are believed to provide evidence documenting the historical development of the Qurʾanic text itself. Such research stems naturally from the German tradition of Biblical Higher criticism which sought to find the textual prototypes of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. The *Wall Street Journal's* story described the sensitivity of the research agenda in the current political moment. It also marked one of the few occasions when the intense, but often hidden debates, amongst Islamicists regarding the origins of Islam was brought to public attention.

Those debates, which have captivated scholars and students for generations, have constituted virtual fault lines in academic circles since the inception of historical studies

---

[1] Andre Higgins, "The Lost Archive," *The Wall Street Journal*, Janurary 12, 2008.

on the Islamic tradition. This has been the case whether the topic of concern is the textual origins of the Qurʾān, the reliability of Muḥammad's words and deeds as recorded in the *ḥadīth* literature, or the development of Islamic doctrine, law, or sectarianism. The core divide in the professional practice of Islamic studies is determined not by theological or metaphysical concerns or even political correctness, though these may be peripherally related to the conversation. Instead, the problem is one with which every historian must tackle—the problem of sources.

How does one trust a source to tell a story about itself? Can an accurate historical portrayal of the development of Islam be constructed if one only refers to the religious tradition's self-representation as recorded in literary materials? For those who answer in the negative, alternative explanations have been sought by questioning the credibility of literary sources altogether, relying exclusively upon documentary evidence or seeking insight from contemporaneous literature outside of the tradition. This skeptical approach is perhaps most exemplified in the infamous work *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World* written by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook.[2] On the opposite side of the spectrum, some scholars have rebuked the premise of the question altogether. They argue that in the study of a religion, modern scholars should concern themselves not with what actually happened in history but with what practitioners believed to have taken place. Hence, for example, many of the writings of Montgomery Watt, especially those that reconstruct the Prophet's life, draw upon the same themes and ideas that one finds in the

---

[2] Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

standard Islamic biographies of the Prophet's life.[3] Between the two extremes, others have affirmed the broad historical accuracy of the tradition's self-portrayal, arguing that there is no reason to view Islamic sources with a particularly high level of skepticism. They advocate, nonetheless, maintaining a critical distance from the subject matter. The lifelong work of Frederick Donner is perhaps the best example of this third approach.[4]

The question of representation, however, is not unique to Islam. In the field of religious studies similar concerns have consumed scholars attempting to reconcile the perennial insider/outsider question that haunts the discipline. Representing religious traditions from a perspective at odds with accounts held sacred by practitioners has had the potential of becoming a controversial, even hostile, affair in the development of field. Consider the reactions to Sam Gill's *Mother Earth* by both professionally trained American Indian scholars of religion and American Indian activist intellectuals. The former accused Gill of not having lived within American Indian communities long enough to understand their traditions while the former accused Gill of participating in the colonial discourse of undermining the integrity of American Indian spiritual traditions. Whether criticism of Gill's work was based upon methodological concerns or accusations of imperial ideology, the resounding message from "insiders" was that one needed to use emic sources and categories in order to properly conduct scholarship on American Indian

---

[3] Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953); idem, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

[4] Frederick M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); *idem*, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the beginnings of Islamic historical writing* (Princeton University Press, 1998), and most recently *idem*, *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

religious traditions.[5] Similar issues arose in reaction to Paul Courtright's *Ganesa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings.*[6]

Energizing the debate in recent years, Russel McCutcheon has argued that it may not be in the best interest of a scholar of religion to uncritically incorporate the main themes, structures, and conventions of a religious tradition when pursuing an academic inquiry into that tradition.[7] His argument is one that advocates a redescription rather than (re)presentation of religious practice and belief in the study of religious phenomena. The ethical implications here are obvious.

The subject of this dissertation—the origins of the Sunni-Shiite conflict—is bound to be embroiled in the methodological and ethical issues alluded to here if for no other reason than that the entire conflict centers on a difference in historical interpretation. As I assure my many students who ask—"Why does it still matter?"—the inquiry here is no mere exercise in antiquarianism. For those familiar the broad contours of Muslim history, the sheer perseverance and multiple manifestations of sectarian discord is one of its most

---

[5] Sam Gill, *Mother Earth: An American Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). For the reaction of a cultural and political activist infamous for his polemics see Ward Churchill, "Sam Gill's Mother Earth: Colonialism, genocide, and the expropriation of Indigenous spiritual tradition in contemporary academia" *American Indian Culture and Research*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 49-67. For an "insider's" critique from within the discipline of religious studies see Christopher Ronwanième Jocks, "American Indian Religious Traditions and the Academic Study of Religion: A Response to Sam Gill," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 65 (Spring 1997): pp. 169–76. For Sam Gill's reactions to the issue as well as his comments on the state of religious studies as it was in 1994, see Sam Gill, "The Academic Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 62 (Winter 1994): pp. 965–75.

[6] *Ganesa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). For a review and update to the questions raised by Courtright's encounter as they relate to the field as a whole see the exchange between him and Russel McCutcheon in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, v. 74, no. 3, pp. 720-756.

[7] See especially his "Redescribing 'Religion' as Social Formation: Toward a Social Theory of Religion" in *Critics not Caretakers* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001) pp. 21-39; *idem*, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

salient features. Regrettably, these fissures are at times exacerbated in the form of systematic discrimination and collective violence. This is the case even as one concedes that the various occasions of Sunni-Shiite hostility have historically taken radically different forms, have been subject to overt political manipulation, and have been layered in diverse communitarian sensibilities. This said, the question over the Sunni-Shiite divide would mean nothing today if it were not the case that the rhetoric and discourse in which it is grounded did not retain its immense viability throughout centuries of social and political change.

Thus the subject of this study is much less about the historical developments that allegedly caused the initial divisions in the early Muslim movement and much more about the development of sectarian discourse, language, and rhetoric which together execute the power of orthodoxy and hegemony. More precisely this study is concerned with the emergence of Sunni Islam's particular historical vision and the ways in which it has managed to claim the loyalties of the majority of Muslims for nearly a millennium.

Indeed, recent outbursts of sectarian violence in the Middle East and South Asia have made the division between Sunnis and Shiites a standard component in any political or social analysis of the Muslim world. Arguably, this has been the case since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, when the Ayatollah Khomeini's Shiite theocratic ideology emerged triumphant and further catalyzed the rise of religious politics in the region. Since then, there has been a steady increase in the study of Shiite Islam, the historical formation of its

doctrines, internal developments and founding propositions.[8] Yet there has not been a parallel research agenda exploring Sunni Islam as a particular sectarian formation in its own right. This is so despite Sunni Islam's millennium-long endurance as socio-political force, in addition to the tremendous resurgence of distinctly Sunni tropes in modern global politicized Islam.

The aim of this study, then, is to explore the question of Sunni collective identity as a distinct sectarian formation. Unlike the many impressive studies that explore the roots and developments of Sunni theology and jurisprudence, the present work simply explores how Sunni Islam functions in terms of a community. It should be remembered that Sunni Islam describes itself as a distinct group (e.g. *ahl* = people), and operates as an *imagined political community*. It is therefore constituted, like all imagined communities, by a mytho-historical narrative of itself and its adversaries. The formation of the various dimensions of that grand narrative, or myth, is the immediate subject of this study.

In order to pursue such a question we explore conventional Sunni representations of Islamic origins as they relate to the early religious and political conflict that fractured the Muslim polity. We read these historical representations as a discourse in community building and identity construction. Specifically for example, how does the notion of *al-jamāʿa* (the Muslim community) remain viable through the formidable internecine divisions in the emerging Muslim empire in Sunni rhetoric? How did Sunni exegetes

---

[8] Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿite Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shiʿism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Wilfred Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Maria M. Dakake, *The Charasmatic Community: Shiʿite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007); Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Shi'ite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998).

explain the First Civil War (35-40/656-661) when, the Prophet Muḥammad's closest companions and family led armies against one another? How can modern historians approach common Sunni historical categories such as the Rightly-Guided Caliphs in terms of myth and sacred history? How have the hagiographic profiles of early Muslim leaders been shaped by sectarian tension? These and other questions will be explored in this study in order to provide a better understanding of the relationship between historical discourse and communal self-legitimation in Sunni Islam.

Geopolitical Background

Although the specific historic and geographic contexts of this study vary according to the set of questions raised in each chapter, the broad scope concerns the ways in which dominant Sunni historical narratives of Islam and of the Sunni community reflect the intense competition, rivalry, and ultimate reconciliation between a number of religious and political parties in the first three centuries of Abbasid rule (133-447/750-1055). Consequently, the sectarian milieu of early Islam provides the foreground. In addition, the study is concerned with the ways in which Sunni Islam as a socio-political force came to occupy a place of hegemony in the late antique eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamian heartlands. While the expanse of such parameters might seem unmanageable, they are precisely the space and time that any study of the formative period of Islam need consider to ensure credibility. The following survey outlines dimensions of the first centuries of Islamic history which are immediately relevant for the present study.

The context most important for understanding the early years of Islamic social and political formation is that of late antiquity.[9] Historian Garth Fowden argues in *From Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* that as a monotheistic religious claim and temporal empire, Islam was the last element in a long pattern of historical development that united classic and late antique political and religious formations.[10] Here Fowden argues that temporal power and the claim to monotheism and/or universalism were inextricably linked in the ruling rhetoric and ideology of successive regimes spanning from Alexander the Great to the first Umayyad Caliph, Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 41-61/661-680). According to Fowden, the claim to a universal culture or creed (Hellenism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, or Islam) buttressed universal imperial ambitions for nearly two millennia. Therefore, domination over what Marshal Hodgson has dubbed the *Oikumene*[11]

---

[9] See G. W. Bowersock, Peter Robert Brown, and Oleg Grabar (eds.), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post-Classical World* (Cambridge MA: Belknap, 1999); Averil Cameron and Lawrence Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Middle East: Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1992); Averil Cameron (ed.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Middle East: States, Resources and Armies* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1992).

[10] Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: The Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[11] Marshal Hodgson coined the term *oikumene* to refer to the Afro-Eurasian "stage on which was played all civilized history, including that of Islamicate civilization, and this stage was set largely by the contrasts and interrelations among the great regional cultural complexes" in Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in World Civilization*: *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago, 1977), p. 114; cited here from Robert M. Burns, *Historiography: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 181 n. 69.

While Fowden's sweeping conclusions warrant considerable revision, the basic notion that there was mimetic process involved in the religious and political developments of late antiquity has long been held and has been expanded upon by a number of recent studies.[12] Stressing the idea that militant piety was an expected feature of early Islamic ethics and self understanding, Thomas Sizgorich holds that

> the conquests or *futūḥ* of the Persian Empire and the most important regions of the eastern Roman Empire represented for early Muslim intellectuals a grand drama in which the one God of Abraham had given the long oppressed Muslim *umma* dominion over vast territories and immeasurable wealth via a lightning campaign of military conquest undertaken by bands of ascetic, pious warriors 'on the path of God.'[13]

Following a similar line of inquiry, Andrew Marsham has recently explored the ways in which the rhetoric of divinely sanctioned leadership in early Islam incorporated themes from both Sassanian and Byzantine models of leadership.[14]

—the territory ranging from littoral lands of the eastern Mediterranean to the Persian plateau and the steppes of central Asia, in effect *the world*—was the natural aspiration of early Muslim elites and the obvious military consequence of the marriage between monotheism and political power.

While the universal pretensions of Islam's founding religious claims are too obvious to deserve mention, their less discussed temporal manifestations are also rather obvious. Consider the architectural imperatives of the Umayyad Caliph ʿAbd al‑Malik (r.

---

[12] Thomas Sizgorich, *Vilolence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009; Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy* (Edinburgh: Endinburgh University Press, 2009); Nadia M. El-Cheikh, *Byzantium viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[13] Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief,* p. 13.

[14] Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy* (Edinburgh: Endinburgh University Press, 2009)

66-86/685-705) in his construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.[15] By placing the structure literally atop the Temple Mount and incorporating Byzantine aesthetic motifs, the Dome of the Rock sent a powerful message of Islamic triumphalism to Christians and Jews in the region. Other examples of Islam's self-conception as the new center of the world and pivot of history can be seen in the retention of Byzantine facades of the Umayyad Mosque, the prominence of Damascus in early Islamic eschatological narratives, the cosmic reflections of Baghdad's urban layout or the appropriation of the title Shahanshah (King of kings) by Buyid Amirs. Political and religious rhetoric in the emergent Islamic empire was an outgrowth of trends in late antiquity and deeply influenced the formation of orthodoxy/heresy in Islamic theological discourse. The temporal manifestation of Islamic universalism is, then, a critical to understanding the ways in which Sunni Islam identifies itself as the exclusive arbiter of Muḥammad's mission.

Thus the inextricability of Islam's political and religious claims must be understood in the context of the Umayyad dynasty (41-133/661-750) precisely because it is that ruling house which first defines the external boundaries of Islam's identity as an imperial force on the world stage of history. This is the case even as the Umayyad ruling house faced a number of external challenges and internal fissures. The first and most severe rupture occurred in 680 when ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr refused to offer allegiance to Yazīd (r. 61-64/680-83) upon the death of his father Muʿāwiya b. Abū Sufyān in

---

[15] Amikam Elad, "Why Did ʿAbd al-Malik Build The Dome Of The Rock? A Re-Examination of Muslim Sources," in J. Raby & J. Johns (ed.), *Bayt Al-Maqdis: ʿAbd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, 1992, Part 1, Oxford University Press: Oxford (UK), pp. 33-58; Herbert Busse, "Omar's Image as Conqueror of Jerusalem," *JSAI* 8 (1986), pp. 149-68; idem, "Monotheismus und islamische Christologie in der Bauinschrift des Felsendoms in Jerusalem," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 161 (1981), pp. 168-78.

61/680, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty. Ibn al-Zubayr then declared a counter caliphate with the capital at Mecca when Yazīd died in 64/683. These problems in western Arabia were confounded by successive Shiite revolts like those of al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī at Karbala (61/680), the Tawwābūn or Penitents (65/684), and al-Mukhtār al-Thaqāfī (67-68/686-7), not to mention the Khārijite counter caliphates of the Azāriqa in Iran and the Najdiyya in eastern Arabia (65/684). Nonetheless, I will be arguing that as it came to define itself against competing interpretations of Islam and alternative theocratic models, be they Shiite or otherwise, Sunni Islam inherited the Umayyad legacy of an imperial universalism nurtured in the sectarian milieu of late antiquity. This may be counterintuitive considering the efforts of a range of Sunni *ʿulemaʾ* to distance themselves from the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties.

However, because the Islamic expansions were organized under members of the Umayyad house as early as during the reign of Abū Bakr, they included the Prophet's immediate successors and companions. These military activities then continued through their disciples and descendants for a number of generations under Umayyad military patronage. As ʿAbd al-Malik reconsolidated the Umayyad dynasty with the help of his governor al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī (d. 95/714), he employed the rhetoric of Islamic unity (*al-jamāʿa*) and emphasized that his rule was a direct extension of Muḥammad's mission. Therefore, reverential narratives concerning the early community or pious ancestors (*al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*) would necessarily overlap with the imperial history of Islam's early expansion in Sunni *Heilsgeschichte*, salvation history. One of the more remarkable discursive accomplishments, then, of Sunni mytho-history is that the concept of *al-jamāʿa* (community of believers) was decoupled from the ruling dynasty, whether

Umayyad or Abbasid (750-1258), but nonetheless remained as a discrete political entity.[16]

A telling indication of the inextricability of collective identity and religious authority in early Islam is the fact that some of the earliest designations used to identify heretical groups in Islam are appellations related to inclusion in a political community and not terms strictly associated with theological ideas. That is, competing religious groups were understood in terms of their political position vis-à-vis the first civil war that ensued upon the revolt against the third Caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān in 35/656. It was not until much later that the theological implications of this conflict were discussed in isolation. Thus a Shiite (partisan) was short for *shīʿat ʿAlī*, party of Alī. whereas ʿUthmānī was the appellation for those who sided with the third caliph. *Khārijites*, the secessionists, were those who literally "went out" of the community, deserters. A *rāfiḍī*, was one who *rejected* (the community), a turncoat.[17] Even the *murjiʾites*, those who *set aside* (the question between faith and works), were named as such because they refused to take sides in the mortal conflict.[18]

The success of the Abbasid revolution in 133/750 further complicated the religious and political landscape of early Muslim society.[19] Basing their legitimacy on

---

[16] This idea is explored in chapter three.

[17] There are a number of different possibilities that can explain exactly what *rāfiḍis* were rejecting, for a review see Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam, Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, pp. 73-5.

[18] Crone, *God's Rule*, pp. 27-8.

[19] Moshe Sharon, *Black Banners from the East: The Establishment of the ʿAbbasid State* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983); idem, *Revolt: The Social and Military Aspects of the ʿAbbasid Revolution* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983); Hugh Kennedy, *When Baghdad ruled the Muslim world: The Rise and*

tribal descent from Muḥammad and thus deploying Shiite rhetoric, Abbasid commanders did their utmost to see through the extermination of the Umayyad house in the first years of their victory. Nonetheless, they would continue to fight loyalists in the Syrian provinces until the late ninth century while pro-Umayyad sentiments persevered in Baghdad for centuries to come.[20] The most difficult struggle for the Abbasids, however, was not to win over disgruntled Umayyad sympathizers, but rather to consolidate their own diffuse Shiite political base.

The clandestine revolutionary movement that led to the advent of the Abbasids had begun in Khurāsān with an ambiguous call to place "the accepted among the family of the Messenger of God" (*al-riḍā min āl rasūl Allāh*) at the head of the Muslim community.[21] This general call for leadership to be held by a member of the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*) galvanized Shiite support in the final years of the Umayyad dynasty which was now facing another civil war over internal succession. However, the base that made up the Abbasid movement immediately collapsed under its own rhetorical ambiguity. When Abū al-ʿAbbās, al-Saffāḥ (r. 133-137/750-4) was declared leader of the new polity, he legitimated himself as a member of the Prophet's family through his descent from Muḥammad's paternal uncle, al-ʿAbbās, thus defining the *ahl al-bayt* as members of the Prophet's entire clan (Banū Hashim). This clearly was unacceptable to

---

Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2005); idem, *The Early 'Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History* (London, U.K.: Croom Helm, 1981).

[20] Paul M. Cobb, *White Banners: Contention in 'Abbasid Syria, 750-880* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).

[21] Patricia Crone, "On the Meaning of the 'Abbasid Call to al-Rida" in C.E. Bosworth *et al* (eds.) *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press 1989), pp. 95-111.

the long militarized Shiites (themselves fragmented) who recognized leadership to be the exclusive right of the descendants of ʿAlī and Fātima. This genealogical contention soon erupted into open rebellion, most exemplified by the rise in 145/762 of the ʿAlid claimant Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh (al-Nafs al-Zakiyya).[22] From then on the ideological division over the definition of the *ahl al-bayt* as Muḥammad's clan as a whole or exclusively his descendants set the tenor of much of the Abbasid dynasties internal political battles.[23]

This incessant internecine political climate firmly positioned the Abbasid ruling house between two radically opposite poles. On the one hand were Umayyad loyalists and sympathizers who were involved in their continued, if intermittent, rebellion. On the other hand were the competing groups of Shiite ʿAlids, themselves fragmented politically and theologically, who nonetheless challenged the established order from within. Meanwhile, rulers were expected to meet the mundane demands of empire: continuous expansion and defense of its territory, the extraction of taxes, the support and maintenance of necessary infrastructure, and the administration of justice.

It is within this context that the nascent Abbasid ruling house, in order to achieve a semblance of balance, would chart a path of comprise between a range of pressures threatening its existence. Muhammad Qasim Zaman and Jacob Lassner have pointed to the ways in which this political climate led to the emergence of particular discourses conducive to the Abbasid regime's broader political needs. While Zaman highlights Caliphal patronage of "proto-Sunni" trends, and Lassner considers the relationship

---

[22] Crone, *God's Rule*, p. 89.

[23] Wilfred F. Madelung, "The *Hāshimiyyāt* of al-Kumayt and Hāshimī Shiʿism," *Studia Islamica,* 1989 (no. 70), pp. 5-26.

between historical memory and state propaganda, it quickly becomes clear that it is within the context of the socio-religious turbulence of the Abbasid period that Sunni Islam emerges as a plausible venture. This is the case even as the Abbasid house itself was consumed by political rivalry, succession disputes, and shifting political and religious policies.[24]

It is also during the Abbasid period that the age of the great Caliphal Empire with centralized authority and religious loyalty gave way to a system of provincial suzerainty and military autonomy. Although no longer united as an empire, regional provinces were loosely affiliated as a type of commonwealth of Muslim controlled lands, that is, of course, if the ruling elites shared socio-religious proclivities. When they did not, political and military rivalry turned into sectarian warfare affecting, urban centers and broad socio-political configurations alike.

Such was the case with the near implosion of Baghdād during the civil war (194-198/809-813) between Hārūn al-Rashīd's (r. 170-194/786-809) sons al-Amīn (d. 198/813) and al-Maʾmūn (r. 198-218/813-833). On a broader imperial scale similar theocratic divisions rocked the polity from North Africa to the Mesopotamian plateau and the Persian Gulf. Such was the case when Shīʿte movements of a variety of stripes began taking military and political control of the Muslim heartlands. Often referred to as the "Shiite Century", the tenth to eleventh centuries saw the establishment and expansion of the Fāṭimid dynasty in North Africa (297-567/909-1171), the Hamdanid dynasty's (344-

---

[24] Qasim Zaman, *Religion and politics under the early ʿAbbāsids : the emergence of the proto-Sunnī elite* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Jacob Lassner, *Islamic revolution and historical memory : an inquiry into the art of ʿAbbāsid apologetics* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1986).

395/944-1004) turn to Shīʿism in Syria, and the Buyid takeover of Iran (Shiraz, 311/923) and the Abbasid capital, Baghdad (334-447/945-1055).[25]

However, the political fortunes of various Shiite regimes began to wane almost as soon as they were established. With a dismembered empire and only a symbolic level of power, the ʿAbbasid caliphs quickly began to use the intense rivalry between warlords against one another in order to pursue their own religious and political agendas. One of the most illustrative examples of this can be seen in the career of the Caliph al-Qādir Bi'llah (r. 381-422/991-1031). Having been installed by the Buyid amir Bahā al-Dawlā (r. 378-403/988-1012), al-Qādir originally endorsed the Buyids in power, but when the opportunity arose to work in tandem with Maḥmūd of Ghazna (r. 998-1030)—a staunch anti-Shiite and anti-Muʿtazilite warlord in Khurasan who recognized the Caliph's Sunni authority—he did not hesitate. Al-Qādir eventually used the power of his restored religious office to proclaim official doctrine in line with Ḥanbalī notions. The emerging Sunni ideological nexus that united Caliph and warlord served as a model to the Turkish Seljuks who inherited the religious and political prerogatives of Maḥmūd of Ghazna. They eventually ousted the Buyids from Baghdad in 447/1055 after plundering their holdings in Iran.[26]

The Seljuks also suppressed other Shiite inspired political projects, such as helping defeat what remained of the Qarmaṭī state in Bahrayn in 1070.[27]

---

[25] John J. Donohue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

[26] Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam, six centuries of Islamic political thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 220-22; Sourdel, "al-Kādir Bi'llah," *EI2*.

[27] Qarmaṭī, *EI2*.

siding with the ʿAbbasid Caliphs in 440/1048 after the counter‑caliphate of the Umayyads in Spain (317-422/929-1031) had already disintegrated.[28] As can be seen, the overturning of Shiite fortunes was an empire-wide phenomenon.

Among their most enduring political projects of the Seljuks however was the mobilization of volunteer forces aimed at recapturing Muslim lands lost to the Byzantines during the Shiite century. The period that marks the Seljuk rise to power has been dubbed the Sunni Revival, described by scholars as the socio-religious phenomenon concomitant with the rise of Seljuk power, which allegedly *restored* Sunni Islam's place as the dominant religion of the ruling dynasties and the rightful representative of the majority position of the population.[29]

It is in this context that the protracted process of the development and crystallization of Sunni Islam unfolds. Rather than attempting to provide the reader with a narrative that can manage the many moving parts of this complex history, this study explores central aspects of the problem, thinking through the various obstacles, and attempting to provide a preliminary sketch of such a possible history. For example, chapter two explores the ways in which myth, history, and community are interwoven in Islamic historical materials and suggests that narrative literary analysis be used as a method in the study of ḥadīth and history to explore Sunni senses of collective identity. Chapter three returns to the long debated subject of orthodoxy in Islam. It argues that rather than exploring the problem of orthodoxy through jurisprudence or political ideology or

---

[28] Amin Tibi, "Zirīds," *EI2*

[29] We explore the notion of Sunni revival further in chapter three.

doctrine more generally, scholars should critically examine the development of Sunni discourses of community (*al-jamāʿa*) as sites to better understand the constitution of orthodoxy and heresy in Islam. In chapter four the myth of Ibn Sàbạ, the Yemeni Jew credited with instigating the conflict between Muḥammad's companions and the creation of Shīʿism, is analyzed in light of a recent discovery of the story's original source. Therein we explore the ways in which this myth has been central to Sunni Islam's own self-understanding in external relationship to Christianity and Judaism on the one hand and its internal relationship to Shīʿism on the other hand. Exploring the creation of another internal boundary, chapter five analyzes the idea of the Rightly Guided Caliphs as historical problem. In doing so it explores the nature of ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib's hagiography in Sunni tradition. Another figure central to Islam's early development, Muʿāwiya b. Abū Sufyān, is the subject of the final chapter of this study. Using a previously unstudied treatise, *The Faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya*, we ask the question, "What happened to the partisans of Muʿāwiya?" Together, these studies analyze Sunni narratives of Islamic origins in order to identify the textual and rhetorical foundations that have made the *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*, in the mind of its adherents, synonymous with Islam itself.

II

History, Myth, and Community:

Approaching Islamic Historical Writing through Narrative

Since the publication of Benedict Anderson's influential text *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* in 1991, scholars across the humanities and the social sciences have interrogated the putative claims of collective and group identity as discursive constructions and social processes deeply imbued with politics. Whether for an ethnic group, a nation, or pan-historical religious community, claims of collective identity all function in similar social fashions in that they are constituted through performed social discourse. It might be said that all notions of collective identity are products of the discursive imaginary. As Gyan Pandey, a premier historian of modern Indian nationalism, has argued, communities may only be "solidary collectivities that come into being through the very narratives that invoke them."[1]

---

[1] Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 204.

massive levels of material and emotional resources testifies to their material consequence and temporal endurance.

Here, I plan to explore at a conceptual level the dynamics of what I term communal or communitarian discourse in order to provide a conceptual model through which to understand Islamic historical narrative in terms of community formation. Communitarian discourse includes the range of discursive acts which express and make claims towards the definition of a particular collective identity. It should be understood as an order of ideological discourse inasmuch as it relates to power—every claim to collective identity is an argument *against* an alternative one. The following discussion reviews communal discourse in terms of *narrative* by reviewing recent discussions at the intersection between narrative theory and the social sciences. The goal is to arrive at an understanding of the intimate relationship between the social processes of collective identification and the construction and maintenance of historical narratives.

Narrative analysis, in the world of literary theory has occasioned much discussion in both structuralism and post-structuralism and given rise to an entire sub-field, narratology.[2] These conversations have in turn influenced theoretical and methodological approaches across various disciplines such as history, philosophy, and psychology.[3] Of course, to say that collectivities are reducible to language constructions is not meant to diminish their significance. Rather, recognition of their remarkable ability to mobilize

---

[2] There is a substantial literature on the topic of narrative, some of the most important statements can be found in Martin McQuillan (ed.), *The Narrative Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[3] In history see the work of Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 1978); Frank Ankersmit, *A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language* (Boston: Springer, 1983); idem, *Historical Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); in psychology see Jerome Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality," in *Critical Inquirty* vol. 18, no. 1 (Autumn, 1991), pp. 1-21; in philosophy see David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vols. 1-3 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984-1988).

While there is much to say about the development of these debates and their influence over the last few decades, the most useful dimension of the narrative form for the following discussion is the emphasis in narrative studies on *order* and *plot* in the development of a story's rhetorical power. Namely, the sequential unfolding of events in a given narrative, what Hayden White calls *emplotment* is the most important and basic element of story because it is the linguistic function that produces the effect of chronology. Through the simple arrangement of sequence, random and otherwise disparate elements are brought into relationship with one another. It is this relationship between various events and elements of a story that ultimately constitutes narrative's representational function. Narratives give the illusion of representing reality and therein lies their power as a discursive form; like all representational schemata, their viability depends on their perceived plausibility, their life-likeness. Narratives then, function as "regimes of verisimilitude."[4]

In *Time, History, and Narrative*, philosopher David Carr provides a model through which to understand the experience of collective subjectivity in terms of narrative.[5]

---

[4] A good, brief, summary of the narrative form and its various aspects can be read in Paul Cobley, *Narrative*, *The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2001); for a more detailed review of the development of specific debates in narratology see Ruth Ronen, "Paradigm Shift in Plot Models: An Outline of the History of Narratology" in *Poetics Today* 11:4 (Winter, 1990), pp. 817-842; a useful bibliography can be found in "In Search of Knowledge about Narrative: An Annotaded Bibliography" in *The English Journal* 83:2 (Feb., 1994) pp. 62-64; the comments about verisimilitude come from Cobley, *Narrative,* pp. 218-223.

[5] For a psychological approach to the concept of "narrative experience" see Jerome Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality" in *Critical Inquiry* 18:1, 1991, pp. 1-21; also Bruner's earlier texts, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* and *Acts of Meaning*.

which has continuous existence through its experiences and activities."[6] This narrative account is the larger frame in which the variety of communitarian discourses might appear. Therefore, a nation, religious community, or even a family all are constituted by a larger narrative which binds the individual fragments of communitarian discourse into a plausible whole; this narrative exists prior to both the individual and collective subject and is part of a constant dynamic of revision and change contingent upon shifting social circumstances.

The extent to which the narrative frame dominates a community's sense of subjectivity cannot be overstated, given that it is the mechanism through which mundane individual experiences are mediated and brought into a collective whole. Carr notes, "Communal temporality is constituted by the collective narrative of particular events which members subscribe to as part of their own constitution as we-subjects. This temporality marks the points of significance in the story of the community of we-subjects and also is the frame through which the continuous narrative experience takes place."[7] Therefore, a community is always aware of its origin, development, and the potential of its own fini[tude]. He makes of course only important point that "[a] community exists wherever a narrative account exists of a "we"

It is at this point of collective experience that historical consciousness becomes a central factor in the constitution of collective subjectivity. Carr delineates this process:

---

[6] Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, p. 163.

[7] Carr, *Time, Narrative and History,* p. 167.

> [A] community at any moment has a sense of its origins and the prospect of its own death as it seeks to articulate its own internal coherence and integrity over time. [This articulation may] take the form of a kind of negotiation among participants or even between parties to different versions of the group's story. Changing external circumstances or internal crises may be the occasion for a sort of collective *Besinnung* in which participants are reminded of their past, formulate or reformulate present problems and projects, and orient themselves toward the future.[8]

Historian and anthropologist Michel Trouillot provides a pithy insight into this process: "The collective subjects who supposedly remember did not exist as such at the time of the events they claim to remember. Rather, their constitution as subjects goes hand in hand with the continuous creation of the past…they do not succeed such a past: they are its contemporaries."[9] The creation of a shared collective past, again, is a process fundamental to all social collectivities, regardless of size, that assign themselves a degree of collective agency and subjectivity. Therefore, the emergence of a putatively held historical narrative signifies the achievement of a degree of stability in a community's sense of self.

Naturally, narrative theory has much to say about the representation of historical events themselves. Hayden White is one of the most emblematic figures in this debate.

---

[8] Carr, *Time, Narrative and History,* 164-5

[9] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 16.

His first major statement on the topic, *Metahistory*,[10] claimed that historical writing largely conforms to the narrative form and follows its literary structures and procedures. While this basic point had been made in various ways, for example by Arthur Danto years earlier in *Knowledge and Narration*,[11] White's unique contribution was the claim not only that narrative representations of historical events provide them with a conceptual framework for comprehension, but also that the events themselves exist only inasmuch a narrative scheme is imposed upon them.

Positivist historians, of course, continue to be averse to this conclusion in that it allegedly blurs the line between fiction and fact by arguing that historical accounts are mere constructions of particular historians' imagination and as such often tell more about the historian's ideological and discursive positionality than it does the events its purports to recount. Conventional historians' anxiety aside, the anthropological utility of understanding collective historical consciousness through an analysis of the structures of historical narrative remains an indispensable tool in the historical anthropology of early Islamic society.

Borrowing directly from developments in narrative theory, Hayden White focuses his analysis on the *emplotment* schema of historical narratives in order to understand their degree of import vis-à-vis the social world. He says, "By emplotment I mean simply the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot

---

[10] Hayden White has had a tremendous impact on the subject of narrative and history. For a review of his impact in the field of history see Richard Vann "The Reception of Hayden White" in *History and Theory* 37:2, pp. 143-61; also for a good interlocutor see Wulf Kansteiner "Hayden White's Critique of the writing of history" in *History and Theory* 32:3 pp. 273-295.

[11] For example see the review article by Geoffrey Roberts, "J. H. Hexter: Narrative History and Common Sense" in *The History and Narrative Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001) pp. 134-139.

structure."[12] Ultimately, the structure of emplotment, for White, is the mechanism through which narrative displays its ideological—that is power—dynamics.[13] He says "narrative in general…has to do with the topic of law, legality, legitimacy or more generally, authority."[14] Historical narration, that is, any speech act that lays claim towards the recollection past events, contains a moralizing impulse and produces a legitimating function, because it posits one interpretation over and against another. Even in its singularity, a solitary historical account is always part of a debate. He argues, "In order to qualify as historical, an event must be susceptible to at least two narrations of its occurrence. Unless at least two versions of the same set of events can be imagined, there is no reason for the historian to take upon himself the authority of giving the true account of what really happened. The authority of the historical narrative is the authority of reality itself…"[15] Here a historical text can be read as an argument between groups.

On the plurality of possible historical interpretations, Carr makes an insightful observation, "at precisely the point where the need for collective *Besinnung* arises, rival accounts often present themselves. Is it not the case that much communal activity at all levels, from the smallest and most intimate to our huge modern nation-states, consists in the clash of incompatible story-lines, a battle over which account of who *we* are and

---

[12] Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" in Geoffrey Roberts, ed., *The History and Narrative Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 223.

[13] White, Hayden "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth" in *The History and Narrative Reader*.

[14] Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" in *The Content of the Form,* p. 6.

[15] White, "The Value of Narrativity," p. 20.

where *we* are going is to be accepted?"[16] In this light, Carr and White seem to be in complete agreement: a degree of agon inheres in all narrative accounts.

We now turn to the concept of myth (used synonymously here with meta-narrative) as it relates to the constitution of community identity. While there is a vociferous debate behind the category of myth and its utility in religious studies, suffice it to say that the term is now used anthropologically to understand the social dynamics of particular societies rather than to posit the putative nature of human existence. Thus, "myth" is no longer understood in terms of the fantastic or false, but rather the pervasive, the self-evident, social truths in a given society. Ultimately, myths and metanarratives constitute the widest boundaries of communitarian discourse and thus remain indispensable for the study of history and society.

Given that the very definition of the word myth has been the site of much contest, it might seem presumptive to offer another one here; however, a vague delimiting of terminology is unavoidable. Bruce Lincoln states that "myth is ideology in narrative form."[17] It is the mundane, common-sensical, quality of myth that warrants its continued utility as an analytic category. Myth or metanarrative should be understood as that type of discourse in any given society that presents itself as beyond the pale of plausible contestation. As Bruce Lincoln points out, in society "myth is often treated as an anonymous and collective product, in which questions of authorship are irrelevant."[18]

---

[16] Carr, *Time, Narrative and History,* p. 156

[17] Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 147.

[18] Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, p. 149.

Outside of the realm of religion, Roland Barthes considered mythical those forms of discourse which presented themselves as the "only possible way of thinking: 'what goes without saying'… myth is depoliticized speech which represses the contingent, historical..."[19] Myth is *the* category of broad-narrative through which, as Carr might argue, the singular and collective subject constitute their realities.

To understand the function of myth in society, an anthropological mode of analysis must be developed that intertwines myth's narrative and social dimensions. Russel McCutcheon argues for an approach to myth in the context of social formation, encouraging a reading of myth in terms of process rather than static text: myth in terms of myth-making; story-telling rather than story.[20] Laurie Patton, a critic of McCutcheon, does not disagree on this point. For example, Patton's treatment of the subject posits that myth can be understood as "the process by which a cultural form can be argued as transcendental, thus guiding and regularizing human behavior."[21]

---

[19] Laurence Coupe, *Myth*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 148.

[20] One can see a fundamental difference between this approach and that of Wendy Doniger's: myth is "a story that is sacred to and shared by a group of people who find their most important meanings in it." in *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 27.

[21] Laurie Patton, *Myth as Argument: The Bṛhaddevatā as Canonical Commentary* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), p. 40.

McCutcheon argues for an understanding of mythmaking as "a species of ideology production, of ideal-making, where 'ideal' is conceived not as an abstract and absolute value but as a contingent, localized construct that comes to represent and simultaneously reproduce certain specific social values *as if* they were inevitable and universal."[22] While McCutcheon's insistence rests on interrogating the concepts of the transcendent and the sacred, his position does not fundamentally differ from Patton's which seeks an understanding of myth as a claim to transcendental authority. Both answer the question of power and the production of meaning in society as mediated through myth.

Patton encourages a reading of myth drawn from the work of Walter Benjamin. She says, "For Benjamin, the mythic process must be read in the texts of the storytellers, the street names of Europe, the names of corporations, on the exhibit halls of the expositions, and in the architecture of the arcades."[23] The reading of the myth here character understood mundanely refers to a larger mythological process in the classical understanding of myth, which through religion understand social behavior as an expression of the transcendent plausibility of the universe as given physically and temporally. society. Now, the more commonly accepted approach understands myth as a function of social production. This production is accessible only through an analysis of what Patton calls the "mythological fragment." An analysis of the even the most major

---

[22] Russell McCutcheon, "Myth" in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell McCutcheon, pp. 204-207 (New York: Continuum, 2009).

[23] Laurie Patton, "Dis-Solving a Debate" in Frank E. Reynolds and David Tracy, ed., *Religion and Practical Reason* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 231.

systems of cultural meaning production must be reduced to smaller discursive units that can be investigated as sites of ideology/mythical production.

The analytic challenge of this approach to reading myth and history is to negotiate between simply highlighting their narrated, thus constructed forms and demarcating the process through which the myth achieved its ascendance. Michel Trouillot speaks to this problem. Referring to this approach as constructivist, he says, its "dilemma is that while it can point to hundreds of stories that illustrate its general claim that narratives are produced, it cannot give a full account of the production of any single narrative."[24] He holds that "a theory of the historical narrative must acknowledge both the distinction and the overlap between process and narrative."[25] To write a history of meta-narrative formation requires an analysis of changes in discourse over time juxtaposed with an account of the transpired events which correspond to those fluctuations. Of course, a two-tiered project of deconstructing a dominant historical narrative and writing the history of formation at the same time runs the risk of assumingly producing another historical narrative imbued with its own moralizing agenda.

The seeming tension in writing a historical explanation for the way in which a historical narrative forms may be tempered through recent discussions about *tradition* as an analytic for social change. Where the genealogical method can point to breaks and subversions in seeming historical continuities, as a deconstructive project it fails to account for actual continuities in social history. Tradition opts to account for genealogy's failings. Alasdair MacIntyre argues that virtually every speech-act has to be understood

---

[24] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, p. 13.

[25] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past,* p. 23-4.

in its context as the work of someone who has made him or herself accountable by his or her utterance in some community, whose history has produced a highly determined shared set of capacities for understanding, evaluating, and responding to that utterance.[26]

Thus, a central goal of this study is to understand historical reporting as a *discursive tradition*. Combining all of the elements reviewed in the preceding discussion, I advance here Talal Asad's conceptual framework as presented in "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam." He encourages scholars to understand the ways in which the "Islamic" is constituted in lived embodied practices, recognizing the pedagogical dimension involved, whether in a formal or informal social context. Understanding Islamic historical reporting, be it in the form of *ḥadīth* transmission or the compilation of historical chronicles, as a process of social development, will allow us to gain insight into the earliest stages in Islamic sectarian formation. We turn now to a review of the major elements of the Islamic historical tradition that bear upon this project.

Islamic Historical Discourse

In the development of the Islamic sciences that took place between the seventh and tenth centuries, history (*tārīkh*) was not considered a discrete discipline of learning. That is, it did not invited patronage, tutelage, and institutionalization the way that other sciences of religion such as law, *ḥadīth*, or Qurʾānic exegesis did. Chase Robinson explains,

---

[26] David Scott, "The Tragic Sensibility of Talal Asad" in David Scott and Charles Hirschkind, eds, *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 144; for Asad's responses to the question of "Tradition" see pp. 137-48 in the same volume.

But most learned Muslims of that period accorded the historian far less authority than we do, and envisioned his activity not so much as a discipline independent from other disciplines, but as a kind of narrative practice. Medieval Muslim historians, unlike modern western ones, only rarely insisted that they were doing something special.[27]

This is ironic, considering that other Islamic sciences ultimately depended on historical information for their own legitimacy. As Franz Rosenthal states, "Muslim historiography has at all times been united by the closest ties with the general development of scholarship in Islam."[28] Indeed, the entire range of law (*fiqh*) would be impossible without regular recourse to *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* which function as a textual repository for the Prophetic Sunna; nor could one imagine Qurʾanic exegesis (*tafsīr*) without the "occasions of divine revelation" (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) which historicize the piecemeal moments of revelation as they related to Muhammad's life. Nonetheless, the first treatise that addresses history writing as a discrete scienceʿ(*ilm*) does not appear in the Muslim world until 867/1463.[29]

The study of Islamic history writing is further complicated when one attempts to define the genre and its curators. The Muslim historian *par excellence*, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī

---

[27] Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 6: "But most learned Muslims of that period accorded the historian far less authority than we do, and envisioned his activity not so much as a discipline independent from other disciplines, but as a kind of narrative practice. Medieval Muslim historians, unlike modern western ones, only rarely insisted that they were doing something special."

[28] Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1968), p. 30.

[29] Rosenthal, *The History*, p. 245. This is the work of Muhyī al-Dīn Muhammad b. Sulaymān al-Kafiyaji entitled *al-Mukhtasar fi ʿilm al-tarikh.*

(d. 311/923), was perhaps more famous in his day as a jurist and exegete than a historian. Further, the tremendous history that he produced corresponds, in basic form, to the genre of *ḥadīth* literature—that is the *matn-isnād* structure, yet he was considered *persona non grata* to the *ḥadīth* experts of his day.[30] There is a visible paradox in the fact that in the early generations there was little to no distinction between *ḥadīth* scholars and historians as far as scholarly method and form was concerned. Scholarly divisions, nonetheless, eventually became based on increased specialization in *isnād* criticism or thematic focus. While these may appear as inconsequential instances of academic competition and jockeying, they in fact translated into a great degree of rivalry, even, enmity between scholars of *ḥadīth* and those of history. As we will see throughout this study, many of these differences were embedded in the polemics of emerging sectarian groups and not confined to scholarly issue of method or technique. With these complications in mind, how then is the student of early Muslim expected to approach her source materials?

There have been a number of impressive studies which survey the development of Islamic historical writing along with its basic contents and features. The contributions of Franz Rosenthal, Frederick Donner, and Chase Robinson are among the more enduring.[31] These scholars have sought to identify the origins of the genre, its relationship to pre-Islamic practices of historical writing, and the literary structures that define its form.

---

[30] Christopher Melcher, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th-10th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 152,

[31] Franz Rosenthal, *A history of Muslim historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1968); Frederick Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

However, a parallel genre of literature—*ḥadīth* and its sciences—has been the subject of another sub-discipline that concerns historical thought. Since the pioneering work of Ignaz Goldziher, this literature has almost exclusively been concerned with whether or not ḥadīth transmissions can be used as historically reliable sources. For example, Joseph Schacht in his influential *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* and G.H.A. Juynboll who expanded his methods sought to explain the conditions which led to a proliferation (read forgery) of *ḥadīth* materials in the eighth and ninth centuries. Schacht's insights were countered by Nabia Abbot and M.A. Azimi in their respective studies, who advocated a more conservative approach to the materials. This authenticity debate dominated much of the scholarly output on the subject of *ḥadīth* in the middle and late twentieth century and has left a legacy of impasse that still consumes scholars today.

Here, I do not intend to review the findings of scholars working in Islamic historiography or outline the debates concerning the historical reliability of *ḥadīth* materials. Rather, because this study is concerned with the way in which certain narratives of Islamic history are deeply ingrained in sectarian rhetoric and discourse, I would like to focus on the features of Islamic historical writing—whether in the form of *ḥadīth or akhbār*—that played a role in the articulation of Sunni and Shiite historical claims. Here I draw special attention to the way in which Islamic history writing is related to community self-legitimation.

Prominent Structures and Themes in Islamic Historical Materials

One of the most important features of both history writing and the more formalized practice of *ḥadīth* transmission is the *isnād-matn* structure. The *isnād*, or literally support, is best thought of as an ancient footnote or citation practice that provided historical "documentation" for the *matn*, or content report. The *isnād* takes the form of a simple list of names that begins with the most recent transmitter and continues until the narrator of the report itself often a companion or family member of the Prophet Muḥammad. Together, the *isnād-matn* combination came to constitute the basic unit of all historical reference. It is the free standing nature of the historical unit that allowed for a variety of genres to make use of Islamic historical materials and adapt them to their specific needs.

The fluidity and pervasiveness of historical materials throughout Islamic discourses raise an important methodological concern for the contemporary historian and student concerned with the relationship between historical narrative and community identity. How is one to interpret phenomenon as opaque as "historical consciousness" in light of the many genres that historical writing and referencing took place? What would a scholar use as a representative textual site for the project? Is such a project even possible? Given the ubiquity of the *isnād-matn* structure it would be limiting to restrict the study of history writing to a specific genre of literature, if not shortsighted. Rather the phenomenon of historical consciousness or discourses of memory should be approached in a broad intertextual sense, mindful of the ways in which various genres of Islamic literature make use of historical reporting in their own configurations of authority and authenticity. This broad approach, however, is only made possible only through analysis

of, and attention to, the *isnād-matn* structure of historical reporting and more specifically its variable placement in Muslim literary tradition.

One must also keep in mind the ways in which the *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* have been subject to modification and manipulation within the Islamic tradition itself. Not unlike the basic historiographical problems faced by any researcher, early Muslim scholars undertook the challenge of sifting through a bulk of materials in order to distinguish historical fact from fiction. The way in which Muslim critics, especially in the third Islamic century (ninth-century C.E.), approached the problem was to initiate a rigorous campaign of authentication based upon scrutinizing the individuals involved in the transmission of *akhbār* and *ḥadīth*. This practice would later crystallize into the formal sub-specialty of *ḥadīth* science known as knowledge of men (ʿ*ilm al-rijāl*) or impugning and affirm (*al-jarḥ wa al-taʿdīl*), through which scholars would attain certainty that their vision of an Islamic past was indeed the correct, unadulterated one.

A parallel development of "correcting the record" took place in the compilation of historical chronicles. During the eighth and ninth centuries many historical compilations revolved around specific events, themes, or individuals. Take for example *Kitāb al-Ridda wa al-Futūḥ* written by Sayf b.ʿUmar al -Tamīmī, a Kufan historian. This text is historical compilation dealing with the Wars of Apostasy and the Islamic Conquests and was used as a primary source of information for al-Ṭabarī's reconstruction of early Islamic history. Al-Ṭabarī did, however, suppress a number of elements in Sayf's text, thus fragmenting it in order to fit his overall narrative scheme.

This taxonomy of *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* into the *true and false* along with the fragmentation of earlier thematic compilations had many implications for the development of Muslim society in the ninth; two dimensions deserve explicit comment. The first and most important for our purposes is the simultaneous process of differentiation of the historical record and the crystallization of sectarian identities. In fact, the two developments should be understood as a single phenomenon as they were understood by Muslim scholars themselves. For example, Ibn Sirin repordetly said that the scholars

> …were not in the habit of asking about the *isnād* but when the civil war broke out they said 'Mention to us your transmitters.' The people of the community (*ahl al-sunna*) were investigated and their hadith was accepted while the heretics (*ahl al-bidaʿ*) were investigated and their hadith was rejected.[32]

Even if Ibn Sirin's comments are not historically accurate with regard to the chronology of introduction of the *isnād*, it is still revealing of the ways in which scholars understood that their historical work was directly related to the formation of in and out group distinctions.

Thus, for example, as Shiite political movements came to emphasize an elevated position for ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib in the course of the divine revelation, it would be natural that a historical tradition would develop to substantiate such a position. Ibn Abī Ḥadīd comments that indeed it was the Shiite movements in their veneration of ʿAlī that led to

---

[32] Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 21.

the mass proliferation of *faḍāʾil* (meritorious characteristics and distinctions) materials.[33] It would be mistaken, however, to consider this development in an isolated ideological sense. Rather, it is more important to recognize the effect such developments had on the larger corpus of historical writings on a particular subject given that competing groups would necessarily need to respond to such challenges with their own vision of historical events. As we will see in chapter five, in the case ofAlī b. Abū Ṭālib in the Sunni memory, a hardening of historical narrative concerning his place in early Muslim society accompanied the consolidation of sectarian boundaries.

Another important consequence of the rise of *isnād* criticism is the suppression of historical materials carried by non-*ḥadīth* specialists. The traditional historians who did not always scrutinize their chains of transmission, and the story tellers who often served as intermediaries between the scholarly and public classes would soon be considered insignificant, even a burden, in the eyes of their more discriminating *ḥadīth* critics. This jockeying for historical authority led to the rise of a scholarly vanguard imbued with a distinct sense of religious authority. As Tarif Khalidi points out, "the form that Hadith took was bound up with the development of the isnād and with the emerging class of scholars who sought to regulate the production of religious scholarship."[34] Thus, Sufyān al-Thawrī is reported to have snapped at the Caliph al-Mahdi (r.158-168/775-785) for insisting that he relate stories and tales to him: "I am not a *qaṣṣ*!"[35]

---

[33] G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 12-13.

[34] Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought,* p. 23.

[35] Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought,* p. 23.

For these reasons an increased level of suspicion has been cast by western trained scholars of Islamic history on the reliability of historical literary materials. This basic problem has produced heated debate and competing schools of thought in various disciplines that continue until the present. As Herbert Berg notes, "At the crux of the debate is the value scholars assign to the chain of transmitters (the *isnād*), which is intended to demonstrate the authenticity and indicate the provenance of the tradition (*ḥadīth*) [or *khabar*] or book of which it is a part."[36] On one side of the spectrum lies the descriptive, if credulous, approach of simply assuming the reliability of Islamic materials.[37] On the other side is the "skeptical school" which assumes that no amount of recoverable material is available in the extant Islamic sources because they are so far removed from the events they describe and as such must be understood as later interpolations, fabrications, and embellishments.[38] While there is little indication that the debate concerning the authenticity of early Islamic materials will subside or be resolved, a variety of methods and approaches use *isnāds* and their attendant reports for things other than a positivist reconstruction of history.

---

[36] Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), p. 1.

[37] Donner, *Narratives*, p. 6-9. Another important feature of this approach which is not entirely irrelevant to the present concern is the consideration of the Quran as a source of "documentary" evidence of Muhammad's life. Donner includes in this approach the earlier work of Edward Gibbon, William Muir, Philip K. Hitti as well as more recent authors such as Marshall Hodgson, Hugh Kennedy, Ira Lapidus, and Albert Hourani.

[38] Donner, *Narratives*, p. 19. An early example of this approach can be seen in the figure of Henri Lammens followed by more recent examples such as John Wansborough, Patricia Crone, Michael Cook and their students. Donner's outline of the methodological developments in the study of early Islamic history/historical accounts serves the larger aims of his project which are to decisively refute the "skeptical" school's theoretical and historical framework and in turn advance an understanding of early Islamic historical materials in terms of competing community claims to legitimacy.

One of the most useful methods has been to engage the polemical nature of Islamic historical materials as a method in historical anthropology. Tarif Khalidi argued that the obsession with a positivist reconstruction of past events distracts us from many other possibilities of inquiry. He says, "When one learns to recognize the mythopoeic activity of third-century scholars and to understand that much of this material is meant to edify or to propagate a sectarian viewpoint rather than to inform, one might begin to see the material in a new light."[39] Khalidi's recommendations however were anticipated long before by Albrecht Noth, whose *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen, und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsüberlieferung* in 1973 marked a turning point in Islamic historiography.[40]

---

[39] Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, p. 26.

[40] Noth's text is available in English: Albrecht Noth, trans. Lawrence Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source Critical Study* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994). References to Noth's work are drawn from the English edition. Noth, *The Early Arabic*, pp. 3-17. Noth's primary and lasting contribution was his decided refutation of a commonly accepted analytic model that posited the existence of historiographic schools akin to the schools of theology and law in classical Islam. Noth argued that de Goeje, Wellhausen, Mednikov, and Caetani distinguished the historical compilations of the eighth and ninth centuries and their authors as belonging to either the Hijazi (e.g. Medinan) or Iraqi schools of history. It was assumed that these authors would report histories from their regional perspectives only. Noth points to the fact however that many compilations from within the supposed same "schools" report traditions that vary greatly in terms of content and origin. Also, compilations across the regional distinctions can be shown to report similar materials.

"rubrics under which the transmitters considered their own past."[41] These themes then, constitute the core materials around which later narratives would congeal.

Noth states from the outset of his project that his "study will avoid any connection between source criticism and the presentation of actual history."[42] In this sense he might be considered part of the 'skeptical school'. However, Noth reminds his readers that "when an account is for various reasons found to misrepresent or color what it claims to report, this is in itself a contribution to historical knowledge."[43] That is to say, the construction of a particular historical narrative can say a tremendous amount about Muslim communities in the early period and the competing socio-political forces in which their development was grounded. In this way, Noth might be considered an unassuming harbinger of the now popular literary methods and approaches used by contemporary scholars in Islamic studies.

Noth argued for an approach to the entire corpus of history writing that focused analytic attention on the atomistic report—the *isnād-khabar* unit— and the content of its narration. By comparing and contrasting the bulk of these reports as loose and fragmented materials, Noth identified major themes which he describes as

Building upon Noth's conclusions, Fred Donner offers a distinct approach that might serve as a basic framework for understanding historical narrative as a function of Sunni self-imaging.[44]

---

[41] Noth, *The Early Arabic*, p. 27.

[42] Noth, *The Early Arabic*, p. 18.

[43] Noth, *The Early Arabic*, p. 24.

[44] Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1998).

historical reporting that can illuminate the ways in which various groups situated themselves in terms of their assumed collective pasts.[45] As a refutation of the "skeptics", Donner argues that the intense rivalry and fractiousness of the early community was such that it guards against wholesale fabrication of historical fact. That is, while the details of many events in early Islamic history are surely embellished or elided by the proclivities of later generations, the basic contours of the Islamic narrative must be considered to represent actual history. He argues, then, for an understanding of Islamic historical writing in terms of community identity, an approach, he argues, that allows for a conceptualization of *a system of competing orthodoxies* in the early, formative period of Islam.[46]

Like Noth's approach to the material, Donner pays careful attention to both the content and form of the narrated traditions. For Donner's thesis, this structure of Islamic historical reporting is indispensable because it is the unit through which chronologies are arranged: the "free standing textual unit" (e.g. *isnād-khabar*) allowed for a range of possible manipulations, interpolations, and reconfigurations to occur in various stages

Donners thesis revolves around the notion that historical reporting,

or more precisely, the reporting of particular historical narratives, is a function of the *legitimation* of particular collectivities and their concerns at given period of time. Ultimately, Donner attempts to offer an understanding of the *Sirz im Leben* of Muslim

---

[45] Donner, *Narratives*, pp. 144-5. His themes are: 1) Prophecy, which includes prophetic (*nubuwa*) and Quran related material, e.g: occasion of divine revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), (*isrā iliyāt*), and (*qiṣāṣ al-anbīyāʾ*); 2) Community, which includes the Muslim community (*umma*), cult/administration, taxation, e.g. battle commander/participation lists, administrative records of governors and urban organization; 3) Hegemony, which includes conquests (*futūḥ*) and Caliphal lists (*khilāfa*), 4) Leadership, which includes *fitna, sirat al-khulafāʾ, ridda,* pre-Islamic Arabia and pre-Islamic Iran. Donner argues that these themes are crystallized in the mid-second century.

[46] Donner's primary charge against the skeptical school is that early Muslim divisions, what he calls multiple orthodoxies, serves as a guard against any thorough dogmatic purge of early material, a charge he corroborates with the stark diversity of extant material which nonetheless concur on specific events. For the skeptical school and criticisms see Donner, *Narratives*, pp. 20-31 and pp. 285-90.

throughout the construction of historical narratives.[47] The atomistic feature of the *isnād-khabar* unit is central to the presentation, reconstruction and analysis of dominant narratives because of their propensity to manipulation.[48]

Donner's final contribution to Noth's taxonomy of the historiographic tradition is to posit that the particular themes described above can be traced to particular localities in the early Muslim community.[49] For example, because Kufa was a flashpoint in the dispute over of the ʿUthmān's murder, it is expected that *fitna* narratives would appear in that city. Likewise, Syria because it was home to the Umayyads, might be particularly rich in themes related to conquest, administration, and Caliphal authority. However, this proposition—linking historiographic themes to particular locales—should be nuanced by prioritizing group affiliation over geographic context. That is, it might be more appropriate to attach particular themes to particular groups, be they theological, political, ethnic, or class-based, given that ruling elites patronized scholars in various regions and that those scholars also cultivated relationships across geographical boundaries.[50] In fact, political patronage and group affiliation might be the very nexuses through which narrative configuration and evolution can be discerned.

The analysis of dominant narratives in this project proceeds by identifying historical narratives and other discursive sites that are prominent in the polemics and

---

[47] Donner, *Narratives*, p. 262. Like Noth, Donner pays attention to a range of *topoi* and mechanisms of schematization that largely structure the content of historical narratives.

[48] As will be further described in the following section, this textual unit corresponds, at a narrative level, to what Hayden White describes as *emplotment* points in narrative configuration.

[49] Donner, *Narratives*, p. 214-29.

[50] Donner, *Narratives*, p. 227.

rhetorical differences between competing social and political groups in the Islamic formative period. The various constructions of these narratives are outlined and charted in representative texts alongside a description of the socio-political dimensions of the various groups and individuals involved in the transmission of the narratives themselves. While this procedure is fairly straightforward for texts after the ninth century, for reasons described above it becomes speculative for traditions before that period. However, the general approach of G.H.A. Juynboll which further develops Schacht's "common-link" theory is used here, within certain limitations, in order to trace the social milieu of particular narratives and their transmitters in the first two centuries of Islamic history.[51]

The literary nuances in the changes and shifts of these narratives will be outlined to show the ways in which narrative transformation corresponds to social change. A survey of the means by which the narratives achieve a measure of stability and reproduction supplements this analysis. Against the backdrop of broad political developments, this textual/social juxtaposition provides the performative context of the *discursive practice of historical narration*, which is *the act* through which narrative authority is achieved and Sunni orthodoxy becomes a possibility.

---

[51] The classic demonstration of Juynboll's method can be seen in his "Some Isnad-Analytical Methods Illustrated on the Basis of Several Woman-Demeaning Sayings from Hadith Literature," in *al-Qantara,* X (1989), 343-84. For recent, critical, review of Juynboll's approach see Jonathon C. A. Brown, "*Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith* By G. H. A. Juynboll (Leiden, 2007)", in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 2008 19(3): pp. 391-397; also Sulaiman Muhammad Al-Jarallah, "The origins of Ḥadīth : a critical appraisal of a Western approach to the subject" (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1991) Ph.D. Thesis.

III

Rethinking Islamic Orthodoxy through the *Jamāʿa*

Since the inception of western studies of Islam, the question of orthodoxy and heresy has been, to say the least, an elusive problem. Literally *straight opinion*, orthodoxy, in Christianity and Judaism is typically understood as being defined by ecclesiastic institutions whose explicit function in society is to define and maintain the boundaries of proper religious interpretation and practice. Muslim societies, void of similar structures, were said early on not to possess the quality of orthodoxy as did other traditions. Of course, the mere absence of synods and councils was not understood as evidence of the lack of religious authority in the tradition. Rather, it became clear that the need to demarcate the dynamics and loci of religious authority in Islam would need to take into account the tradition's own distinct features.

In an attempt to dismiss the question altogether, many have claimed that Islam is best understood as a religion of orthopraxy—a tradition concerned with proper practice rather than proper belief (orthodoxy). Indeed, advocates of this perspective point to the flurry of intellectual activity in the Islamic tradition concerned with the formulation of proper interpretations and applications of Islamic law, *shariʿa*. As such, this stream of scholarship has focused on the development of Islamic jurisprudence as a site to investigate Islamic religious authority. Observers of the first centuries of Islam, however, have pointed out that the triumph of *sharīʿa*

regimentation in Muslim societies followed, or at least was accompanied by, a period of intense theological debate. This line of research has focused on the theological and philosophical disputes of early Islam and their eventual resolution as the location through which to understand authoritative religious discourse in Islam. In the end, however, these two approaches—the legal and the theological—to the study of authoritative discourse in Islam have been largely unable to capture the meaning of "orthodoxy" in Islam, which is ultimately a question about power, society, and the politics of knowledge.

Alongside the ebb and flow of these debates, the tendency for many specialists and non-specialists alike, has been to simply conflate the terms "orthodox" and "Sunni." Sunni Islam has come to be seen as an original (i.e. orthodox) phenomenon from which other Islamic sects have deviated. From this perspective—Sunnism as orthodoxy—the question of religious authority fully enters the realm of imperial politics as opposed to remaining in the more insular, but not apolitical, arena of clerical discourse (theology and jurisprudence). While all historians of Islam can attest to the fact that a distinctly Sunni set of legal and theological practices and identities did not come into existence until a much later period than that claimed by the tradition, few can describe the way in which this process occurred.

All this is to say that the question of orthodoxy in the study of Islam has produced an array of results and perspectives which have not always been congruous with one another. Here I engage various approaches to the problem of orthodoxy in Islamic studies. I begin by deconstructing the dichotomous "orthopraxy vs. orthodoxy debate" which has sought to locate authoritative discourse in Islam in either jurisprudence or theology. I do so in order to demonstrate the way that both discourses rely upon recourse to *ḥadīth* for ultimate self-legitimation. I then suggest that historical imagination as represented in *ḥadīth* and other historical literatures is a critical site through which to understand the dynamics of power in

Islamic tradition. To do this I engage literature on power and orthodoxy both in and outside of Islamic studies. Finally, I argue that the notion of *al-Jamāʿa* (Community) as a foundational myth in Sunni Islam during offers a fresh perspective on the concept of orthodoxy and power in Islam.

Orthopraxy and *Orthodoxy* in Islam

Ignaz Goldziher seems to have been the first to make the comment that the notion of orthodoxy is out of place in the case of the Islamic tradition because of the lack of synods and councils which were discretely invested with the authority to decide on what constituted proper faith and practice. He describes,

> There is no parallel between dogma in Islam and dogma in the religious system of any Christian church. In Islam there are no councils and synods that, after vigorous debate, fix the formulas that henceforth must be regarded as sound belief. There is no ecclesiastic office that provides a standard of orthodoxy. There is no exclusively authorized exegesis of the sacred texts, upon which the doctrines of a church, and the manner of their inculcation, might be based. The consensus is the highest authority in all questions of religious theory and practice, but it is a vague authority, and its judgment can scarcely be precisely determined.[1]

Given his prominence in the tradition of western scholarship on Islam, many scholars have simply followed Goldziher's description that the concept is inapplicable in the Islamic case.[2]

---

[1] Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law,* trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

[2] Montgomery Watt for example in *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), p. 19: "It is best in Islamic studies to avoid the term 'orthodox' and ask instead whether there was a central body of moderate opinion"; also see him in *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: One-world, Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 5-6.

Thus the quest for understanding the nature of religious authority in Islam has become an object of intense albeit diffuse academic inquiry.

The imposition of the category of orthodoxy on Islamic materials in the first place however, has been called, by some, a problem of contemporary imperial designs. Most forcefully John Henderson says:

> [T]ying basic cultural (and cross-cultural) concepts such as orthodoxy and heresy too closely to the circumstances of their manifestations in any one culture makes doing comparative intellectual history very difficult, if not impossible. At its worst this procedure is a variation of the old cultural imperialist ploy, which first asserts that traditional non-Western cultures lack science, or philosophy, or reason…[3]

The inability for western scholars to conceive of an Islamic model of religious authority, Devin Stewart argues "stem[s] from, in part, a conviction of the fundamental otherness of Islam."[4]

For Sherman Jackson, the negation of the question of orthodoxy in Islam elides the ever present phenomenon of communal authority. Responding to Montgomery Watt, who also describes Islam as being devoid of the notion of orthodoxy, he says,

> Professor Watt overlooks what every member of a religious community knows by experience: the threat of stigma, malicious gossip, ostracism, or verbal attack by respected members in the community is far more imminent, far more effective, and far

---

[3]John Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and Early Christian Patterns* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 20.

[4] Devin Stewart, "Religious Authority and Orthodoxy in Islam" unpublished paper.

more determinative of religious belief and behavior than is the threat of formal excommunication.[5]

Jackson overlooks, however, that Goldziher himself and Watt after him never made the claim that Islam lacked structures or systems of authority, but rather they argued precisely that religious authority in Islam need be understood in terms of community claims to legitimacy and consensus. But which community does one look to in the formative period of Islam when the fractiousness of Muslim society is perhaps its most prominent feature?

Herein lays the source of conceptual confusion when discussing orthodoxy and heresy in Islam. That is, is the task to locate a structure akin to a hegemonic church authority, a type of polity capable of enforcing religious regulations upon will? Or is the task to find an exegetical practice that authorizes and constitutes religious legitimacy? If the former question, then one is ultimately asking about the construction of "Sunni" Islam and its various components. If the latter, then one is asking about the methods of a range of religious doctors including dialectical theologians, jurists, mystics, caliphs and so forth. It could be argued that ambiguity surrounding the question of orthodoxy in Islam stems from a lack of distinction, in the analysis, between 1) authority structure and 2) exegetical practice and their various relationships to the constitution of legitimate religious authority in Muslim societies.

At the conceptual level, the lack of "orthodoxy" in Islam has caused scholars to focus upon debates regarding proper practice rather than proper belief, urging some to argue that Islam is actually best understood as a religion of orthopraxy, one concerned with the regulation of religious ritual practice. This approach has been so pervasive that even Joseph Van Ess, one of the most prominent scholars of early Islamic dialectical theology can still say, "For Islam,

---

[5] Sherman Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 30.

orthopraxy is more important than orthodoxy."[6] But it may be the case, as Devin Stewart has argued, that even the notion of orthopraxy is not entirely devoid of aspects of belief;[7] hence, he develops the notion of Islamic legal orthodoxy.

Nonetheless, the strength of the *orthoprax*y thesis has led to a number of investigations that have sought to understand the development and formation of structures of the Islamic judicial system, such as the court systems and legal schools (*madhhabs*) as well as the development of the principle sources of Islamic jurisprudence.

Any basic textbook on the Islamic tradition will attest to the canonicity of the four sources of Sunni jurisprudence: 1) Qurʾān, 2) Sunna, 3) Consensus, 4) Qiyas (analogy). While their status as principle sources has gone on uncontested for about the last thousand years, the process of their historical recognition as such is only vaguely understood. Christopher Melchert and Wael Hallaq's important studies,[8] however, agree that the principle aspect in this process was the eventual reconciliation between the two major blocs of jurisprudents: the rationalists (*aṣḥab al-ray*) and the traditionalists (*aṣḥab al-ḥadīth*).[9]

---

[6] Joseph Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 16, 38.

[7] Devin Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shi'ite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1998), pp. 45-48. For example, the normative Islamic position across sects, save the Kharijites, is that to commit a sin does not make you an unbeliever, but holding to the opinion that it is permissible to partake in a particular sin, does.

[8] Christopher Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th-10th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Wael Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[9] Melchert describes the basic outline of his argument: "I develop on the one hand traditionalist objections to rationalistic jurisprudence, important because the adherents of *ra'y* would largely modify their practice to meet them on the other hand, the impracticalities of the traditionalists' program, which put a term to pure traditionalism and called forth the efforts of traditionalists such as al-Bukhari and Muslim, jurisprudents such as Ibn Surayj and al-Khallal, to devise a more manageable system of jurisprudence based on ḥadīth." *Formation,* p. xxvi.

rationalist sympathetic Caliph, al-Maʾmūn (r. 198-218/813-833).[10] This alleged reconciliation, argues Hallaq, "was the mid-point between the two movements that constituted the normative position of the majority; and it was from this position that Sunnism, the religious and legal ideology of the majority of Muslims, was to emerge."[11] In this description one can see the conflation of the adjectives normative/majority/Sunni, which signals, again, the lack of clarity in the definition and use of "orthodoxy" as an analytic category or at best relies upon a circular logic.

Hallaq's description of the emergence of legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) as being concomitant with the rise of Sunni Islam should not be taken to signal the end of hostilities between various legal and theological parties that all laid claim to the truth of the *Sunna* of the Prophet. Rather, the consolidation of the hierarchy of sources in Sunni legal theory signals but one boundary of a perceived community; and like all communities, the Sunni one too was constructed primarily in the realm of the imaginary. One of the constitutive elements of this imagined community was the emphasis on Prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) as a discrete, accessible, historical model to which community members could refer in order to solve a range of mundane and transcendental problems.

Hallaq places this "reconciliation" to have culminated in the mid-ninth century as part of a larger set of social, political, and religious conflicts exemplified by the notorious inquisition, *miḥna* (218/833-234/848) instituted by the

As scholars of early Islamic law describe, the role of *ḥadīth* writing had a lasting effect on the debate between the advocates of *raʾy* (juristic opinion) and the proponents of Prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*). In the first two centuries of Islam, most judges and jurists followed local precedent and executed reasoned, discretionary opinion to arrive at legal conclusions. Much of this precedent was believed to have based on the practice of the Companions of the Prophet (what

---

[10] Hallaq, *The Origins,* pp. 124-5.

[11] Hallaq, *The Origins,* p. 125.

Hallaq calls *sunnaic* practice)[12], many of whom took part in the establishment of the various garrison towns, which would eventually become the major urban/intellectual centers of the Muslim polity where the major debates over religious authority would transpire.

The rise of the formal practice of *ḥadīth* writing and transmission, which may have begun as early as the late first century of Islam,[13] provided a significant challenge to local practices and forced a number of restructurings in the constitution of religious authority. As Hallaq describes,

> The projection of the Companions' model back onto the Prophet was accomplished by a long and complex process of creating the narrative of the *ḥadīth*. Part of this narrative consisted in the Companions' recollection of what the Prophet had said or done, but another part of it involved extending the chain of authority back to the Prophet when it in fact had previously ended with the Companion.[14]

Thus, the rise of textual *ḥadīth* and the science of *ḥadīth* transmission must be understood in the context of a process whereby a community of religious authorities (jurists/jurisprudents) began *to create a past* through which they constituted a new sense of the religiously authoritative.

---

[12] Hallaq, *The Origins*, p. 102.

[13] See generally the various work of G. H. A. Junboll, but most especially his *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Melchert uses him to qualify this chronology, *Formation* p. 3. One of the most important figures in the development of the writing of *ḥadīth* is al-Zuhrī. For more on him and the controversy over the early writing of *ḥadīth* see Michael Cook's article/study "The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition in Early Islam" in *Studies in the Origins of Early Islamic Culture and Tradition*, which also includes a number of useful articles. Also see Gregor Schoeler's *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[14] Hallaq, 102-3.

Ultimately, it is in the creation of a shared past culminating in the construction of a putatively held Prophetic Sunna, that the element of orthodoxy resides.[15]

The story of how the traditionalists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) eventually defeated the rationalists (*ahl-raʾy*) has been the subject of a host of arguments, but al-Shafiʿi's insistence that the *sunna* can only be known through *ḥadīth* seems to be a watershed in the development and eventual consolidation of the Sunni principles of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence).[16] His position seemed to provide, according to Melchert, a semi-rationalist position upon which later Sunni jurisprudential technicians could agree, even if it did take some time.[17]

While Hallaq argues against attributing the explicit articulation of the four principles of *usul al-fiqh* to al-Shafiʿī, the general consensus amongst scholars, devoid of Shafiʿī's role, is that the *ḥadīth* as putatively held source of religious authority allowed for further consolidations amongst competing groups of jurists and jurisprudents.[18] This point of consensus would inaugurate the proliferation of *ḥadīth-fiqh* manuals organized for judges under subject headings (rather than according to the *ahl-ḥadīth* taxonomy which organized them according to transmitter in works that were termed *musnads*)—a genre under which the six canonical books of *ḥadīth*, would appear. These six books constitute the authoritative *ḥadīth* books for all four Sunni schools of law (*madhhabs*).

---

[15] For a brief overview of the ways in which local regions, e.g. Hijaz, Syria, Iraq, adapted/conformed/contested their local practices with/to the "Sunna" as represented through *ḥadīth* see Hallaq, *Origins,* pp. 103-9.

[16] Hallaq, *Origins*, p. 109.

[17] Melchert, *Formation*, p. 70. Also important for this topic are (according to Melcher): Hallaq, "Was al-Shafi'I the Master Architect of Islamic Jurisprudence?" in *IJMES* 25 (1993); Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), chapter. 9.

[18] Hallaq, *Origins*, pp. 117. Hallaq is countering Schacht and Coulson who he feels overstate the role of al-Shafiʿī in the development of the Sunni jurisprudence.

The four Sunni schools of law, or *madhhabs,* are often described in textbooks as having been founded by their eponyms. Thus, Abū Ḥanīfa was said to have laid out the principles of the Hanafi School of jurisprudence; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, the Ḥanbalī School, and so forth. In light of Melchert's invaluable study, however, this assumption is no longer tenable. It is more correct to understand their consolidation and formation in light of the scholarly activity of their disciples who advanced the original insights of their teachers. It was the growing popularity and institutionalization of this activity that eventually led to the formation of the *madhhab* as a formal institution. While Melchert and Hallaq may disagree on the definition of *madhhab,*[19] both agree that by the tenth century, discrete entities by that name consolidated in such a way as to have members of the juristic community identify themselves and others according to one of the four schools and that the significance of this development is paramount for an understanding of Sunni Islam in particular and Islamic history in general.[20]

Hallaq cites four factors as the causes of the particular failure or success of particular schools of law: 1) political affiliation/patronage from ruling elites, 2) adherence to the rationalist-traditionalist "reconciliation" of jurisprudence, 3) affiliation with successful/non-successful theological movements, 4) qualitative jurisprudential distinction.[21]

---

[19] Hallaq, *Origins,* p. 164. Hallaq argues that a School is the body of collected doctrinal points, whereas, Melchert argues for an understanding of a school as a body of scholars whose jurisprudential activities claimed to have upheld the founder's positions. The two aspects may not be as mutually exclusive as the debate implies.

[20] Melchert, *Formation*, p. 199. Hallaq, *Origins,* p. 169

[21] Hallaq, *Origins,* p. 169-72*.*

and development of Islamic law is irrelevant or unnecessary. Rather, it is to say that the authoritativeness of law as a discourse in Islam ultimately rests upon something beyond itself, rendering the analytic logics, structural formations, and jurisprudential debates secondary, derivative discourses.

At the end of his study, Melchert reflects on the broader social and political environment of the period, considering why law and legal schools were of such intense debate in the first place and *what forced* the shifts in each of the constituent movements. On the question of political patronage he says,

> Behind vizerial aid to what would be the successful party was probably some calculation that a jurisprudence such as theirs would keep the peace. The successful jurisprudence had to have something in it for both the rationalists and the traditionalists, for both the sophisticates around the court and the earnest but less refined common people.[22]

Thus, the question of political and social struggle as a defining contextual feature of the formation of Sunni law must be given central attention in any investigation of authority and orthodoxy in Islam. One must ask, what *demanded* "reconciliation" in the first place? Promising a further study of the question, Melchert continues to reflect: "At one time, I supposed that another decisive impulse to compromise came from the traditionalists' fear of Shiism, to resist which they accepted the necessity of closing ranks, of widening the accepted significance of 'Sunni' to include semi-rationalists."[23]

Hallaq's conclusions on the whole corpus of Islamic law, including both its structure and exegesis, remains at worst circular, and at best unsatisfying. The logic is as follows: the development and consolidation of the *madhhabs* depends upon the development and consolidation of the debate between rationalists and traditionalists, which depends upon the development of *ḥadīth* as an authoritative discourse in the early, variegated Muslim community. This is not to say that the investigation of the origins

---

[22] Melchert, *Formation*, p. 201.

[23] Melchert, *Formation*, p. 201.

The place of theology in the spectrum of religious authority in Islam is, like jurisprudence, both central yet not definitive. Furthermore, for roughly the last one thousand years, theological discourse has not been the most prominent feature of Muslim intellectual activity—"orthopraxy" advocates cannot be challenged very effectively here. However, in the earliest periods of Islamic history, theological disputation went hand in hand with political contest, making it a central component in the definition of Islam in the formative period. Indeed, any inquiry into the development of Islamic theology must be accompanied by a thorough review of the socio-political vicissitudes of early Muslim polities and their fledgling enterprises. Unfortunately, in the consideration of time and space, the following discussion cannot provide such a comprehensive framework. Instead, it reviews the parameters of major theological debates in Islam and places their development in a socio-historical context in order to demonstrate the way in which theological discourse, like legal discourse, is intrinsically connected to the dynamics of community formation and historical imagination. Theology, like jurisprudence, must be considered a secondary order of authoritative discourse in Islam.

One of the first and most lasting questions in Islamic theology relates to the gravity of sin in the definition of Muslim identity. How does the commitment of unlawful acts affect one's status in the "community of believers?" How should Muslims relate to those who persist in sin? How, in fact, does one begin to define sin? While these questions remained central to Islamic intellectual history for centuries, their immediate historical context can be traced to the first internecine conflict in Islamic history in which the third Caliph, ʿUthmān, was murdered. ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib, his disputed successor, attempted but ultimately failed to consolidate the polity, leading members of the Prophet's early entourage fought one another, ending in the arbitration between ʿAli and Muʿāwiya at the Battle of Ṣiffin, shortly after which, ʿAlī was assassinated. The discussion returns to this question later, but for the time being it seems prudent to explore the other authoritative Islamic discourse that seems to bear so heavily on the question of orthodoxy in Islam—namely theology, or *ʿilm al-kalam*.

Montgomery Watt therefore begins his narrative *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* with a discussion of the murder of ʿUthmān and the Kharijite political/theological party.[24] Kharijites took responsibility for the assassination of ʿAlī. His death, they claimed, was justified by his recourse to arbitration in his dispute with Māʿwiya; the more correct approach would have been to implement God's judgment.[25] This error, claimed the Kharijites, meant that ʿAlī was no longer a Muslim and that his blood was licit. The origin of the question of sin in Islam then, coincides with the emergence of the Kharijites as a political force.

It is important to note, however, that the appellation, Kharijite, is not a self-imposed one, but rather a term of opprobrium, literally translating as "those who go away" (from the community). Thus the negative dialectics of identity formation can be seen in the delegation of this "group" and its theological position as "outside" of *the community* and as such, the immediate inextricability of theology and *community* formation.

There were of course those groups that did not consider ʿAlī to have been wrong at all. These were the early amorphous Shiite. Likewise, one the other side of the spectrum, were the ʿUthmānids and the Umayyads. The former were loyal and sympathetic to the plight of the third Caliph, and maintained that the insurrection against him was unjustified. The latter espoused that not only had ʿUthmān been wrongfully murdered, but that ʿAlī had not adequately dealt with his assailants and therefore was ineligible for the duties of leadership. Thus, the question of legitimate authority in the early period was inextricably bound up in the politicization of historical interpretation.

In the course of the development of Islamic theology, the question of sin would largely be answered by solution of postponement, or *irjaʾ*. The origins of the position may be traced back to

---

[24] Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld, Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 10-38.

[25] Thus they are known by the infamous words "*la hukm illa li-llah*"—No judgement but God's.

the figure of al-Ḥasan b. Muhammad, the son of a Shiite leader, who sought reconciliation with the Umayyads—but given the opacity of the period, authorship remains questionable.[26] Regardless of origins and authorship, the position of *irjaʾ* advocated an understanding, as Van Ess describes it, "that it was no longer possible to impute sin to a single guilty part or to a single group…," this position "was a call for political moderation."[27] Needless to say, various Shiite groups would not subscribe to such a position, nor, of course, would the staunch ʿUthmānids or Umayyads, who equally saw their position as the correct one. Nonetheless, the quietist impulse of *irjāʾ* would eventually become a fallback position upon which the pertinent historical and political concerns of various groups could be *postponed* and effectively accommodated. These quietist impulses eventually found their way into Sunni and Shiite theology much later.

Another important theological question with which Islamic tradition has wrestled is the ancient and more pervasive debate concerning human free-will and pre-destination. While this question has taken shape in various forms in various religious and philosophical traditions, it is important to note that in the early Islamic context, this question was entirely connected to historical and political concerns. One of the first times this question arose in Muslim history surrounded the anxieties of the Umayyad Caliph, ʿAbd al-Malik who asked al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), a central figure in early Islamic intellectual history, about the controversial idea that human beings might possess some degree of power/agency (*qadar*) over the course of human events in general and over their fate in the hereafter.[28]

---

[26] Tilman Nagel, trans. Thomas Thorton, *The History of Islamic Theology: From Muhammad to the Present* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000), p. 59. Watt holds that the western understanding of this position has been skewed from reliance on Ashʿarī sources; *Formative,* pp. 119-20. Michael Cook argues against the ascription of the *Kitab al-Irja'* to Ḥasan b. Muḥammad, he argues against Van Ess's claim to the texts authenticity in *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 68-88.

[27] Van Ess, *The Flowering*, p. 122.

[28] The question of free will and pre-destination in the context of Umayyad leadership can be reviewed in Nagel, *History of*, pp. 35-41; also see Watt, *Formative*, pp. 82-118.

For Umayyad ruling elites, this logic meant that their claim to be deputies of God could be undermined: e.g. they were not in the position of leadership *because* God *willed* it so, but rather *because* of some mundane unfolding of human affairs.[29] Those who advocated human agency were called *qadarites* and were largely disparaged by ruling elites in the Umayyad period. One of the first, and most influential adherents of the Qadarite position was Ghaylān al-Dimashqī, an Umayyad secretary, who was later executed for his espousal of the *qadarite* position.[30] The predestinarians would hold that the actual sequence of human events is, given God's omnipotence, the intended one.

Of course this question, ultimately one about evil, extended beyond the Umayyad dynasty and held serious implications throughout the course of Islamic history. For example, the question of human agency was intricately tied to the question of sin, reviewed above. A Caliph, like a prophet, would need to be held accountable to God. Otherwise, tyranny would go unpunished and evil would be caused by God.[31] It is not hard to imagine the historical implications this debate held for the memory of the early community of Muslims, especially given, the tumultuous political history of nascent Islam. Nagel sums up the import of this dimension well,

> We are already getting a glimpse of yet another characteristic of Islamic thinking: any interpretation of current events has to refer to the period of the original community;…all dogmatic or religio-political movements developed their own interpretations of earliest Islamic history' this analytic construct allowed them to discover, in a circular conclusion,

---

[29] For an understanding of Umayyad self-representations see Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[30] Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 85-6.

[31] Nagel, *History*, p. 38.

their predecessors in the original community, whose true heirs they felt they were and whose work they were continuing.[32]

Here also, the relationship between faith and sin, and the role of human agency vs. divine will in many ways are reducible to a question of historical interpretation and political history. More precisely, the way in which the political developments of early Islamic history are understood by Muslim practitioners will in many ways determine their respective positions on questions of theology.

While the theological and political questions thus far raised can be attributed to the Umayyad period, speculative theologý (*ilm al-kalam*) as a discrete Islamic science and intellectual practice began to mature into a more systematic form in the late eight and early ninth centuries under the patronage of the Abbasid Caliphs. Montgomery Watt places the rise of *kalam* in the context of inter-religious polemics between an emerging Muslim empire that encountered the late antique world of Hellenism, Sasanian Persia, and various Christianities throughout Mesopotamia, arguing that these encounters provided a "stimulus to rationalist thinking in Islamic theology."[33]

---

[32] Nagel, *History*, p. 41.
[33] Watt, *Formative*, p. 184.

The emblematic party of *kalam,* the Muʿtazilites, known to themselves as the People of Justice and Divine Unity (*ahl al-ʿadl wa al-tawḥīd*), refined the host of theological questions into a coherent enough program to constitute a school much in the same way and around the same time that the legal guilds began to consolidate.[34] The Muʿtazilites were constituted, albeit some nuances, by adherence to five principles (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*): 1) divine unity, 2) divine justice, 3) the promise and the threat, 4) the intermediate position, 5) commanding the right and forbidding the evil.[35] While Muʿtazilites held a large degree of favor in the courts of the early Abbasid Caliphs, and most especially during the reign of al-Maʾmun, their fall from power coincided with the failure of his inquisition (*miḥna*) whereby he sought to impose Muʿtazalite theological principles on the state judges.[36]

The fall of the Muʿtazilite school also corresponds to the triumph of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*, then represented by the staunch Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. As Richard Martin notes, "Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and the traditionalist People of Ḥadīth seem in historical hindsight to have been more representative of the religious views of Islamic society as whole…than were the *mutakallimun*."[37]

Indeed, in the courts of the Caliphs and the salons of viziers, debates were held in front of elite audiences—making a claim to truth would require much more than recourse to revelation. Greek philosophy steadily streamed into *kalam* discourse with the ongoing ~~translation of the texts of classic~~ thinkers. In such an environment, more abstract questions about the nature of God's Being and the created or uncreated status of Quʾran began to be entertained. As such, *kalam* throughout its history was associated with elite politics and perhaps, for lack of a better word, cosmopolitanism.

---

[34] There is some discussion, as in the case of the legal schools, as to when and how one can identify the presence of a "school" outside of a circle of students subscribing to similar positions. For contrasting views on the origins of the Muʿtazilite school compare Richard Martin, *Defenders of Reason in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), pp. 25-7 to Watt, *Formative*, pp. 209-17.

[35] For an explanation of the five *uṣūl* see: Martin, *Defenders*, pp. 59-89.

[36] There is good deal of literature available on al-Maʾmūn and the *miḥna*. For a recent treatment that summarizes previous research and adds new insight into the Caliph's life within the theological and political context of his time see Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mun* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[37] Martin, *Defenders*, p. 29.

> The more firmly the conviction was established that what Muhammad did and said, and that the divine guidance as it was so strongly felt in the original community became palpable in the *ḥadīth*, the more the *ḥadīth's* content was apt to reveal its practical usefulness for providing binding rules for everyday life.[38]

Speculative theology would be trumped by textual fidelity as represented in the *ḥadīth*.

This development should not be taken, however, to mean that textual fidelity was synonymous with irrationality. It is more correct to understand that the *ahl al-ḥadīth* simply deemed rationalist speculation unreliable, unstable, and ultimately a foreign addition to Muḥammad's message. They argued that the early generations sought answers to their problems through recourse to the *sunna* of the Prophet and, therefore such, the place of reason in the deciphment of religious problems would need to be relegated to a second order.[39] That "reason" and "traditionalism" were not entirely mutually exclusive might be seen in the eventual rise of the Ashʿarite theological school. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿari (d. 323/935) was one of the most promising students of Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbaʾi (d. 303/915), one of the "two masters" of the Muʿtazilite school in Basra. His fame lies in his "conversion" from Muʿtazilism to Ḥanbalism, wherein he championed traditionalism through the methods of *kalām*.[40]

The *ahl al-ḥadīth* movement, in fact, up to this period did not favor even participating in *kalām* much less entertaining the implications of some of the topics in question. The refusal to engage in *kalām* was simultaneously an act of resistance and affirmation; as Nagel explains,

---

[38] Nagel, *History*, pp. 80-1.

[39] A brief but helpful discussion of traditionalist understanding of reason can be in Binyamin Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp. 12-31.

[40] For more on al-Ashʿarī see Watt, *Formative Period,* pp. 303-312 and George Makdisi's classic article "Ashʿarī and the Ashʿarites in Islamic religious history," originally published in two parts in *Studia Islamica* XVII, 1962, pp. 37-80; and XVIII, 1963, pp. 19-39; now available in *Religion, Law and Learning in Classical Islam* (Great Britain: Variorum, 1991).

The Treatment of Orthodoxy in the Study of Islam

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that neither legal nor theological discourse in Islam can be taken as *the* source of authority in Muslim society. Both of these systems rely upon a common set of assumptions regarding the history of the Muslim community and its founding figure(s) as represented in the phenomenon of *ḥadīth* and historical discourse more generally. Also, the developmental unfolding of each of the discourses coincides with the emergence of a discrete entity commonly known as Sunni Islam which when tied to various political arrangements seems to possess the qualities that most have in mind when thinking of religious orthodoxy. However, describing orthodoxy in terms of the Sunni community can be circular. The logic is as follows: the Sunni community is orthodox because the Sunnis deem such through a consensus (*ijmaʿ*) of scholars they recognize as legitimate. There is little more here than an endorsement of Sunni doctrine. Post-tenth century discussions of orthodoxy and heresy in Islam largely fall into this trap[41] and many studies of the formative period project this tension/slippage anachronistically onto the data. A few scholars, however, problematize the formation of community identity in the formative period alongside developments in theological, legal, and political authority. The most helpful of these studies focus on the question of the Ḥanbalī movement and its role in the formation of Sunnism writ large.

As such, theology as we saw in the case of law earlier needed to make recourse to the authority of *ḥadīth* in order to have any viability.

Aziz al-Azmeh offers a conceptual frame with which to gauge the influence of the Ḥanbalī movement in Islamic history. He argues that given the multiplicity of religious behavior and forms in all religions, including Islam, the unifying characteristic of a given tradition is what he calls the "unity of genealogy." He explains that, "Like all genealogies, this one is constructed

---

[41] An important exception to this trend is the recent work by Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Pre-Modern Islam*: *: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

by a spurious history which has the task of eliminating unevenness in the genealogical tradition…such a task is undertaken by interpretation whose task it is to establish the concordance of the present…with the original event, invariably in the form of showing the present as an ineluctable result of this absolute rectitude which is the past in question."[42] This is the conceptual frame within which we can understand the proliferation of the *ḥadīth* writing/transmission emerged as force that provided a mechanism through which disparate communities could come to imagine themselves as one.

The unit of genealogy in the Islamic case is what al-Azmeh describes as textual fideism—a profound adherence to the scripture of revealed texts that argued for a minimalist interpretative position. Ḥanbalīs described themselves as the *ahl-ḥadīth* or *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* and saw themselves as the guardians of the religion which was represented in the sacred texts themselves.[43] Ḥanbalīs then naturally saw themselves, and would eventually be able to convince others, that as textual authorities they represented a pristine transmission of sacred authority and thereby most loyally embodied the Prophetic practice (*sunna*). The rhetorical effect of this claim cannot be overstated in terms of influence on the larger tradition. Al-Azmeh says, "the sacred unalterable *sui generis* utterance which is the profession of orthodoxy, of Sunnism, is inseparable from the authority which polices its integrity."[44]

Many have argued, however, that as a school/movement, the Ḥanbalīs and the *ahl-ḥadīth* were not recognized as authoritative and were often disparaged by Muslim elites. In fact, the bulk of courtly privilege and patronage showered upon religious doctors throughout Islamic lands fell

---

[42] Aziz al-Azmeh "Orthodoxy and Ḥanbalīte Fideism," in *Arabica* 1988, 253-266.

[43] Al-Azmeh, "Orthodoxy," p. 258; al-Azmeh points to the statement attributed to Ahmed b. Hanbal that "religion as such is the Book of God and veracious narratives about the Prophet and his associates, that religion is imitation, and that the substance of scriptural statements is textually incontrovertible while being intellectual ineffable." p. 256.

[44] Al-Azmeh, "Orthodoxy," p. 259.

into non-Ḥanbalī hands. If Ḥanbalīs were on the margins of emerging Sunni power, how can we accept, then, the counterintuitive claim that they in fact constituted a key element in the Sunni enterprise? George Makdisi managed this problem in his article "Ḥanbalīte Islam."[45] He demonstrates the many relationships the Ḥanbalī movement had with centers of learning (*madrasas*) and even with Sufi brotherhoods.[46] He reviews, much in the manner of this discussion, the deficiency of the concept in the study of Islam, but draws upon Ibn Taymiya (d. 728/1328) for insight into orthodoxy from a Ḥanbalī perspective.

According to Ibn Taymiya the range of divisions with the Sunni world would find a common denominator in the belief in the legitimacy, priority, and authority of the generation of the pious ancestors (*salaf*) as represented in the scriptural tradition of *ḥadīth*.[47] Ibn Taymiya's typology even includes Mutazilites, whom he commends for refuting the Shiites and the Khārijites. His treatment of divisions in Islam provides insight into the self-conception of the Sunni community as being constituted by belief in a historical narrative. Thus, Makdisi argues that "the Ḥanbalīte movement stood at the center of the Muslim community. From its beginning, this movement saw itself as the protector of the heritage of the Prophet….The Ḥanbalīte school found itself in the vanguard of the traditionalist movement."[48] By positioning itself as the authority over the narrative of the Prophet's life, the traditionists and the Ḥanbalīs were able to secure a monopoly over the interpretation of sacred history.

With al-Azmeh's conceptual contribution and Makdisi's historical outline, the study of Islamic orthodoxy—whether that is understood in terms of the emergence of Sunnism or in terms

---

[45] George Makdisi, "Ḥanbalīte Islam" in *Studies on Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

[46] Makdisi, "Ḥanbalīte Islam," pp. 228-251.

[47] Makdisi, "Ḥanbalīte Islam," pp. 259.

[48] Makdisi, "Ḥanbalīte Islam," pp. 262-3.

of development of textual fideism—cannot ignore the role of *ḥadīth* literature in the construction of what is putatively held as authoritative in Islam. More importantly, it is necessary to keep in mind the anthropological implications of the *ḥadīth* and the activities of its doctors, namely, the construction of a shared past that simultaneously serves as a discourse of community identity and sacred authority, both of which are constituted by a notion of sacred history. Thus, the study of Islamic orthodoxy must ultimately be a study concerned with the dynamics and processes involved in the construction of a common historical narrative.

<u>The Study of "Orthodoxy" in related literatures</u>

The ambiguous results of the various treatments of orthodoxy in Islamic studies may be attributed to the opaque nature of the question being asked. Namely, what is intended by the use of the word *orthodoxy* in any investigation of religious authority? According to its etymological definition, it means straight (*ortho*) opinion (*doxa*), but unlike theological doctors who might be investigating the possibility of such a phenomenon, the scholar of religion seeks to understand what constitutes "straight opinion" in a religious society. Even more, as an inquiry into the dynamics of religious authority in the time and space of a given society, the question of orthodoxy for the historian of religion is much more about the *claim to orthodoxy*, the way in which that claim is made viable, and the consequences this claim has in the execution of concrete religious practices. Thus, the study of orthodoxy and heresy is a socio-historical inquiry into the power dynamics associated with claims to and dissent from religious authority.

As a socio-historical question, then, the phenomenon of "orthodoxy and heresy" must be studied from a sociologically informed theoretical position. Jacques Berlinerblau's brief theoretical statement on the issue, "Toward a Sociology of Heresy, Orthodoxy, and Doxa," has

become invaluable to such an endeavor.[49] To be sure, from a sociological approach orthodoxy and heresy can only be understood from a dialectical or relational perspective. Berlinerblau centers the tautological statement that a heresy can only be labeled as such by an orthodoxy in order to remind readers that what is being discussed is a set of competing truth claims by particular claimants of authority at particular times in particular societies.[50] Indeed some argue that there is nothing intrinsically religious about orthodoxy and heresy,[51] but that what is being discussed is a dominant versus subordinate phenomenon of power relations. As Berlinerblau states, what is interesting about this perspective "is that it sees the relation of heresy and orthodoxy as not restricted to religion but germane to manifold departments of human interaction."[52] This conceptualization of orthodoxy and heresy, then, allows for the appropriation of theoretical models and frameworks from outside of the discipline of religion; and it is in this vein that Berlinerblau proceeds discussing the issue.

Berlinerblau posits orthodoxy as an irreducibly political construct. Citing a range of theorists but relying mainly upon Max Weber and Antonio Gramsci, he defines religious orthodoxy in terms of hegemonic apparatus. This he calls "hard orthodoxy" which he provisionally defines as

a superordinate compulsory organization composed of a leading class in cahoots with other classes and social groups that 1) controls the means of material, intellectual, and symbolic production; 2) articulates "correct" forms of belief and praxis through the work

---

[49] Jacques Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology of Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Doxa" in *History of Religions* Vol. 40, No. 4 (May 2001), pp. 327-351.

[50] Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology," pp. 330-32.

[51] Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology," p. 334. He is citing George Zito "Toward a Sociology of Heresy" *Sociological Analysis 44* p. 126.

[52] Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology," p. 334.

of rationalizing and consent-generating intellectuals (and/or priests); 3) identifies "incorrect" forms of belief and praxis through these same intellectuals; 4) institutionally manages deviant individuals and groups through coercive mechanisms (e.g. physical and symbolic violence, excessive taxation, ostracism, etc.) or through "re-education," compromise, accommodation and so on.[53]

The overtly materialist and Marxists residues in this definition aside, Berlinerblau brings to light the aspect of the phenomenon scholars of orthodoxy seem to be chasing—namely, pervasive authority. As he says it is not just that orthodoxy and heresy are simply relative and fluid, for "only one group (or coalition of groups) within a social body can behave like an orthodoxy in word and deed."[54] For our purposes, Sunni Islam is the only group of Muslims that can function as if other interpretations and traditions simply never existed. Knowing that dominant groups arrive at positions of hegemony through a series of protracted and dialectical encounters with other groups, the challenge then is to uncover the residues of this process in orthodox self-representations.

In an effort to "think outside of the box" about orthodoxy and heresy, Berlinerblau draws on the concept of the criminal and deviant as treated by Durkheim and[55] Simmel's treatment of the heretic.[56]

---

[53] Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology,"p. 340.

[54] Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology,"p. 336.

[55] Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology," pp. 341-3.

[56] Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology," pp. 343-5.

confrontation with the alleged heterodox claim, the social formation of orthodoxy and heresy undergoes similar processes.

Berlinerblau closes out his theoretical statement with recourse to the notion of *doxa* as advanced by Pierre Bourdieu.[57] For Bourdieu, the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy presumes a discourse of unspoken commonality (*doxa*) that the subjects take for granted in their debates. Thus, in Christianity it is the Christ event that allows for the realm of Christiological debates to transpire. In Islam, it is the prophetic mission of Muhammad. "Doxic" truths might be understood as the ultimate realm of orthodoxy and heresy as they constitute the most obvious, natural set of beliefs of a given society in a state of competition over the definition of "straight opinion." But here too we do not have to rely upon Berlinerblau's theoretical preferences.[58] Berlinerblau advocates an understanding of orthodoxy and heresy which takes into account the discursive "nexuses" of relations of subordination and domination which fluctuate throughout time and space but constitute the boundaries (or rather claims to) correct and incorrect belief.[59]

As alluded to earlier, if the study of orthodoxy and heresy can be reduced to the study of community formation, then there is a host of conceptual and theoretical materials from which one can draw to buttress their study. Burton Mack, in his study of Christian origins *Who Wrote the New Testament: The Making of the Christian Myth*, employs the concepts of social formation and mythmaking.[60]

The main point Berlinerblau takes from these thinkers is that the positing of heretics can be a "catalyst for social unity." That is in the dynamics of community formation the labeling of an outsider clarifies the boundaries of and gives definition to the insider. Thus, just as a textual orthodoxy (such as a creedal statement) reacts, responds to, and is ultimately shaped by the

[57] Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology," pp. 345-49.

[58] The idea of a realm of discourse that assumes a "natural, obvious" form might be discussed in terms of Barthes notion of myth/ideology.

[59] Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology,"pp. 350.

[60] Burton Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament: The Making of the Christian Myth* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995) 11-14. For more on these two concepts see the articles "Social Formation" and "Myth" in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, (eds.) Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, (London: Cassell, 2000).

particular society, and more importantly, its fractious and interrelated nature during instances of transformation and emergence. Though Mack does not explicitly employ the language of orthodoxy and heresy, his study of the Christian myth can be readily understood in terms of Bourdieu's *doxa*.

Daniel Boyarin in *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* argues for an understanding of the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy which can serve as a site to understand the historic partition between Judaism and Christianity.[61] Drawing upon Michel Foucault's understanding of language and power in order conduct a genealogy of Christian identity, Boyarin argues for a shift away from an understanding of orthodoxy and heresy that assumes the existence of dominant and subordinate discourses. Rather, according to Boyarin, a proper investigation of the problem will focus attention on the discourse of heresiology as a site through which to understand the construction and maintenance of the identity boundaries that lay claim to or reject particular notions of religious authority.[62]

One recent attempt at a comparative study of orthodoxy and heresy is John Henderson's *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy.*[63]

These two concepts allow us to understand the rise of a dominant discourse in a

---

[61] Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[62] Boyarin, *Borderlines*, pp. 3-5. Here he follows Alain Le Boulluec's *La notion d'heresie dans la literature grecque II-III siecles* (Paris: Etudes Agustiniennes, 1985). This book advances earlier insights of Walter Bauer whose work *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christianity* seems to be one of the first critical explorations into the question vis-à-vis claims to Christian origins.

[63] John Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and Early Christian Patterns* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998).

of legitimacy: 1) primacy (originality), 2) true transmission, 3) unity, 4) catholicity, and 5) a conception of orthodoxy as a *middle way* between heretical extremes.[64] Seen from the perspective of community identity, it might be the case that these categories can be extended to collective entities like ethnic groups, nations, or even political parties.

In light of the forgoing discussion, it does not seem unwarranted to propose that the most effective approach to understanding orthodoxy and heresy would necessarily have to dissolve the categories and sites of investigation of any essential or fixed investiture. Indeed, this may be the most positive outcome of studies concerning religious authority and the power it wields in society. In other words attempting to understand the way in which an orthodox system of beliefs is achieved might reveal certain processes that reflect shifting subjectivities and notions of authority in societies during moments of transition. Unsettling the dominant narratives, stripping them of their "natural" mystique and highlighting the socio-historic processes involved in their construction then seems like a worthy endeavor in the study of Sunni origins. It with this in mind that we turn now to the notion of *al-Jamāʿa* in Sunni Islam as a foundational myth through which one can investigate both the formation and continued maintenance of Sunni sectarian boundaries and identities.

Although Henderson does not make use of the range of theoretical and conceptual tools available to study domination and subordination and its relationship to authority and discourse, his work is a redeeming meditation on the various formations of claims to orthodox power and the ascription of heresy to particular groups.

Luzūm al-Jamāʿa: (Re)membering Muhammad's community

Henderson lists five attributes of *orthodoxy* that claimants maintain about their right to and degree I now turn to the notion of *al-Jamāʿa* or "The Community" as a discursive site to witness the development of a collective Sunni identity. I first would like to review the way in which the concept of al-Jamāʿa has been used by contemporary scholars of Islamic history to describe the formation of sectarianism in Islam, specifically the rise of Sunni orthodoxy. I then end by

---

64 Henderson, *The Construction*, p. 85.

reviewing the discourse of *lazimat al-jamāʿa* as it appears in early Sunni *ḥadīth* collections and polemical works.

Jonathan Berkey's recent *The Formation of Islam* reviews the complex social, political, and sectarian dynamics of the pre-modern Islamic world. Of particular interest for the purposes of our study is his treatment of the putative "Sunni revival"—a common theme in various contemporary narratives of Islamic history. The conventional account records that "militantly Sunni regimes such as that of the Seljuks responded to the challenge of the 'Shiite century',…by vigorously re-asserting—reving—Sunni identity and claims to dominance."[65] Adding nuance to this picture, Berkey demonstrates that the changes which took place within the *Sunni community* during the tenth and eleventh centuries such as the concomitant rise of Seljuk and Ayyubid patronage of religious institutions, the consolidation of an elite Turkish military system, and the crystallization of the four legal guilds did not in fact reflect earlier relationships of religious and political power. Instead, radically new patterns and relationships were established, which were adopted and perpetuated by successive regimes in the Muslim heartlands of the eastern Mediterranean and the Mesopotamian plateau, and which extended into the modern period.[66] Such patterns set the stage for the increased homogenization and institutionalization of religious practices subsumed under the identity of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*.

In an attempt to avoid anachronism, Berkey prefers Richard Bulliet's notion of the "re-centering" of Sunni Islam over the idea of a putative revival.[67]

---

[65] Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 189.

[66] Berkey, *The Formation*, p. 196.

[67] Bulliet describes the Sunni Revival as "the first stage in the dissemination of religious institutions and standardization of Sunni religious norms that becomes the hallmark of later Islamic history." *View from the Edge*, p. 127; for the concept of recentering see pp. 169-182 in passim.

symbolic power, yet a commonwealth of Sunni lands flourished under a fairly homogenous system of education and legal administration, exemplified by the institution of the Sunni *madrasa*. Yet it is the very notion of the continuity of *a community* that remains problematic in both Bulliet and Berkey's conception of Sunni Islam prior to and after the "Shiite century."

Given Berkey's insistence on historiographic precision, it is interesting that he argues that "the history of Sunni Islam in the Middle Period is not so much one of the new developments as it is one which brought a sharper resolution to *identities and principles* which crystallized earlier [emphasis mine]."[68] Such a position assumes the presence of a "*type of Sunnism*" prior to its consolidation in terms of religious and political institutions; Qasim Zaman refers to this as the phenomenon of proto-Sunnism the emergence of which he makes the subject of an impressive monograph. According to modern scholars, then, in order to understand the phenomenon of Sunni Islam we must identify an element of Sunni Islam that must have existed prior to the political and educational institutions which are the hall marks of Sunni Islam came into being. Before this, however, we are also to assume that the major doctrinal points and competing historical perspectives that distinguish Sunnis and Shiites from one another have some kind of "proto-" status before the Shiite century. Recognizing the differences between the putative Sunni revival that took place during the late tenth to twelfth centuries and Muslim society during the late Umayyad and early Abbasid periods (eighth to early tenth century), Berkey searches for a term that can capture the *element of continuity* which allows scholars to conceive of a linear trajectory between the proto-Sunni and the Sunni revival. For Berkey this *element of continuity* is captured under the notion of "Sunni traditionalism."[69]

Like Bulliet, he is concerned with the drastic changes that occur within the "Sunni community" between the periods of the tenth and twelfth centuries when the political authority of the caliphate disintegrated into a position of

---

[68] Berkey, *The Formation*, p. 201.

[69] Berkey, p. 142. It is important to note that Berkey's overlapping periodization in the description of the formation of Sunni traditionalism and the re-centering of Sunni Islam reflects his conception of the continuity of a Sunni community before and after the "Shi'ite century." This overlapping periodization is

The distinct feature of Sunni traditionalism Berkey argues is the "emphasis on the community, the *Jamāʿa*, as the locus of religious authority, the will of which is *expressed*[70] through its consensus, *ijmaʿ*…", as articulated by the Sunni ʿulemāʾ. [71] However, the question of who exactly constituted or subscribed to "Sunni Traditionalism" is not so clear. For most of the twentieth century, scholars have had a difficult time delineating who precisely represented Sunni traditionalism and more, importantly, how as contemporary historians of the Muslim world we are to narrate their activities if we can hardly delineate their identities.

For Berkey much of what constituted this "identity" was, "in a way, simply *non*-Shīʿi Islam."[72] It is worth quoting here Marshal Hodgson's observations long ago on the problems involved in identifying the "group" that adhered to, what is so often called, *Sunni Traditionalism*,

> We do need a term for those who rejected the Shiite (and Khārijī) positions in favour of the continuing jamāʿah; but for this, the term *Sunni* is inappropriate. At best, the term *Sunni* is confusing, for it has been used, from the beginning, in special ways by those who wanted to use it exclusively for their own brand of orthodoxy. Some used it for those devoted purely the use of ḥadīth reports (*sunnah*), without speculative discussion (*kalam*)…A far more accurate term would have been *Jamāʿī*, for the point at issue was acceptance the historical jamāʿah unity, whereas all parties accepted the sunnah practice in relatively similar forms…I shall use by preference (though rather unhappily) the hyphenated phrase *Jamāʿī –Sunnī*..[73]

---

indicative of a the governing historiographic narrative in both conventional Sunni accounts and western scholarship on the history of Sunni Islam.

[70] Expressed=Represented

[71] Berkey, p. 143. Note here Berkey's recourse to *ijmaʿ* as a doctrinal notion

[72] Berkey, p.141.

[73] Hodgson, *Venture*, vol. I, p. 278.

Accepting this general framework, Patricia Crone uses the term *Jamāʿī* Muslims as a short for Hodgson's *Jamāʿī-Sunni*, defining them as "all those who refused to form separatist communities under present or future imams of their own even though they might regard the ruling dynasty as sinful—in effect all those who were not Shiites or Khārijītes…In the early centuries they were divided into hostile groups that had little in common apart from their high appreciation of communal togetherness."[74] However Crone complicates her own taxonomy by saying, "They did form a single party for some fifty years, from the first civil war to c. 700, and in that period one can call them ʿUthmānīs." Adding further complexity she says, "Jamāʿī Muslims in this book are much the same people as the Murjiʾīs of the Shiites and the Khārijites, but they include Muʿtazilite adherents of the four-caliphs thesis, and from the eleventh century onwards I shall replace the expression with 'Sunnis'."[75]

I draw upon the comments of these exemplary scholars in order to identify provisionally what I consider to be a set of historiographic and conceptual problems associated with the interrelated ideas of *Sunni traditionalism, proto-Sunnism, and al-Jamāʿa*. In an effort to map the evolution of religious and political thought in early Muslim society, most scholars have tried to identify religious groups and classes whose basic ideas and premises would manifest in later more crystallized sectarian formations. My sense is that this impulse is derived from the basic early twentieth-century emphasis on the history of ideas or an earlier fixation with positivist intellectual history more generally. Here, a particular concept such as *sunna* or *al-jamāʿa* is traced in the literary sources in order to recount its development and evolution. Such concepts function as a synecdoche, a stand in, for social formations more generally.

---

[74] Patricia Crone, *God's Rule*, 28.

[75] Patricia Crone, *God's Rule*, 29.

This reliance on intellectual history as a stand in for social history is precisely why contemporary scholars have had a difficult time distinguishing proto-Sunnis from the many other socio-religious designations that were in use in the first three centuries of Islam. Thus, if Crone argues that "Jamāʿī Muslims" were ʿUthmānis for a period, (but also Shiite and Khārijite) then Sunni later, what, if anything, does the designation tell us? By creating categories to identify elements of latter phenomenon in early more opaque periods, scholars necessarily become liable to the critique of anachronism. In conventional representations of the development of early Muslim society this could not be more the case. Equally consequential, however, for the accurate portrayal of this period is that the application of invented categories such as "Jamāʿī Muslim" or "proto-x" impose an artificial teleology on the data which immediately and necessarily attaches it to the conditions and characteristics of the presumed conclusion. Thus, when one *identifies* a proto-Sunni individual or idean centuries before anyone in Islamic society ever used the term Sunni as an indicator of group identity, one should exercise scholarly caution.

Such problems of anachronism can be avoided by a simple shift in focus away from an attempt to chart a linear development between social and political groups in the seventh and twelfth centuries towards moments of transition and rupture which account for the changes in meaning of major concepts, ideas, and uses of language. Investigation should perhaps then more directly address the location of particular ethical and religious discourses as they existed and evolved in practice. Doing so would allow the scholar of early Islamic studies to highlight moments of transition and transformation as indicators of historical development rather than identifying presumed tracks of continuity where there may be only linguistic coincidence.

As a beginning then, let us consider what is meant by *al-Jamāʿa* in terms of religious authority in first two to three centuries of Islamic history. According to Berkey, the authority of the *community* or *al-jamāʿa* was grounded on the opaque notion that it "as a whole had got things

right."[76] Crone likens the idea of the community to a caravan: "The early Muslims saw life as a journey through a perilous desert…one needed to band together under the leadership of a guide…who knew the right paths…"[77] Thus, the notion of a community and a rightly guided leader were inextricable: "Nobody could achieve salvation without an imam (or at least that there ought to be one), for there was no community without such a leader, or in other words there was no vehicle of salvation."[78] The historical memory of competing groups that challenged this basic notion would then constitute an incompatible point of distinction between religious parties and their affiliates.

Thus Shiites and Khārijites who challenged the established political rule (by which I mean nothing more than the group that exercised military hegemony) were considered outside of the *Jamāʿa*. However, what we are discussing here is a difference in degree, not type, of religious authority—earthly and divine salvation is attached to inclusion in *a community* that is led by an "Imām of guidance." It is for this reason that Crone draws a parallel between the notion of *Jamāʿa* in Sunni discourse and that of Imam in Shiite thought, arguing that over time they became mutually exclusive precisely because each concept held the same set of implications and consequences.[79] Treasured *ḥadīth* in Sunni tradition remind believers for example that the Prophet said:

> (1) "My community shall never agree on an error"; (2) "The hand of God is with the community"; (3) "A section of my community will continue to follow the truth"; (4) "Whoever separates himself from the Muslim community even a span, throws away the

---

[76] Berky, *Formation*, p. 142.

[77] Crone, *God's Rule*, p. 21.

[78] Crone, *God's Rule*, p. 22.

[79] Crone, God's Rule, p. 53.

tie of Islam from his neck"; (5) Hudhayfa is reported to have asked the Prophet: "What can save me from it [schism]?" whereupon he replied: "The community of Muslims and their leader."[80]

With this type of discourse articulating Sunni ideas about communal fidelity, earthly, and heavenly success, Crone's juxtaposition of the concepts of *imām* and *al-jamāʿa* becomes a useful one for analytic purposes.

Shiite conceptions of authenticity and continuity are made possible by the existence of the continuous Imamate. In Sunni Islam, the *Jamāʿa* is a conduit that functions in a similar though not identical fashion. That is, the use of the terms *ahl* and the *Jamāʿa* in *The People of Prophetic Custom and the Community* should be understood as powerful communitarian claims, imbued with dynamic sets of political inheritances and historical developments, which present themselves as site through which temporal and heavenly salvation is enabled. A central piece, then, of understanding "Sunnism" or "Sunni Traditionalism" is the rhetoric of *al-Jamāʿa* and its evolution in early Muslim society. Such an approach challenges the tenuous notion (ultimately a point of theological self-affirmation) that *a community* persisted intact throughout this turbulent early period and opens the way to understand the discourse of *al-Jamāʿa* in terms of a socio-religious myth central to the process of community formation.

At this point, one could begin an investigation of the *origins* of the *Jamāʿa* as it is described in religious literatures such as the *ḥadīth* or apologetic treatises. Doing so, one is likely to encounter many early traditions, similar to those above, which articulate the notion of *community* in the Qurʾānic and Prophetic discourse. Scholars can then take them as a point of intellectual, even doctrinal, origins of the concept. This is the approach adopted by Wael Hallaq,

---

[80] Wael Hallaq, "On the Authoritativeness of the Sunni Consensus" in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1986, ps. 427-454, n. 38.

who investigates the development of *ijma*ʿ as a jurisprudential category in Sunni Islam. This method of analysis—recourse to *fiqh* as a site of authority—is subject to the same set of critiques laid out earlier in this chapter regarding the presumptions of law and theology as primary authoritative discourses in early Muslim society.

The most consequential oversight, however, lies in the reification of the Sunni concept of *al-Jamāʿa* as a heuristic in our own analytic framework of sectarian formation. What one misses by only looking at *al-Jamāʿa* in the religious texts where it is cast in the voice of the Prophet Muhammad or his Companions as a timeless ethic is the immediate social and political context in which the concept was deployed. While one can make the positivist argument by using the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* as documentary sources of evidence that the concept did in fact exist during Muḥammad's life, the concept of *al-Jamāʿa* for the purposes here is only relevant in so much as it relates to the political fractiousness of the early Muslim polity which gave rise to the first stages of Islamic sectarian formation. Thus, the most important historical context to conduct a genealogy on the term *al-Jamāʿa* is the Umayyad state.

Patricia Crone explains the overlap between the concept of *al-Jamāʿa* and Umayyad policies:

> The Umayyads constantly stressed the importance of sticking to the *jamāʿa*, the collective body or compact majority. 'Satan is with the individual,' as al-Walid I reputedly said…one stuck to the *jamāʿa*, and thus stuck to the safe path, by obeying the Umayyad imams of guidance, who were way-marks and lodestars to their followers and who never tire of enjoining obedience (*ṭāʿa*) in their official letters.

If the *jamāʿa* and loyalty to the Umayyad state were inextricable in the first Islamic century then how are we to understand the preservation of the *jamāʿa* as a foundational concept in Sunni Islam centuries later? Put another way, why didn't the Abbasid caliphate simply become a Hashimī

Shiite Imamate? Moreover, how did the discourse of the *jamāʿa* become decoupled from imperial politics, what Crone calls the "de-politicization of the community of believers?"[81] These and other questions have rarely been investigated directly by modern scholars although these general historiographic problems have long been known.

Drawing upon the insights of a recent study by Andrew Marsham on the early Islamic ceremonial,[82] I provisionally outline here the ways in which the notion of the *jamāʿa* was deployed by the Umayyad state to sanction the notion that loyalty to the polity it administered was considered both religious duty and the exclusive path to temporal and heavenly salvation. I then point to the way which similar discourses appear in some pre-canonical *ḥadīth* collections in order to question the degree to which Umayyad state rhetoric and the emerging Islamic ethic of communal solidarity were actually distinct.

What may be deduced from the literary materials available, it is fairly clear that both the religious texts (Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*) and political discourse across Muslim society during the late seventh and early eighth centuries indicated that an oath (*bayʿa*) of allegiance was understood as both a commitment to martial service and political loyalty as well as a declaration of faith and guarantee of salvation. Thus, for early Muslims the most pressing question was "who constituted the community and whom they should follow into war."[83]

That the Umayyads considered their own rule in such terms was made clear Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds in their influential work, *God's Caliph* first published in 1986. Andrew Marsham further points out the inextricable relationship between salvation and political loyalty.

---

[81] Crone, *God's Rule*, p. 30.

[82] Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

[83] Marsham, *Rituals*, p. 102.

To illustrate, he draws upon a tradition that describes ʿAbd Allah b. ʿUmar's reaction when the people of Medina refused to continue their allegiance to Yazīd in 680:

> When the people threw off allegiance (*khalaʿa*) to Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya, Ibn ʿUmar gathered his sons and his family. Then he said the shahada. Then he said, 'To begin: we have already pledged allegiance to this man according to the pact of God and His Messenger (*fa-innā qad bāyaʿnā hādhā al-rajul ʿalā bayʿ, Allāh wa-rasūlihi*), and I heard the Prophet say: "Truly a flag is raised for the traitor (*al-ghādir*) on the Day of Resurrection, (on which) is stated of what his betrayal consists, and that there is no greater treachery, besides idolatry, than to pledge allegiance to a man according to the pact of God and His Messenger and then to undo (*nakatha*) his *bayʿa.*" So let none of you throw off allegiance to Yazīd nor any one of you take a prominent position in this matter (*yushrifanna fī hādhā al-amr*), for there will be a cutting-off between me and him (*fa-yakūna ṣaylam baynī wa-baynahu*).'[84]

Ibn ʿUmar's comments represent a pervasive understanding during the Umayyad period. In the well know panegyric made to the Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik by the celebrated poet al-Akhṭal for example, the notions political allegiance and "*kufr*" are made absolute inverses of one another.[85]

ʿAbd al-Malik's reign between is a critical moment to witness the rise of *al-Jamāʿa* as distinct communitarian claim. Among his most important achievements was restoring political and administrative order to a fractious polity rocked by Ibn al-Zubayr's counter-caliphate and the various Shiite uprising in Iraq such as those carried out by al-Ḥusayn and al-Mukhtār, not to mention the menacing raids of the Khārijites. The ethic of broad communal solidarity was among the main avenues through which ʿAbd al-Malik was able to solidify his political project. As

---

[84] Marsham, *Rituals,* p. 99.

[85] Marsham, *Rituals,* p. 102-5.

Marshal Hodgson noted long ago, "In his relations with the Arabs, ʿAbd al -Malik stood for the principle of the *jamāʿa*, the moral and political unity of all Arabs under the aegis of Islam; a unity which was to be enforced, if necessary, by military power."[86] It is of course under the direction of ʿAbd al-Malik that the Dome of the Rock is constructed with motifs made to challenge Christian Byzantine hegemony and place Islam in a primary position in the holy city of Jerusalem.

Andrew Marsham describes the language used byʿAbd al -Malik's governor in Kufa, Khālid b. ʿAbd Allah b. Khālid b. Usayd to demand loyalty as further indicative of the relationship between political loyalty and religious confession:

> God has imposed the duty of jihad on His servants, and required obedience to those who govern them (*wulāt al-amr*) . . . He who defies (*aṣā*) the governors and rightful authorities brings down God's wrath on himself, merits corporal punishment (*al- ʿuqūba fī basharihi*), and makes himself liable to confiscation of his property as public spoils (*istifāʾa mālihi*), cancellation of his stipend (*ilqāʾ ʿaṭāʾihi*), and exile to the furthest part of the earth and the evil places (*al-tasyīr ilā abʿad al-arḍ wa-shirr al-buldān*) . . . I swear by God (*uqsimu bi'llāh*) that I will not overcome someone in defiance of authority (*ʿāṣiyan*) after this letter of mine, but that I will kill him (*qataltuhu*), God willing. Peace be with you, and the mercy of God.[87]

Among the more striking elements of this communiqué is the threat of punishment. Marsham explains that in "the early Islamic ideological context, the penalties also reflect the 'outsider' status accorded to those in rebellion against God's covenant: the confiscation of property as 'booty' or as 'public revenue' (*fayʾ*), and the negation of rights to women and, potentially, to life, were the key features of the Muslims' treatment of unbelievers who had been defeated in war and

---

[86] Hodgson, *Venture*, vol. 1, p. 246.

[87] Marsham, *Rituals*, p. 106.

were outside treaty-obligations…"[88] That enemies of the Umayyad state were considered heretics outside the pale of the Muslim community and deserved of the worst forms of punishment is a point that cannot be overstated when attempting to understand the formation of Islamic sectarianism.

Here the themes of obedience (*al-ṭāʿa*) and defiance (*al-maʿṣiya*) are important topoi that recur in later Marwanid documents regarding Caliphal succession in the form of state letters or Caliphal decrees.[89] All of the concepts that tie together themes of Prophetic history, obedience to God, obedience to the Caliph, the duty of *jihād*, and membership in *the community* of salvation can be understood in what Michael Cook has called a "mission topos." This is a central feature in the articulation of Islamic salvation history which unites the contemporary Islamic political ethic with a transcendental aura or religious legitimacy.

Particia Crone and Martin Hinds made use of a succession letter attributed to the Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd II (r. 125-126/743-744) which displays all of these literary features in order to demonstrate the overwhelming religious authority with which the Umayyads ruled. Central to the aims of this study is the way in which an Umayyad "mission topos" includes the notion of *al-jamāʿa*:

> So the caliphs of God followed one another, in charge of that which (*amr*) God had caused them to inherit (*awrathahum*) from His prophets and over which He had deputed them. Nobody can dispute their right without God casting him down, *and nobody can separate from their* **polity** (**jamāʿa**) *without God destroying him (ahlakahum)…This is how God has acted towards anyone who has departed from the obedience (fāraqa al-*

---

[88] Marsham, *Rituals,* p. 108.

[89] Marsham, *Rituals*, p. 153-154.

ṭāʿa) to which He has ordered (people) to cling, adhere and devote themselves, and through which it is that the heaven and earth are supported (*qāmat bihā al-samawāt wa'l-arḍ*). . .[90]

The manifold Qurʾānic allusions in this text are obvious. One of the most important being that the polity, *al-jamāʿa*, fulfills God's primordial covenant which is understood as that made between God and Adam prior to the creation of the rest of humanity.[91] Thus, membership in, and loyalty to, the *jamāʿa* became inextricably bound up with the discourse of political obedience and thus becomes a central feature of early Muslim religious sensibilities.

The degree to which the Umayyad state actually enjoyed the genuine religious loyalty of its subjects is an impossible question to speculate much less answer. Some have argued that the religious overtones of Umayyad self-representations were *merely rhetorical* and have been misunderstood by modern scholars. Likewise, the argument can also be made that Umayyad courtiers were drawing upon pre-existing concepts and ideas in order to draw support from the independent religious classes. Such critiques have been advanced largely in order to promote the notion that Islamic religious ethics developed independently from direct Umayyad influence.

Patricia Crone, following Marshall Hodgson, has made the argument that the idea of th *jamāʿa* as a locus of religious authority was likely already developing in the late Umayyad and early ʿAbbasid periods. Indeed, the rhetoric of *al-jamāʿa* as retained in the *ḥadīth* collections indicates an early and fairly widespread ethic of "clinging to the *jamāʿa*." Variably expressed as *luzūm al- jamāʿa* or *lāzimat al- jamāʿa*, the notion of "clinging to the *jamāʿa*" was prevalent enough to warrant early eighth century *ḥadīth* collectors to consciously organize material related

---

[90] Marsham, *Rituals,* p. 174.

[91] Marsham, *Rituals*, p. 175.

to the injunction under its own section. Thus ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/826) records utterances from the Prophet and his companions attesting to the religious compulsion of staying attached to the community. He also records other reports mandating *listening* and *obedience*.

A prominent report that recurs in many *ḥadīth* collections is related on the authority of the Companion al-Ḥārith al-Ashʿarī.[92] The report appears in different versions with early renditions visible in the *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq, the *Musnad* of al-Ṭayālisī and the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. The segment important for this subject has Muḥammad say,

I command you in five [duties] that Allah has commanded me in: *al- jamāʿa*, listening (*samʿ*), obeying (*ṭāʿa*), emigration (*ḥijra*) and holy war (*jihād*) in the cause of Allah. Thus, whoever departs from the community (*al-jamāʿa*) so much as a hand's width, verily he has thrown off the tie (*ribqa*) of Islam from his neck, except he who returns.[93]

This report and its variants are but one example of a plethora of available materials that articulate a similar ethic. Outside of *ḥadīth* compilations it is telling that Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (d. 311/923), whose collected *responsa* from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal likely mark the beginning of the formation of the Ḥanbalī school of jurisprudence begins his text with a similar *ḥadīth*.[94]

One may choose to recognize in this report a continuous ethical tradition faithfully transmitted from a Companion of Muḥammad in the seventh century to the *ulemāʾ* (religious scholars) of the ninth and tenth centuries in Baghdad and elsewhere. One may also assume no

---

[92] His name is al-Ḥārith b. al-Ḥārith al-Ashʿarī, but the ḥadīth is sometimes quoted as being reported by Abū Mālik al-Ashʿarī, which is one of al-Ḥārith's known kunyas. He is not to be confused however with another companion with the same kunya. For a discussion on how early ḥadīth transmitters were prone to this mistake see, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 426, vol. 6, p. 481.

[93] Al-Ṭayālasi, *Musnad*, vol. 2, p. 14 # 1163; ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanāʿnī, *al-Muṣannaf*, v. 11, p. 339, # 21771. Also see Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, v. 5, p. 114 # 16842; v. 5, 228 # 17467; v. 6 pg. 471 # 22530.

[94] Melchert, *The Formation*, pp. 137-155; Al-Khallāl, *al-Sunna*, p. 49.

direct relationship between Umayyad state policies and this tradition. Doing so however would overlook the political and religious context of the report's transmission in Muslim society regardless of debates surrounding the authenticity of the *isnād*. On the lower, that is later, end of the report's chain of transmission are the elites of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* who recorded the material. It may be more interesting to look at the report's upper (e.g. earlier) attestations of documentation in order to better understand the early political context of this report.[95]

To begin at the Companion level, the report is transmitted by al-Ḥārith b. al-Ḥārith al-Ashʿarī, a companion of Syrian origin whose sole transmission from Muḥammad is this report and its variants. Nothing further is known about him. The individual responsible for transmitting it from him is Mamṭūr Abū Salām al-Aʿraj al-Aswad al-Ḥabashī. He is described as having a Yemenite origin though he had been a slave of an inhabitant of the people of Syria. The biographers point out that the *nisba* al-Ḥabashi stems from either a tribe or a quarter in Ḥimyar and should not be confused with an Ethiopian origin. He is said to have been called by the Caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz to relate to him a report from the Prophet describing the heavenly pool (*al-Ḥawḍ*). When he was called by the Caliph, the biographers record that he was transporting the mail, which indicates that he was operating in an elite or at least sub-elite, socio-political milieu. He is said to have reported from Kaʿb al-Aḥbār among a number of other prominent figures.[96] It is not known when he died.

The next figure in the *isnād* is Mamṭūr's grandson Zayd b. Salām for whom the biographers say next to nothing other than confirming his reliability, noting his relationship to his

---

[95] Muḥammad →Mamṭūr → Zayd b. Salām → Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr: In the various renditions of this *ḥadīth* the names of informants is consistent until Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr after which the chains spread out. He may thus be considered the "common link" in the report.

[96] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tarkih Madinat Dimashq*, vol. 63, pg. 190. That he was a mail carrier is also confirmed by Ibn Saʿd who mentions this in passing when discussing the scholars of al-Yamāma, Ibn Saʿd, *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, v. 6, p. 78.

grandfather, his colleagues and pupils.[97] After Zayd b. Salām, the figure in the isnād can be considered the "common link" given that all of the variants of the *ḥadīth* cross at his name. He is Abū Naṣr Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr al-Yamāmī (d. 129). He was among the clients of the Banū al-Ṭāyy from Basra and was held by later ḥadīth critics in high esteem, counting the prolific jurist ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAmr al-Awzāʿī as one of his students. Shuʿba is said to have preferred his transmissions to those al-Zuhrī, and, according to Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī, no one had preserved more knowledge from Medina than he.

While little detail can be discerned about his social and political status, two pieces of information taken together at least give some insight into the political location he most likely occupied in early Muslim society. The first concerns his *nisba*, al-Yamāmī. Al-Yamāma,[98] located in the middle-eastern Arabian peninsula, was the site where the famous "imposter prophet," Musaylima the Liar, refused to submit to Muḥammad's command at Medina but was later vanquished. The Banū Ḥanīfah, the main tribal group in the region, were again enemies of the emerging Muslim state during the Wars of Apostasy. Much later the Banū Ḥanīfah and the al-Yamāma region rose in rebellion against the Islamic state. This time the effort led to the establishment of an autonomous Khārijite state between 61/680 and 73/692 under the direction of the Najda b. ʿAmir who was in alliance with Nāfiʿ b. al-Azraq. It was not until the reconsolidation of the Umayyad state under the Caliphal direction of ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwan and the military command of al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf that al-Yamāma was brought to some semblance of order. During al-Ḥajjāj's political reign, al-Yamāma was conjoined with al-Baṣra as a political unit. All of this occured during the lifetime of Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr, who is said to have been originally from Basra but moved to al-Yamāma.

---

[97] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, v. 2, p. 303.

[98] Information provided here on al-Yamāma is summarized from ʿAbd Allah al-Askar, *Al-Yamāma in the Early Islamic Era* (Ithaca: Ithaca Press, 2002) pp. 32-42, 106-140.

There is sufficient reason to conclude that his move there was part of an Umayyad effort at stabilization. To confirm this, the tribal group to whom he was attached as a client—the Banū Ṭayy—was not a group native to the region of eastern Arabia or Iraq for that matter. Rather the Banū Ṭayy, were originally from Northern Arabia and made up one of the primary tribal groups of the early Muslim conquest armies, having participated in campaigns as early as during the reign of Abū Bakr. To add evidence to the notion that Yaḥyā operated within a state sanctioned religious milieu, it is worthwhile to note that one of his students was a judge in al-Yamāma—ʿIkrima b. ʿAmmār (d. 159) —who was noted for is reliable transmission of Yaḥyā's reports.[99] ʿIkrima was also originally from Basra and likewise relocated to al-Yamāma.

Returning to the question of the extent of Umayyad influence in shaping the religious discourse of *al- jamāʿa*, this prosoprographical analysis has shown that at the very least such communal sensibilities were operative in official or semi-official state capacities. That is, even conceding the point that Umayyad political rhetoric was drawing upon an independent or pre-existing religious ethic, it is still illuminating that the first texts which articulate such an ethic—*al- jamāʿa* as salvation—nonetheless point to a social and political milieu that conflates loyalty to the Umayyad state with religious devotion.

Of course, we have reviewed here just one tradition. To argue that the concept of *al-jamāʿa* originates in an official Umayyad capacity, much more work is surely needed. However, a preliminary review of some other prominent ḥadīth that carry the theme of *al-jamāʿa* also indicate intimate connections with Umayyad patronage networks. For example, Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 261/875) under the section "The obligation to stick to the community of Muslims when civil discord appears" enlists a tradition in which Muḥammad foretells a group of companions of days of trial and tribulation ahead. When asked how to endure such days he responds, "follow the

---

[99] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, v. 4, p. 228.

jamāʿa of the Muslims and their imām."[100] If we begin with the transmitter that appears after the Companion level we encounter a certain Abū Idrīs al-Khawalānī, a Damascene judge described as one of the giants of the al-Tābiʿīn (Followers).[101] Further down the chain of transmission well into the Abbasid period, we find al-Walīd b. Muslim al-Dimashqī (d. 175/791), a client of Banī Umayya, student of al-Awẓāʿī, and regarded by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal as among the most intelligent men he ever encountered from Syria.[102]

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that the notion of orthodoxy in Islam, though radically different than that conceived in other religious traditions, should not be abandoned as an analytic project altogether. Rather, understanding orthodoxy as a function of power and discourse, as discussed in chapter 1, it may be possible to trace the formation of the rhetoric of hegemony through which Sunni Islam both became established and persevered through history. I have attempted a preliminary exploration into that possibility by first deconstructing the concept of al-*jamāʿa* as it has been approached by modern historians and then analyzing the discourse of al-*jamāʿa* in the socio-political context of the first two centuries of Islamic history.

---

[100] Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, v. 12, p. 186, # 4740. Isnād: Muḥammad ← Ḥudayfa b. al-Yamān ← Abū Idrīs al-Khawalānī ← ʿUbayd Allah al-Ḥaḍramī ← ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Yazīd b. Jābir ← al-Walīd b. Muslim ← Muḥammad b. al-Muthanā.

[101] Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, v. 4, p. 156; al-Dhahabī, *Siyār*, v. 5, p. 253-255.

[102] Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, v. 19, p. 455.

IV

The Persistence of Heresy:

Paul of Tarsus, Ibn Sabaʾ, and the problem of Shiism

There are many textual sites where Sunni sectarian identity is performed in historical narrative. In this essay I discuss the parallel representations in various exegetical works of Paul of Tarsus and the infamous ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʾ. The former is said to have led Jesus's original community of believers into dissension and disarray while the latter is said to have done the same to the early Muslim community by inciting the rebellion against Islam's third Caliph, Uthmān b. ʿAffān (r. 23-35/644-656). I focus on the early and most coherent form of these narratives as they appear in the recently discovered fragments of Sayf b. ʿUmar's (d. ca. 180/796)[1] *Kitāb al-Ridda wa-l-Futūḥ* [The Book of the Wars of Apostasy and Conquests] and *Kitāb al-Jamal wa-Masīr ʿĀʾishā wa-ʿAlī* [The Book of the Battle of the Camel and the Journey of ʿĀʾishā wa ʿAlī].[2]

Sayf b. ʿUmar's work, on account of its early composition and the fact that it served as one of the primary sources for al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) reconstruction of the murder of ʿUthmān, the wars of apostasy, and the conquest of Syria have been a recurring subject of Orientalist

---

[1] Donner, "Sayf b. ʿUmar," *EI2*.

[2] Sayf b. ʿUmar al-Tamimi; al-Sāmarrāʾī (ed,), *Kitāb al-Ridda wa'l-futūḥ and Kitāb al-Jamal wa masīr Aʾisha wa-ʿAlī* (Leiden: Smitzkamp Oriental Antiquarium, 1995).

scholarship and debate since the days of M.J. De Goeje and Theodore Nöldeke.[3] Moreover, the

figure of Ibn Sabaʾ continues to incite considerable controversy in   modern Muslim sectarian

discourse. I revisit this arena of scholarship, however, not to pass judgment on the integrity of

Sayf as a historian or to speculate over the historicity ʿAbd Allah b. Sabaʾ, but instead to

demonstrate that the narrative structure of the Paul of Tarsus and Ibn Sabaʾ myths have powerful

discursive links to larger and much more persistent themes in Sunni Islam. These discursive

themes I maintain should be explored, in and of themselves, as sites through which to understand

the notion of Sunni identity. In order to do so, I engage the theoretical work on lists and canon

formation advanced by Jonathan Z. Smith. Before doing so a review of the figure of Sayf b.

ʿUmar and the recovery of his recently recovered text is necessary. As an appendix to this

chapter, a translation of the portions of Sayf's compilation which were suppressed by al-Ṭabarī is

provided.

Sayf Ibn ʿUmar and the *Kitāb al-Ridda wa-l-Futūh*

Sayf b. ʿUmar al-Tamīmī (d.197), a second century Kufan, has been the subject of wide debate in

both western and traditional studies of Islam. While discussions concerning his reliability as a

transmitter surfaced with the very inception of western scholarship on Islam and have continued

until the present, substantial advances concerning his work are now possible in light of the recent

discovery and publication of the *Kitāb al-Ridda wa-l-Futūḥ*. In modern scholarship, Sayf's

reputation as untrustworthy began with Wellhausen's wholesale condemnation of him, based

upon the idea that he was the head of the "Iraqi school of historiography", which Wellhausen

considered unreliable. His position was adopted by a host of Orientalist scholars and historians of

---

[3] Qasim al-Sāmarrāʾī, "A Reappraisal of Sayf as a Historian in Light of the Discovery of the discovery of his work *Kitab al-Ridda wa-l-Futuh*" in *Essays in Honor of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munnajid* (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2002) p. 545; Ella Landau-Tasseron, "Sayf Ibn ʿUmar in Medieval and Modern Scholarship" in *Der Islam*, vol. 67, 1990, 1-27.

early Islam, including Caetani, Petersen, Goitein, Gibb, Rosenthal, Schacht, Brockelmann and Shoufani.[4] The trend may have even begun earlier, with M.J. de Goeje, who was also suspicious about his reliability as we can tell from a letter he wrote to Nöldeke.[5]

The main concerns for these critics lie in the fact that Sayf's rendition of accounts did not match those recorded by other historians and that the names of most of Sayf's transmitters cannot be found in the biographical dictionaries. Furthermore, Sayf mentions a number of locations which simply are unknown in other sources and for which we have no other information. These anomalies earned Sayf the reputation of a fabricator, liar, and untrustworthy transmitter not only with modern readers but also in the eyes of Muslim critics, who in the medieval period considered him unreliable as a *ḥadīth* transmitter. These criticisms came mostly from the circles of the scholars of *ḥadīth* and were levied in accordance with the strict requirements of their discipline of tradition criticism. Thus, Wellhausen submitted what would become the standard question regarding Sayf's role in medieval Muslim scholarship: "Why would al-Ṭabarī, a respected historian and jurist, use Sayf so freely when he must have been well aware of his shortcomings?"

Considering the fact that most source critics deemed *ḥadīth* literature unfit for the extraction of historical data, it is ironic that Wellhausen relied upon the opinions of *muḥaddithūn* to assess the credibility of Sayf, who himself was not a *muḥaddith*, but an *akhbārī*. The difference between the two genres and their two distinct sets of curators in early Islamic history is the basis of Ella Landau-Tasseron's review and update of the Sayf debate.

---

[4] Ella Landau-Tasseron, "Sayf Ibn ʿUmar," p. 3, nn. 9-15.

[5] Qasim al-Sammarai, "A reappraisal of Sayf ibn 'Umar as a historian in the light of the discovery of his work *'Kitab al-Futah wa Ridda'*" in *Maqālāt wa dirāsāt muhdāhila' al-Duktur Salāh al-Dīn al-Munajjid,* 2002, p. 553.

That early Muslim *ḥadīth* transmitters did not trust Sayf has less to do with Sayf himself than with the group to which he belonged—the *akhbāriyyūn*—who constituted a threat to the authority of the *muḥaddithūn* and as such were routinely criticized by them. Landau-Tasseron points out that other historians such as al-Wāqidī and Ibn Isḥāq, considered by Wellhausen as trustworthy, are subject to similar criticism to those voiced against Sayf.[6] Ultimately, she suggests that "the question why al-Ṭabarī relied on him is not a real question, but one which springs from the prejudice against him introduced into the field by Wellhausen."[7] That Sayf was a much less controversial figure than Wellhausen and early Orientalist literature make him out to be is further attested by the fact that seminal medieval Muslim scholars such as Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) and Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) found no fault with him.[8] Furthermore, there was a movement detectable as early as the fourth/tenth century that sought to rehabilitate a number of *akhbāriyyūn* on account of the fact that they alone had built the foundations of much of the early *sīra*.[9] Whether or not these efforts included Sayf is still unclear, but this trend signals an important shift in an old rivalry.

On the more substantive criticisms of Sayf—his inconsistent dating, anomalous geographical citation, and tendency towards embellishment—to which Wellhausen as a source critic was probably most drawn, scholars such as Hinds, Blankinship and Landau-Tasseron have also added insight. Hinds, following the earlier work of Myednikov (1897) and Sezgin (1957), demonstrated that Sayf relied upon written and not only oral materials.[10]

---

[6] Landau-Tasseron, "Sayf Ibn 'Umar," p. 6.

[7] Landau-Tasseron, "Sayf Ibn 'Umar," p. 6.

[8] Landua-Tasseron, "Sayf Ibn 'Umar," p. 10.

[9] Landau-Tasseron, "Sayf Ibn 'Umar," p. 7-9.

[10] Martin Hinds, "Sayf ibn ʿUmar's Sources on Arabia in Studies" in *Early Islamic History,* eds. Bacharach, Conrad, Crone (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc. 1996), pp. 143-159; Landau-Tasseron, "Sayf Ibn 'Umar," p. 5.

transmissions therefore attest more to his fidelity than to his dishonesty as a transmitter and place him firmly alongside other transmitters who collected disparate pieces of information despite their incompatibility.[11] On the charges of invented locations, persons, and fabricated accounts, Landau-Tasseron reviews the work of Wellhausen, Caetani and others and shows that such skepticism and dismissal of Sayf as a reliable historian is at best exaggerated and at worst mistaken, and she ultimately calls for a wholesale reassessment of Sayf's renditions on an account by account basis.[12] Blankenship, in a separate study, does not provide nearly as much textual evidence as that submitted by Landau-Tasseron or Hinds, but arrives at a similar conclusion regarding the exaggerated distrust of Sayf in the field, arguing that his material could not have been fabricated outright, since the events it recounted would have been all too well-known to his immediate audience.[13] Blankinship also provides examples of similar accounts to Sayf's in other material which may corroborate his claim.[14]

The most useful insights of Blankinship, however, lie in his presentation of Sayf and his material in the social context of Kufan political infighting, and the transition between the Umayyad and the Abbasid empires. Although Patricia Crone seems to have been surprised by the fact that Sayf was an ʿUthmānid, Blankinship's understanding of the various tribal affiliations in Kufa anticipated this. He states that Sayf represented an anti-Shiite undercurrent of Kufa that likely dissented from the various Shiite uprisings initiated from the city.[15]

Inconsistencies in his

---

[11] Martin Hinds, "Sayf," p. 159.

[12] Landau-Tasseron, "Sayf Ibn 'Umar," pp. 12-23.

[13] Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The Challenge to the Empires* edited by Khalid Yahya Blankinship (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. xvii.

[14] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Challenge,* p. xviii.
[15] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Challenge,* p. xix.

ʿUmar is propelled mainly by the "opposition to the extreme claims of the ʿAlids and justification of all the Companions of the Prophet."[16]

Although Blankinship tempers anti-Sayf skepticism by placing him within his socio-political context, he nonetheless maintains that he fabricated and embellished his reports, saying that Sayf's stories "belong more to the realm of historical romance than to that of history."[17] Seemingly unaware of the later scholars who found no fault with Sayf, Blankinship makes the mistake of saying that "medieval Sunni Muslims…unanimously rejected Sayf's authority in the most absolute way possible."[18] Any contention that medieval Muslim scholars considered Sayf's work unreliable must be discarded not only because of the quality of the manuscript itself, which serves as documentary evidence in its own right, but also by the fact that historians throughout the centuries and throughout Muslim lands relied upon his work for their historical renditions. The list of scholars includes those as early as al-Minqarī (d. 212/827) and Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ al-ʿUṣfūrī (d. 240/854) and those as prominent as al-Dhahabī, al-Subkī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī.[19] More important than who did and did not consider Sayf reliable is the fact that his narratives concerning the *fitna* become standard in the Sunni historical imagination.

Outside of western studies, the work of Sayf has been subject to wide criticism in Muslim, particularly Shiite, circles. Writing in the middle of the twentieth century, Murtaḍā al-ʿAskarī has set the tone for much of this debate with the publication of his work on Sayf and He also notes that Sayf belonged to the Umayyad loyal Usayydī tribe. Ultimately, he claims that the work of Sayf b. ʿAbd Allah Ibn Sabaʾ.[20]

---

[16] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Challenge,* p. xix.

[17] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Challenge,* p. xxvii.

[18] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Challenge,* p. xxvii.

[19] For a useful list: Al-Samarrai, *A Reappraisal,* pp 534-5.

[20] Murtaḍā al-ʿAskarī, *Abdallah b. Sabaʾ* (Cairo: Maṭbūʿāt al-Najāḥ, 1961).

transmissions of Sayf, in various traditional Muslim accounts of the *fitna* and most prominently in that of al-Ṭabarī. He is said to be the son of a black woman and a Jewish convert whose sole purpose of existence was to lead the Muslims astray in religious affairs and spark and perpetuate communal strife. Al-ʿAskarī, following the methods resembling those of Wellhausen and indeed relying upon many of his conclusions, considers Sayf to be of purely malicious intent, citing familiar anomalies as evidence against his reliability. Apart from Sayf's contemporary critics, al-ʿAskarī attaches ideological motivation to him, some of which is admittedly at least tacitly possible, considering Sayf's political location in Kufa. In conclusion, al-ʿAskarī charges Sayf with outright fabrication.

Al-ʿAskarī and contemporary Sayf skeptics all have one common methodological error that can be summed up in the adage, "The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." Namely, the fact that we are unable to locate Sayf's names and places in our sources is not an indication that they do not exist, but rather that our extant source materials simply may not provide an comprehensive and exhaustive representation of the period. Again, that most Sayf critics rely upon *muḥaddithūn ṭabaqāt* for a better understanding of Sayf, the *akhbārī,* is a curiosity seemly lost upon all of them, an anomaly that leads Landau-Tasseron to state that "the lack of *ṭabaqāt* works for historians should not force us to adopt ḥadīth *ṭabaqat* as a surrogate."[21]

The recovery of fragments of Sayf's text occurred in 1991 when Qasim al-Samarrai discovered, along with a ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ manuscripts, the long sought After Allāh, *Kitāb al-Ridda wa-l-Futūḥ*, who Masīr ʿUthmān shortly, is known copied further basement appear, hiding through the Muḥammad ibn Saʿūd Islamic University in Riyadh in what he describes as a suitcase of "rat-eaten manuscripts."[22]

---

[21] Landau-Tasseron, "Sayf Ibn ʿUmar,"

[22] Al-Samarrai, *A Reappraisal,* p. 531.

whose clarity demonstrates the value of the text to whatever audience it may have served, indicates a Syrian or Egyptian provenance. Notes on the first folio bear testimony to its journey, the earliest pointing to affiliation with the rulers of Yanbūʿin the later 8 [th]/14th century, and the latest, Najd in the 13th/19th century.[23] Its value is further attested by corrections and marginalia in the manuscript itself.[24]

Al-Samarrai identifies the earliest copyist of this work as Abū Bakr b. Sayf al-Tujībī al-Miṣrī (d. 307/980), who he takes to be a contemporary of al-Ṭabarī. Thanks to the erudite work of Marianne Engle Cameron, his identification of this scholar has been proven incorrect. The Abū Bakr b. Sayf in the text is actually Aḥmad b. ʿAbd Allah b. Saʿīd b. Sayf who was a well known Shāfiʿī *muḥaddith* (d. 393/1003).[25] Al-Samarrai demonstrates through a few brief examples al-Ṭabarīʿs methods of transmission and lists a number of important changes between the source he used and the excerpts that made their way into his larger corpus.[26] Here he assumes that the texts that al-Ṭabarī was working with were virtually the same as the one he has discovered.[27] Michael Lecker has also reviewed the work and found substantial suppressions made by al-Ṭabarī in his transmission and "fragmentation" of the text.[28]

In light of al-Ṭabarī's "editing" of Sayf's text, his historiographic methods must be given yet another look. It was long held that he was simply a hardworking copyist, doing little more

---

[23] Al-Samarrai, *A Reappraisal,* p. 532.

[24] Al-Samarrai, *A Reappraisal,* p. 533.

[25] Marianne Engle Cameron, "Sayf at first: The Transmission of Sayf ibn ʿUmar in al -Ṭabarī and Ibn ʿAsākir" in James E. Lindsay (ed.), *Ibn ʿAsākir and Early Islamic History* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 2001), pp. 62-77. The manuscript itself dates from the 9th/13th century, and its Mamluk script,
[26] al-Samarrai, *A Reappraisal,* pp. 539-42.

[27] Early on Martin Hinds notes that al-Tabārī must have been working with two versions of Sayf's text.
[28] Michael Lecker, "Review: *Kitab al-Ridda...*", in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 119, No. 3, p. 533.

than simply recording and arranging reports.[29] Recently, Boaz Shoshan has sought to illuminate al-Ṭabarī's worldview and ideological leanings by demonstrating the structural arrangement of his narratives and the considerations it forces the reader to reflect on. If al-Ṭabarī, the virtual eponym of Muslim historiography, actually meddled with reports by paraphrasing, combining, and repressing them, then it may the case that we need seriously to reconsider the craft of early Islamic historiography. Instead of imagining it as an exercise in mere transmission, it should be understood as discourse, just as are other literary materials.

Narrative and Plot: Ibn Sabaʾ and Paul as Jewish Perpetrators

For nearly four decades, narrative analysis has introduced a dynamic set of methods of reading "texts" which have been applied across the humanities and social sciences. The acclaimed historian Hayden White long headed the movement to apply post-structuralist methods of narrative analysis to the discipline of history. Although his anti-positivist approaches have been criticized for blurring the lines between fiction and reality, in combination with concomitant intellectual trends, they have enabled historiographical approaches that uncover the ways a putative historical narrative reveals the socio-political bias of any text.[30]

Recalling the discussion in chapter two which highlighted the relationship between historical discourse and communal identity, it is important to recognize the central place the sensitive issue of the murder of the third Caliph ʿUthmān and the ensuing civil discord (*fitna*) holds in Islamic sacred histories. Here, Hayden White's notion of emplotment patterns plays an

---

[29] The few analyses conducted thus far on the Sayf fragments have shown that al-Ṭabarī was probably working with more than one version of Sayf's text and with only minor adjustments copied Sayf's transmissions dutifully (Lecker 1999; al-Samarrai 2002; Cameron 2001). For our purposes it is important to note that al-Ṭabarī transmitted virtually all of Sayf's narratives about Ibn Sabaʾ and with few exceptions placed them within their corresponding sequence in his own narrative structure (Samarrai 2000, 55).

[30] Richard Vann "The Reception of Hayden White" in *History and Theory* 37:2, pp. 143-61.

especially significant role. It is through this historical episode that most Muslim sectarian identities are remembered and reproduced. When reviewing the murder of ʿUthmān, the eminent historian, jurist, and exegete Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī transmitted the notorious story of Ibn Sabaʾ, also known as ʿAbd Allah b. al-Sawdāʾ (son of the black woman), the nefarious Jewish convert to Islam whose pernicious machinations, along with those of other adherents to his movement, the Sabaʾiyya, led to revolt against ʿUthmān, his murder, Shiite heresy, the Battle of the Camel, and ultimately to the dissolution of the unity of the early Muslim community. Al-Ṭabarī's primary sources for this set of historical reports were the works of Sayf b. ʿUmar.

In a review of the Sayf fragments Patricia Crone, argues that given the way that his narrative exonerates ʿUthmān and the Prophet's Companions of any involvement in the Caliph's assassination and the ensuing civil war, it is clear that Sayf was an Uthmanī.[31] Indeed, when reading the events of the *fitna* through the frame of Ibn Sabaʾ one realizes that he and his Sabaʾiyya—the fictitious Shiite movement said to have been started by Ibn Sabaʾ —constitute a critical *topos* in early Sunni self-imagining.

The first time Ibn Sabaʾ appears in Sayf's text is in a short entry briefly describing his origins from Yemen and having been born to a black mother. Hence, he is referred to regularly as Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, son of the black woman. He is said here to have converted to Islam during the sixth year of ʿUthmān's reign.[32] The timing is significant because it was in the sixth year of the caliph ʿUthmān's reign when he is described as having dropped the Prophet's ring into a well, which has been interpreted as symbolizing the loss of an era of authority and legitimacy.[33] The placement of

---

[31] Patricia Crone "*Kitab al-Ridda wa'l Futūḥ*....by Sayf b. ʿUmar al-Tamīmi, edited by Qasim al-Samarrai…" in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britian and Ireland* 6, 1996: 237-240.

[32] Sayf, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, p. 55.

[33] Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The Crisis of the Early Caliphate,* trans. Stephen Humphreys (Albany: Albany State University of New York, 1990), pp. 63-4.

this report in al-Ṭabarī's chronicle is critical because it appears directly before the discussion about Abū Dharr's confrontation with ʿUthmān which we will describe shortly. The six year partition of ʿUthmān's caliphate was a common way for many Muslims to describe the events of his turbulent reign.[34] Al-Ṭabarī describes the world as having fallen into chaos when Ibn Saba converted to Islam.[35]

Ibn Sabaʾ also appears in a report concerning the ousting of Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ b. Abī Uḥayḥa, ʿUthmān's nephew and son-in-law, whom he appointed governor of Kufa.[36] Here, Ibn Sabaʾ is said to have brought those with whom he had been conversing with around the circle of Yazīd b. Qays, who is credited with having led the movement against Saʿīd. There is no further mention of him in this section, but as is the case throughout his appearances, he is presented as an instigator of rebellion and strife.

The next appearance comes in the narration of the story of Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, the well-known companion of Muḥammad who is said to have been among the earliest converts to Islam and who is often remembered because of his confrontations with ʿUthmān and Muʿāwiya over the alleged abuse of public funds by ruling elites in Syria. Here Ibn al-Sawdāʾ is said to have first approached Abū Dharr asking him about Muʿāwiya's use of the phrase "God's money" in reference to public funds, which is the center piece of Abū Dharr's disagreement with Muʿāwiya. Ibn Sabaʾ is then to have approached Abū al-Dardāʾ, apparently to ask the same questions, who immediately recognized him as a Jew and expelled him from his presence. This is an interesting point given that Abū al-Dardāʾ himself was said to have been a Jewish convert to Islam and close associate of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār. Ibn Sabaʾ then went to ʿUbādah b. al-Ṣāmit, who took him to

---

[34] Wilfred Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 85.

[35] al-Ṭabarī, *The Crisis,* p. 225.

[36] Sayf, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, pp. 70-1.

Muʿāwiya exposing him as Abū Dharr's instigator.[37] It is interesting to note here that the later two companions, Abū al-Dardāʾ and ʿUbādah b. al-Ṣāmit, who are ranked as reputable Companions, were affiliated with the Umayyads. Although the date of death for Abū al-Dardāʾ is subject to dispute, he is said to have been appointed judge of Damascus during ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb's caliphate and worked closely with Muʿāwiya in the conquest of greater Syria.[38] ʿUbāda b. al-Ṣāmiṭ is also said to have been sent by ʿUmar as a judge and teacher to Syria, where he settled in Ḥimṣ and then took up the first post as judge in Ramlah, where he eventually died and was buried.[39]

Both figures are affiliated with the emergence of the first Islamic expansions and are said to have played important roles in the early dissemination of Islam, and both are said to have resisted the temptations of Ibn Sabaʾ. Meanwhile, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, considered a righteous Companion in his own right and one who also participated in the expansions, but whose memory is tainted by his confrontations with ʿUthmān and Muʿāwiya, seems not to have been strong enough to resist the deceitful propaganda of Ibn Sabaʾ. Already at this early stage, a Syrian-ʿUthmānid motif emerges, wherein protest against ʿUthmān's regime is seen as a direct product of Ibn Sabaʾs machinations. This narrative also simultaneously serves as an alternative to Shiite narratives of Abū Dharr which hold him in high esteem for his resistance to the Umayyad clan.

The next time Ibn Sabaʾ appears, he is reported to have taken residence with a certain Ḥukaym b. Jabala who, according to the sources, was originally part of the lead command on the frontier of Sind but was ultimately unsatisfied with the scarce spoils on that front and as a result

---

[37] Sayf, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, pp. 102-3.

[38] Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995), pp. 297-99).

[39] Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995), p. 355.

took to thievery and marauding and abandoned of his tribal affiliations.[40] Ḥukaym b. Jabala reoccurs throughout Sayf's narratives as the leader of a contingent from Baṣra to Medina where amongst other treacheries he is said to have thrown stones atʿUthmān while he was de livering a Friday sermon is said to have presented theological and legal problems to the circle of individuals around Ḥukaym.[41] Incidentally in this short entry, Ibn Sabaʾ is said to have been recognized as deceitful by ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿĀmir b. Kurayz, a cousin of ʿUthmān whom he appointed governor of Basra.[42] More importantly, this is the first report where Ḥukaym is mentioned in Sayf's text, thus rendering his association with, Ibn Sabaʾ both a premonition of things to come and a clear point of *ad hominem* attacks.

The next appearance of Ibn Sabaʾ is the most significant report about him. Here he is introduced fully by Sayf and is treated biographically under the heading entitled "The Beginning of the Murder ofʿUthmān." [43] It is also the lead report in al-Ṭabarī's description of the year 35 A.H., the year of ʿUthmān's murder underneath a heading which describes the military encampments of the Egyptians and Iraqis and directly precedes the section onʿUthmān's murder.[44]

---

[40] Martin Hinds, "The Murder of the Caliph ʿUthmān" in *IJMES*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1972, pp. 450-469; pp. 461-2.

[41] Sayf, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, pp. 91-2.

[42] Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Al-Istīʿāb*, pp. 64.

[43] Sayf, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, pp. 135-7.

[44] al-Ṭabarī, *The Crisis*, pp. 145-7.

"commanding the good and forbidding the evil." ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Sawdāʾ is listed as belonging to a band from Egypt who had persuaded ʿAmmār b. Yāsir, one of Shiite Islam's most esteemed figures, to join their cause. It is important to note also that ʿAmmār b. Yāsir was killed at the Battle of Ṣiffīn.[45]

Thus far in Sayf's narratives of Ibn Sabaʾ the formulation of a frame appears in which the Shiite claim of ʿAlī's succession sits at the center and is couched by heresies concerning Muhammad's return, which are in turn surrounded by grievances against ʿUthmān's authority and that of his governors throughout the early Islamic state. All of these contingencies are presented as the machinations of the cunning ʿAbd Allah ibn Sabaʾ. All other mentions of Ibn Sabaʾ, Ibn Sawda, or the Sabaʾiyya in Sayf's text conform to the narrative patterns thus far presented.

Other significant associates of Ibn Sabaʾ were said to be ʿUmayr b. al -Ḍābiʾ, who along with Kumayl b. Ziyād opposed ʿUthmān and rode out from Kūfa to Medina to confront him. [46] Much later when ʿUmayr was "but a frail old man" he was executed by Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf in vengeance for his role in ʿUthmān's murder. [47] It is also quite significant to note that Kumayl b. Ziyād al-Nakhaʿī is the same figure associated in Shiite tradition with the well known "Prayer of Kumayl" read customarily in Ithnā ʿAsharī (Twelver) circles on Thursday nights. He is said to have been a close companion of ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib and fought alongside him in his various campaigns. Kumayl was also eventually killed by Ḥajjāj's forces.[48]

Ibn Sabaʾ is said to have traveled throughout the Islamic lands in efforts to lead people astray; only the Syrians were able to resist his temptations, whereas he was fully embraced by the Egyptians. Here he begins to ,introduce theological deviations. He advocates the idea of Muḥammad's return, the divinely mandated succession of ʿAlī, and begins writing to his followers in the other garrison towns, urging them to proclaim publicly that they are

As the dust of ʿUthmān's murder began to settle and ʿAlī rose as Caliph, Sayf has the Sabaʾiyya warning ʿAlī of the woes of leadership when they immediately begin to conspire

[45] Reckendorf, "Ammār b. Yāsir," *EI2*

[46] Sayf, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, pp. 83-6.

[47] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Crisis,* p. 233.

[48] Al-Ṭabarī, *Biographies of the Prophet's Companions and their Successors* edited by Ella Landau-Tasseron (Albany: State University of Albany Press, 1998), p. 270.

against him, urging the Bedouin to revolt.[49] Ibn Saba' finally appears at the Battle of Camel,

provoking hostilities between the two sides, just as they were ready to make peace.[50] The last

time we see the Saba'iyya is at the end of a description of the Battle of the Camel, when ʿĀʾisha

is heading back to Mecca and Medina and the people are offering allegiance to ʿAlī. It is here that

the Saba'iyya are said to have left the city without ʿAlī's permission, which caused him to ride

after them in order to ensure that they cease their machinations.[51]

While the pro-ʿUthmānī and anti-Shiite basis in the text should be clear from the

foregoing historical reports, it is essential to recognize the way in which this provincial narrative

is wedded to the universal claims of Islamic monotheism as part of a grand narrative of prophetic

history. This may not be clear when the story about the murder ofUthmān is presented in the

chronological schema provided by al-Ṭabarī, but when read in Sayf's text the message is clear. In

the portion of *Kitāb al-Ridda* entitled "The Beginning of the Murder ofʿUthmān," Sayf re lates a

set of prophetic *ḥadīth* reports forewarning the Muslim community about going astray:

> The Messenger of God, Peace be upon him, said: You will follow the path of those who
> came before you step by step and inch by inch even if those who came before you were to
> enter a mouse's hole, you would follow just like them, and he read…["They had enjoyed
> their portion, so enjoy your portion, as those before you enjoyed their portion, and you
> indulged in play and pastime as they indulged in play and pastime."][52]

Immediately after these warnings, Sayf provides what seems to be an unwarranted digression into

Christian history, wherein the apostle Paul of Tarsus is portrayed as a malicious and insincere

---

[49] Sayf, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, pp. 241-3.

[50] Sayf, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, p. 265.

[51] Sayf, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, p. 362.
[52] Sayf, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, p. 131-2.

Jewish convert to Christianity and is ultimately blamed for the misguidance of Jesus's followers.[53]

Sayf begins his report on Jesus by noting that as many as seven hundred families amongst the Israelites heeded the Messiah's prophetic mission. Paul of Tarsus, described as a king, ordered that the Christians be killed. They fled into the mountains, and the pursuit tired his forces. At this point Paul decided to disguise himself by wearing their clothes in order to be led to their encampment. When he was found out, he presented himself as having received a vision from Jesus and thus swore to join their ranks and teach them the Torah. He requested that a small house for worship be built for him in which he retreated in seclusion. He emerged at various intervals with a new revelation each time. First he changed the direction of prayer (*qibla*), then retracted Mosaic dietary laws, and finally proscribed *jihād*. Then he emerged and requested the audience of only four individuals—Yaʿqūb, Nesṭūr, Malkūn, and al-Muʾmin—who are meant represent the heads of the three eastern Christian churches, the Syrian orthodox, Nestorians, and Melkites. The fourth figure is cast as a Muslim prototype. He asked them,

> Have you [ever] learned [e.g. heard] of any human who created a creation from clay, and breathed [life] into it [by himself?], they said, "no." He said, "Have you [ever] learned of any human who cured leprosy and blindness, and could resurrect the dead?" They said, "no." He said, "Have you [ever] learned of any human who knew what people were eating and saying in their homes?" He said, "I believe that Allah the Most High, revealed himself to us then concealed himself."

After this revelation the community was thrown into disarray, with Yaʿqūb, Nesṭūr, and Malkūn either agreeing with Paul or offering their own renditions of Jesus's divinity.

---

[53] Sayf, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, p. 132-5. For a discussion about this text in the context of other apocryphal descriptions of Paul see Koningsveld, "The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabus" in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 20, 1996, pgs. 200-228.

The believer (*al-Muʾmin*), aghast, exclaims, addressing his companions,

No, by God, he is trying nothing other than to lead you astray! [We should be] amazed at our acceptance of him [Paul]. We are the companions of Jesus, without him, surely we saw Jesus and listened to him, and obeyed him. [Woe unto you]! No by God, he is trying nothing other than to lead you into error and cause you to stray.

The believer's warnings were not heeded, and the community split into four groups, each corresponding to the figures mentioned above. After their confrontation with the believer, they returned to Paul and with him decided to track down the believer and kill him. The believer and his small community (said to be the smallest of the four) eventually fled to Syria, where they were provided security as long as they lived in hermitages and caves.

Sayf adds that they were forced into this religious innovation (*bidʿa*) of monasticism because of their circumstances. In order to augment the authenticity of this report, he confirms it by citing Qurʾān 57:27: "But the monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them, but they sought it only to please Allah therewith, but that they did not observe it with the right observance." He concludes by reporting, "The believers amongst them departed to western Arabia. The Prophet found thirty monks among them believing in him. *And like him (Paul) in this nation is the example of Ibn Sabaʾ*."[54]

In addition to the explicit comparison between Paul and Ibn Sabaʾ, there are a number of narrative parallels between the two figures and the two stories of heretical innovation in Sayf's rendition. As will be demonstrated shortly, these correspond to prevalent *topoi* in other Sunni exegetical works. The first is the premonition of discord as represented in Sayf's invocation of the prophetic ḥadīths which foretell the going astray of the community. The second is inherency of

---

[54] Sayf, *Kitāb al-Ridda*, p. 135.

Jewish hostility to the Divine Will and the Jewish will to infiltrate the divinely guided community. The third is the introduction of heretical innovation as a part of that Jewish propensity to subversion. The fourth is the violent dismemberment of the community. Finally, there is the motif of survival and continuity whereby one group manages to resist and persevere despite overwhelming odds. Through these narrative patterns the local nature of Sayf's ʿUthmānī narrative is tied to the larger universal pretenses of Islam in general. How this narrative contributed to the formation of a Sunni imaginary of collective identity is the question to which we now turn.

Sunni Self-Legitimation and the Islamic Imperial Prerogative

Despite the apocryphal nature of the Ibn Sabaʾ account, the social fact that he was (and continues to be) believed in as a historical figure in many prominent Sunni circles is more significant than any discussion concerning his actual historicity. Likewise, the historical (in)accuracy of Muslim accounts of Paul of Tarsus is more revealing of Muslim identity formation than is any discussion about origins or development of the text itself. The combination of these two stories in Sayf's account is important because, despite Sayf ʿUmar's having been discredited as a reliable historian by the doyens of Muslim historical criticism, his narratives made their way into annals of the highly respected Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī and thereby into the venerable canon of Sunni historical writings.[55]

This discursive connection is also revealing of Sunni identity formation for the fact that Sayf and al-Ṭabarī could scarcely be said to have shared political, tribal, or religious affiliations, yet they share a common historical vision of the events of the early community. Sayf's narrative

---

[55] Frederick Donner, "Sayf ibn ʿUmar," *EI2*

displays a clear ʿUthmanīd bias, while al-Ṭabarī faced severe hostility from his *ahl al-ḥadīth* (often also ʿUthmānid) contemporaries for his alleged Shiite sympathies. I would argue that what accounts for this connection between al-Ṭabarī and Sayf is the larger phenomenon of a distinctly Sunni sectarian historical imagination emerging within the politically fragile environment of the Abbasid period which placed at its center the existence and continuity of *a community* from the Prophet's age into the present. Such self-imagining and legitimation were largely based on fundamental beliefs concerning the necessary righteousness of the early community and more on the important idea that the existing body politic, or the *jamāʿa*, was a direct extension of that early community and thus *the* legitimate Muslim party in a peripatetic empire defined by what Fred Donner would call a context of "multiple orthodoxies."[56]

Sayf's narrative circulated in the late second Islamic century during the generation that saw the overthrow of the Umayyad Caliphate (r. 41-132/661-80 in 132/750) and the rise of the Abbasid house. Amongst these changes, Shiite inspired rebellions were a constant phenomenon, despite the Hashimite-Shiite leanings of the early Abbasids.[57] Moreover, by the time of al-Ṭabarī's writing, Ismāʿīlī Shiite groups had long established formidable propaganda centers around the Muslim empire including its center at the time, Baghdād.[58] Before the end of al-Ṭabarī's own life, North Africa had become the center for the rise of the formidable Fāṭimid state. Soon after his death, the Shiite Buyid Emirate would effectively end Caliphal rule in Baghdad.

It is also in this context that the examination and verification of historical transmitters (*taʿdīl*) became an increasingly normative feature of Sunni jurisprudential and hadīth literatures.[59]

---

[56] Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Darwin Press 1998), pp. 285-90.

[57] Qasim Zaman, *Relgion and Politics under the Early ʿAbbāsids*, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 33-69.

[58] Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 197-204).

In this sense, the rigorous *isnād* analysis of ninth and tenth century *ḥadīth* critics can be seen as an example of the formation of a pristine Sunni vision of the past. Thus, Ibn Saba, by rehabilitating the Prophet's Companions and providing an explanatory mechanism for competing Shiite historical claims, serves an emerging Sunni historical narrative and its own assertions of orthodoxy and authenticity at a time of imperial instability.

It is critical to note, however, that Ibn Saba ʾ is not an isolated case of this mechanism, but rather one example of a broader polemical trope that links alleged Jewish hostility to Islam with Shiite dissension and heresy more generally. It is through this trope that one of the many early strategies of Sunni self-legitimation develops. Parallel forms of the Jewish-Shiite polemic can be found throughout canonical Sunni texts, a phenomenon discussed at length by Steven Wasserstrom in his *Between Muslim and Jew*. Wasserstrom points to the appearance of Jewish-Shiite polemical equations/lists in Kufa during the late first and early second Islamic centuries.[60] These lists are attributed to the well known Kufan, ʿUthmānī, *ḥadīth* transmitter ʿĀmir b. Shuraḥbīl b. ʿAbd al -Kufī al-Shaʿbī (d. 103/721-2).[61] The quintessential form of this equation appears as "the Rāfiḍa are the Jews of this community."

In a report in Ibn Taymiyya's *Minhāj al-Sunna*, attributed to al-Shaʿbī, Ibn Saba ʾ is named as one of the malevolent Jews who sets out to corrupt the community. What is significant is that the Jewish-Shiite polemic appears and seems to have currency in Kufa, the same environment where Sayf's reports presumably circulated. Although Kufa was typically known for its Shiite sympathies, it should not be surprising that some of the most pointed ʿUthmānī anti - Shiite polemic would gain circulation in the same center. As Blankinship points out, Sayf, and we

---

[59] G.H.A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 190-206.

[60] Stephen Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 100-105.

[61] G. H. A. Juynboll, "al-Shaʿbī," EI2.

could include al-Shaʿbī, represented a strong ʿUthmānī undercurrent in the city of Shiite dissent.[62] The presence of these agonistic themes emerging in Kufa confirms Frederick Donner's observation that particular geographic centers would give rise to historical narratives that reflect the political priorities in those regions.[63] It also augments my nuance of that idea, which encourages identifying tribal and patronage networks as an added layer of information available to analyze the *ḥadīth* transmission networks.

Employing Jonathan Z. Smith's influential discussion of lists as fundamental to the process of canonization, Wasserstrom also argues that such Jewish-Shiite lists/equations constitute "canons of the other…a kind of normative domestication of all (mis)belief" and thus serve to explain existing contingencies (e.g. Shiite dissension) and perpetuate myths regarding them.[64] This discourse then *persists* in various forms being replicated in a variety of settings. Hence, Ibn Sabaʾ becomes a rhetorical framing device that is but one example of a larger Jewish-Shiite polemic recurrent in Sunni discourse.

Here I would like to build upon Wasserstrom's use of Smith's discussion on canon formation. Smith argued that "canon [formation] is best seen as one form of a basic cultural process of limitation and of overcoming that limitation through ingenuity," which identifies a number of texts and compiles them in a *list* and treats them "as authoritative and immutable" be it in literate or non-literate society.[65] The items in a canonical list, Smith argues, remain rather arbitrary as individual items but nonetheless "possess mnemonic devices and codes of classification" through their mediation by "the *necessary* existence of a hermeneute, of an

---

[62] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Challenge,* p. xvii.

[63] Donner, *Narratives*, p. 227.
[64] Wasserstrom, *Between*, p. 98.

[65] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon" in *Imagining Religion: From Jonestown to Babylon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) pp. 44, 52.

interpreter whose task it is continually to extend the domain of the closed canon over everything that is known or everything that exists *without* altering the canon in the process."[66] What remains important in the cultural process of canon formation is that despite variation, circumstance, time, and geography, a relatively stable set of religious traditions, or in our case memories, can persist and retain their social function and thus display a remarkable adaptive capacity.

I would like to suggest extending Smith's application of items in a list to rhetorical/polemical topoi in narrative emplotment schemes, which fluctuate in form but remain constant in terms of basic content and thus produce recurring narrative/legitimating effects. This can be done by thinking about the *list* not in terms of its apparent structure—a formal enumeration of items—but rather its essential function, a bound sequence of items intrinsically related to one another by the hermenuete (reader/audience) and ordered in a particular fashion. Like Hayden White's notion of an emplotment sequence, a list serves to enumerate particular items in a particular order for the express social function of classification and interpretation. And similar to a list, an emplotment sequence of events in a narrative can be manipulated by expansion or reduction without changing its basic meaning.

With this comparison we can conceptualize a historical narrative, or memory in terms of a list or sequence of *topoi* wherein the actual content of the story may be manipulated, disjointed, reproduced and even occasionally forgotten, yet the social function enabled by its discursive performance persists over time and space. In this case the pervasive Islamic idea of the Christian community's simply being led astray as opposed to the Jewish community's being in active rebellion shares the same discursive space as the original followers of Jesus being led astray by Paul of Tarsus, a calculating and malicious Jew found in Sayf's text. This historical mythological construct when mapped upon collective Sunni articulations, represent Shiites as a fifth column

---

[66] Smith, "Sacred Persistence," p. 48.

within the Umma, are both insincere and with ulterior motives. This can be seen as an analogous *topos* in a larger meta-narrative of Sunni identity of deviance and obedience to the divine will in which the "plot's conclusion" confirms Sunni Islam's historical triumph as the orthodox community.

Recall Sayf's description of Ibn Sàba and its appearance after the report on Paul provided above; as a transition into the narration of Uthmān's murder he writes, "And like him (Paul) in this nation is the example of Ibn Sabaʾ." Here appears, although not explicitly stated, an example of the equation cited by Wasserstrom, "The Shiites are the Jew's of *our* community." The prominent Ḥanbali advocate and contemporary of al-Ṭabarī, Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (d. 311/923) expressed the similarity between Ibn ʾSaba and Paul through the simple axial preposition, *kamā*, "just as", in his *Masāʾil*, printed as *Kitab al-Sunna*.[67] At this juncture we see the construction of a historical narrative, which accounts for internal dissent in an imagined community attempting to come to account with its troubled history, grounded in a larger narrative that relates the Muslim community to the Christian community.

An important question remains in the simple but powerful equation: namely, who are the *we* in the text? That is, the equation does not simply say that Shiites are like Jews, but that they are like Jews as the Jews were to others—whom, presumably, we now resemble. Recalling the discussion in Chapter 2, David Carr's comments could not be more relevant: "[a]t whatever level of size or degree of complexity, a community exists wherever a narrative account exists of a "*we*" which has continuous existence through its experiences and activities."[68]

---

[67] Abū Bakr al-Khallāl, *al-Sunna* (Cairo: al-Faruq al-Hadith, 2008), v. 1, p. 392.

[68] Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, p. 163.

The "*our community*" in the equation formulas and Sayf's narrative might be seen as reflecting the vision of a religious and political community—*al-Jamāʿa*—which according to divine providence has inherited and surpassed the religious empires of the classical world, thus taking center stage in a grand narrative of world history. Most important of these historic rivals was of course the Byzantine Empire. The religious and ideological boundaries that articulated Islamic triumphalism in discourse had their physical correlations to the military frontier zones and periphery Muslim settlements on the edges of the Abbasid Empire. Known as *al-thughūr*, these borders or boundaries typically consisted of a front line of military fortifications and rear line of provisional settlements designed to support the military campaigns launched from the first. In theory there existed *thughūr* on all edges of the Islamic empire, but in practice the southeastern Anatolian region that separated Baghdad from Constantinople quickly became one of the most urgent political and religious priorities, if not obsessions, of Muslim ruling elites and masses alike, who organized annual summer campaigns against their Christian rivals.[69] Hārūn al-Rashīd was the first Abbasid Caliph to systematically reassert Muslim military power on that border, thereby continuing the trajectory of Islam's early conquests as carried out by ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and the Umayyad Dynasty. In the process, the ethos of *al-jamāʿa* would also necessarily be reconstituted to fit the current political conditions.

That the Sunni community came to see itself in this light is a suggestion laid out by Garth Fowden in his *Empire to Commonwealth* in which he argues that the relationship between monotheism or universalism and empire building or worldly power was inextricably linked with the self-representations and political ambitions of successive religious and political communities in the late antique world. Here, Fowden examines Umayyad frescos in addition to the well-known inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock which depict a political community that defined itself both Thus, in the *topos* "we/our community/just as", we find the early stages of a collective identity.

---

[69] Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic violence and holy war : studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1986).

in worldly and religious terms over and against the previous religious and political communities of the eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamian frontiers.[70] The center of the world motif would be transferred to Baghdad and the Abbasid Caliphate through the very planning of the city amongst other architectural acts of homage.[71] Later still Ibn ʿAsākir would con flate Sunni orthodoxy and the transcendental precedence of Damascus and Greater Syria in his meritorious narratives of his home city.[72] Similar patterns of mimetic social activity arising in the context of Umayyad/Abbasid and Byzantine rivalry have been demonstrated by other scholars to have pervaded cultural formations as diverse as *jihād* and gender.[73]

Whether or not we can read this much into Sayf's text on Ibn Sabaʾ and Paul may be open to dispute. However, what remains significant is the conflation of Jewish, Shiite, and Christian polemics in this particular text, a phenomenon which may bear more significance when considering the notion of audience, performance, and transmission of this story. We have already pointed out that the ʿUthmānid texture of Sayf 's narrative is subsumed in al-Ṭabarī's universalism, and the same phenomena could be pointed out in the adoption of al-Shaʿbī's Shiite-Jewish equation lists by Ibn Taymiyya in his own polemic tracts. But the discovery of Sayf's manuscript fragments themselves is also revealing of the transmission of this narrative well beyond the Abbasid period.

---

[70] Garth Fowden, *From empire to commonwealth: consequences of monotheism in late antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 138.

[71] Michael Cooperson, "Baghdad in Rhetoric and Narrative" in *Muqarnas*, vol. 13, 1996, pp. 99-113.

[72] Zayde Antrim, "Ibn ʿAsākir's Representations of Syria and Damascus in the Introduction to the Taʾrīkh Madinat Dimashq" in *IJMES* vol. 38, 2006, pp. 109-129.

[73] Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Nadia El-Cheikh, *Byzantium Through Arab Eyes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

Qasim al-Samarrai, who discovered the Sayf fragments, notes that the oldest marginal note on the manuscript reads, "The servant of God and the needy for His favour, Saʿd ibn Abū al-Ghayth the governor of Yanbū has read it" who ruled in 786/1385. [74] He fails to note, however, that this governor's father, Abū al-Ghayth b. al-Qatāda, was installed as ruler of Mecca, along with his brother ʿUṭayfa, by the Mamluk Sultan al-Mālik al-Nāṣir Muhammad (r. 698-708/1299-1309) in what proved to be a difficult policy of dismantling Zaydi Shiite hegemony in the holy city during the 14th and 15th centuries.[75] For example, Abū al-Ghayth complied with al-Nāṣir's orders to prohibit the use of the Shiite formula of the call to prayer while his brotherʿUtayfa is said to have thrown out and prohibited the Zaydī Imam from the premises of the holy sanctuary.[76] Thus, Saʿd b. Abū al-Ghayth probably served as a Sunni bulwark for the Mamluks in the Hijaz, making the presence of Sayf's text in his court an expected discursive corollary to the de-Shīʿitization policies of the Mamluk Sultanate. Incidentally, 14th-century Cairo also witnessed increasing persecution of Copts at the hands of state policies set forth by al-Malik al-Nāṣir.[77]

Narrative Persistence

The examples presented thus far demonstrate a range of socio-political contexts wherein myths about the origin of Shīism in Jewish malevolence become important discursive foundations for the expression of an imagined community. The rhetorical power of the Ibn Sabaʾ myth circulating in Saʿd b. Abū al-Ghayth's court is an expected feature of a Mamluk political context attempting

---

[74] al-Sammarai, "A Reappraisal," p. 532.

[75] Richard Mortel, "Zaydi Shiʿism and the Hasanid Sharifs of Mecca" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 19, no. 4, 1987, pp. 455-472; p. 462.

[76] Mortel, "Zaydi Shīʿism," pp. 462-5.

[77] Donald P. Little, "Coptic Conversion to Islam under the Baḥrī Mamlūks, 692-755/1293-1354" in *The Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* vol. 39, no. 3, 1976, pp. 552-569; p. 555.

to assert a catholic Sunni vision in the midst of Shiite rivalry, Mongol conquest, and repeated Crusader incursions. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Ibn ʿAsākir, a favorite of the Zengid ruler, Nūr al-Dīn (d. 569/1174), whose political career was virtually defined by his anti-Christian, anti-Shiite, policies included a detailed account of the Ibn Sabaʾ story in his massive history, which he presumably drew from a direct copy of Sayf's text.[78]

If the Ibn Sabaʾ myth served in part to define one of Sunni Islam's internal borders, that is vis-à-vis Shīʿism, then t he narrative of Paul as a nefarious Jew intent on corrupting the followers of Jesus served to define one of its most important external borders, Christianity. As a discourse enabling the collective identity of Sunni Islam, the Paul myth, like the Ibn Sabaʾ story, was expansive enough to include a range of diverse and often incompatible currents in Muslim exegetical activity. Although Paul would appear in the form of many different representations in a wide range of Qurʾānic exegesis, a few of those examples where he is depicted as source of heretical innovation deserve mention. It is also important to note that, although none of these scholars draw upon Sayf b.ʿUmar's text as a source, the narrative structure of Paul as a Jewish source of corruption remains the same.

Gabriel Reynolds has recently shown that the Muʿtazilī doyen al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) used this depiction of Paul in his polemical discussion on the origins of Christianity as did his contemporary Abū Isḥāq al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035) in his Qurʾānic commentary.[79] The

---

[78] James Lindsay, Ibn ʿAsākir, His Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq and its Usefulness for Understanding Early Islamic History" in *Ibn ʾAsākir and Early Islamic History* edited *idem* (Princeton: Darwin Press 2001), pp. 6-8.

[79] Gabriel Reynolds, *A Muslim theologian in a sectarian milieu: ʿAbd al-Jabbār and the critique of Christian origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 165-70. I thank Professor Walid A. Saleh for pointing me to this reference. I take exception however with Reynolds on one point. He argues that alternative versions of Paul exist in Muslim historical literature which do not depict him in the same polemic fashion as does the narrative that concerns us here. He points for example to the writings of Yaqūbi, Masudi, and Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, and notes that such depictions are "marked not by *theologumena*, but by an investigative and scientific spirit (Reynolds 170)." He then concludes "that 'Abd al-Jabbàr's polemical style is not simply an inheritance of earlier Islamic tradition. It is a product of his own religious thought (Reynolds 171),"

highly celebrated Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 543/1149) draws upon al-Thaʿlabī's student Abū al-Ḥasan al-Wāḥidī for his exploration of one of the many causes of Christian sectarianism and the heresy of the trinity.[80] The Mālikī Andulusian scholar Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) and the Shāfīī Abū Muḥammad al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) quote the same narrative of Paul.[81] The well respected Ḥanafī jurist Abū Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983) also found resonance with this description.[82] Much later the Khalwatī Ḥanafī Ottoman scholar Ismāʿīl al-Burūsawī (d. 1137/1724) also found this exegetical frame useful in his *Rūḥ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*.[83]

In the contemporary period, amidst ongoing political crises and sectarian tensions in the Middle East, there has been little delay in the resurgence of anti-Shiite and anti-Jewish literature in a number of Sunni circles. The motif of a linked Jewish and Shiite malevolence first evident in the report attributed to al-Shaʿbī and transmitted by Ibn Taymiyya reappears in the recent text *The Exhaustive Effort in Confirming the Resemblance of the Shiites to the Jews*.[84]

---

which is hard to understand considering Reynolds is aware that the earliest source of a Paul's depiction as a corrupting Jew is Sayf's work collated over a century, if not two, before the writings of 'Abd al-Jabbar and Thaʿlabī and this is without mentioning the appearance of Paul as a malevolent Jew in a number of locations in al-Waqidi's *Futuh al-Sham*.

[80] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzi, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr au Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1990), vol. 16, p. 30.

[81] Abū Muḥammad al-Baghawi, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī al-musammā al-mʿālim al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dar al-Maʿrifa, 1987), vol. 2, 284-285; Abū ʿAbd Allah al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jami' al-Ahkām al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1958), vol. 6, p. 24.

[82] Abū Layth al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-Samarqandī al-musammā, Baḥr al-ʿulūm* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1994), vol. 1 374.
[83] Ismāʿīl al-Barūsuwī, *Tafsīr Ruḥ al-Bayān* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 367-8.

[84] ʿAbd Allāh al-Jumaylī, *Badhl al-majhūd fī ithbāt mushābahat al-Rāfiḍah lil-Yahūd*, (Medina: Maktabat al-Ghurubāʾ al-Athriyya, 1994).

narrate the history of Judaism more generally, not to mention its timeless animosity with Islam.[85]

For many contemporary writers, the Ibn Saba myth still carries the force of historical fact. [86]

Interestingly, some of them cite the Orientalists (*mustashriqūn*) for evidence of his positive

existence.[87]

Conclusion

Through this focus on discourse, narrative, and performance, I have sought to demonstrate Talal

Asad's pithy comments regarding Islamic discursive traditions which he describes as "discourses

that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that,

precisely because it is established, has a history."[88] In our present example, the practice is not a

ritual or creedal statement, but rather the proper iteration of a shared community memory. The

repetition of this narrative, however, should not be seen as a cultural artifact or relic. Asad

More specifically, the identification of Ibn Saba and Paul is also still seemingly a viable conduit with which to

reminds readers that Islamic discursive traditions are not "necessarily imitative of what was done

in the past. For even where traditional practices appear to the anthropologist to be imitative of

what has gone before, it will be the practitioners' conceptions of what is *apt performance*, and of

how the past is related present practices, that will be crucial for tradition, not the apparent

repetition of an old form."[89]

---

[85] Muḥammad Muhanna al-ʿAlī, *Ṣirāʿinā maʿ al-Yahūdiyya bayn al-Ṣilāḥ al-Mustaḥīl wa al-Muwwājaha al-Ḥatmiyya* (Riyāḍ: Dār Umayya, 1993), pp. 363-4.

[86] Muḥammad Nādā, *Jināyyāt Bani Isrā'il ʿala al-Din wa al-Mujtamaʿ*, (Riyadh: Dar al-Lawā', 1984), pp. 320-27.

[87] Fatḥī Muḥammad al-Zoghbī, *Ghulāt al-Shiʿa wa Tā'thrihim bi al-adiyan al-Mughāyra lil-Islam, al-Yahudiyya, al-Masihiyya, al-Majusiyya* (n.l.: Maṭābiʿ ghubāshī, 1977), pp. 73-90; al-Jumaylī, *Badhl al-majhūd*, pp. 97-153.

[88] Talal Asad, "The idea of an anthropology of Islam" in *Occassional Papers* (Washington D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1986), p. 15.

[89] Asad, "The Idea of", p. 15.

exegetical texts like those reviewed here that accounts for their continued interpretation in terms of nuance, manipulation, and persistence simultaneously.

I do not dwell on the pervasiveness of the Ibn Sabàmyth and its obvious persistence in order to simply call attention to the problem of a stereotype. Nor do I wish to overstate its centrality in Sunni tradition, for many assume a Sunni identity without ever knowing about Ibn Saba᾽ or Paul of Tarsus. On the contrary, I point to the persistence of such narrative motifs in diverse contexts over time in order to demonstrate both the inertia and versatility of Sunni identity as an orthodox discourse. As J. Z. Smith argues, the repetition of these motifs points to the adaptability and limitation rather than stasis and imitation of *canon*. I have tried to show this by positing identity formation in terms of orthodoxy. I maintain that just as orthodoxy is defined by the negative construction of heresy, so too is sectarian identity defined by the exclusionary narrative construction of its presumed antithesis. In the case of Sunni identity, both Shī῾ism and Christianity, despite their great variety and change over time, remain attractive discursive sites against which the Sunni imaginary is enabled. What constitutes that attraction is a much larger and more problematic question.

It is interesting to note, however, that on the third anniversary of September 11, 2001, Dr. ῾Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Anṣāri, a former dean of the College of Islamic Law Sharī῾a, at the University Asad's approach allows for understanding historical narratives and of Qatar, reacting to the almost immediate circulation of rumors after the events the day that Israeli intelligence officers were behind the World Trade Center attacks, denounced such conspiracy theory motifs that pervade Arab and Muslim political discourse, ascribing their roots to the "legendary figure" of Ibn Sabà. Later, a prominent columnist, Mashari al-Dhayidi, in the London based Arabic paper *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, also wrote, "we are those who blew up the

Muhaya quarters [in Riyadh], not the Mossad and not Ibn Sabāʾ."[90] Such political commentary testifies to the pervasiveness of the Ibnʾ Sabāʾ idea down to the present moment. More importantly, it demonstrates the continued auto-critique of a tradition of historical narration which, if the argument in the course of this essay has anything to offer, seems to face substantial obstacles.

---

[90] For both references see The Middle East Media Research Institute: www.memri.org (Special Dispatch Series # 792 and Inquiry and Analysis # 155.), http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP79204, last accessed on June 4, 2009.

Appendix:

Translation from Sayf b. ʿUmar's *Kitab al-Ridda wal-Futuḥ*

(Section suppressed by al-Ṭabarī)

The Beginning of ʿUthmān's Murder
May Allah be satisfied with him

[Report #] 130

It has been reported to us by al-Sarī, who said that it has been reported to us by Shuʿayb, who said it has been reported to us by Sayf, from Muḥammad b. Nuwayra al-Hajīmī, from ʿAzīz b. Muknif Abī ʿUthmān al-Tamīmī, one of the tribe of ʿUsayd, and from Ṭalḥa b. al-Aʿlam al-Ḥanafī from al-Mughīira b. ʿUtība b. al-Naḥḥās who said:

The first *fitna* was [*who was not of ?*] the long reign of Uthmān —May Allah be pleased with him—and incited evil, and caused them to try [---] from the world until it made them haughty, with what came in the differences of this nation from that which was to them from him.

[Report #] 131

It has been reported to us by al-Sarī who said that it has been reported to us by Shuʿayb who said it has been reported to us by Sayf from ʿAbd Allah b. Saʿīd al -Muqbarī from Abī Saʿīd from Abī Hurayra who said:

The Messenger of God—Peace be upon him—said: You will follow[91] the path of those that came before you step by step and inch by inch even if those who came before you were to enter a mouse's hole, you would follow just like them, and he read, "enjoy your portion…until…they indulged."[92]

[Report #] 132

It has been reported to us by al-Sarī who said that it reached him from Shʿab who said that it reached him from Sayf from Abī Rawaq al-Hamdānī from Abī Ayyūb al-Hamdānī from ʿAlī. Upon him peace,[93] from al-Ḍaḥāk from Ibn ʿAbbās from the words of the Majestic and Mighty:

So enjoy your portion, as those before you enjoyed their portion, and you indulged in play and pastime as they indulged in play and pastime.[94]

[Report #] 133

It has been reported to us by al-Sarī who said that it has been reported to us by Shuʿayb who said it has been reported to us by Sayf from ʿAtiyya from Yazīd from al-Faqʿasī[95] from Ibn ʿAbbās who said:

---

[91] *litarakabnna*: Is the double *n* used for emphasis, certainty here?

[92] Sura 9:69. The text reads as such. However, the *ayat* reads: "*They had enjoyed their portion, so enjoy your portion, as those before you enjoyed their portion, and you indulged in play and pastime as they indulged in play and pastime…*"

[93] It is interesting here to note the appellation *'alayhi salām* for 'Alī which is commonly used in Shi'ite but less so in Sunnī circles. There are a number of other instances in Sayf's text where this appear

[94] This is a portion of 9:69, quoted before, what is interesting is that this report seems to be framed as a *ḥadīth qudsī*.

[95] Al-Samarrai' says that the original has "al-Faqasī" in the margin. It should be noted that none of the names here correspond to any known *hadith* transmitters aside, of course, from that of Ibn ʿAbbās, whose presence in this *isnād* is somewhat dubious.

That Jesus, upon him peace, called the Children of Israel, and those whom God willed, answered it. When God, the Mighty and Majestic raised him, the people found his words pleasin [such that] the number of his followers reached seven hundred families.

Paul, who was called Abū ʾShā and was a king in those days said: "Kill the Christians!"[96] So they [the Christians] fled. He rode upon their dwellings until he reached the mountain passes, they had worn him down.

Paul said to them [the Jews],[97] "Their words are pleasing and they call upon your enemies, and they still [will continue to] win them over to their side, then they [will] ride upon you (*bi-him*) up to now, unless you support me in what I tell you."

They said: "Yes!" [Paul] said: "You are my partners in what is good and bad, it is as if I am one of you." They said "Yes"

So he left his [position as king], then dressed in their[98] clothes, then he followed them in order to lead them astray until he reached their army, [at which point] they captured him. They said: "Praise be to God who disgraced you and [*amkana minak*]." He said: "[Give me your attention][99], [as if it] exceeded my stupidity to [approach] you without [having] proof with me." So they [gave him their attention] and said: "*Mah!*"

He said: "Jesus appeared to me upon my departure to you and took my hearing, sight, and reason, so I couldn't hear, see, or think. Then he removed himself from me. By God, I made a

---

[96] "*Uqtalū al-naṣārā"* here it not entirely clear who the audience is; Koningsveld assumes Paul is speaking to the Jews here.

[97] Again, it is unclear who the audience is in this instance, but it is logical to assume that he is discussing the Jewish community who may be opposed to Jesus.

[98] It is unclear again who "they" are here, the shift of pronouns to signify the Christians would indicate that Paul had gone undercover with them.

[99] *Ballighūnī ruʾūsakum*---"give me your heads", figuratively, e.g. attention; or as Koningsveld has it, "take me to your chiefs"--?

promise to and I offered a promise to God to enter your ranks and to call you to account [through myself?]. I will teach you the Torah and its laws.

So, they believed him. He said, "Build me a house," and he said, "Furnish[100] it with ash." They furnished it with ash and he prayed in it. He taught them what God willed and then he locked them out and they began to circumambulate the house. They said, "We fear that he will see something that he detests and will shun it."

So he opened the house after a day and they said, "Did you see something detestable?" He said, "No, but I saw a vision that I will show you, and if it is proper, then take it, and if it is false, then reject[101] me [regarding it]. They said, "Give it." He said, "Have you [ever] seen [*sāriḥa qaṭ tasraḥ*] except he who has his lord." They said, "No". He said, "I have seen the night and the morning and the sun and the moon and the towers which come here, and what comes from this face except [from] Him whose face is most deserved of worship?" They said, "You are correct." And he changed the direction of their *qibla*.

After this, he locked the door for two days, and their [the Christians'] fear increased more intensely than the [the first time], so they began to circumambulate the [house]. When [Paul] opened it they said what they said the first time, and he responded the same. They said, "Give it." He said, "Do you not believe that if a man offers a gift to another man and honors him and [then] he refuses the gift from him, he has insulted him? And if God has granted you dominion over the earth and has caused what is in the sky for your blessings, blessing you with it, then is God not more deserved than he who refuses his graces? So then why is it that some things are *ḥalāl* and

---

[100] Furnish or spread out. I have consulted Professors, Robinns, Berger, Blumenthal, and Newby for possible insight into what the significance of ash might be in early Christian/Jewish Levantine practice. None of them were able to offer a convincing resolution, although ash, of certain types and in specific applications, is a purifying substance in rabbinic Judaism. Prof. Berger said that it is custom not to pray on earth/stone as it would resemble praying in the Temple, as such, ash on the floor might prohibit that possibility.

[101] Samarrai' notes that he had to fill in this word from the text of al-Qaysī.

some things *ḥarām*? What is between [e.g. everything from] the gnat and [to] the elephant is *halāl*." They said, "You are correct."

Then, after this, he locked [the door] for three days and their fear increased more intensely than the second time, so they circumambulated the house. When he opened the door, they said [asked] like they had said [asked before] and he had said [responded] like he said [did before]. They said, "Give it." [Paul] said, "I see (e.g. think) that no one should be harmed or rewarded, so who ever shows you evil do not reward him, and if he slaps his cheek, offer to him the other cheek, and if he takes some of his clothes, supply him with the rest." They accepted this and left Jihad.

Then, after this, he locked [the door] for a period longer than this, and their fear increased more than what they had feared before, so they circumambulated the house until he [Paul] opened it. And they said to him like they had said and he said [responded] like he had before, and they said, "Give it." He said, "Leave me, except for *Yaʿqūb, Nesṭūr, Malkūn,* and *al-Muʾmin*"[102], and so they did. He said, "Have you [ever] learned [e.g. heard] of any human who created a creation from clay[103], and breathed [life] into it [by himself?], they said, "no." He said, "Have you [ever] learned of any human who cured leprosy and blindness and could resurrect the dead?" They said, "no." He said, "Have you [ever] learned of any human who knew what people were eating and saying in their homes?"

He said, "I believe that Allah the Most High, revealed himself to us, then concealed himself." Some of them said, "You are correct!" The other said "He is Allah, and Jesus is His son", and the other said, "No, but He [God] is three: Jesus, the Son, His Father, and His Mother."

---

[102] The first three names represent the founders of the three eastern Christian churches.

[103] This is can be a reference both to the Quranic description of Jesus in which he crafts birds from clay, but given that this report seems to have circulated in Syria, for Christian readers familiar with the Infancy Gospel of Thomas in which the same story appears, this report would not have been strange.

The believer was alarmed and said, "Allah curse you, woe unto you! No, by God, he is trying nothing other than to lead you astray! [We should be] amazed at our acceptance of him. We are the companions of Jesus, without him, surely we saw Jesus and listened to him, and obeyed him. [Woe unto you]! No by God, he is trying nothing other than to lead you into error and cause you to stray." He began to malign him, seek forgiveness and repent. Then he returned [ʿammā mālāhim ʿalayhi], he approached his followers cautioning them and he feared that they would watch him. He said "leave me to [sic]and do to them as you like. I see nothing other than that they will separate like they separated [from] you." So they left and did do them like they predicted, so that each man amongst them had a group, and of course, that of the believer's was the smallest.

The three returned to [Paul] and gave him the report. He said to them, "Catch the believer and his companions and kill them or else they will lead you astray." So they left for their companions and [together] rode upon the believer. He said, "Woe! Are not his lies and wickedness clear to you? Didn't he prohibit you from hitting anyone or to ride upon [anyone]? Hasn't he changed his words to you?" So they fought them, and they won. So the Believer and his companions fled to Syria.[104] The Jews captured them and they (the believer and his companions) told them the story. They said, "Verily, we fled to you so that we could gain security in your land, and we have no need for what is in the world, Surely, we will stick to the caves, the tops of the mountains and the hermitages, we will disappear in the land." So they freed them and the remainder united with them.

So they occupied the hermitages and the caves, they roamed, and were forced towards innovation, because it is of His, the Most High's words, "But the monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them, but they sought it only to please Allah

---

[104] Syria reoccurs in the next section on Ibn Saba' as being the only place that resisted his temptations. Koningsveld for some reason has it that the believer and his companions fled to Palestine.

therewith, but that they did not observe it with the right observance,"[105] meaning divine unity, so they disagreed about it, [*and they also, without a faction from them?*] "So We supported those who believed"[106] over them and they "over their enemies" from them the group of the Believer and other than them "and they became victorious" (in the proof and emergence of Muhammad) peace and blessings upon him. The believers amongst them departed to western Arabia. The Prophet found thirty monks among them believing in him. And like him (Paul) in this nation is the example of Ibn Sabaʾ.

---

[105] Sura al-Ḥadīd 27. Translation from *Interpretation of the Meaning of the Noble Quran in the English Language*, (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 1996).

[106] The following three sets of quotations all form the last sentence in Sura 61:14.

V

The Problem of ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib:

Reflections on the Idea of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs

In his influential article, "How did the early Shiite become sectarian," Marshal Hodgson outlined an important historical problem in early Islamic factionalism. After surveying the shifting religious sentiments in Muslim society over the course of the first three centuries of Islamic history vis-à-vis the ongoing political revolts of pro-ʿAlid parties across the Muslim polity, Marshall Hodgson observed that Sunni Islam offered a "half loaf" to the Shiites. That is, while Sunni Islam would never accept the claim that ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib was *supposed* to be Muḥammad's successor, the emerging consensus among non-Shiite and non-Khārijī groups who did not challenge Abbasid rule nonetheless came to embrace ʿAlī as one of the most important foundational figures of early Islam. Following that logic, Hodgson then argued that, "in its whole piety Sunni Islam can be called at least half-Shiite."[1] In this chapter I explore the implications of Hodgson's passing comment by exploring the discursive effects in Sunni tradition of ʿAlī being counted among the Rightly-Guided Caliphs.

The idea of the al-Khulafāʾ al-Rāshidūn, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, is an important site through which one can witness the formation of a distinctly Sunni mytho-historical claim.

---

[1] Marshall Hodgson, "How did the early Shiʿa become sectarian?" in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, v. 75, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1955), p. 4.

This pervasive Sunni idea refers to the thirty year period between the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 11/632 and the beginning of the Umayyad dynasty in 49/661. It includes the reigns of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, ʿUmar al-Khaṭṭāb, ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, and ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib over the administration of the expanding Muslim polity. Many critical events foundational to Islamic history and the emergent community of believers toook place during this period, including the Wars of Apostasy (*al-Ridda*) and Islamic conquests (*al-Futūḥāt*). However, it also includes the mutiny against ʿUthmān's administration in Medina, his assassination, and the subsequent civil wars that culminated in the Battle of the Camel and the Battle of Ṣiffīn in 656 and 657.

Nonetheless, in the memory of the Sunni community, the era of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs has expressed a pristine, unadulterated moment of salvation history wherein the community of believers still operated in the shadow of the Providential will. This is in contradistinction to the history of the Muslim community under the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties and their many successor monarchies which together may represent an exemplary, but not divinely inspired, history.

In order to appreciate the importance of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs as a mytho-historical concept, it is important to recognize just how unusual the idea of ʿAlī's being in a natural continuum with Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān must have been in Muslim society a little over a thousand years ago. Because of the formidable divisions that were established and fought over after the siege of Medina, the assassination of ʿUthmān, and during the reign of ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib, there were few after his death or throughout the duration of the Umayyad period who would, or even could, consider Abū Bakr,ʾUmar, ʿUthmān, and ʿAlī members of one singular, much less pristine, historical period. Consider for example that ʿĀʾisha, one of Muḥammad's wives and the daughter of Abū Bakr, led forces againśtAlī;

that Abū Bakr's son, Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, is himself recorded by historians to have handed the death blow to ʿUthmān; or further that Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān, the then governor of Syria sent a force to Ṣiffīn in order to confront what he saw as the illegitimate command of ʿAlī as head of state. Early Muslim society in the first three centuries, even before the crystallization of the legal guilds or the onset of theological speculation, was divided into a range of factions constituted by competing interpretations of this volatile history. Because of his central role in the *fitna*, ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib, as a historical figure, lies at the center of the disputed memory over righteousness and integrity of the early community.

From a broad historical view, it is fairly clear that the enumeration ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib as one of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs corresponds to the larger political and religious reconciliations taking place between elites during the early Abbasid period. It is not so clear, however, just how the discursive foundations of this powerful idea originally developed. That is, how did a new narrative emerge that displaced previous incommensurable ones which, for example, treated ʿAlī as a treasonous figure? Answering that question with absolute precision is probably impossible in light of the nature and scarcity of Islamic source materials prior to the mid-ninth century, not to mention the limits of positivist historiography in general. Nonetheless, as this chapter seeks to demonstrate, vestiges of the process through which ʿAlī was incorporated into emergent visions of Sunni salvation history can be found in historical chronicles, ḥadīth literature, and apologetic works.

Long before the pioneering insights of Hayden White into the relationship between narrative and historiography influenced scholars across many disciplines, the esteemed analytic philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto coined the phrase "narrative sentence." He further developed this concept in *An Analytic Philosophy of History* and later summarized,

130

> Narrative sentences, as I characterize them, give descriptions of events under which the events could not have been witnessed, since they make essential reference to events later in time than the events they are about, and hence cognitively inaccessible to observers. 'The Thirty Year War began in 1618' could not have been known true in 1618…narrative structures penetrate our consciousness of [past] events.[2]

The idea of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs can be understood as a phrase or clause the persuasive power of which rests in its simple narrative structure. Here one does not need to rely upon Hayden White's concept of emplotment because narrative sentences or clauses operate as whole discourses in and of themselves. In our case, the idea of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs distinguishes a particular moment in history. It also inherently prefigures its inverse—a period of *unrightly-guided caliphs*—and thus contains elements of transition, plot, and normativity.

From this perspective, the idea of the four Rightly-Guided caliphs in Sunni Islam is much more than a simple historical category. Embedded in its very iteration, I argue, is an entire set of historical claims that act to refute Shiite ideological challenges that justified various attempts to replace Abbasid rule with ʿAlid house and thereby "correct" the mistaken path of history. It is therefore a competing commentary on history. A close reading of the discourse constituting the Rightly-Guided Caliphs provides insight into the way in which its continual redeployment is in fact a performance of an old polemic and maintenance of orthodox boundaries. In this sense, the narrative of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, rather than functioning as an autonomous and independent historical configuration, is in fact one piece in

---

[2] Arthur C. Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) p. xii. The original article is "Narrative Sentences" in *History and Theory*, V. 2, No. 2, (1962) pp. 146-179. It is developed further in *An Analytic Philosophy of History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

a dialectical process of agonistic narrative formation. Put differently, it is in and of itself a historical commentary, a revision.

The Problem of the Pristine Past and Early Islamic Factionalism

In light of the religious and political landscape of early Islam, it is fair to say that the foundation narrative of the nascent *umma* in Muslim society was hardly a settled matter. Instead, incommensurable discourses concerning what constituted the boundaries of Islamic salvation history circulated in various quarters throughout Muslim society and did so well into the Abbasid period.

For the Umayyads and their supporters, there was simply a five-year interruption between the death of the third caliph and the reconsolidation of the *umma* by Muʿāwiya in what has come to be called the year of the *Jamāʿa* (661/41). That this Umayyad perspective of history was a common or normative one is corroborated by a contemporary Syriac chronicle which gives the following reigns for the leaders of the Muslm community: Muhammad 10 years; Abū Bakr 1 year; Umar 12 years ; ʿUthmān 12 years; *no ruler for 5 years*, and Muʿawiya 20 years.[3] Representative of the position that questioned the legitimacy of ʿAlī's caliphate was Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī (d. 281/894), a pupil of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Ibn Maʿīn, who states in his *Tārīkh* that during the controversial years of ʿAlī's rule there was no *khilāfa*, just *fitna*. He says, "When ʿUthmān was murdered the people differed…until they agreed upon Múāwiya, they named it the year of *al-Jamāʿa*."[4] Abū al-Hasan al-Ashaʿrī confirms that this was the dominant position of the *ahl al-Jamāʿa*, who said: "Abū Bakr and

___

[3] Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, p. 183 n. 30.

[4] Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī, *Tārīkh* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutūb al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), p. 41.

ʿUmar were Imams, and ʿUthmān was an Imam [until he was killed]…"[5] That this position is attributed to the *ahl al-Jamaʿa* without an elaboration on ʿAlī's absence from the list further confirms the notion that the Abū Bakr—ʿUmar—ʿUthmān temporality predated the notion of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs.

As we will see shortly, determining the nature of ʿAlī's caliphate with respect to those of his predecessors was a problem that occupied the *ahl al-ḥadīth* and constituted a point of division in that scholastic environment. Nonetheless, from the perspective of a later more refined Sunni position, the unacceptable view that ʿAlī was not a legitimate Muslim ruler was still considered moderate when compared to what seems to have been official Umayyad policy of cursing ʿAlī during Friday prayers.

The subject of ʿAlī's being cursed from the pulpits in the mosques of the Umayyad empire is controversial even today. It is common to find competing claims by Sunnis and Shiites regarding the issue distributed through polemical texts, websites and lectures. In such a hostile environment, it is safe to say that both the affirmation and denial of the practice are subject to regular hyperbole. The tenuous nature of the literary source material being used adds complications, although the extensive material that does exists seems to confirm that the practice at least indeed took place.[6]

Cursing one's enemies in a religious imperial polity as part of official state practice was not an uncommon custom in the world of late antiquity. It also seems to have been a standard rhetorical practice used to foster a sense of collective identity in Christian sectarian

---

[5] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn*, (Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1969) v. 2, p. 143.

[6] The historical chronicles document the practice rather passively. Evidence also exists within the *ḥadīth* tradition and the biographical dictionaries that the practice was well documented.

contexts.[7] In light of the late antique precedent in which Islam emerged as a political imperial force, the Umayyad custom of cursing ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib—the patron of the regime's adversaries—would be expected. Indeed al-Ṭabarī records as much when he reports that Muʿāwiya ordered his governor al-Mughīrah b. Shuʿbah to do so when he installed him in Kufa.[8]

In a much different example that demonstrates the persistence of this practice centuries after the fall of the Umayyad dynasty, Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān, writing in the early tenth-century describes in his well-known travel account coming upon a village in Jurjan where every Friday the *khuṭba* ended with routine cursing of ʿAlī. [9] Given that Ibn Faḍlān had little incentive to invent this story, the ritual cursing likely represents a vestige of earlier practices. Also in the Abbasid period the practice of publicly cursing ʿAlī from the *minbar* seems to have continued in part through the efforts of Ḥarīz b. ʿUthmān al -Ḥimṣī (d. 163), a Damascene scholar lauded by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.[10] The case of Ḥarīz is also interesting because in addition to maligning ʿAlī publicly, he is said to have also incorporated cursing him into his personal ritual devotions. In one exchange, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī records that Ḥarīz did not leave the mosque after the morning prayers without cursing ʿAlī seventy

---

[7] Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, in passim; Aristeides Papadakis, "Anathema" in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*.

[8] Al-Ṭabarī, *Between Civil Wars: The Caliphate of Muawiyah*, translated by Michael G. Morony (Albany: State University of New York, 1987) p. 122-3. The source for al-Ṭabarī's report is Abū Mikhnaf, who on account of his alleged Shiite leanings is typically rejected as a reliable source of history amongst Sunnis.

[9] Richard Frye, *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to Russia* (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2005), p. 30. I would like to thank Devin Stewart for pointing me to this reference.

[10] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tarīkh al-Baghdād* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 19--) v. 8, p. 260.

times.[11] He is said to have done the same during the afternoon and night prayers as well. When asked to answer for his disdain for ʿAlī he said, "He [ʿAlī] is the slayer (*al-qāṭiʿ*) of my father's and grandfather's heads."[12]

Ḥarīz was not alone however in rememberingʿAlī as an adversarial military commander. For example, the early successor and *ḥadīth* transmitter Abū Labīd al-Baṣrī, Limāza b. Zabbār who fought against him at the Battle of the Camel: when asked if he loved ʿAlī, he replied "How can I love a man who killed 2,500 [men] of my tribe in one day"[13] Also consider the well-known *muḥaddith* Damascene émigré to Baghdad, Ibrāhīm al-Jawzajānī (d. 256/869), whose disdain for ʿAlī was counted as his only flaw. He is said to have invited a group of scholars to his home, and while they stood at his door his maid brought forth a chicken to be killed. Finding that none among the scholars was up to the task he exclaimed with sarcasm, "[Wow] Glory be to God!, there is none [willing] to slaughter the chicken, yet ʿAlī in one slaughtered over twenty odd thousand Muslims."[14]

Anti-ʿAlī currents were common enough to earn them a pseudo-sectarian, collective affiliation. Expressed as nasibism (*naṣb*), to carry enmity towards ʿAlī, one could be labeled a *naṣibī* (pl. *nawāṣib*), which was often simply the Shiite pejorative for Sunnis. Given Aḥmad's praise of al-Jawzajānī and Ḥarīz b. ʿUthmān, it is safe to say that through his generation Naṣibism was not enough to invite expulsion from *ahl al-ḥadith* circles. It is difficult to say

---

[11] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tadhhīb al-Tadhhīb* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Tarīkh al-ʿArabī, 1993) v. 1, p. 490.

[12] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tadhhīb al-Tadhhīb* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Tarīkh al-ʿArabī, 1993) v. 1, p. 490.

[13] Ibn Asākir, *TMD*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya,) v. 53, p. 236.

[14] Ibn Hajjar, Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb, (Beirut: Muʾassasa al-Tarikh al-ʿArabī, 1993) v. 1, p. 117. Abū Zuraʿ al-Dimashqī is predictably counted as one of his students.

even whether it had been recognized as a significant theological problem.[15] Common mostly

in Syria, among Umayyad loyalists and also in part amongʿUthmānī partisans, Nā ṣibism did

however eventually occasion redress by scholars espousing the emerging ecumenical Sunni

view of history.

Among those eager to "correct" the problem of Nāṣibism was Aḥmad Abū Abd al-

Raḥmān al-Nasāʾī (d. 303/915), the Egyptian based author *al-Sunan*, one of the six Sunni

canonical *ḥadīth* collections. He travelled to Damascus and found wide spread distortions

against ʿAlī. He decided to compile a collection of ḥadīth entitled *The Special Characteristics*

of ʿAlī and another *The Merits of the Companions* "in order to guide" the people in Syria.

After delivering lectures on the subject in the Umayyad Mosque, he was asked if he was

prepared to compose a similar work on Muʿāwiya. He answered sarcastically to the effect that

there was nothing flattering to write. This earned him enough disrepute to have to flee the

city. When he arrived in Ramla he was asked about the incident and then beaten in the

mosque for his insolence to Muʿāwiya. He begged to be spared and be sent to Mecca where

wounded, he died.[16]

Much more moderate and instrumental in facilitating the emerging mainstream Sunni

position were theʿUthmānīs, named after their eponym, ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān. They held that

there were only three Rightly-Guided Caliphs. From their perspective, the community was an

intact continuation of the Prophet Muḥammad's divine mission until ʿUthmān's assassination.

Many of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* and the nascent Ḥanbalī circle seemed to be of this opinion. For

example, Abū Muḥammad al-Barbahārī (d. 329/941), the controversial Hanbalī polemicist

---

[15] It is also likely the case that the category of *sahaba* had not fully congealed given that disdain for ʿAlī was treated as something distinct from the charge against the *shiʿa* for insulting the shaykhayn. That these were registered as separate practices indicates that the category of *sahaba* as a whole had not yet fully articulated or defined.

[16] al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām,* v. 11, pp. 194-200; Yusuf Ibn al-Zakī al-Mizzī, *Tadhhīb al-Kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl* (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risāla, 1992), pp. 151-156.

and self-professed commander of good and forbidder of evil, was representative of this historical vision.[17] In his *Kitāb al-Sunna* he considers the practice of the Muslim community during first three caliphs, the *al-dīn al–atīq* (the ancient religion), as original and pure, prior to the death of ʿUthmān which introduced the "first split and the first disagreement" in the community.[18] The same historical vision is held by Ibn Baṭṭa al-ʿUkbarī (d. 387/997), another influential Ḥanbalī figure.[19]

This temporality is also reflected in numerous *ḥadīth* reports which profess the virtues and merits of the first three caliphs. Perhaps the best known of these is ascribed to Ibn ʿUmar: "While the Prophet was still alive and his Companions numerous, we used to reckon (*naʿudd*) Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmā n and we used to stop at that."[20] There are many other reports that express a similaʿUthmānī vision. Qasim Zaman believes that these were understood by Aḥmad and his students not as excluding ʿAlī from the caliphate in any way.[21] However, an example of this discourse which more clearly indicates that the early golden period was seen to have ended in the murder of ʿUthmān is evident in the following *ḥadīth*,

> Abū Yaʿlā ← ʿAbd Allāh b. Muṭīʿ ← Hashīm ← al-ʿAwwām ← from who reported to him ← ʿĀ"isha: When the Messenger of Allāh founded the Mosque of Madina, he brought a rock and placed it, Abū Bakr brought a rock and placed it, ʿUmar brought a rock and placed it, and ʿUthmān brought a rock and placed it. The Messenger of

---

[17] Melchert, *Formation*, pp. 152-55.

[18] Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.), v. 2, p. 16. "al-Barbahāri" in *EI2*. See

[19] Laoust, "Ibn Baṭṭa," *EI2*

[20] Qasim Zaman, *Relgion and Politics under the Early ʿAbbāsids* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 173.

[21] Qasim Zaman, *Relgion and Politics under the Early ʿAbbāsids* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 173-4.

Allāh was asked about his and he said, "They are commanders of the Caliphate after me." [22]

The report is quoted in a number of genres, but perhaps most significantly in ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad's *Kitāb al-Sunna*.[23] This report expresses the purity of the early period by creating a parallelism between the construction of the Madina mosque and the Caliphate. While Ibn ʿUmar's report speaks specifically to merit and precedence and does not inherently exclude ʿAlī, this *ḥadīth* directly equates precedence with the early caliphate and necessarily does not include ʿAlī in the early pristine continuum. Such discourses probably represented a position between Umayyad and ʿUthmānī sentiments which were the dominant ones among religious and political elites during the early Abbasid period. Given their being at odds with later orthodoxy, they were not kept in the canon of Sunni *ḥadīth*.

On the other side of the spectrum for the Shiite movements as a whole, there was simply one thwarted Imām whose short-lived reign was marred by betrayal and warfare. During the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, Shiite positions differed considerably, but were consistent on the point of ʿAlī's having been usurped as leader. The most moderate position would be held by the Zaydis, who recognized the legitimacy of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar's caliphate, but nonetheless argued for ʿAlī's superiority in merit.

In an effort to remain aloof from partisanship over ʿAlī and ʿUthmān, one could hold the Murjiʾī position and simply "postpone" judgment on their actions and dissociate from the adherents of either party. Adherents of this view would argue that both ʿAlī and ʿUthmān's actions should be relegated to a divine court of appeals rather than speculation by mortals. This argument, however, by simply acknowledging the existence of a problem would

---

[22] Ibn Kathir, *al-bidaya wa-l nihaya*, v. 7, p. 204.

[23] ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad, *al-Sunna*, (n.p.)

guarantee estrangement from all camps, as indeed was the result of this early position. Nonetheless, such was a seemingly attractive solution to the Khawārij, whose rejection of the concept of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs *in toto* is almost too obvious to mention.

It is worth noting that that these competing positions correspond to, but are not conterminous with, the theological issue of *tafḍīl*—the ranking of the first four caliphs in terms of their respect merit. As Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936) reviews the issue, he mentions the less common but known position that placed ʿAlī above ʿUthmān in merit, but behind Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.[24] Al-Ashʿarī also noted the existence of an even more marginal position which favored ʿAlī over Abū Bakr. That is, something akin to the Zaydi position.[25] Discursively, favoring ʿAlī over the first three caliphs probably found expression in, for example, the controversial Report of the Bird (*ḥadith al-Ṭayr*).[26] Al-Tirmidhī records, "There was a fowl next to the Prophet and he asked, 'Oh God bring me the most beloved of your creation to you, so that he may eat this fowl with me.'ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib came."[27] Although al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī argued that this narration was unnecessarily left out of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, it was slowly excised from the tradition by later authorities, and its proponents accused of Shīʿism.[28]

---

[24] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālat al-Islāmiyyīn*, (Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1969) v. 2 p. 147.

[25] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālat al-Islāmiyyīn*, (Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1969), v. 2 p. 147.

[26] For two references see, Al-Ḥakim al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990) v. 2, p. 324; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub alʿIlimiyya, 1994) v. 10, p. 169 #3877.

[27] al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub alʿIlimiyya, 1994) v. 10, p. 169 #3877. In this narration the isnad is ← Sufyān ← Waqīʿ ← ʿUbayd Allāh b. Mūsā ← ʿIsā b. ʿUmar ← al-Suddī ← Anas b. Mālik.

[28] For a discussion, see "*Hadīth al-Tayr*" in Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidayā wa al-Nihayā*, v. 7, pp. 350-353; also Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization ofal- Bukhārī and Muslim* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 159-60.

Although the issue of *tafḍīl* is technically distinct from the discussion of the legitimate caliphate, as will be seen, it is intimately connected with the problem of establishing the idea of the Rightly-Guided caliphate in the first place. That this question seems to have been an open one throughout the Abbasid period is evident in the fact that Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahāni (d. 430/1038) author of the celebrated biographical collection of saints, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyāʾ*, composed a specific treatise on the issue entitled *The Imamate and the Refutation of the Rāfiḍa*, wherein he argues against the Shiite position of both ʿAlī's right to the caliphate and his precedence over the first three caliphs.[29]

Amidst the theological and historical disarray briefly reviewed here emerged the Sunni doctrine of a Rightly-Guided historical moment that includes both ʿAlī and ʿUthmān and considers the period to be one of continuity with Muḥammad's prophetic mission wherein the integrity of Islam was not challenged. Such a development should be recognized as a rather remarkable achievement because of the way it engages and modifies religious and political debates that defined early Islamic factionalism. However, just how this new historical taxonomy became the dominant narrative of the *ahl al-Sunna wa-l Jamāʿa* is the important remaining question.

---

[29] Abū al-Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Imāma wa al-Radd ʿalā al-Rafīḍa*, (Medina: Maktabat al-ʿUlūm wa al-Ḥikam, 1987) edited by ʿAlī al-Faqīhī ; also published under the title *Tathbīt al-Imāma wa Tartīb al-Khilāfa* (Beirut: Dar al-Imām Muslim, 1986) edited by Ibrāhīm ʿAlī Tuhāmī.

The Rightly-Guided Caliphs as a Historical Problem

Patricia Crone summarizes the historiographic problem at hand in what she calls the "four-caliph thesis,"

> It is not known when or where it was first proposed that one should recognize both
> Uthman and Ali as Rightly-Guided Caliphs...but it was in the course of the ninth
> century that the four-caliphs thesis spread in Iraq. As for how one could possibly
> remain loyal to all the participants in a mortal conflict, the answer was that one
> should suspend judgment on the rights and wrongs of it, not in the sense that one
> should neither affiliate to nor dissociate from the participants as the early Murji'ites
> said, but rather in the sense that one should affiliate to all of them, on the grounds
> that it was not for later generations to sit in judgment on people so favored by God as
> the companions.[30]

It was indeed an ecumenical and pietistic impulse that contributed to the consolidation of the idea. Crone also argues that the four-caliph thesis grew out of an ʿUthmānī, but not Umayyad position, though she concedes that it is difficult to know the exact details of the process. Asma Afsaruddin also agrees that the ʿUthmānī position came to "include ʿAlī as one of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs."[31] Both echo the observations of Hodgson mentioned at the outset of this chapter.

Qasim Zaman has also speculated on the development of the notion of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. In his meticulous study, *Religion and Politics under the Early Abbasids,* he links the rise of the idea with the converging interests of Abbasid political elites who sought to distance themselves from their original Shiite milieu and those of the "proto-Sunni"

---

[30] Crone, *God's Rule*, p. 135.

[31] Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims: History and Memory* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), p. 56.

ʿulamāʾ whose catholic worldview demanded an accommodating attitude to the political problems of the pious predecessors. At the center of the process of arriving at the four-caliphs doctrine, Zaman argues, was the authoritative role of the infamous scholar of *ḥadīth*, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. In order to make his argument, he outlines the history and provenance of what he calls the "thirty years *ḥadīth*" which virtually always accompanies narrative reports about the Rightly-Guided Caliphs as a golden age.

Here, Muhammad is alleged to have said, "The Caliphate is thirty years, after that it will be kingship." The logic here is that ʿAlī's caliphate, close to six years, when added to the 24 years that made up the reigns of the first three Caliphs, completes a sanctified period foretold by the Prophet Muhammad himself.

Zaman effectively argues that when this ḥadīth is authenticated by Aḥmad b. Hanbal it gains a type of canonical status and is then presumably more widely accepted and circulated.[32] Zaman does point out that Aḥmad's designation of ʿAlī's caliphate seems to have been something that he eventually grew to accept throughout his life and that it hardly constituted a point of consensus in *ahl al-ḥadīth* circles of the time. As mentioned above, Abū Zūrʿa al-Dimashqī, one of Aḥmad's own pupils seems to have been unable to accept this position. A report in Ibn Abī Yaʿlā's *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* further indicates that this idea was controversial for intergroup relations; Aḥmad is to have said, "For those who do not *make ʿAlī the fourth*, do not talk to them or inter-marry with them."[33] Yet the very presence of

---

[32] For Zaman's discussion of this issue see pp. 50-53, 168-178.

[33]Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanabila* (n.p.: Dar Iḥyā al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, n.d.), v. 1, p. 45. The issue of not making ʿAlī fourth is also addressed under the biographical entry for Muḥammad b. ʿAwf b. Sufyān al-Ṭāʾī al-Ḥimsī Abū Jaʿfar who sought clarification on the issue from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal because Aḥmad was allegedly credited with having stopped at ʿUthmān in ranking the best of the companions after the Prophet. Aḥmad tells him "Who stops at ʿUthmān and does not make ʿAlī the fourth is off of the path (*ghayr al-sunna*)." v. 1, p. 313.

reports like this in the *Tabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* points to the ongoing need for religious pedagogy on this issue of ʿAlī in *ahl al-ḥadīth* circles.

As Zaman points out, for Aḥmad, given the fact that ʿAlī was called commander of the faithful, led the pilgrimage to Mecca, distributed alms, rendered legal judgments, and assumed the responsibility of other Islamic governing institutions, it was impossible to deny his place as a caliph.[34] That even this evidence was not enough to convince others of ʿAlī's legitimacy is evident in the following response from Aḥmad to the dissenting position:

Muḥammad b. ʿAlī informed me on the authority of Ṣāliḥ that he asked his father regarding this issue. If someone objects: 'If one recognizes ʿAlī's caliphate, is it necessary to make ʿAlī the fourth [caliph]? He [Aḥmad] said, 'We accept what has happened. Didn't we [already] say this? ʿAlī for us is a Caliph, he called himself Commander of the Believers, and the Companions of the Messenger called him Commander of the Faithful, and plenty of the Companions of Badr called him Commander of the Faithful.'

I said, and if someone objects, 'We find the Khārijī going out and calling [their leader] Commander of the Faithful, and the people called him Commander of the Faithful.' He said, 'This is disgusting talk, to compare ʿAlī —may God be pleased with him—to a Khārijī and to compare the companions of the Messenger of God to the rest of the people. This talk is disastrous. If this is acceptable to say, will he then say that ʿAlī was a Khāriji?!'[35]

---

[34] Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, 168-69.

[35] al-Khallāl, *Kitāb al-Sunna*, v. 1, p. 328, #639.

The reaction expressed by Aḥmad is indicative of the intense conflict over the issue among *ahl al-ḥadīth* circles at the time and the unsettled nature of the question. From this report it is clear that the issue of *tafḍīl*, the ranking of the companions, is not yet fused with the issue of the four Rightly-Guided caliphs. Effectively, through the question, "Is it necessary to make ʿAlī the fourth caliph?" the ʿUthmānī position, as represented in the reports above, can be seen to be coming under some degree of change and manipulation that eventually led to the consolidation of the doctrine.[36] That one could hold the rather nuanced position that a Caliphal period existed through ʿAlī's reign and yet that the best of the companions were limited to the first three of Muḥammad's successors is indicated in Aḥmad's alleged assertion: "Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān in the [issue] of precedence [*taqdīm*] and in the [issue] of the caliphate, ʿAlī is for us among the caliphs."[37] Here, ʿAlī could simply have been a Caliph in legal terms without being imbued with a unique religious status.

Zaman also points out the interesting fact that Aḥmad's defense of the thirty years *ḥadīth* involved not only reimagining the early period of Islamic history but also defending the integrity of particular transmitters found in the *isnād* of the ḥadīth whom heretofore had not yet been entirely accepted as reliable. Ḥammād b. Salama (d. 167/783) a prolific gatherer of *ḥadīth* from Basra, is one such central transmitter of the tradition who Zaman sees as possibly representing an early (read "proto-Sunni") position on the Rightly-Guided caliphs. He quotes a revealing report wherein Aḥmad's endorsement of ʿAlī and Ḥammād seem to be linked.[38] Zaman thereby shows that Aḥmad consolidated the doctrine, not only by

---

[36] Making a similar argument, Zaman reviews how Aḥmad reconciled the Ibn ʿUmar hadith with the "thirty years hadith"; *Religion and Politics*, p. 174.

[37] al-Khallāl, *Kitāb al-Sunna*, p. 320, #613. Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, p. 174, n. 28.

[38] Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, p. 171.

maintaining a particular position on ʿAlī's status, but by advancing *ḥadīth* and their transmitters in order to do so.

The conclusion one gets from Zaman's discussion, then, is that through Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's endorsement of the thirty years *ḥadīth*, his authentication of its transmitters, and his reconciliation of the ʿUthmānī commitment to the precedence of the first three caliphs with the ambiguous status of ʿAlī's reign, he helped to "'complete' the Sunni vision of the ideal caliphate."[39] That is, the idea must have achieved its level of authenticity through the work of Aḥmad and his students.

Zaman's treatment of the issue has undoubtedly helped to further understanding of this foundational Sunni idea in its formative process. However, as a methodological point I harbor reservations about the way in which Zaman's treatment, whether explicitly or implicitly, privileges the role of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in establishing or at least consolidating the idea of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. An initial and rather unobjectionable criticism is that such a representation simply imbues Aḥmad with a level of authority that is likely anachronistic.

A wider point of criticism concerns the way in which a historical representation that privileges Aḥmad as authorizing the idea of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs lends itself to a "history of ideas" or "intellectual history" approach to our problem. Put simply, since the "linguistic turn," scholars across a range of disciplines have largely discarded the "great minds, great books" paradigm of history that ascribes the origin of a set of ideas, discourses, or doctrines to a particular singular person, moment in time, or text. Many have opted instead

---

[39] Zaman, *Religion*, p. 174. I should be clear that Zaman is very cautious in his conclusions and thus does not with any degree of certainty commit to some of the results of his research (e.g. p. 52: "it is not unreasonable that he [Ahmad] played some role in strengthening it [the doctrine of the rightly guided caliphate]" and p. 172 "it is impossible to be certain…"). However, what I am criticizing is the general method one gets from reading his work which, it is safe to say I believe, follows a model of doctrinal, e.g. intellectual history that seeks an origins of ideas.

for a genealogical model that owes attention to the ways in which discourses are subject to evolution through the nexus of social practice, power, and ideology.[40] I submit that the historical problem of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs demands such a genealogical approach.

Given the paradox of ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib's central role in the early civil war and the exalted position afforded to him by his followers, his being a fourth caliph and presiding over a singular community has tremendous implications vis-à-vis the remaining narrative of the nascent community in general. The same should also be said about the formation ʿAlī's own hagiography. When one looks at ʿAlī's portrayal from this perspective, a number of important, yet often overlooked, questions come to the fore.

For example, what does the Rightly-Guided caliphate imply for related historical/theological problems in Sunni Islam such as the status of the companions at the Battles of the Camel and Ṣiffīn? What is the fate of competing reports on the oath of allegiance given to ʿAlī? Some hold that he received it unanimously; others that Ṭalḥa and Zubayr offered it only under the threat of violence; others still that some companions never gave him allegiance in the first place. If, following Hodgson and others, ʿAlī was appropriated as part of a protracted process of consensus building, in what ways were elements of his hagiography shaped by his becoming a "Sunni" figure? When placed within the framework of later Sunni orthodoxy, these questions indeed remain problematic. Is it enough then to say that the radical idea of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs was established through the verification of a particular set of *ḥadīths* and their transmitters? That is, as singular linear point of intellectual history?

---

[40] For an overview of trends in historiography since the linguistic turn see Elizabeth C. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). For foundational articles on "authorship" and genealogy see Michel Foucault, "What is an Author" and "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" both available in Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

The point I am emphasizing is that the idea of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs is best seen as a commentary upon history rather than as an autonomous historical taxonomy that was the result of an intellectual exercise in doctrinal formulation. In this light, the "thirty years *ḥadīth*" is but one among many discursive strategies that attempt to mitigate the incommensurability of partisan narratives which testify to the deep divisions in early Muslim society. Therefore, I would argue that along with the very idea of the Rightly-Guided Caliphate to which it is attached, the "thirty years ḥadīth" is but one in a series of discursive methods deployed to achieve a catholic Sunni vision of early Islamic history. Such discourses are best understood as *performances of orthodoxy* in that their various appearances within the tradition are in and of themselves polemical claims masked as neutral history.

An example of what I mean by a performance of orthodoxy and *ḥadīth* as exegesis can be seen in Ibn Kathīr's treatment of Muḥammad's prophecy regarding events after his own death. In a discussion on the thirty years *ḥadīth* he calculates the years of rule by Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, ʿAlī, and al-Ḥasan in order to arrive at thirty years and confirm Muḥammad's prophecy. Then he invokes another variant of this ḥadīth on the authority the companion "ʿAbd al-Raḥman b. Abī Bakra who said: 'I heard the Messenger of God say, The Prophetic Caliphate (*khilāfa nubūwa*) is thirty years, then God will grant kinship to whom he wills.' So Muʿāwiya said, 'We are satisfied with kinship.'" Ibn Kathīr then comments, "This ḥadīth is clear refutation of the rejected Rawāfiḍ…and against the Nawāṣib among the Umayyads and those from Syria who follow them, who reject the caliphate of ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib."[41] While the presence of Shiite movements in Syria during the Mamluk period is well known, it is interesting to find Ibn Kathīr refuting an anti-ʿAlī Umayyad sentiment which must have had enough influence to demand his attention. More importantly, Ibn Kathīr's comment is an important example of what I intend by "a performance of orthodoxy." That is,

[41] Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa-l Nihaya*, v. 6, p. 191.

in his invocation of the thirty years *ḥadīth*, we see the very maintenance of orthodox boundaries through a polemical invocation of *ḥadīth*.

A more complex question that needs to be addressed is the way in which discourses affiliated with ʿAlī's tenure as Caliph and hagiographic profile are dealt with in the tradition. I turn now to two textual sites that illuminate the discursive methods used by Sunni historians to provide narrative coherence to the tenuous idea of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs.

The first is the issue of the *Bayʿa* of ʿAlī's caliphate, The Oath of Allegiance. This, of course, is a fundamental point in legitimating his Caliphate. Without it, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs would remain an impossible idea. In the second example I return to Zaman's treatment of the thirty years ḥadīth in order to offer some preliminary observations about the relationship between *rijāl* criticism, *isnād* analysis, and the construction of ʿAlī's hagiographic profile in Sunni tradition. In doing so, I call into question the notion of a proto-Sunnism as both a historical phenomenon and an effective tool of historical analysis.

The Oath of Allegiance of ʿAlī

In order for the Rightly-Guided caliphate to exist as a stable and continuous period, it would need to be established that the transitions between the caliphs were smooth, legitimate, and took place within the context of a unified community. Given that ʿAlī assumed leadership of the community even as the dust after ʿUthmān's assassination had yet to settle, not to mention the momentous events at the Battle of the Camel and the Battle of Ṣiffīn which took place within the first two years of his reign, it is hard imagine how ʿAlī's tenure as caliph could come to be interpreted as a legitimate continuation of that of his three predecessors.

Through reliance on stories such as the infiltration of the community by the subversive Jew ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Sabaʾ, the responsibility for the events of the *fitna* in Sunni historical traditions are externalized, placed outside the space of the "community" and cast as a providential inevitability. The character óʿAbd Allāh b. al-Sabaʾ also plays a role in determining the events of both ʿAlī's rise to power and his troubled attempt at managing his new post, but ʿAlī's very assumption of leadership still provides an obstacle to the narrative coherence necessary to the Sunni vision of the Rightly-Guided caliphate. Therefore, the story concerning the oath of allegiance whereby ʿAlī assumed the title of commander of the faithful (*amir al-muʾminīn*) deserves some attention.

I have chosen to focus on the details of reporting how ʿAlī received his oath of allegiance, because of its relationship to two other critical issues. The first is that if ʿAlī did not receive the unanimous consensus of the community through its elite representatives, then he could not be considered caliph in the first place. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī confirms that such a belief was common enough to demand the attention of the theologians (*mutakallimūn*). Reviewing the various positions on the Imamate ʿAlī and Abū Bakr, he writes, "The petitioners say Abū Bakr was an Imām, then ʿUmar, then ʿUthmān, but ʿAlī was not an imam because a consensus was never reached upon him."[42] This notion is obviously incompatible with the idea of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, and would need to be subverted.

The second and related issue concerns the status of ʿAlī's adversaries who were also leading Companions of Muḥammad. In classic Sunni political theory, rebellion against the ruler of the Islamic state amounted to act of apostasy and was punishable by death. Equivalent to the notion of treason, such an act was exacerbated if the transgressing party

---

[42] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn* (Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1969), v. 2, p. 144-5.

initially offered allegiance to the Islamic ruler. In the case of the companions Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr whom ʿAlī fought at the Battle of the Camel an interpretive paradox for Sunni historians is presented. On the one hand, had Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr given allegiance willfully, then on what basis could Sunni exegetes explain their actions in light of the pervasive Sunni doctrinal mandate that all of the Prophet's companions be considered to have acted with moral probity (ʿadāla). On the other hand, had they both not recognized ʿAlī's leadership, or done so under coercion or the threat of violence, then ʿAlī's caliphate would be rendered illegitimate, as would the notion of the Rightly-Guided caliphs altogether.

In order to review the way in which this historical paradox was managed by Sunni exegetes, I survey here competing historical reports in light of their transmitters' religio-political affiliations. Most of these reports have been compiled in al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*. Reading his rendition of the events surrounding ʿAlī's oath of allegiance also provides an opportunity to see how his own narrative composition weighs upon the theological implications mentioned above. However, it should also be noted that al-Ṭabarī's account is significant because many see in his compilation one of the first universal histories of the Muslim community that transcends the factionalism and partisanship of the first three centuries.

Al-Ṭabarī's efforts were in fact part of a larger shift in the Muslim community's consciousness of itself. As Chase Robinson notes,

> So the amalgamation of disparate and fragmented accounts into the large, synthetic works of the mid-ninth century represents more than an ingenious solution to a thorny problem of how to organize all the material made increasingly available to historians through the passing of time and the production of knowledge. It marks a massive project of rethinking history, in which contesting visions and versions of the

past were integrated (and, to a large degree, harmonized) according to an imperial project. Unpleasant and controversial history was occasionally suppressed…Far more often, controversial history seems to have been preserved, recast and naturalized into a more eirenic vision of Islamic past. Material concerning early sectarian groups, such as the Shiites and Khārijites, apparently existed in copious amounts, and much of it was initially transmitted by Shiites and Khārijites. Since the bulk of it survives only in synthetic works written by and for tolerant Sunnis with catholic tastes, however, it is frequently recast in terms sympathetic to the Sunni cause. And Sunnis being closest to political power, the result, more often than not, is a benign Sunni triumphalism, which legitimizes through historical narrative what Shiites and Khārijites alike considered illegitimate rule.[43]

Moving to the post-formative period of Islamic history, I also consult the historical representation of ʿAlī's rise to power as provided by Ibn Kathīr, who can be regarded as a fair representative of a later, more reified Sunni orthodoxy.

Regardless of the genre consulted, a consistent pattern is found in the representation of the events surrounding the oath of allegiance given ʿAlī, namely that the potential obstacles to the narrative coherence of the early caliphate are elided through an appeal to the doctrine of the uprightness of the Companions (*adāla*). In fact, a process of circular logic is at play: the uprightness of the community is maintained by the elision of conflict. In the course of this survey, it also becomes apparent that *ḥadīth* literature, specifically the genre of virtues of the companions (*fadāʾil al-ṣaḥāba*)**,** functions as a discourse of historical commentary and acts to displace alternative representations provided in the chronicles.

Al-Ṭabarī's chronicle is a conglomeration of materials that present competing, at times contradictory, views. Al-Ṭabarī acknowledges this before narrating what took place

---

[43] Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 41.

when ʿAlī took over the leadership of the community.[44] He therefore divides these reports in two roughly equal sections. The first records that ʿAlī was pressured by the Medinese community to accept investiture of the Caliphate, which he did after some restraint. The second section presents reports which claim that Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr never offered the oath nor did a number of other prominent companions. Reviewing these reports in light of their transmitters' political and geographic affiliations is revealing of early and competing memories in Islamic society. That is, reading al-Ṭabarī's various reports as points along a religious-political spectrum over the legitimacy of ʿAlī's caliphate demonstrates that the notion of a singular Rightly-Guided caliphate was a rather tenuous idea at least through the ninth century, when al-Ṭabarī's informants compiled their materials.

When these versions are juxtaposed with those of later Sunni historians, a remarkable shift in the sequence of events is noticeable. The most important feature of this shift is the achievement of a level of narrative coherence which conforms to the orthodox Sunni vision of an early community that, although burdened by internal conflict, nonetheless maintained continuity with the divine mission. In fact, elements of this belief are evident in al-Ṭabarī's very ordering of competing accounts.

The first set of reports from al-Ṭabarī are related through chains of Shiite origin and present no conflict among the Companions in giving ʿAlī their oath. In fact they show him reluctant to accept leadership and only after much persistence did he accept. Al-Ṭabarī records,

---

[44] Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided*, translated and edited by Adrian Brockett (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997).

Jaʿfar b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Muhammadī ← ʿAmr b. Ḥammād ← Alī b. Ḥusayn ← Ḥusayn ← his father ← ʿAbd al-Mālik b. Abī Sulaymān al-Fazarī ← Sālim b. Abī al-Jaʿd al-Ashjaʿī ← Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyyah, who said

I was with my fatherʿAlī] when ʿUthmān was killed. He got up and entered his house, and the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh came to him and said, 'This man has been killed, and the people must have an imām. We know of no one at this time more suitable for this, of greater precedence in Islam, and of closer relationship to the Messenger of God than yourself.' He said, 'Don't do this. It is better that I be a wazir than an amir.' They replied, 'No, by Allāh! We will go no farther until we have given allegiance to you.' He said, 'It should be done in the mosque then. Allegiance must not be given secretly or without the approval of the Muslims.'[45]

In another report that al-Ṭabarī relates from Jaʿfar b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Muḥammadī, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr are made to have explicitly offered the oath of allegiance toʿAlī, and that he only accepted the responsibilities of leadership under strict conditions of loyalty and obedience.[46] Al-Ṭabarī's source for these two reports, Jaʿfar b. 'Abd Allāh al-Muḥammadī appears only a few other times as an authority in the *Tārīkh* and he is scarcely mentioned in Sunni biographical dictionaries. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī is among the few to have identified him: Jaʿfar b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī. Ibn Hajar recognized him as an *Imāmī* partisan and author of a text on temporary marriage.[47] As noted in al-Māmaqānī's *Tanqīḥ al-Maqāl*, his *nisba*, al-Muḥammadī, indicates lineage from Muḥammad

---

[45] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided*, pp. 1-2.

[46] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided*, pp. 2-3.

[47] Ibn Hajjar, *Lisān al-Mizān*, v. 2, p. 147.

b. al-Ḥanafiyya (d. 81/700), ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib's well known son in whose name al-Mukhtār (

d. 67/687) led a Kufan revolt in 66/686 C.E.[48]

The *isnād* also contains the transmitter ʿAbd al-Malik b. Abī Sulaymān al-Fazāri (d.

145/762) a figure from Kufa that is counted by Sufyān al-Thawrī as one of the most versed in

ḥadīth.[49] He appears regularly across the *ḥadīth* corpus relating distinctly Shiite transmissions

on the religious merits of the Prophet's family.[50] Although accepted in Sunni circles as a

reliable transmitter, he is counted by the Shiite in their own sources for his various

transmissions.[51] Given the report's Shiite coloring, it is no surprise then that it comes through

such a chain.

Taken together, the texture of these reports portrays an indisputable consensus

amongst the companions, including Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, over the legitimacy of ʿAlī's

caliphate. Though it is difficult to say with certainty in Shiʿi circles, this type of discourse

may have been used as a pretext to condemn the companions who later confronted ʿAlī.

Likewise it could have provided a defense against the charge that ʿAlī's caliphate was in fact

not universally agreed upon. As al-Ṭabarī's other reports seem to suggest, indeed, such an

allegation seems to have been in wide circulation.

A report from ʿUmar b. Shabba through ʿAlī al-Madanī and Abū Mikhnāf credits

Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr with providing immediate allegiance to ʿAlī, but in the same breath he

points out that ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar and Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ asked to prolong their

allegiance until they saw "what the people would do." This hesitation allegedly enraged

---

[48] For a brief summary of al-Mukhtar's revolt and other early Shiite rebellions see Particia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 70-98.

[49] Al-Baghdādī, *Tarīkh Baghdād*, v. 10 p. 395.

[50] He appears in the chains of reports for example of al-Ghadīr…

[51] Hussayn Azīzī, Pīrūz Rustegār, and Yūsef Bayān (eds.), *Raviyān Mushtarak* (Qum: Būstan Kitāb, 2001), v. 2, p. 264.

Mālik al-Ashtar, one of ʿAlī's most loyal devotees, who then asked permission to cut off Ibn ʿUmar's head.[52]

In two succeeding reports that are related on the authority of al-Zuhrī, the virtual father of *ḥadīth* and tutor to Umayyad princes, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr are said to have given allegiance only under direct threat, after Mālik al-Ashtar allegedly said to Ṭalḥā, "By God! You had better give allegiance, or else I will strike you through the forehead."[53] Another report by al-Zuhrī suggests that a number of companions fled to Syria before the oath ever took place.[54] This view is also expressed in another report from 'Umar b. Shabba, who identifies a number of very prominent companions who simply refused to offer their allegiance to ʿAlī.[55]

These reports are important because they provide direct evidence that ʿAlī's caliphate was never an issue that reached consensus amongst the Prophet's companions. It is not hard to imagine how such a view fit in with the position held in certain quarters of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*, who never consideredʿAlī's command legitimate in the first instance. It may have been the logic of prominent figures such as the Syrian Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī, who considered ʿAlī's entire reign merely a period of strife (*fitna*). It is safe to say that from an early Syrian perspective, ʿAlī was never a universally agreed upon caliph. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that this report is related through al-Zuhrī, who is often associated with a Medinese affiliation but is more properly understood in his Syrian context.

---

[52] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided*, pp. 3-4.

[53] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided*, pp. 4-5.

[54] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided*, p. 7.

[55] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided*, p. 6. The companions were: Ḥassan b. Thābit, Kaʿb b. Malik, Maslamah b. Mukhallad, Abu Saʿid al-Khudrī, Muḥammad b. Maslama, al-Nuʿman b. Bashir, Zayd b. Thābit, Rafiʿ b. Khadij, Fadalah b. ʿUbayd, Kaʿb b. ʿUjrah.

With respect to the issue of ʿAlī not having received allegiance unanimously, al-Zuhrī's transmissions are not isolated. For example, al-Ṭabarī records a report through Ibn Saʿd and al-Wāqidī that Ṭalḥa offered allegiance under duress and that prominent companions, among them Ibn ʿUmar and Saʿd b. al-Waqqās, in fact never offered their oath.[56] Another report on the authority of al-Zubayr b. Bakkār (d. 256/870)[57], who is a descendent of al-Zubayr himself, rejects the notion that al-Zubayr ever gave allegiance whether under coercion or willingly. Al-Zubayr b. Bakkār was a tutor to al-Muwaffaq, son of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-861). He was later appointed by al-Mutawakkil as judge of Mecca. He is a fine representative of rich tradition of the prominent Zubayrid family of scholars whose historical transmissions offer insight into ʿUthmānī political positions.[58] More importantly, it is worth recalling that al-Mutawakkil is the Abbasid figure credited with the reversal of the *miḥna* and the courting of Ḥanbalī scholars likely in a reaction to the growing influence of Shiite and Muʿtazilite trends at the Abbasid court. He also leveled the tomb of al-Ḥusayn at Karbalāʾ.[59]

Al-Ṭabarī ends his section on ʿAlī's oath of allegiance by transmitting a number of lengthy reports from the controversial Sayf b. ʿUmar. As discussed in chapter four, in the

---

[56] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided,* pp. 8-9.

[57] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Tarikh al-Baghdād, v. 8, pp. 468-472. "Al-Zubayr b. Bakkār b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Muṣʿab, Abū ʿAbd Allāh" in *EI2.*

[58] Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 56-8. The Zubayrid literary tradition begins with ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr, the son of Zubayr b. al-Awwām and hence brother to the counter caliph ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and nephew of ʿĀʾisha. For information on ʿUrwa's life and work see Abdul ʿAzīz al-Dūrī, *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) pp. 76-95. A extraction of his transmissions on the Prophet's life has been collected in *Maghāzi Rasūl Allāh ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr* edited by A.A. Azimi (Riyad: Maktab al-Tarbiya al-ʿArabī, 1981). He is counted among the seven *fuqaha* of Medina and is one of al-Zuhri's most important teachers and mentors. Zubayr b. Bakkār is noted for his influential genealogical work, *Jamharat Nasab Quraysh wa Ākhbārihā* (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-ʿŪrūba, 1961).

[59] For al-Mutawakkil's relationship to the *ahl al-ḥadīth* and other religious political currents in the ʿAbbāsid period see Crone, *God's Rule*, ch. 11.

case of the ʿUthmān's assassination, al -Ṭabarī imports Sayf's narrative scheme in order to externalize responsibility for communal discord to a space outside of the early community of Prophet's Companions and Islam more generally. The guiding tropes of this narrative portray early Islamic figures as having acted sincerely in the best interest of Islam yet falling victim to plots that are beyond their control. It is in part through this narrative mechanism that the very idea of an early community is reified.

In concluding this section on ʿAlī's oath and leading up to the Battle of the Camel, al-Ṭabarī's own narrative practice conforms to the description above. Hence, Sayf's reports begin to describe the ways in which the Egyptians—who under the influence of Ibn Sabaʾ were responsible for ʿUthmān's murder—approached all of the leading figures including ʿAlī, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, Ibn ʿUmar, and Saʿd with the demand that they take the reign of leadership although they were actually the ones in control of the city.[60] The scene is one of chaos, with the leading Companions hiding behind walled gardens in order to avoid the strifeʿAlī was allegedly charged by the crowd and compelled by Mālik al-Ashtar into taking the leadership.[61] Sayf then reports that both Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr were dragged at sword point to the mosque, where they were forced to give allegiance toʿAlī. Ṭalḥa was allegedly dragged by Ḥukaym b. Jabala, who is described elsewhere by Sayf as a bandit who provided Ibn Sabaʾ with lodging in Kufa, then led the campaign from that city against ʿUthmān.[62]

When ʿAlī is finally given allegiance he is threatened by the Sabaʾiyya about his leadership role:

---

[60] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided*, p. 10.

[61] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided* p. 12—This report is not provided by Sayf but by ʿUmar b. Shabba and al-Madini.

[62] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided*, p. 14, 15.

Take it to you, but beware, Abū Hasan!

We are settling the leadership the way we fix a nose-rein…

And we stab the kingship with a flexible sword like a rope,

until it is trained not to resist.[63]

Then when Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr approachʿAlī demanding that he punish ʿUthmān's murderers, he replies, acknowledging his helplessness,

My friends…I am not unaware of what you know, but how can I deal with people who rule us, not we them? Your own slaves have rebelled with them, and your Bedouin have joined them. They live with you, imposing on you what they want. So can you see a way of achieving any of what you want?

ʿAlī follows this by proclaiming that this affair is beyond the forces of their control, and they need not be lured into the fray. He says offering a premonition of future sectarian discord,

This is an affair of *al-jahiliyya* and so these people will find that they have a persistent problem. This is that Satan has never made a religious law, and those who follow his decree will disappear from the earth forever. If it is stirred up, Muslims will take up different positions with regard to this matter. One group will share your views, another will have views you do not share, and a third will disagree with both, until the people calm down and return to their senses and claims can be settled. So stop complaining to me, and see what will happen to you. Then return to me.[64]

---

[63] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided*, p. 18.
[64] Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided*, p. 18.

Here it is reaffirmed that the discord amongst the early Muslims was the result of external forces foreign to Islam. This point is especially expressed by ʿAlī's emphasis "This is an affair of *al-jāhiliyya*." Gradually, through such narrative mechanisms, the catholic Sunni view that civil war between Muslim factions did not affect the integrity of Islam and the very idea of a community of Muslims that included ʿAlī is established.

As has been shown by many other analyses of al-Ṭabarī's narrations, we also see here that his placement of events conforms to a narrative pattern that implicitly offers moralizing lessons.[65] Al-Ṭabarī begins by presenting a spectrum of partisan perspectives, first through Shiite (e.g. Jaʿfar b. ʿAbd Allāh), then ʿUthmānī (ʿUmar b. Shabba), and finally Syrian (al-Zuhrī). These partisan narratives can be read against one another in order to see the range of the religious political spectrum at hand. However, by moving out of a cataloging mode and incorporating the narrative structure of Sayf b. ʿUmar's accounts into his own rendition of the events, al-Ṭabarī elides the difficult question of the legitimacy of the oath given to ʿAlī. Instead, he describes the disputes between the companions as inevitable, yet ultimately inconsequential for the integrity of Islam. It is through this technique of eliding violence and conflict that early Islamic factionalism is transcended and molded into a Sunni ecumenical vision.

---

[65] See Boaz Shoshan's *The Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing al-Tabarī's History* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

Rijāl Criticism and Narrative Coherence

We return now to the so-called "thirty years *ḥadīth*" noted earlier in this chapter in order to further challenge the notion that the idea of the four-Rightly-Guided Caliphs is an outgrowth of a specific doctrine or proof-text rather than the result of a protracted set of debates, nuanced settlement of related discourses, and emergence of a particularized tradition of historical discourse. Here we build upon the contributions offered by Qasim Zaman, who is among the few scholars to address the idea of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs as a historical problem.[66] Zaman treats the problem of ʿAlī's inclusion among the Rightly -Guided Caliphs as part of a larger trend in early Abbasid society in which Caliphal policies dovetailed with the religious interests of what he refers to as the "proto-Sunni" elite, which though never defined in his study, can be taken to mean simply "early Sunni."

In chapter three I highlighted some of the conceptual shortcomings found in the work of contemporary historians tracing the idea of the *Jamāʿa* (Community). I argued that Hodgson, Crone, and Berkey when describing the formation of the Sunni *Jamāʿa* anachronistically project a fifth-century idea of a pan-Islamic communal solidarity onto an earlier period. I also argued against explanations that tried to find the origin of the idea of the *Jamāʿa* in the development of the concept of *ijmāʿ* in Islamic jurisprudence. The critique of the idea of a "proto-Sunni" that I offer is based on similar concerns. The most important is that the notion of "proto-" itself is a problematic heuristic if for no other reason than the fact that "proto-x", for example, is always teleologically predetermined. That is, by positing the presence of a preliminary or early formation of a later phenomenon, the historian must necessarily read elements of the later phenomenon into the earlier formation which may not

---

[66] Zaman, *Religion and Politics,* p. 169-178.

have actually been present. Such methods are common to intellectual history and the history of ideas, but have largely fallen out of favor across the social sciences and humanities.

By returning to the "thirty-years *ḥadīth*," I assess the veracity of the notion of a "proto-Sunni elite" both as a historical phenomenon and historiographic heuristic. I do so not to critique Zaman's individual contribution but to raise concerns that are common to many representations of the formation of early Islamic sectarianism. I offer this critique by making some preliminary observations about the relationship between *rijāl*-criticism and historical memory. To do so I focus on a certain Ḥammād b. Salama (d. 167/783), one of the common transmitters and possible originators of the thirty years *ḥadīth*.

According to Zaman, Ḥammād b. Salama is an example of what can be called a proto-Sunni because he conveys early ideas that would later be regarded as mainstream Sunni doctrine. One of the most important of such issues is Ḥammād's inclusion of Alī as a Rightly-Guided Caliph via his transmission of the thirty years *ḥadīth*. An underlying assumption here, then, is that Ḥammād held an early position onʿAlī that conformed to a later Sunni consensus. Indeed, Ḥammād was counted among the most reliable members of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*. For example, Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) vigorously defended him against any criticism and praised his dissemination of the *sunna* in the face of protests from the people of innovation.[67] Scott Lucas points out that ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī (d. 234/849) listed Ḥammād as one of the main architects of the entire venture of ḥadīth transmission.[68] A recent Iranian study on the shared ḥadīth transmitters between Sunni and Shiite traditions, claims further that he transmitted over 10,000 ḥadīth reports.[69]

---

[67] Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, p. 172.
[68] Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadith Literature, and the Articulation of Sunni Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 114-5.
[69] Azīzī, *Ravayaan-e Moshtarak*, v. 1, p. 262-65.

According to Zaman however, Aḥmad's endorsement of the thirty years ḥadīth seemed to have been a simultaneous attestation of Hammād's reliability which was questioned by some. Indeed, it is recorded that some of his transmissions were considered to have been raised (*marfūʿ*), that is when a report attributed to a companion is *raised* and presented as the words of Muḥammad. Interestingly, Aḥmad's endorsement of Ḥammād may have had a relationship to the problem of ʿAlī's status in early Muslim community. As Zaman points out, Aḥmad is to have said, "Alī is among the *rāshidīn al-mahdiyyīn* to us; and Ḥammād b. Salama is trustworthy (*thiqa*) for us. Each [passing day] only adds to [our] insight about him."[70] This defense of Ḥammād seems to have been a consistent element in Aḥmad's recollection of him as a defender of orthodoxy, elsewhere he says, "If I were to see someone insinuate [something against] Ḥammād b. Salama, I would suspect his Islam, for [Ḥammād] was stern against the innovators."[71]

Judging from the review above, which was based upon the opinions of Aḥmad and other Sunni icons, Ḥammād b. Salama seems indeed to be the perfect candidate for what can be considered a proto-Sunni. However, in the methodological interest of analyzing the concept of proto-Sunni, itself it may be useful to examine Ḥammād's profile outside of the boundaries of a later more refined Sunni orthodoxy. The preliminary results of such an investigation reveal a more complex relationship between historical narrative and sectarian discourse formation in the third Islamic century than might be assumed from the concept of a proto-Sunni.

A survey of Ḥammād's transmissions in Aḥmad's *Musnad* and the *Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba* as well as their transmission across the Sunni *ḥadīth* corpus, as they relate to issues critical to

---

[70] Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, p. 171-2.
[71] Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar ʿAlām al-Nubalāʾ* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1997), v. 7, p. 340.

competing Sunni-Shiite versions of history—such as the status of the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*) or the religious merits of ʿAlī —incidentally share characteristics that are central to Shiite ideological claims. It is safe to assume that such overlap might pose potential problems in the intense political-religious rivalries taking place in third and fourth century Baghdad. It is not surprising therefore that as the Sunni *ḥadīth* canon crystallizes in later generations, many of Ḥammād's transmissions which may be read as sympathetic to Shiite positions simply disappear from the Sunni ḥadīth tradition.

What explains this shift is discussed further below but its overriding importance lies in recognizing that Ḥammād, if judged by the texture of his transmissions alone, is difficult to classify as a proto-Sunni leaving one with the conclusion that his designation as one has been subject to anachronism. Whether on the part of Zaman or Ibn Ḥibbān, the ability to recognize in Ḥammād an early primordial example of a later phenomenon depends upon a historical reading of him that privileges some aspects of his discourse over others. Looking at the various ways in which Ḥammād was retained in the Sunni ḥadīth corpus provides the most direct demonstration of this point.

In the *Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba* and the *Musnad*, Aḥmad records ḥadīth from Ḥammād that range from the distinctions of ʿAlī to prophecies about the death of Ḥusayn at Karbalāʾ. Many of these reports appear in standard Sunni narratives about the merits of the ahl al-bayt. For example, the well known report which allegedly records an incident at the Battle of Khaybar wherein after days of not being able to break open the fortress's front gate, the Prophet Muhammad tells his companions, "Tomorrow I will give (*l-adfʿān*) the command to a man whom Allāh and his messenger love [in order to open it]. ʿUmar said, 'I didn't like leadership

except on that day…'" This report and its variants appear, amongst others, in Ibn Ḥibbān's *Sunan*, al-Nisāʾi's *Sunan al-Kubrā*, Ibn Abī Shayba's *Muṣannaf*, and al-Ṭayālīsi's *Musnad*. It is listed as one of the many virtuous merits of ʿAlī and seems to be categorically no different than the battle honors so many other Companions received in the course of the Prophet's mission.[72]

Other reports of Ḥammād's though aligned with narratives that attributed a unique set of distinctions upon ʿAlī. These reports often appear in Shiite hagiographies and might serve as pretext for Shiite claims about his usurped position. For example, Ḥammād appears as a transmitter in one of the many versions of the much contested *Ghadir Khum* tradition. This tradition was used by the early Imāmī Shiite partisans as a clear proof that the Prophet Muhammad had designated ʿAlī as his successor; and at least as early as the Buyid assumption of power in Baghdad, ʿĪd al-Ghadīr, on the 26th of Dhū al-Ḥijjah, became a public celebration in Baghdād that often turned violent. The tradition as recorded by Aḥmad in his *Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba* and *Musnad*, via ʿAffān and transmitted by Ḥammād ← ʿAlī b. Zayd b. Judʿān ← ʿAdī Ibn Thābit ← ʿĀzīb, who said:

> We were with the Messenger of God—blessings and peace from God upon him—on a trip. We reached *Ghadīr Khumm* and we prayed together. We cleared the ground under two trees for the Messenger of God. He prayed Zuhr prayer and took ʿAlī by the hand and said, "Do you not know that I am the first of the believers from yourselves." They said, "Of course." He said, "Do you not know that I am closer to

---

[72] That said, it should be noted that in Ḥammād's report, ʿUmar is to have said, "never did I wish for leadership except on that day" which might be read in Shiʿa circles as Umar's deference to Alī.

every believer [even] to himself." They said, "Of course." So he took ʿAlī's hand and said, "By God, whomsoever I was the *mawlā* of, so ʿAlī is his *mawlā*. By God, befriend who befriends him and become an enemy to whoever is his enemy." Then after that, ʿUmar approached him and said, "Oh, son of Abū Ṭālib, you have become and the *mawlā*[73] of every believing man and woman.[74]

It is important here to note how, as in the report about ʿAlī at Khaybar, the trope of ʿUmar deferring to ʿAlī is evident. This *ḥadīth* is of course at the nexus of Islamic sectarian polemics.[75] The purpose of raising it here for discussion is not to engage in a positivist interpretation of its meaning or to contemplate its historicity. Rather, because Sunni sources accept the incident itself as having occurred, it can be used as an important discursive site through which Sunni interpretative patterns may reveal themselves. These patterns in turn lead to the formation of particularized sectarian memories, many of which continue to make up Sunni historical discourse today.

As this report and its many variants were recorded by Aḥmad, Ibn Abī Shayba, and al-Ḥākim al-Nīsabūrī and in the works of chroniclers such as al-Balādhurī, the historicity of the Prophet's utterance of these words seems to have been undisputed by early traditionists and chroniclers. It was in identifying the context in which the words were said and the

---

[73] The meaning of the term *mawlā* itself is at the very heart of Sunni-Shiite differences of interpretation regarding this incident, I therefore refrain from assuming its rendition in English.

[74] Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Faḍa'il al-Ṣaḥāba*, v. 2, p. 610 #1045 and v. 2, p. 596, #1019; idem, *Musnad*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.) v. 5, p. 355 #18134.

[75] For a Shiite perspective of the events which also functions as an inventory of the subject across the Islamic tradition see ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad al-Amīnī al-Najafī, *al-Ghadīr fi al-Kitab wa al-Sunna wa al-Adab* (Tehran: 1952).

theological interpretation of its significance that the sectarian fallout would take place. For example, Sunni interpreters later came to rely upon a variant of the tradition found in other early collections, such as the *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzaq al-Ṣanʿānī[76] to explain that the Prophet Muhammad was actually defending ʿAlī from criticism over his administration of an expedition in Yemen in the course of which he was accused of being harsh or rough with his subordinates.[77] In this case, ʿAlī's character and posi tion were being protected, not exalted. We may presume at this point—though we return to this question below—that Ḥammād's version, categorically different, did not lend itself to a Sunni interpretation and was therefore left out of the developing *ḥadīth* canon.

Another tradition that would be potentially problematic in religious circles daunted by competing historical narratives in a precarious political environment relates the identification of the Prophetic Household (*ahl al-bayt*) as only Muḥammad, Fāṭima, ʿAlī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Exactly who constituted the Prophet's House was a subject of critical importance even to the Umayyads, not to mention the Abbasids, who based their right to power on their genealogical relationship to him. Aḥmad's transmission of various reports that relate to this political-religious issue from Ḥammād then is further illustrative of processes of discursive formation at play in this period. In one example, Aḥmad records the well known *sabab al-nuzūl* (occasion of revelation) account that designates only Muḥammad, Fāṭima, ʿAlī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn as the People of the Cloak (*ahl al-kisāʾ*). The report has many variants and like the *Ghadīr Khumm* tradition is the site of much debate. Nonetheless,

---

[76] Ibn Abī Shayba however also records the ḥadīth mentioned above through the authority of Ḥammād, v. 7, p. 503, #27853.

[77] This ḥadīth is related in the voice of the companion Burayda b. al-Ḥusayb (d. 63/683) through Ibn ʿAbbās. He says, "'I travelled with ʿAlī to Yemen and found him harsh. When I saw the Messenger, I mentioned ʿAlī to him and related this to him. His face started to change.' He said 'Am I not the first among the believers from among themselves?' I said 'Of course! Oh Messenger.' He said, 'Whomsoever I was his mawlā, so ʿAlī is his mawlā.'" Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, v. 7, p. 506 # 27867.

Ḥammād's version recorded by Aḥmad where ʿAlī b. Zayd again serves as his source reads

that Umm Salama, one of the Prophet's wives, said,

> The Messenger of God said to Fatima, bring me your husband and your two son's. She brought them, and he spread a cloak (kisāʾ) over them. Then he placed his hand over it and said, "Oh God these are the Muhammad's family, so place your blessings and grace upon Muhammad and upon Muhammad's family. Truly, you are "Ḥamīd Majīd". I [Umm Salama] raised the cloak in order to enter it with them, and the Prophet drew my hand from it and said, "You are righteous.[78]

In Shiite *tafsīrs*, such this report gives clarity to the Qurānic verse 33:33:   "for God only wants to remove from you *rijs* (loathsomeness), O you members of the household, and to purify you to utmost purity." Together then, this verse and *ḥadīth* provide a justification of the Shiite claim to the infallibility of the Prophet's family. Like the *Ghadīr Khumm* report, this one appears in a range of early sources including al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-Ashrāf* and the *Muṣannaf* of Ibn Abī Shayba and in the *tafsīr* of al-Thaʿlabī. Over time though, Sunni

exegetes either rejected the report as an occasion of revelation altogether or simply listed this as one of the many distinctions of the Prophet's family that need not be interpreted further.

Also, as with the G*hadir Khumm* report, it can be presumed that this report was rejected from the *ḥadīth* corpus because of its Shiite leanings. Sunni *ḥadīth* critics, however, allegedly rarely engaged in such flagrant *matn* criticism; doing so would contradict the important claim that the reliability of the *isnād* was the primary criterion for judging the authenticity of a report. Otherwise it could be said that *muḥaddithūn* were as selective in their

---

[78] Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, v. 7, p. 455 no. 26340; idem, *Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba*, v. 2, p. 602 no. 1032.

use of the Prophet's words as they alleged their opponents in speculative theology were. But, with Ḥammād's centrality to the project of ḥadīth transmission how could one justify reports such as these without accusing him of holding Shiite sympathies himself? Indeed, how then can one explain Aḥmad's transmission of similar reports? The most straightforward answer provided would be that Aḥmad collected even weak ḥadīth and was conscious of doing so especially when it came to the genre of faḍāʾil and manāqib. Also it could be argued that because these reports, not directly related to theology or to law, were permissible even in less than perfect form.

Another, perhaps more satisfactory, explanation however is that through the process of rijāl criticism certain transmitters were excised from the corpus of ḥadīth reports on the basis of their sectarian sympathies or affiliations, ex post facto as the boundaries of sectarian interpretations of history became more crystallized. In the case of Ḥammād's reports mentioned above, his source, a certain ʿAlī b. Zayd b. Jud n al-Makkī al-Baṣrī (d. 129/746)[79], seems to serve as a demonstration of this point. The significance of this phenomenon lies in the fact that it demonstrates a case where orthodox interpretations of history in effect rewrite history by redrawing boundaries of community, and vice versa.

Both the Ghadīr and Cloak reports are related by Aḥmad through the lower portion of the isnād: ʿAffān ← Ḥammād b. Salama← ʿAlī b. Zayd b. Judʿān**.** Like Ḥammād, ʿAlī b. Zayd seems to have been a prolific figure in the transmission of religious and historical information in the second Islamic century. He thus appears widely in early materials, including tafsīr works, ḥadīth, and other historical writings. For example, in the Musnad of

---

[79] ʿAlī b. Zayd b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Judʿān al-Baṣrī al-Makkī (d. 129/746). For the most complete biography see Mizzī, Tadhīb al-Kamāl v. 13, p. 269-274.

Abū Dāwūd al-Ṭayālisī (d. 203/813) ʿAlī b. Zayd's transmissions are carried on the authority of Ḥammād b. Salama and Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 170/776) where he records the sayings and actions of a variety of leading Companions and Successors.[80] The same can be said of his transmissions in the *Muṣannaf* collections of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/826) and Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849). In Qurʾanic exegesis reports transmitted through him can be found in *Tafsīrs* as early as al-Ṭabarī and as late as Ibn Kathīr.

He was originally from Mecca and a seemingly well known companion of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣri, whom he held in higher esteem even than ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr. He himself is to have said that he and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī would spend late nights in prayer together reading "al-Baqara, Āl ʿImrān, al-Nisāʾ, and al-Māʾida." When al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī passed away, a certain Manṣūr b. Zādhān, famous for completing the Qurʾān twice a day, told ʿAlī b. Zayd to reconvene al-Ḥasan's study circle.[81] ʿAlī b. Zayd transmitted from prominent figures such as Anas b. Mālik al-Anṣārī, ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr, ʿAlī b. al-Husayn,[82] and ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. Other elites transmitted directly from him, such as Sufyān b. ʿUyyana, Sufyān al-Thawrī, Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj, and of course Ḥammād b. Salama.

Despite his seeming prominence in a number of different circles, his profile as recorded in the biographical dictionaries is rendered in unfavorable and at best ambiguous terms. He is said to have mixed up *ḥadīth*, had a poor memory, and relied upon writing down traditions, yet he was still acknowledged as one of Basra's judges, albeit blind.[83] Ibn Saʿd

---

[80] For information in Shuʿba's role in the development of ḥadīth criticism see Muḥammad Zubayr Ṣiddīqī, *Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development, and Special Features* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), pp. 35-39; Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Ḥadīth: Muḥammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 77-80.

[81] Al-Mizzī, *Tadhīb al-Kamāl*, v. 13, p. 272-3.

[82] ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, likely Zayn al-Ābidīn.

[83] Mizzī, *Tadhīb al-Kamāl* v. 13, p. 269-274.

reports that he was prolific in *ḥadīth* but that there was no need to rely upon him for reports; Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, upon the authority of his father, said that he was not strong. ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad transmits a similar report.[84] Aḥmad's cousin and student Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq b. Ḥanbal (d. 273/866) affirms that Aḥmad explicitly called him weak.[85] That viewpoint was also shared by other master critics such as al-Nasāʾī and Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn. Ibrahim b. Yaʿqūb al-Jawzajānī, whose Nāṣibī leanings were mentioned above, said he was groundless in ḥadīth.

While these criticisms are levied in general terms, others are more explicit about his Shiite leanings being the point of objection. Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, and Ibn ʿAdī both said he was inclined towards Shīʿism (*tashayyuʿ*). and Yazīd b. Zurayʿ said, "I saw ʿAlī b. Zayd and I didn't take from him, he was a Rāfiḍī. Ḥammād b. Salama himself is to have attempted to fend off criticism of ʿAlī b. Zayd leveled by Ḥammād's rival, Wuhayb b. Khālid (d. 160)[86] saying, "None but the elite (*al-ashrāf*) would hold company with ʿAlī."[87]

In addition to his alleged sectarian affiliations, ʿAli b. Zayd was accused, like Ḥammād of the practice of raising (*rafaʿ*) *ḥadīth*. It is more likely however that the accusation of being prone to raising *ḥadīth* was directly related to the sectarian nature of the transmissions under suspicion. In this vein, Ibn Ḥibbān is said to have found major fault in him for raising a report which incidentally is related by Ḥammād b. Salama that alleges the

---

[84] Mizzī, *Tadhīb al-Kamāl* v. 13, p. 270.
[85] *Tabaqat al-Ḥanābila*, v. 1, p. 134.

[86] Mizzī, *Tadhīb al-Kamāl*, v. 19, p. 504.

[87] Mizzī, *Tadhīb al-Kamāl* v. 13, p. 273.

Prophet to have said, "If you see Muʿāwiya on this pulpit then kill him."[88] Of course this

tradition and its variants were subject to serious contention amongst the scholars of *ḥadīth*.

Given the proximity of this and ʿAlī b. Zayd's other reports to contentious Shiite discourses it

is to be expected that they would be excised from the corpus of reliable material.

If ʿAlī b. Zayd's reliability as a transmitter was actually called into question because

of his mere participation in contentious discourses, and not necessarily because of issues

related to the technical methods of tradition transmission, then basic presumptions about the

claims of *ḥadīth* critics arise. The most immediate concern centers on the central claim that it

was in fact *isnād* analysis and not *matn* (content) scrutiny that drove the filtering process of

critics in the third Islamic century. The findings here, of course, suggest an inverse. That is,

content scrutiny (*matn* criticism) drove the purge of transmitters from the community of

reliable scholars. The basis of this assertion is attested to by the fact that third century *ḥadīth*

critics were already invested in the practice of matn criticism as demonstrated by the recent

and erudite work of Jonathan A.C. Brown.[89]

The remaining positive historical question that can still be raised however is, who in

fact was ʿAlī b. Zayd b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Judʿān? As we have seen later Sunni critics were fairly

certain that he was a Shiite or Rāfiḍī. However, unlike Ḥammād who is explicitly claimed by

Imāmī Shiites as a companion of Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn and special confidant of Jaʿfar al -Ṣādiq[90],

ʿAlī b. Zayd b. Judān is conspicuously absent from Shiite biographies although he relates a

number *ḥadīth* reports central to Shiite sacred history.

---

[88] Ibn Hajjar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, v. 4, 269.

[89] Jonathan A.C. Brown, "How We Know Early Ḥadīth Critics Did *Matn*
Criticism and Why It's So Hard to Find" in *Islamic Law and Society*, v. 15, no. 2 (2008), pp. 143-184.

[90] Azīzī, Raviyaan Mushtarak, v. 1, p. 262.

This analysis shows that it is at best presumptuous to consider Ḥammād a proto-Sunni, in the way that Sunni scholars present him. Rather, it is only when the guardians of tradition deem him as such and the corpus of his transmissions are made to fit the criteria of an emerging orthodoxy, that he can be described as a Sunni at all. It is of course not surprising to see communitarian discourse operating in this fashion. The question worth entertaining, however, is the role of the contemporary historian in redescribing the early Islamic period and the development of sectarian boundaries in Muslim society. If the discourse of early Muslim scholars is not approached with a fair amount of scrutiny and subjected to a degree of skepticism, the modern student of Islamic history runs the risk of reifying the indigenous categories and taxonomies used by Muslim scholars themselves. Of course this would not be a problem had those categories not been from the beginning imbued with sectarian bias, as this analysis has demonstrated.

More importantly, a diachronic study of the Ḥammād b. Salama ← ʿAlī b. Zayd link and the reports they carry may be telling of a larger process of narrative formation. It may be an example of the way in which third/fourth-century *ḥadīth* scholars, in discerning the reliability of various narrators, simultaneously prioritized particular historical narratives over others and thereby slowly contributed to the construction of particular Sunni visions of history. Alongside the turbulent sectarian politics of Baghdad and the 'Abbasid Empire more generally, such taxonomy of historical narrative would be expected. But what is important to recognize is that in these nuanced constructions of figures like Alī and groups like the *ahl al-bayt*, collective memories are not simply repeated, but rather constructed. In this way Alī's installation as a fourth Caliph must have been accompanied by a stripping of his status as a Shiite Imam, an epistemological shift worthy of further inquiry.

Conclusion

The arguments in this chapter have revolved around one central theme, namely that as an act of political and religious reconciliation that both appropriates and suppresses partisan histories, the eventual Sunni inclusion of the figure of ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib in continuum with the caliphate of Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān necessarily creates a tension in the narrative of early Islamic history which requires constant discursive maintenance. I have argued that the idea of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs is but one expression of this type of discursive activity and that a close reading of the narrative structure surrounding the character of ʿAlī in Sunni literature reveals the many ways exegetes came to secure the belief that ʿAlī was part of the early pristine period and not a cause of its dismemberment. Some of these methods used to arrive at narrative maintenance include the use *ḥadīth* reports as a means of historical interpretation, emplotment schemes as means for narrative analysis, and *rijāl* criticism as polemics. As the Sunni vision congealed over time, it would come to include elements of each of these techniques even as they acquired a normative form.

Making ʿAlī "fit" into the Sunni historical vision required that elements of his hagiographic profile be "de-Shiitized." Hence, as we saw above, by removing ʿAlī b. Zayd from the canon of reliable transmitters, so too were the troublesome narrations reporting ʿAlī's sacred status removed from the corpus of historical accurate material. Likewise, in the case of the *Ḥadīth al-Ṭayr*, ʿAlī's alleged superiority in merit or precedence over other companions would not be countenanced. In effect, his memory in Sunni tradition is an inherently agonistic one that mitigates potential Shiite challenges. More directly, his very hagiographic profile, if read closely, reveals the sectarian tension which lies at the heart of his memory in Sunni tradition.

As a final example of this claim, I survey here Ibn Kathīr's introductory treatment of Alī b. Abū Ṭālib in *al-Bidāya wa-l Nihāya*. As noted before, historical writing and *ḥadīth* criticism were technically distinct genres. However, the flourishing of *ḥadīth* criticism in many ways aimed to "correct" the distortions of the *quṣāṣ* and *akhbāriyyūn*. As master *ḥadīth* critic himself, Ibn Kathīr's universal history provides an excellent source to witness the way in which a narrative history is constructed under the shadow of the sciences of *ḥadīth*.[91]

Ibn Kathīr first introduces ʿAlī's basic biographical information such as his birth, genealogy, and siblings. He then marks ʿAlī's distinction as one of the ten Companions promised paradise (*al-ʿashara al-mubashara*) and the fourth Rightly-Guided Caliph; he also offers his physical description. Next, Ibn Kathīr takes on the issue ʿAlī's conversion to Islam. He says, "ʿAlī accepted Islam early (*qadīman*). Some say he was seven, others eight, others nine, others, ten…" Then he refers to a *ḥadīth* recorded in ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī's *Muṣannaf*,[92] found also in Aḥmad's *Faḍāʾil*,[93] that says that the first person to accept Islam after Khadīja was ʿAlī.[94]

As Asma Asfarrudin and others have argued, the early debate over legitimate authority in Muslim society was grounded primarily in the concept of precedence (*sābiqa*), and not genealogy, as Shiite claimants would argue.[95] While her conclusions vis-à-vis early Muslim society writ large await scrutiny, it is safe to say that this indeed came to represent a Sunni vision. Hence, for Ibn Kathīr, it is important to manage the potential Shiite claim that argues ʿAlī's precedence over other companions. The way in which he does this is an

---

[91] Ibn Kathīr, al-*Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, v. 10, pp. 411-428.
[92] ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Sanʿānī, *Muṣannaf*, v. 11, p. 221.
[93] Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba*, v. 2, p. 589.
[94] Ibn Kathīr, al-*Bidāya wa al-Nihāya* (Cairo: Dar al-Ḥijr, 1998), v. 10, pp. 412-13.
[95] Asma Afsaruddin, *Excellence and Precedence: Medieval Islamic Discourse on Legitimate Leadership* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002).

important example of Sunni historical logic at work. Although, Ibn Kathīr acknowledges the

authenticity of this report he mitigates its potential implications by saying,

> And it is [indeed] true that he was the first of the servants/youth (al-ghulamān) to
> become Muslim, just as Khadīja was the first of the women to become Muslim, and
> Zayd b. Ḥāritha was the first of the slaves to become Muslim, and Abū Bakr al-
> Ṣiddīq the first among the free men to become Muslim. The reason for ʿAlī's
> acceptance of Islam at a young age was because he was in the custody of the
> Messenger of God.[96]

At stake in this discussion is establishing that the unfolding of events after the Prophet's

death—the assumption of the Caliphate by Abū Bakr—naturally corresponded to the proper

hierarchy amongst the Companions while he was alive. Thus, the theological issue of *tafḍīl*

visited above is directly embedded in the Ibn Kathīr's presentation of ʿAlī's basic

biographical data. Here Abū Bakr's precedence over ʿAlī is made explicit. Ibn Kathīr follows

by saying, "It has been related that ʿAlī [himself] said, 'I am the first to become Muslim',

[but] its *isnād* is not authentic."[97] To further his case he points out that Ibn Asākir rejected

this *ḥadīth* and its variants. Ibn Kathīr also summons the explanation that ʿAlī, out of fear of

his father concealed his faith until his father told him to follow his cousin, Muḥammad.

Ibn Kathīr then transitions to the subject of ʿAlī's participation in the Flight (*hijra*) to

Medina from Mecca. He immediately again begins to "correct" and properly interpret ʿAlī's

relationship to the Prophet. Here he reviews the way in which Muḥammad *brothered*

---

[96] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, v. 10, pp. 413.
[97] Ibid.

(*muʾākhāh*) the companions from Mecca with counterparts in Medina in an effort to solidify the new community. He says,

> The Prophet made him [ʿAlī] brothers with Sahal b. Ḥanīf. Ibn Isḥāq and others from the People of *Sīra* and *Maghāzī* have mentioned that the Prophet brothered himself with ʿAlī. There have indeed been many ḥadīth related in that regard. [However] there is nothing authentic in [the story] because of weakness in its *isnāds* and feebleness in some of its *matns*. In some of them [they say] 'you are my brother and inheritor' or 'successor (*khalifatī*)' or 'the best in command after me'. This *ḥadīth* is a fabrication…[98]

Here Ibn Kathīr, following the footsteps of other ḥadīth masters who critique the renditions of the historians, summons the authority of the *isnād* to suppress the authenticity of their reports. Similar to the case seen above in ʿAlī b. Zayd this technique of *matn* critique via *rijāl* criticism is one of the most important examples of the way in which salvation history is re-created in Sunni tradition through ḥadīth literature over historical chronicles.

It is in this general manner that Ibn Kathīr continues his biographical overview of ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib. Both affirming and negating the various dimensions of his relationship to the Prophet and the establishment of Islam more generally, ʿAlī's valor in the Prophet's various campaigns are highlighted in Ibn Kathīr's treatment, but he makes necessary changes along the way. For example, Ibn Kathīr, again relying upon Ibn ʿAsākir's opinion rejects the notion that ʿAlī was permanently given the Prophet's sword, "Dhu al-Fiqār" and the popular praise for ʿAlī "There is no sword except Dhu al-Fiqār and there is no young man like ʿAlī."[99]

---

[98] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, v. 10, pp. 413. The story is originally recorded in Ibn Isḥāq, *Sirat Rasūl Allāh*, edited by A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 234-5. Ibn Kathīr addresses the issue more directly in *al-Bidāya*, v. 4, pp. 460-65.

[99] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, v. 10, pp. 415.

Dispelling stories about ʿAlī fighting Jinn in the desert, he says "these are stories…from the ignorance of the *akhbāriyyūn*."[100] Many of ʿAlī's unique distinctions and merits, however, are also affirmed such as the report in which Muḥammad says to ʿAlī, "You are from me and I am from you," and also the report that compares ʿAlī to Muḥammad, to that of Aaron to Moses, known as the *ḥadīth al-manzilah*.[101] The are followed of course by a critique of the "ignorance of the Shīʿa, story tellers (*al-quṣṣāṣ*), and idiots (*al-aghbiyāʾ*) who claim that these translate into a notion that ʿAlī was appointed as Muḥammad's successor."

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the historiographic problems associated with the Sunni category of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Rather than offering a point of origin for the doctrine, we have tried to demonstrate the ways in which the idea is itself a critique and revision of Islam's early tumultuous history connected to the pervasive Sunni idea of the Companions (*al-ṣaḥāba*). We have also tried to show the ways in which the appropriation of ʿAlī by ʿUthmanī traditionists was a critical feature of the emergence of the idea of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Most significantly, given the ways in which Sunni doctrine concerning the Companions colors Sunni historical materials, we have showed the difficulty faced by modern historians in reconstructing first century Islamic political history.

---

[100] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, v. 10, pp. 417.

[101] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya,* v. 10, p. 418.

VI

The *Faḍāʾil* of Muʿāwiya

in the Formation of the Ḥanbalī *madhhab*

Because of his central role in intra-community conflicts that plagued the early Muslim movement, Muʿāwiya b. Abū Sufyān, I argue, holds an ambivalent place in the memory of the Sunni community and his relation to Islamic history more generally. While his demand that ʿUthmān's murderers be brought to justice before the election of a new Caliph, which led to the Battle of Ṣiffīn, was categorically no different than the claims leveled by Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, and ʿĀʾisha at the Battle of the Camel, Muʿāwiya's political career more generally stands in the way of Sunni Islam's vision of a pristine early community. For example, in addition to abstention from offering allegiance to ʿAlī throughout his short reign, it is commonly accepted that through the appointment of his son Yazīd as the next Caliph, he was the first to attach hereditary succession to the office of the Caliphate. In that sense, Muʿāwiya sits at the very division between the periods of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs and the dynastic imperialism in early Islamic history. Also, that he bore ultimate responsibility for the deaths of ʿAmmār b. Yāsir and Ḥujr b. ʿAdī, both highly respected associates of Muḥammad further tainted the memory of the first Ummayad caliph.

However, Muʿāwiya also plays a central role in Islam's post-salvation triumphalist history. Most importantly, he took command over greater Syria during the reign of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb after the death of his brother Yāzid b. Abī Sufyān (d. 63/683). This critical frontier with the Byzantine Empire functioned as a focal point of religious ideology and polemics in the world of late antiquity and it was where Islam quickly established its own sense of collective identity and mythic history. Muʿāwiya is credited with ordering the first Muslim naval siege of Constantinople (674-678)[1], an act that, according to the ḥadīth, record was foretold by Muḥammad himself. The flourishing of an Islamic Damascus under his rule was also taken as another manifestation of Islam's religious and imperial glory. At the very least, then, the praiseworthy characteristics of political acumen, foresight, and forbearance (ḥilm) have been the characteristics that Sunni scholars have come to agree upon about Muʿāwiya's legacy. While the fact that the legacy of Muʿāwiya was a contentious discourse in early Islamic history is fairly self-evident, the question of how the conventional narrative of his place in the Islamic grand narrative coalesced against the backdrop of Islamic sectarian formation is not.

This chapter pursues this question through the investigation of a recently edited manuscript entitled *Faḍāʾīl Muʿāwiya* held in the Zahiriyya Library. This work was compiled by a certain ʿUbayd Allāh b. Jaʿfar Abū al-Qāsim al-Saqaṭī who, though originally from Baghdad, spent the last forty years of his life in Mecca where he died in 406/1015. This text has been edited along with two other little known

---

[1] Stephen Humphreys, *Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān: From Arabia to Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 58.

treatises on the merits of founder of the Umayyad Dynasty. The first is *Ḥilm Muʿāwiya* by Ibn Abī Dunyā (d. 281/894) and the other, *Sharḥ ʿAqd ahl al-Imān fī Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān* by al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī Abū ʿAlī al-Ahwāzī (d. 446/1053).[2]

The materials in Abū al-Qāsim's text, however, are treated uniquely here for two reasons. The first is that the text appears to be one of Ibn ʿAsākīr's many sources for the construction of Muʿāwiya's biography. The second and more important reason concerns the nature of the content of the reports in the *Faḍāʾīl Muʿāwiya*. Unlike the texts attributed to Ibn Abī Dunyā[3] and al-Ahwāzī whose materials can be found readily in a number of extant texts and fit the conventional narrative of Muʿāwiya that we find in Sunni literature writ large, Abū al-Qāsim's text contains *ḥadīth* reports that were considered fabrications or otherwise deemed unfit for continued transmission by most Sunni scholars. The qualitative nature of these traditions breaks with conventional praises of Muʿāwiya in that they focus not on his extraordinary political merits, but on the allegedly central role he played in the transmission of Islam to humanity through his relationship with the Prophet Muḥammad.

Rather than dismissing these materials as mere aberrations or speculating upon the historicity of the events described in the *ḥadīth*, this chapter treats the text as a heuristic through which to study unconventional and otherwise suppressed narratives about Muʿāwiya and to gain insight into the floundering pro -Umayyad movement during the Shiite century. Alongside providing a translation of the text and

---

[2] ʿIṣām Muṣṭafā Hazāyimah and Yūsuf Aḥmad Balī Yāsīn (eds.), *Thalāth rasāʾil fī faḍāʾil Muʿāwiyah* (Irbid: Muʿassasat Ḥammādah lil-Dirāsāt al-Jāmiʿīya wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2000).

[3] James Bellamy discussed much of the material in this text when it was still in manuscript form in "Pro-Umayyad Propaganda in Ninth-Century Baghdad in the Works of Ibn Abī Dunyā" in *Preʾdication et propaganda au Moyen Age; Islam, Byzance, Occident* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), pp. 71-86).

preliminary prosoprographical analysis of its some of its transmitters, the primary goal of this chapter is to establish the relationship between the text's contents and the larger more ambiguous *faḍāʾil* Muʿāwīya tradition more generally, which seems to be an ever-present undercurrent in Sunni historical discourse.

To do so, I bring together two ongoing debates in the study of Islam—the question over the nature of authority in early Islam and the question concerning Cult of Muʿāwiya in the Abbasid Baghdad in the ninth century. First, I support the seemingly unpopular argument, originally set forth by Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds in *God's Caliph*, that the early conception of the caliph in Islam wholly coupled temporal and religious authority in a way which resembled qualities typically associated with Shiite conceptions of the *imamāte* but became diluted over time to arrive at a conception of leadership that de-coupled the religious and political spheres. This is done in order to argue that Muʿāwiya was likely considered as both a religious and political authority by his supporters well into the Abbasid period, but that as emerging political trends sought to reconcile Umayyad-Shiite, tensions the criterion of how one could remember him also naturally adjusted. Thus, as Sunni visions came to revere the triumph of the *jamāʿa* (read polity), Muʿāwiya would come to fall into the category of a simple companion (*saḥābī*) and remembered as a king, with both good and bad qualities. The consequences of this transition was the suppression of his specifically religious merits which placed him in a unique position not only with regard to the early history of Islam as an empire but also with regard to the revelation of Islam itself. Highlighting the contours and history of this understudied tradition, then, is the focus of the following discussion.

The *Faḍāʾil* Muʿāwiya in the Abbasid Political Milieu

We have already mentioned that it is within the context of intra-Shiite rivalry that much of politics of ideological reconciliation took place between the Abbasid house and *jamāʿa* loyalists. Muʿāwiya of course plays a central role in this process and was often a potential flashpoint in Baghdad's tense sectarian milieu. For example, in 211/826 the caliph al-Maʾmūn attempted to institute a ritual cursing of Māwiya from the pulpit. The decision to do so was allegedly retracted upon concerns that it would be a cause of public strife. The same aborted attempts occurred again during the reign of al-Muʿtaḍid in 284/897. Although segments of the Abbasid house may have advocated such a position on the memory of Māwiya, a large portion of the rest of society clearly felt otherwise. Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī, author of the anti-Shiite polemic *al-ʿAwāṣim min al-Qawāsim* mentions that the doors of the mosques in Baghdad were adorned at the entry ways with the phrase, "The best of the people after the Prophet are Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, and Muawiya the Uncle of the Believers."[4]

The literary effects of this rapprochement between the Abbasids and the Umayyads in early Islamic history writing has been discussed by scholars of early Islamic history such as Goitein, Erling Peterson, James Bellamy and most recently Tayeb El-Hibri. These studies have all in part examined the way in which Abbasid period elites managed the legacy of Umayyad rule in their own turbulent political

---

[4] Abu Bakr Ibn al-Arabi, *al-ʿAwāṣim min al-Qawāsim* (ed.) Muhib al-Din al-Khatib (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1989), p. 213.

moment. El-Hibri states, that "a moralizing undercurrent governs much of the representation of the Umayyads, especially the portrayal of Muʿawiya…" Most of this sort of discourse, he argues, seeks to "confirm the centrality of the Abbasid argument and position at the expense of ʿAlid right to the succession and leadership of the Hashimite family."[5] That is, having to choose between the Umayyads and ʿAlids as a threat to their own leadership, Abbasid were quick to conclude that a favorable attitude towards the former ruling house at Damascus held wider benefits and involved less risk than courting the ʿAlid cousins now turned mortal rivals. Whereas lingering pro-Umayyad elements in the polity manifested an occasional uprising, ʿAlid challenges posed a viable ideological and military threat to Abbasid rule.

Third/ninth-century Baghdad, specifically the consequences of the inquisition (*miḥna*, 833-851)[6] initiated by al-Maʾmūn's, provides the political context to best understand why and how a counterintuitive pro-Umayyad policy may have been favorable to the ruling house. While most narratives of al-Maʾmūn's inquisition recall the Caliph's efforts to impose Muʿtazilite doctrine of the createdness of the Qurʾān on the scholars and judges across the polity, his pro-ʿAlid overtures should also be emphasized for their consequences on the development of Sunni identity. Not only did he explicitly place ʿAlī b. Mūsa al-Riḍa (d. 818), the eighth imām of the *imāmī* Shiites, as heir apparent, he also changed the color of the military flags to green, instead of black, which were understood to symbolize the ʿAlid and Abbasid houses

---

[5] El-Hibri, "The Redemption of Umayyad Memory," p. 242.
[6] Zaman, "Mihna," *EI2*

respectively. In addition, he returned the rights of Fadak to the descendants of the ʿAlids as well as ordered the troops in Baghdād to pronounce the *takbīr* (Allāhu akbar) three times after the ritual prayer, a custom associated with Shiite practice. He is also said to have considered temporary marriage permissible and been of the opinion that ʿAlī was the best of men after the Prophet Muḥammad. Given that the collective designations of Shiite and Sunni were yet not established, it would clearly be anachronistic to consider that any of these issues on their own were clear signs of Shiite sympathies. However, when these elements are taken together and juxtaposed with al-Maʾmun's desire to institute the ritual cursing of Muʿāwiya in the face of Baghdād's religious tensions, one can only imagine how an already Shiite Abbasid political milieu further polarized the public sphere.[7]

It is no surprise, then, that in post-*miḥna* Baghdad, we encounter the rise of a strident pro-Umayyad political and religious movement that can be seen as a perfect inverse of support for the Shiite ʿAlī.[8] Ibn al-Jawzī comments that "Among those who claim adherence to the *sunna*, some became zealous for Muʿāwiya and concocted *ḥadīth* about his merit to anger the *rāfiḍa*, and a group of *rāfiḍa* fabricated *ḥādīth* that defamed him. Both groups were badly in error."[9] It is likely the case, as Patricia Crone has argued, that the most vociferous pro-Umayyad elements were in effect

---

[7] John Nawas has returned to the issue of the *miḥna* in a number of recent articles. He makes a strong effort to deconstruct the notion that al-Maʾmūn's *miḥna* policies were motivated either by Muʿtazilite or Shiite leanings. On the latter point he attempts to reverse the conclusions made by Sourdel, who argued that al-Maʾmūn's actions were deeply influenced by sympathies for the ʿAlids. While Nawas's call to caution and precision is appreciated, it falls short of convincing.

[8] Compile list of the literature: Ḥabīb Zayyāt, "Al-Tashayyuʿ li-Muʿāwiya fi ʿAhd al-ʿAbbāsiyyin," *Al-Mashriq* (1928): 410-414; Charles Pellat, "Le Culte du Muʿāwiya au III siècle de le hegira," in *Studia Islamica* 6 (1956): 53-66.

[9] ʿIsām ʿUqla Hazāymeh and Yusef Aḥmad Banī Yasin (eds.), *Faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya* (Irbid: 2001), p. 61.

ʿUthmānis who did not capitulate to the four-caliph thesis that was gaining momentum in mid-ninth century Baghdad.[10] The text that we translate here, *Faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya*, is reflective of this religious and political current.

It should be clear, however, that the bulk materials favorable towards the Umayyads in general, and Muʿāwiya more specifically, that arise in post -*miḥna* Abbasid period are reflective of an emerging mainstream Sunni position and not necessarily the result of a deliberate reaction to ʿAlid propaganda. There were many other incentives to promote a favorable attitude towards the Umayyads for Abbasid elites. At the forefront was the preservation of the idea of the *jamāʿa* of Muḥammad and his followers which is necessarily incompatible with the fundamental Shiite premise of the historical usurpation of ʿAlī by the Prophet's companions. As the Abbasid dutifully maintained the military expeditions against the Byzantines, that were perfected as state ritual by the Umayyads, they would come to represent their own rule as part of a providential plan which necessarily included the former ruling house.

Thus, the actual material continuities between the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties would come to be reflected in the rhetoric of historical anecdote. Here, Tayeb El-Hibri has pointed out the ways in which alleged conversations between Abū Sufyān and al-ʿAbbās, for example, or those between Muʿāwiya and Ibn ʿAbbās demonstrate the ways in which the Umayyad house recognized the religious superiority of the Abbasid house. Such anecdotes also were designed to demonstrate that the Umayyads actually paved the way for Abbasid rule. As Abbasid struggled

---

[10] Crone, "ʿUthmaniyya," *EI2*

with the pains of managing an empire that extended into three continents, Umayyad gestures of excessive generosity and effective political administration were natural tropes through which to emphasize their own patronage efforts in a different political moment.

It is in this vein that Muiya's legacy as a gracious and noble leader uniquely equipped with the characteristics of political forbearance and wisdom would come to be enshrined in the classic Sunni tradition. Writing in the post-*miḥna* period, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā penned a short treatise *Ḥilm Muʿāwiya* in which he brought these virtues to light for a courtly audience.[11] It should be recalled that Ibn Abī al-Dunyā tutored the Caliph al-Muʿtaḍid's (r. 279-289/892-902) son, who would later reign as al-Muktafī (r. 289-295/902-908). He also kept close company with the powerful judge Yūsuf b. Yaʿqūb, who incidentally was the person to dissuade al-Muʿtaḍid from publicly cursing Muʿāwiya.[12] Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's text gathers a number of materials that speak to Muʿāwiya's uncanny political acumen. He is called the Khosrow of the Arabs byʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, who also said that he possessed the shrewdness of Heraclius.[13] Ibn ʿUmar is to have said that no one after the Prophet was more equipped in the ability to lead—*aswad*—a tradition that seems to have been in wide circulation amongst the students of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. A number of anecdotes tell of Muʿāwiya's prescient insight and political confidence. Such stories were meant to

---

[11] Bellamy has discussed some of these traditions in --, Most of them however were preserved by Ibn ʿAsākir and are also recorded by al-Balādhuri. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's text lacks isnads, however they have been provided by the editors of *Faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya*.

[12] Bellamy, p. 73.

[13] Ibn Abi Dunya, # 6, #3

convey not only the wisdom of the founding Umayyad prince, but also provide lessons in leadership and nobility for weary Abbasid elites.

The various ways in which Muʿāwiya has been portrayed in the historical sources is the subject of recent and useful dissertation by Khaled Keshk. Keshk's study focuses on the variations over the representation of Muʿāwiya and their correspondence to regional and political differences in early Islamic society. Likewise, a provisional biography of Muʿāwiya has recently been provided by Stephen Humphreys. His contribution is helpful in that it navigates through the historiographic problems involved in the reconstruction of Muʿāwiya's life, while still providing as a thick description as is possible of the key events in his life, showing how they relate to the development of the early Islamic polity.

Although both Keshk and Humphreys' studies make special note of the limitations imposed upon modern historians by the sources themselves, the focus of their works still concerns Muʿāwiya himself. In this chapter I propose a different approach to the competing representations of Muʿāwiya. Rather than pursuing a source-critical study on Muʿāwiya to arrive a "kernel of truth" about his life and influence, I suggest analyzing the discourse about Muʿāwiya as a gauge through which to better understand the social dynamics that accompanied early Islamic sectarian formation. Considered flagrant forgeries, the materials contained in Abū al-Qāsim al-Saqaṭī's text were summarily rejected by the guardians of *ḥadīth* and history alike. However, it is precisely their location on the margins of the Sunni canon that makes them indispensable as sources for a historical anthropology of Abbasid sectarian politics. Here, a review of the text and its transmission will, it is hoped, shed

light on an otherwise opaque pro- *Muʿāwiya* undercurrent in the consolidation of Sunni Islam.

The *Faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya* and the *"al-Nābita"*

The term *al-Nābita* is a useful place to begin backfilling the history of the pro-Muʿāwiya movement in post-mihna Baghdad. Having been the subject of study for over a century by western scholars of Islamic history, the Nābita were identified as a group by al-Jāḥiẓ who reported that their recent and sudden rise to power marked the beginning of the end of Muʿtazilite religious supremacy. Modern historians following the ambiguity of their sources often equated this "group" with the *Ḥashwiyya*, or vulgar elements of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*. In the early portion of the twentieth century A.S. Halkin demonstrated the problems involved in identifying the group, *al-Ḥashwiyya*, namely because it was no more than a pejorative which was transformed and adopted by anyone who wanted to distance themselves from the vulgar or indiscriminate. In a similar fashion, Wadad al-Qadi put much of confusion over the identity of the Nābita to rest in an insightful article that points to the way in which the "Nābita" should not be understood as a real group, but rather as a pejorative whose referent can only be understood in context.

As al-Qadi points outs, al-Jāḥiẓ was reacting to the immanent downfall of the Muʿtazilite School at the hands of a group which "sprouted" seemingly out of nowhere. The Muʿtazilite sources, which use the term to attack and identify their opponents, point to a number of various characteristics of this movement and associate them largely with the *ahl al-ḥadīth*. They are known to have been excessive

in their love for ʿMuʿāwiya. They are accused of harboring anthropomorphic sentiments and indiscriminately recording and transmitting ḥadīth (hence the term *al-ḥashwiyya*, the stuffers). They were said to be identified with either the Shīʿa for Ḥanbalīs.

Ilai Alon notes that a full century after al-Jāḥiz's lament over the pending triumph of the vulgar, al-Maqdasī in his *Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions* still noted a strong pro-Muʿāwiya element in Baghdād that was given also to anthropomorphism. Interesting al-Maqdasī associates the movement with what he called the *Barbahāriyya*, or the "school" belonging to Abū Muḥammad al-Barbahārī (d. 329/941).[14] Christopher Melchert has described the way in which the emergent Ḥanbalī group of the late ninth and early tenth centuries was divided between two groups; he says "These two parties represented alternative paths for traditionalism to follow. Under al-Khallāl, traditionalism would be preserved as the elaboration of legal doctrine based on the opinions of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. Under al-Barbahārī, it would be preserved as a style of public life." That style, Melchert adds did not develop on account of his scholarship or spirituality but upon rioting.[15] Al-Barbahārī's group of followers was notorious for their ruthless enforcement of commanding right and forbidding wrong in Baghdad's public spaces.[16] He was forced underground at different points throughout his life. On one occasion he was sought

---

[14] Alon, p. 240, n. 154.

[15] Christopher Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law,* p. 150.

[16] Michael Cook, *Commanding Right*, pp. 116-18; 500.

after specifically for his protest to the Caliph al-Qāhir's (r. 320-322/932-34) mulling over the idea, again, to have Muʿāwiya cursed from the pulpit.[17]

The *al-Barbahāriyya*, *ḥashwiyya*, or *al-nābita* might be best conceived of as an amorphous bunch of scholars and laymen who had not yet congealed into the various theological and legal groups. Despite not being a distinct group, the fact that they were considered a threat by the students and admirers of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal shows that they were a force to be reckoned with. Under the scholarly leadership of al-Khallāl and Sahl al-Tustarī Aḥmad's admirers were seeking professionalization of their school on par with what had already developed among the student and devotees of al-Mālik, Abū Ḥanīfa, and al-Shāfiʿī.[18] Thus, it is in this internal Ḥanbalī divide that we can begin to place the *faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya* tradition: in order for the Ḥanbalī school to merge with a rapidly developing Sunni consensus on early history, the pro-Muʿāwiya discourse within its milieu would need to be suppressed. We now turn to some figures involved in the transmission of the *faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya*, by which I mean the general positive sentiment of the founding Umayyad Caliph and not specifically Abū al-Qāsim's compilation, in order to glimpse into the underbelly of the formative Ḥanbalī tradition.

One of the more prominent figures associated with the transmission of *faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya* tradition was the highly esteemed Khurasani born but Baghdad based, philologist was AbŭUmar al -Zāhid al-Lughawī, commonly known as Ghulam

---

[17] Al-Barbahārī, *EI2*.

[18] Melchert, p. 149-154.

Thaʿlab (261/874).[19] In Ḥanbalī circles he was considered unparalleled in knowledge of the Arabic language, revered for his extraordinary memory, and known for gathering rare materials. He is remembered as having enjoyed the audience of the notables and elites of Damascus during a visit there, at which time many students also gathered to receive his transmission of the Thaʿlab's works. While many of the *ḥadīth* experts considered him upright, he was regularly accused forgery and fraud by his detractors in literary circles until, that is, he demonstrated his memory to them and foiled their tricks.

Ibn Khallikān notes that he was extreme (*mughālī*) in his love for Muʿāwīya. All of the biographers note that at the beginning of every one of his lessons he demanded that his students to read from a folio (*juzʾ*) of hadith on the *Faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya*. Ibn Ḥajar claims to have seen some of these reports and considers them mostly fabricated. Ibn al-Nadīm notes that a group among the scholars counted him among the intelligence (*al-barīd*). This last note is unique among the details given to him by other biographers, but is not entirely implausible given that his father, according to Ibn al-Najjār, worked for the government (*ṣāḥib al-dawlā*).[20]

---

[19] Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Abī Hāshim al-Lughawī, Abu ʿUmar al-Zāhid Ghulām Thaʿlab. Al-Khaṭīb, *Tarīkh Baghdād*, 3/158; Abu Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, vol. 2, pp. 56-7; Ibn Hajar, *Lisān al-Mizān*, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, vol. 5, p. 303; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayat al-ʿAyyān*, vol. 2, p. 386; Ibn Nadīm--; "Ghulām Thaʿlab," *EI2*.

[20] Ibn Najjār, *Dhayl Tarīkh al-Baghdād*, vol. 16, p. 141.

Another transmitter of pro-Muʿāwiya traditions was Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd Allah al-Ājurrī, the author of the book *Sharīʿa fi-l Sunna.*[21] He was originally from Baghdad, where he heard and transmitted hadith before his departure to Mecca where he died in 360/971. According to al-Khaṭīb, his *nisba* is derived from a village named al-Ājurr, outside of Baghdad. But because of his long residence in Mecca and affiliation with Baghdad's *ʿulamāʾ*, the *nisba* al-Baghdādī also often accompanies his name. He was known as a prominent and reliable *muḥaddith* and *faqīh* and was claimed by both Shāfʿīs and Ḥanbalīs.

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī includes a short entry on him in the *Tārīkh al-Baghdād,* while a longer treatment is given to him in Ibn Khallikān's (d. 681/1282) *Wafayāt al-ʿAyyān*. Al-Dhahabī refers to him as *shaykh al-haram al-sharīf*. In Baghdād his most prominent teacher was, as al-Dhahabī suggests, the well respected *muḥaddith* Abū Muslim Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbd Allah al-Kājjī (d. 292/905),[22] author of a certain *al-Sunan* that apparently has not survived. Al-Ājurrī is said to have participated in the transmission of ḥadīth before the year 330/941, at which point he departed to Mecca, where he prayed for provision to allow him to stay for a year. He died in Baghdad in 346/956 and his prayer was answered from the well-known ascetic Maʿrūf al-Karkhī. His departure to Mecca seems to coincide with the flight of other *ʿulamāʾ* affiliated with *ahl al-ḥadīth* circles at the time. Though al-Ājurrī's departure from

---

[21] The printed editions of this text are entitled simply *al-Sharīʿa*, but al-Dhahabī has it recorded as *al-Sharīʿa fi-l Sunna*, Dhahabi, *Siyār*, v. 12, p. 273.

[22] Franz Rosenthal, *General Introduction*, pp. 64-65; al-Khaṭīb, *Tarikh*, vol. 6, p. 118-121; al-Dhahabi, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥufāẓ*, vol. 1, p. 275-6. al-Kajjī's reliability was authenticated by al-Daraquṭnī. Of note is the fact that Abū Bakr b. Mālik al-Qaṭaʿī, one of the major transmitters of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's *Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba* is recorded as one of his students.

Baghdad takes place four years before actual Buyid conquest of the city, the Daylamite warlords had already seized control of most of Abbasid territory in central Iran with repeated incursions into Iraq. Besides, in 322/934, ʿAlī b. Buyeh, the eldest of the three founding brothers of the dynasty, openly professing Shiism had already been recognized by the caliph as governor of Fars.[23]

With caliphal power diluted, sectarian tensions were on the rise, and it is in this context that al-Ājurrī managed to befriend Ibn Baṭṭa al-ʿUkbarī, the well known Ḥanbalī polemicist and close associate of the infamous al-Barbahārī. Ibn Baṭṭa may have also been in self-imposed exile, given the state of affairs in Baghdad. In Mecca, al-Ājurrī also seems to have served as a mentor to Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṣaqaṭī, the compiler of our *Faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya.* His most famous student, however must be Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038) author of *Akhbār Isbahān* and *Ḥilyāt al-Awliyāʾ,* whose text *Tathbīt al-Khilāfa wa-l Raddʿalā al -Imāma* was mentioned in chapter five.

He appears also as a regular authority on a variety of issues of law in Ibn Taymiyya's *responsa* and to a greater extent in Ibn Mufliḥ's *al-Furūʿ,* where he regularly quotes al-Ājurrī's now lost *al-Naṣīḥa.* In passing, Ibn Taymiyya refers to *al-Sharīʿa* as the book "that the people of knowledge refer to."[24]

---

[23] Tilman Nagel, "Buyids" in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. 4 p--.

[24] *Risāʾil wa Masaʾil Ibn Taymiyya*, Dar al-Fikr, vol. 1, p. 200.

Adab al-Nufūs, Taḥrīm al-nard wa-al-shaṭranj wa-al-malāhī, Akhlāq ḥamalat al-Qurʾān, and fragments of others still in manuscript.

During his lifetime, al-Ājurrī became a staunch defender of an emerging Sunni worldview. This may be the reason that he drew the attention of Andalusian *ʿulamāʾ* during their travels to the eastern Islamic world in the mid fourth/tenth century. While Baghdad's scholars struggled with the emerging power of Shīʿism in central Islamic heartland, those in the Iberian Peninsula shared similar concerns with the rising influence of the Fatimids on their own door step. Such explains the declaration of the Qurtuban based Umayyad Caliphate in 310/922.

It is no surprise then that he appears as an authority and destination for scholars in this political context who sought to bolster their credentials during their pilgrimages to Mecca and otherwise. From Cordoba he received Abū ʿAbd Allah al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥayy in 348/959, Abū al-Qāsim Aḥmad b. Mawfiq al-Umawī visited in 352 and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Layth in 357, who also stayed with al-Saqaṭī. Others who proclaimed Umayyad lineage that visited him were Abū Naṣr Fath b. Ibrāhīm al-Umawī from Toledo and Abū al-ʿUthmān Saʿīd b. Muḥammad al-Umawī 350 from Balda.

The text that has occasioned this discussion is attributed to Abū al-Qāsim ʿUbayd Allah b. Muḥammad al-Ṣharqī al-Baghdādī (d. 406/1015). This scholar originally from Baghdad settled in Mecca for the last forty years of his life, Despite being a colleague and student of a number of reputed *muḥaddithun* of the fourth/tenth century, his biographical information is exceedingly scarce. A large part of this is due to the fact that al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī did not include him in his massive

biographical encyclopedia. Whether this omission was based his presumed ideological differences with Abū al-Qāsim is difficult to tell. Ibn Najjār filled this void with a short entry mostly composed of a list of Abū al-Qāsim's students and teachers, with examples of two well-known *ḥadīth* reports which he is known to have transmitted. Ibn Najjār's description then served as the primary source for al-Dhahabī's treatment in both his *Tārīkh al-Islām* and *Siyar aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, where he offers little new information.

Despite the paucity of biographical information available on Abū al-Qāsim al-Saqaṭī, a vague picture of his theological and political alignments may be discerned through his network of associates. While in Baghdad he is said to have heard from Abū Bakr b. Mālik al-Qaṭīʿī, who was responsible for much of the transmission of Aḥmad's *Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba* and the prolific ʿAlī b. ʿUmar al-Dāraquṭnī. Ibn Abī al-Fawāris transmitted a number of folios from him. In Mecca he kept close company with Aḥmad b. Mūhammad b. Ziyād b. al-Aʿrābī and Ismāʿl al-Ṣaffār. The latter, a well known grammarian and *adīb*, was described by al-Dāraquṭnī, his most accomplished student, as extreme (*mutaʿṣṣib*) in his commitment to the *sunna*.[25] He was buried near Ibn ʿUmar al-Zāhid[26]: the grammarian who began each of his classes with a recitation of the merits of Muʿāwīya encountered above.

His most important connection may be that of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ājurrī. In fact, in many ways Abū al-Qāsim seems to have been the conduit through which al-Ājurrī's teachings were transmitted. For example, a certain Hudhayl b.

---

[25] *Siyar* vol. 12 p. 97.

[26] al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh al-Baghdād*, v. 6, pp. 299-301.

Muḥammad al-Bakrī (d. 400/1010) from Cordoba is said to have heard al-Ājurrī's *al-Sharʿīa* in 380/990 from Abū al-Qāsim. Other scholars from Spain such as Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Qurṭubī[27] and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā.[28] Abū al-Qāsim and al-Ājurrī's connection with each other and to al-Andalusia seems to have been well known. Ibn Bashkuwāl notes al-Saqaṭī and al-Ājurrī as a pair when describing the destination of particular scholars in their travels to the east. But a unique demonstration of al-Saqaṭī's strong connection to Andalusian scholars can be seen in the fact that IbnʿAbd al -Barr (d. 463/1071), the well known author of *al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb*, is said to have received permission in writing from Abū al-Qāsim to transmit his hadith. This rather entrenched connection to Umayyad Spain can probably be explained in political terms similar to those that account for al-Ājurrī's connections there. We now provide full translation of Abū al-Qāsim al-Saqaṭī's *Faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya*, after which we discuss its significance in light of the preceding discussion.

---

[27] Also known as Ibn al-Mīrāthī, *Siyar* v. 13 p. 372.

[28] *Siyar* v. 13 p. 510

Juzʿ fīhi Faḍāʾil Amīr al-Muʾminīn Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān

(May Allah be pleased with him)

Compiled by
Abī al-Qāsim ʿUbayd Allah b. Muḥammd b. Aḥmad al-Saqaṭī
(May Allah be merciful to him)

1. Isḥāq b. Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Sūsī ← Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Saqaṭī ← Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim b. Sulaymān al-Muʾadab ← Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. al-Ḍaḥāk ← Aḥmad b. al-Haytham ← Qutayba b. Saʿīd ← Ibn Lahīʿa ← Darrāj ← Abī al-Samaḥ ← Abī al-Haytham ← Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, who said:

   The Messenger of God said, "Muʿāwiya (may Allah be pleased with him) will be raised from his grave, wearing a sash made of silk and brocade, studded with pearls and rubies, and written upon will be, "There is no god but God, Muḥammad is the messenger of God, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with them.""

2. Isḥāq ← Abū Bakr ← Aḥmad b. Isḥāq b. Ḥabīb al-Qaṭshī ← ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb ← Naʿīm b. Ḥammād ← Shuʿāyb b. Shābūr ← Marwān b. Janāḥ ← Yūnis b. Maysra b. Ḥalbas ← ʿAbd Allah b. Bisr, who said:

   The Messenger of God sought the council of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar regarding an issue he was concerned with. They said, "Allah and his Messenger know better."
   The Messenger said, "Call Muʿāwiya for me." When he came he said, "Present your affairs to him, entrust him with your affairs, and have him witness your affairs, for he is strong"

3. Isḥāq ← Abū Bakr b. Mahrān ← Abū Bakr b. ʿAbd al-Khālaq ← Ibrāhīm b. Naṣīr ← Sulaymān al-Riqqī ← Shaykh ← ʿAbd al-Raḥmīm b. Ghanam ← ʿUrwa b. Ruwaym who said:

A Bedouin came to the Prophet and said, "Oh Messenger of God, wrestle me."

Muʿāwiya rose to him and said, Bedouin, I will wrestle you" The Prophet said,

"Muʿāwiya will never be defeated." So he pinned the Bedouin down. (or went mad).

He [ʿUrwa b. Ruwaym?] said "When it was the day of Ṣiffīn, ʿAlī, God be pleased

with him, said, "Had I remembered, this hadith, I would not have fought Muʿāwiya."

4. Isḥāq ← Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ṣiddīq ← Abū Bakr Muḥammad b.
Ibrāhī al-ʿAwāmī ← al-ʿIrābi ← al-Mubrid ← al-Māzanī ← al-Aṣmaʿī

Muʿāwiya was presented a handmaiden (*jāriya*) with whom he was pleased so he
asked about her price. Her price was 100,000 Dirhams and he bought her. He looked
to ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ and said "For whom is this slave girl fitting."
He said, "For the Commander of the Believers."
He [Muʿāwiya] looked to another and who said [what ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ suggested].
[Muʿāwiya] responded, "No."
They said, "then for who?"
He said, "For Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, may Allah be pleased with them both. He
is most deserving of her on account of his honor and because of what was between us
and his father." So he sent someone to watch over her. After forty days he sent her
with great amounts of money, fine clothes, and more. He wrote [to Ḥusayn]: "The
Commander of the Believers purchased a slave girl and she was pleasing to him, and
he preferred you for her."
When she arrived to Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī she entered upon him and her beauty was
pleasing to him. So he said to her, "What is your name?"
She said, "Hawa [the wind]"
He said, "You are the wind as you have been named. Are you good at anything?"
She said, "Yes, I read the Qurʾān and recite poetry."
He said, "Read."
She read, "To Him are the keys of the unseen, no one knows them save Him (al-
Anʿām, 59)."
He said, "Recite poetry for me."

She said, "Can I choose [what to read]?"

He said, "Yes."

She recited, "You are the perfection of delight if you would but last, but indeed man does not last."

Ḥusayn cried and said, "You are free, and what Muʿāwiya sent with you is for you." Then he asked her, "Did you say anything to Muʿāwiya."

She said,

"I saw the man spend and gather his efforts in the hope of riches, while those who will inherit stay idle. But for the man there is only piety in his destiny. Yet when he departs from the world, it is that which will be his reward."

He ordered a thousand dinars for her and sent her off. Then he said, "I have seen much of what the Commander of the Believers used to recite:

"For he who seeks pure pleasure in this world, he will have, by my life, blame soon. For if it slips away strife will befall a person, yet if it comes near its time is short lived.

Then he cried and rose to his prayer.

5.   Isḥāq ← Ibn Ṣiddīq ← ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar al-Farghānī ← ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar al-Maydānī ← Abū ʿAbd Allah Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd Allah ← Abū al-Rabīʿ al-Zahrānī ← Ḥammād b. Zayd ← Ayyūb ← ʿAṭā b. Abī Rabbāḥ ← Ibn ʿAbbās

On the Day of Resurrection, The Prophet will be called with Muʿāwiya next to him. They are standing in between the two hands of God, the Mighty, Most High. He (God) presents the Prophet with a necklace of rubies and a bracelet made of three bands of pearls. The Prophet took the necklace and put it on Muʿāwiya's neck and gave him the bracelet. God the Mighty, Most High said, Oh Muḥammad, you are generous to me and I am the Generous, and I am not a miser. The Prophet said, "My lord and master, I entrusted Muʿāwiya with the realm of the world and I find him to have fulfilled what I entrusted to him from between your hands, oh Lord." So the Lord, the Mighty, Most High smiled at the both of them and then said, "Take the hand of your friend and enter Paradise together."

6.	Isḥāq ← Abū Bakr Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Saqaṭī ← Mujāhid ← Ibn ʿAbbās and Jābir b. ʿAbd Allah al-Anṣārī who both said: The Messenger of God said,

"There are seven trustees of God." They said, "Oh Messenger of God, who are they?" He said, "The Pen, the Tablet, Isrāfīl, Mīkāʾīl, Me, and Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān."

On the day of resurrection, God the Mighty, Most High will say to the pen, 'to whom did you discharge the revelation?' He [the pen] will say, 'to the tablet'.

Allah the Blessed, Most High will say to the tablet, 'to whom did you discharge the revelation?,' And he [the tablet] will say 'to Isrāfīl.'

He, the Mighty, Most High will say to Isrāfīl, 'to whom did you discharge the revelation.' He will say—And Allah knows best—to Gabriel.

Allah the Blessed, Most High will say to Gabriel, 'to whom did you discharge the revelation.' He will say, 'to Muhammad'.

Allah the Blessed, Most High will say to Muhammad, 'to whom did you entrust the revelation.'

So I will say, 'Muʿāwiya', as Gabriel told me from you that you said, "he is trustworthy in this world and in the hereafter.'

God the Mighty, Most High will say, 'the pen was right, the tablet was right, Isrāfīl was right, Mīkāʾīl was right, Gabriel was right, and you were right Oh Muḥammad, and I was right, Muʿāwiya is trustworthy in this world and the hereafter."

7.   Isḥāq ← Abū Bakr b. Ṣiddīq ← al-Iṣbahānī ← Abū al-Qāsim Naṣr b. Jāmiʿ ← ʿUbayd Allah b. Hārūn al-Ṣawwāf ← Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥer b. ʿAmr (client of ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān) ← Ḥamdān b. ʿAbd Allah al-Aylī ← Ḥamīd al-Tawīl ← Anas b. Mālik, who said, The Messenger of God said:

Gabriel, peace upon him, descended upon me and with him was a pen [made] of pure gold. He said to me, the Highest of the High sends you greetings of peace and says to you, my love, I have given the pen from the top of the Throne to Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān, so deliver it to him and order him to write *Verse of the Throne* in his handwriting with this pen, in proper form and with proper vowels, and to present it to you. I have written for him blessings in the amount that [he will receive reward] for every person who reads *Verse of the Throne* from the hour that he writes it until the Day of Resurrection.

The Messenger of God said, "Who will take me to Abī ʿAbd al-Raḥmān?" Abu Bakr al-Ṣiddīq rose and left until he took him [Muʿāwiya] by the hand, and they came together to the Prophet. They gave him the greetings of peace and he returned them. Then he said to Muʿāwiya, "come close to me oh Abī ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. come close to me oh Abī ʿAbd al-Raḥmān"

So he approached him and the Prophet presented him with the pen and then said to him, "Oh Muʿāwiya, truly this pen was given to you as a gift from your Lord from

the top of his throne for you to write Verse of the Throne with it in your writing with proper form and diacritics and to present it to me. All thanks to God and I thank him for what he has given you. Truly Allah is the Majestic and Mighty, he has written for you blessings in the amount that [you will receive reward] for every person who reads Ayat al-Kursi from the hour that he writes it until the Day of Resurrection.

He said, he took the pen from the Prophet's hand and placed it above his ear. Then the Prophet declared [to God] three times, "Know that I did indeed deliver it to him, Oh God, You know that I indeed delivered it to him." Muʿāwiya knelt between the Prophet's two hands and did not cease thanking and praising Allah for how he honored him then he was given a paper and inkwell. He took the pen and didn't stop writing Verse of the Throne with the best handwriting, until he wrote it with its proper form and presented it to the Prophet. The Messenger of God said, "Oh Muʿāwiya, Allah the Praiseworthy and High, truly has written for you blessings in the amount that [you will receive reward] for every person who reads Verse of the Throne from the hour that he writes it until the Day of Resurrection.

8.   Ishāq ← Ṣiddīq ← Abū al-Qāsim, better known as Ibn al-Bāqalānī ← Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Bakr al-Nābulsī ← Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Ḥadhāʾ ← ʿUmar b. Saʿd al-Ṭāʾī ← ʿUmar b. Sanān al-Rahāwī ← my father ← from his father ← ʿAṭāʾ ← Ibn ʿAbbās

Gabriel came to the Prophet with a green Myrtle leaf which had written upon it, "There is no god, but God. Love of Muʿāwiya is an obligation from me to my servants."

9.   Isḥāq ← Ibn Ṣiddīq ← Yusuf b. Yaʿqūb b. Hārūn al-ʿAskarī in the Blessed Asakir ← Aḥmad b. Isḥāq b. Ṣāliḥ al-Wazzān ← Yazīd b. ʿAbd Allah al-Ṭabarī ← his father ← grandfather ←

I saw ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭalib delivering a sermon from the minbar of Kufa when he said, "By Allah, I will take it from my neck in order to put it on yours, Are not the best people after the Messenger of God are Abu Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, then ʿUmar, then ʿUthmān, then me? Didn't I myself say that before? And [I will] to take what is in my neck for Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān. Truly, the Messenger of God asked him to write, and I was sitting between his hands. He took the pen and put it in his hand, and I wouldn't [have been able to] find it in my heart if I knew that that wasn't from the Messenger of God, and it was from Allah, the Majestic and Mighty. Is not the Muslim he who sends peace upon my share and his share.

10.   Isḥāq ← Ibn Ṣiddīq ← Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Mughayra al-ʿAbādānī ← Qays b. Ibrāhīm b. Qays al-Ṭuwābayqī ← Abū Yaʿqūb Isḥāq b. Yaʿqūb al-Ḍārīr ← Abū ʿĀmir al-ʿAqdī ← Saʿīd b. ʿĀmir ← al-Fuḍayl b. Marzūq ← ʿAṭiyya al-ʿAwfī ← Abī Mūsā al-Ashʿarī who said:

When Verse of the Throne was revealed the Companions of the Messenger of God sought its honor. Each one of them said, "I will write instead of so and so."
The Prophet herd this and said, "I won't appoint anyone to write this except that it [is ordered] from the sky through revelation."
Abū Mūsā said, "I was sitting with the Messenger of God when the revelation descended. He covered himself with his *robe* and when the revelation came out of him immediately said, "What is Muʿāwiya the servant doing?"

Muʿāwiya came and he mentioned that to him. (The Prophet came). There was a pen in his ear and he had a bound mule.

The Prophet said, "Come close oh servant." So he came close. Then he said, "Come close oh servant." So he came close. Then he said, "Come close oh servant." He approached until his knee was drawn upon the Prophet's knee.

The Prophet said, "Write oh servant."

He said, "What should I write, I sacrifice my father and mother for you oh Messenger of God."

He said, "Write 'Allah, there is no God save Him, the Giver of Life, the One who resurrects.'" So he wrote it until its end when The Glorious and Mighty says "and He is the Most High, the Great." Thus he wrote it.

The Prophet said, "Write it oh servant." He said, "Yes oh Messenger of God." "Allah has forgiven all that you have done until the Day of Resurrection."

11. Isḥāq ← Abū ʿAbd Allah Farraj b. Aḥmad al-Sāmurī al-Warrāq ← ʿĪsā b. Naṣr al-Qaṣrī ← ʿAbd Allah b. Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd Allah b. Masmār al-Dīrʿāqūlī ← Abū Rabīʿ al-Zahrānī ← Ḥammād b. Zayd ← Ayyūb ← ʿIkrima ← Ibn ʿAbbās, who said the Messenger of God said:

Oh Muʿāwiya, the earth will tear apart over he who doubts your virtue on the Day of Resurrection, and he will have a necklace of fire around his neck, upon it three hundred branches and on each one a devil scowling on his face *muqdār* the age of the world.

12. Isḥāq ← Ibn Ṣiddīq ← al-Ḥasan b. Shādhamā al-ʿAskarī in the Blessed ʿAsakir ← Abū Zuraʿ ← Sulaymān b. Ḥarb ← Ḥammād b. Zayd ← ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Ṣahīm ← Anas b. Mālik:

After performing the afternoon prayer the Messenger of God entered the Umm Ḥabība's house. He said, "Ya Anas, go to Fatima's house and bring me four bananas." He said to me, "One of al-Ḥasan, one for al-Ḥusayn, and two for Fāṭima and come back to me"

So I did it and returned to him.

Umm Ḥabība said, "Oh Messenger of God, you prefer your companions from the Quraysh. They boast against my brother for having given you allegiance under the tree."

He said, "No one should be prideful at the expense of another. [Besides] he did give his allegiance just as they did. He went out with the Messenger of God, and I went out with him."

He sat at the door of the mosque and Abū Bakr, Umar, ʿUthmān, and ʿAlī came out and the people departed. The Messenger of God said to Abū Bakr, "Oh Abū Bakr."

He said, "I am here for you Messenger of God."

He said, "Do you remember, by Allah, who was the first to give me allegiance when were under the tree?"

Abū Bakr said, "Me, oh Messenger of God, ʿUmar, and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib." So, ʿUthmān raised his head.

The Messenger of God said, "Oh Abū Bakr, if I disappeared, ʿUthmān. And if ʿUthmān disappeared then I am ʿUthman." Abū Bakr laughed.

ʿUthmān said, "Oh Messenger of God, ʿAlī, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, Saʿd, Saʿīd, ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. ʿAwf, Abū ʿUbayda b. al-Jarrāh."

The Messenger of God said, "The who?"

"These are those who were there, and we were present."

"And where was Muʿāwiya?"

"He was not present with us."

The Messenger of God said, "By he who sent me with the truth as a Prophet, truly Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān gave allegiance, just as you [all] did."

Abū Bakr said, "We did not know oh Messenger of God."

He said, "In paradise and I don't care. It was you Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, ʿAlī, Ṭalḥā, al-Zubayr, Saʿd, Saʿīd, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf, Abī ʿUbayda b. al-Jarrāh, and Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān in that qibda. Truly, he gave allegiance just as you did and advised just as you advised. Allah has forgiven him just as he has forgiven you to and permitted him paradise just as he permitted you."

13.   Isḥāq ← Abū Bakr ← Muḥammad b. Isḥāq b. Mahrān al-Faqīh ← Razīq b. Muḥammad ← al-Ḥasan b. Yazīd ← Yazīd b. Hārūn ← Ḥamīd ← Anas who said, I heard the Prophet say,

No one will be missing in paradise except Muʿāwiya, then after a period of time he will come and I will say to him where are you coming from Oh Muʿāwiya. He will reply, From the Lord of Honor and Majesty, He brought me and wrapped me with His hand and said to me, "Through this, you are rewarded for your honor in the world."

14.   Isḥāq ← Abū Bakr b. Mahrān ← Abū Bakr b. ʿAbd al-Khāliq ← Muḥammad b. al-Ruḥī ← Saʿīd b. Salama ← Ibrāhīm b. ʿUmar b. Ibān ← al-Zuhrī ← Saʿīd b. al-Musayb who said,

Abu Sufyān b. Ḥarb came visited ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān and said, "Oh commander of the believers, how is your satisfaction with Muʿāwiya?" He replied, "How could I not be

pleased, having heard the Messenger of God say, "Congratulations Muʿāwiya! Truly you have become the trustworthy over the heavens"

15. Isḥāq ← ʿUbayd Allah b. al-Ḥarr b. Khuzayma ← Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Shāfiʿī ← ʿAmr b. Yaḥyā al-Saʿdī ← his grandfather who related, the Prophet, al-Mustafa, the Prophet of Mercy, was on that day sitting amongst his companions when he said,

"Today a man from the people of paradise will enter upon you from the door of the mosque through whom Allah will make me delighted."

Abū Hurayra said, "So I waited (tatawalat) in the mosque [sic], when Muʿāwiya entered, I said "Oh Messenger of God, is this him?"

He said, "Yes, Abā Hurayra, it is him, him" over and over again. Then he said, "Oh Abu Hurayra, in hell there are blue eyed dogs with horse like hair upon their heads. If Allah the Blessed, Most High allowed, each dog could swallow the seven heavens with one swallow, and that would be easy for them. On the Day of Resurrection they will be placed as overlords upon whosoever cursed Muʿāwiya."

16. Isḥāq ← Abū ʿUmar al-Zāhid ← ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣaʾigh ← his father who said,

I saw al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, may Allah be pleased with them both, with my own eyes lest they be gouged out and heard him with ears lest they be deafened. He came to visit Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān in Syria and came to him on a Friday as he was on the minbar delivering the sermon. A man said to him, "Oh Commander of the Believers, let al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī take the minbar."

Muʿāwiya said "By Allah, I ask you Abū ʿAbd Allah [al-Ḥusayn], am I not the son of the earth of Mecca?"

Al-Ḥusayn said, "Truly, you remind me of the love of my grandfather, yes you are the son of the earth of Mecca."

Muʿāwiya said, "I ask you [by] Allah, am I not the uncle of the believers?"

He said, "By He who sent my grandfather in truth, of course."

Then he said, "By Allah, I ask you oh Abū ʿAbd Allah, am I not the scribe of revelation?"

He said, "By He who sent my grandfather in truth, of course." Muʿāwiya then descended and al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī rose [to the minbar].

Then he said, "My father told me from my grandfather from Gabriel, upon him be peace, from his Lord the Mighty, the Glorious that under the *hall of the throne's footstool* there is a sheet of green Myrtle leaf upon which is written, 'There is no deity but Allah, Muḥammad is the Messeger of Allah.' Oh followers of Muḥammad's family, Allah will not allow anyone in the paradise on the Day of Resurrection except who says there is no deity but Allah."

Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān said, "By God, I ask you oh Abū ʿAbd Allah, who are the followers of Muḥammad's family?"

He said, "Those who do not curse the two shaykhs Abū Bakr and ʿUmar and don't curse ʿUthmān, and don't curse my father, and don't curse you oh Muʿāwiya."

17. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn ← Aḥmad b. ʿĪsā al-Maṣrī ← ʿUmar b. Abī Salama ← Ghālib b. ʿUbayd Allah ← ʿĀṭāʾ ← Abī Hurayra

Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib came from some of his travels and had with him some food made from quince and so he gave it to the Messenger of God. The Prophet in those days was in house of Abū Bakr when Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān entered. The Prophet said to Jaʿfar, "Where did you get this?"

He said, "A handsome young man gave it to me as a gift on some of my travels. I wanted to give it to you oh Messenger of God." So the Prophet ate from it and took a piece from it and gave it to Muʿāwiya.

He said, "Here you go! You will share with me in paradise just like it." He said, "Oh Muʿāwiya who is there like you? Today you took gifts from three, each of them is in Paradise, and you are the fourth. Jaʿfar, do you know gave you the quince?"

He said, "No."

He said, "It was Gabriel and he is the prince of angels. And I am the chief of the Prophets, and Jaʿfar is the prince of martyrs, and you oh Muʿāwiya are the chief of the trustees."

Abū Hurayra said, "By God, after that I never stopped loving him for what I heard concerning his virtues from the Messenger of God."

18. Isḥāq ← Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan ← Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Yūnis al-Zuhrī > Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad al-Anṭākī ← Zuhayr b. Muʿāwiya ← Khālid al-Wālabī ← Abī Ṭāriq ← Hudhayfa: I heard the Messenger of God say:

Muʿāwiya will be resurrected on the Day of Resurrection, wearing a sash made from the light of faith.

19. Isḥāq ← Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan ← al-Ḥusayn b. al-Manṣūr ← Waḍāḥ al-Anbārī ← a man ← Khālid b. Ḥadān ← Wāthalah who said the Messenger of God said:

Allah trusted his revelation through Gabriel, myself, and Muʿāwiya. Truly Muʿāwiya was nearly sent as a Prophet on account of his excessive forbearance, he was entrusted with my Lord's word, Muʿāwiya's sins were forgiven and his good deeds

were paid in full, he was taught His book, Allah made him rightly guided and provided guidance through him."

20.   Rabāḥ b. al-Jarāḥ al-ʿAbdī ← Masʿūd b. ʿImrān ← Sālim b. Ṣāliḥ ← al-Zuhrī ← Sālim ← Ibn ʿUmar who said, the Messenger of God said:

God curse he who insults my companions and my brother-in-laws, and upon him God's curse, that of the angels and the people together. Then he said, Oh people, this Muʿāwiya as he touched his hair: my scribe, my brother in law, the trustee of my Lord's word.

21.   Isḥāq ← Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan ← Ibrāhīm b. al-Haytham al-Baladī ← ʿAffān ← Hamām ← Qatāda ← Saʿīd b. al-Musayb ← Saʿīd b. Abī Waqqāṣ who said: al-Hudhayfa, I weren't you a witness the day the Prophet said:

Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyan will be gathered on the day of resurrection and with him will be a hulla (vestment, ecclesiastic) made from light, its back from mercy, its inside from silk, it is made proud through the collection of writings of revelation between the Prophet's hands, Hudhayfa said, yes.

22.   Isḥāq ← Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan ← Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥusayn al-Kasāʾī in Hamdhān ← Ādam Abī Iyyās ← Shuʿba ← Suhayl b. Abī Ṣaliḥ ← Abī Ṣāliḥ ← Abī Hurayra who said that the Prophet came to Muʿāwiya and said to him:

"Oh Muʿāwiya, what of you do you entrust to me?"

He said, "My face."

So the Prophet said, "Allah protect him from the fire." The he said, "Oh Muʿāwiya "What of you do you entrust to me?"

He said, "My breast."

He said, "May Allah fill it with knowledge, faith, and light." Then he said, "Oh

Muʿāwiya "What of you do you entrust to me?"

He said, "My stomach."

He said, "May Allah guard it, *like he did that of the saints.*" Then he said, "Oh

Muʿāwiya "What of you do you entrust to me?"

He said, "All of me."

He said, "May Allah forgive you and give you the account, teach you the book, and

make you rightly guided, and provide guidance through you."

23. Isḥāq ← Abū al-Qāsim ʿImrān b. Mūsā b. Faḍāla al-Shaʿrī al-Mawṣilī in Mosul ←
    ʿĪsā b. ʿAbd Allah b. Sulaymān ← his father ← Ismāʿīl b. ʿAyyāsh ← ʿAbd al-
    Raḥmān b. ʿAbd Allah b. Dīnār ← his father ← ʿAbd Allah b. ʿUmar who said that
    the Messenger of God said:

    "A man from the people of paradise will enter upon you through this door." Then

    Muʿāwiya entered. The next day, he said something similar. Then Muʿāwiya entered

    so a man said, "Is this him oh Messenger of God?" He said "yes this is him.", then

    the Messenger of God said, "Oh Muʿāwiya, you are from me and I am from you,

    surely you will be pressed with me in the door to heaven like these two." And he

    raised his index and middle fingers.

24. Isḥāq ← Abū ʿImrān ← ʿĪsā b. ʿAbd Allah b. Sulaymān ← Naʿīm b. Ḥammād ←
    Muḥammad b. Ḥarb ← Abī Bakr b. Abī Maryām ← Muḥammad b. Ziyād ←Awf b.
    Mālik al-Ashajaʿī who said:

    While I was sitting in church of John the Baptist (it was then a mosque we used pray

    in), when I was awakened from my sleep and there was a lion walking between my

arms. So I reached for my weapon. Then the lion said, "Don't! I was sent to you with a message for you to spread."

I said, "Who sent you"

He said, "Allah sent me to you so that you can spread it."

I said, "Who sent you."

He said, "Allah sent me to have you send Muʿāwiya [the message] of peace and inform him that he is among the people of Paradise."

I told him, "Who's Muʿāwiya?"

He said, "Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān."

25. Isḥāq ← Abū Bakr al-Qurshī al-ʿIbādānī ← Yaḥyā b. Mukhtār al-Nīsābūrī ← al-Qāsim b. al-Hassan ← al-ʿAlā b. ʿUmar ← Shaybān b. Farūkh ← al-Mubārak b. Faḍāla ← al-Ḥasan ← Abī Dardā who said:

The Prophet went to Umm Ḥabība, Muʿāwiya was with her sitting on the bedstead.

So he said, "Who is this oh Umm Ḥabība."

She said, "This is my brother Muʿāwiya."

"Do you love him Umm Ḥabība?"

"She said, Oh Messenger of God, truly do I love him."

"Then love him," he said, "for I love Muʿāwiya and I love who loves him. Gabriel and Mīkāʾīl both love Muʿāwiya. And Allah, the Praised and High, is more firm in his love for Muʿāwiya than Gabriel and Mīkāʾīl, oh Umm Ḥabība."

26. Isḥāq ← Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī ← Khiḍr al-Zaman in Kufa ← Abū Muʿāwiya ← al-ʿAmsh ← Abī Ṣāliḥ ← Abī Hurayra who said:

I ran out of my house filled with hunger. I said to myself I'll go to Abū Bakr's house, then I said ʿUthmān's food is tastier. So, I went to ʿUthmān's house when I saw the Prophet at the door of al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām eating some food. I said, let me show my face to his. So I showed my face to his.

The Prophet said, "Enter Abū Hurayra, I know from the weakness of your teeth what I know. Between my hands is some nice food so come close and eat."

I approached, he was eating melons with dates. I ate with my hands and the Prophet ate with his, as did al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām. But Muʿāwiya did not extend his hand nor did he approach the food except when the Messenger of God saw a nice moist date and took it. He placed it on a piece of melon and put in the Muʿāwiya's mouth. He said, "Eat it, even against your will."

My night passed until I woke. I went to al-Zubayr and said, "Did you see what the Prophet did for Muʿāwiya?"

He said, "He vested him through that."

I said, "How much do I wish that would be me." So I said, "Oh Messenger of God, I have some good food and I would like you to eat from it."

So he took Muʿāwiya's hand and said to him, "He is the protector of al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām's house. So put between our hands the good food. My truth upon you, you won't eat until I feed you."

27.   Isḥāq > Ibrāhīm b. ʿĪsā ← Māʾmūn ← Ismāʿīl…[sic] ← Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Muṭallib ← his father ← Aḥmad b. Abī al-Sāʾib ← Maymūn b. Mahrān ← Ibn ʿAbbās who said

I was sitting with the Prophet. Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and Muʿāwiya were with him when ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib came. The Messenger of God said to Muʿāwiya, "Do you love ʿAlī" Muʿāwiya said, "Do I! By Allah, who there is no God save him, do I love him for the sake of Allah, a tremendous love." The Messenger of God said, "There will be between the two of you (هنية)" "And what will there be after that Oh Messenger of God" asked Muʿāwiya. The Prophet said, "God's pardon and his satisfaction, then entrance to Paradise." Muʿāwiya said, "We are content with God's decree." And upon that the following verse was revealed: "Had Allah so willed you would not have fought, but Allah does as he wills." [Baqara 253]

28.   Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan said:

I was on top of the black mountain in Sham at the end of the see when a caller called me. He said, whoever holds enmity towards Abū Bakr then he is an atheist, whoever accuses that ʿUmar is in hell he is a (*zumr*). Whoever insults ʿUthmān, he is an enemy of the Most Merciful, whoever insults ʿAlī he is the enemy of the Prophet. Whoever insults Muʿāwiya in secret or out loud will be drug by the angels of punishment to God's relentless fire and thrown in the bottomless pit. A group of *rāfiḍis* are deserved of this. Peace be upon the ten who fell in line with Allah and His Messenger, they are the best of His creation.

29.   Isḥāq ← Saʿīd b. al-Mufaḍil ← ʿAbd Allah b. Hāshim ← ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allah ← Jarīr b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ← Mughayra who said;

When the [news] of ʿAlī's death came to Muʿāwiya he started to cry and recant.

His wife said to him, "You cry for him and you used to fight him?" He said to her,

"Watch your words, you don't know what the people have lost in virtue, fiqh, and

knowledge.

30. Isḥāq ← Abū Bakr al-Qurshī ʿAbādān ← ʿUmar b. Aḥmad al-Jaʿfī ← ʿĪsā b. Yūnis
     al-Fākhūrī ← Sulaymān b. Dāwūd ← al-Ahwāzī ← ʿAbd al-Mālik b. Abī Sulaymān
     ← ʿAṭā b. Abī Rabāḥ ← Ibn ʿAbbās who said:

     Gabriel taught the Prophet, he said: Oh Muhammad proclaim peace upon Muʿāwiya
     and mind him well, for he is the trustee of [God's] book and His revelation. He is
     indeed the grace of trust.

31. Isḥāq ← Ibrāhīm b. ʿĪsā al-Muqraʾ ← Muḥammad b. al-Wāsiṭī ← Yazīd b. Hārūn ←
     Ḥamīd al-Ṭāwīl ← Anas b. Mālik who said:

     I came upon the Messenger of God and Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, ʿAlī, and
     Muʿāwiya were sitting with him. The Messenger of God was eating ripe dates and
     they were eating with him. The Prophet was feeding them. Muʿāwiya said, "Oh
     Messenger of God, you eat and feed us?" He said, "Yes, this is how we will eat in
     Paradise, we feed one another."

32. Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Sayyidī ← Abū Bakr ʿAlī Ismāʿīl b. al-ʿAbbās al-
     Warrāq ← Ahmād b. al-Haytham al-Baẓār al-ʿAskarī ← al-Ḥasan b. Bashār al-ʿAjlī
     ← ʿAbd Allah b. Jaʿfar the brother of Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar al-Madīnī ← Hishām b. ʿUwrā
     ← his father ← ʿĀʾisha who said:

The Prophet was in Umm Ḥabība's house, I entered and when he saw me he said: What brought you oh Ḥumayrā"? I said, "I need for you oh Messenger of God." He said, "No, it was jealousy."

She ʿĀʾisha said, "We were like that when someone knocked the door."

He said, "Look who is at the door."

She said, "Muʿāwiya."

He said, "Allow him [to enter]."

He entered and started to walk, he hastened his step. When the Prophet saw him he said, "It is as if I am seeing his two little legs strutted in heaven."

He got close to the Prophet and had a pen in his ear that he didn't write with. He said, "What is on your ear, Muʿāwiya?"

He said, "I have prepared it for Allah and for the Messenger of God, oh Messenger of God."

He said, "Allah reward you from your Prophet, I did not order you to write upon my own accord. I didn't order you to write except that [was commanded by] revelation from the heavens." Then the Prophet said to him, "Allah the Mighty and Glorious, will place upon you an over garment."

Umm Ḥabība said, "Truly, Allah will do that for my brother?"

He said, "Yes." She said, "Pray for my brother, oh Messenger of God."

He said, "Allah protect you from destruction and forgive you in the last and the first."

<u>Textual Analysis</u>

In his scathing polemic *The Defense against Disasters* (*al-ʿAwāṣim min al-Qawāṣim*), the Andalusian born Malikī jurist Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabi (d. 543/1148) systematically refutes a range of Shīʿite historical claims in order to advance the cause of Sunni orthodoxy. When reading the text, one is struck with the sense of urgency with which the author writes. It was not without due cause. During Abū Bakr's own lifetime the shīʿite Fatimid Dynasty had reached its peak in North Africa and the Almoravid dynasty consolidated its rule on the ruins of the fallen Umayyad house in Spain. It is no surprise then that one finds a staunch defense of the Umayyads throughout the text. He says,

> It is indeed odd that some people deem the rule of Banī Umayya inappropriate! The first to grant them leadership was the Messenger of God for it was he who placed ʿAtāb b. Usayd b. Abī al-ʿAyṣ b. Umayya over control of Mecca, God's sanctuary and his greatest city…And he [Muḥammad] charged Mūʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān as the trustee of God's revelation. Then Abū Bakr placed Yazīd b. Abī Sufyān—his brother—as governor of Syria.[29]

By placing the Umayyad house as whole in such an intimate relationship with the founding moments of Islamic history, Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī demonstrates its service to Islam. More importantly however, he sets up rhetorical structure whereby insulting the Umayyads could be considered blasphemy: "the first to grant them leadership was Muḥammad."

---

[29] Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *al-Qawāṣim*, p. 341.

A central rhetorical claim in this strategy is the pervasive Sunni belief that Muʿāwiya served for some period as a trustee and scribe of Qurʾānic revelation (*amīn al-waḥī*), a tradition with a long history. Conventional Sunni scholarship seems to be conflicted on whether his service was to record the revelation or to simply help with Muḥammad's documentary needs more generally. Indeed, the exegetical tradition typically credits Zayd b. Thābit as having functioned as the Prophet's secretary. More important, however, than answering whether or not Muʿāwiya actually was responsible for recording sections of the Qurʾān is recognizing the larger socio-political implications of such a belief in early Muslim circles. When reading the various *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* that make this claim, it quickly becomes apparent that embedded within the notion of being Muḥammad's scribe is a direct claim to religious authority. That is, in claiming Muʿāwiya as a scribe the texts are also laying forth the argument that he maintained a special relationship with the Prophet in particular and the revelation of Islam more generally and therefore cannot be discredited or maligned in any way for his encounters with ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib or his faults as a leader.

Here we review some of the reports contained in Abū al-Qāsim's compilation in light of their textual and thematic overlap with similar materials in the Sunni *ḥadīth* tradition at large. The aim of this review is to argue that the materials preserved in Abū al-Qāsim's collection dovetail with existing themes and tropes in Sunni tradition rather than represent an aberration or break from conventional views on Muʿāwiya. Thus, despite the fact that these materials would be rejected by the guardians of the

ḥadīth canon and Sunni orthodoxy more generally they represent an ever present undercurrent to those claims.

To make this argument I begin with a well-known *ḥadīth* report recorded in *Saḥīḥ Muslim*. Ibn ʿAbbās says[30]:

> The Muslims used to not look at or sit with Abū Sufyān so he said to the
> Prophet, "Oh Messenger of God, grant me three [requests]."
> He said, "Yes."
> "I have the best and most beautiful of the Arabs, Umm Ḥabība bint Abī
> Sufyān, marry her."
> He said, "Yes."
> "And Muʿāwīya, make him a scribe between your hands."
> He said, "Yes."
> "And give me respite (تُؤَمِّرُنِي) until/so I can fight the disbelievers like I fought
> the Muslims."
> He said, "Yes."

The main features of this text that represent a Sunni orthodox view of Māwiya are Muḥammad's marriage to Umm Ḥabība and his acceptance of Muʿāwiya as a scribe. The former earned Muʿāwiya the title *khal al-muʾminīn* as he was described on the doorways of Baghdad's mosques according to Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabi. The latter was variably expressed, but for those who understood Māwiya's scribal function to be

---

[30] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: Kitab Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992), vol. 16 pg. 52, # 6362. For a further discussion concerning the authenticity of this *ḥadīth* see *Sharḥ al-Nawawī ʿalā Ṣaḥiḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995), vol. 16, p. 51-2.

related to the recording of revelation, he was referred to as *kātib al-waḥī* and sometimes *amīn al-wahī*. The defense of Abū Sufyān in this text and his promise to "fight the disbelievers" foreshadows the Sunni recognition of the Umayyad's role in the early expansion of Islam. These themes when taken as general *topoi* can readily be seen in Abū al-Qāsim al-Saqaṭī's text and thus demonstrate the congruous relationship between the materials therein and those contained in the conventional Sunni tradition regarding Muʿāwiya.

To begin, the theme of Muʿāwiya's relationship to Muḥammad through the Prophet's marriage to Umm Ḥabība is expressed here in reports 12, 20, 25, 32. All of these portray an intimate household setting where Muḥammad expresses his love to Muʿāwiya by promises or pledges made to Umm Ḥabība. It is also in these contexts, however, that Muʿāwiya's special position in Islam is made clear as piece of providential will. This is accomplished through the rhetorical combination of intimacy and religious authority.

In report # 12, Umm Ḥabība complains about the Companions boasting in front of Muʿāwiya that they offered allegiance prior to Muʿāwiya. Following the argument set forth by Asma Afsarrudin, the required qualities of leadership according to emerging Sunni political sensibilities revolved around both capability and precedent. Thus, here the Sunni ethic of *sabiqa* (precedence) is at stake. The report establishes that Muʿāwiya had in fact given allegiance to Muḥammad "under the tree," a reference to the Oath (baýa) of the Tree, wherein Muḥammad's companions pledged to fight the Quraysh to avenge what was thought to be the murder of ʿUthmān. This pledge led to the treaty of Hudaybiya. By establishing Muʿāwiya's

presence and participation in that historic moment of the emerging Muslim polity, this report strengthens the case for his leadership. The report concludes with Muḥammad telling Abū Bakr that "he gave allegiance just as you did and advised just as you advised. Allah has forgiven him just as he has forgiven you to and permitted him paradise just as he permitted you." In report # 25 UmmḤabība is sitti ng in bed with Muʿāwiya. Muḥammad asks her if she loves him. Responding in the affirmative, Muḥammad reassures her that he too loves Muʿāwiya, as do the archangels Gabriel and Michael, but that God, "is more firm in his love for Muāwiya than Gabriel and Michael."

In report # 20, Muḥammad recites a curse prayer, "God curse anyone who insults by Companions and my brother-in-laws…," then introduces Muʿāwiya's "my scribe, brother-in-law, and trustee of my Lord's word." This theme is expanded upon in report # 32; the setting is UmmḤabība's house. The Prophet explains that he did not choose Muʿāwiya to be a scribe on his own accord, but that it came from a "revelation from the heavens." Before continuing to discuss the ways in which Muʿāwiya is cast as a unique spiritual authority sanctioned by God to protect the revelation of the Qurʾān and Islam more generally, a few more instances of Muʿāwiya being protected from criticism on account of the fact that he was a Companion of the Prophet should be mentioned.

One of the methods of writing Muʿāwiya into the sacred history of early Islam used by Sunni exegetes was to include him in the category of Companions (*al-ṣaḥāba*). While an elaboration of this category and a discussion of its origins exceeds the scope of this chapter, it is important to identify to main characteristics of the

concept for Sunni sensibilities towards the past. The first is the idyllic vision in which the mortal conflicts of the past are elided. This is done in part by anecdotes which portray presumed antagonists reconciling differences or speaking against any sense of lingering hostility. Hence, the charge against Shīītes that they curse the companions of the Prophet quickly became one of the most distinguishing characteristics of Sunni polemics and continues today.

In al-Saqaṭī's text we see a number of examples of these two features. On reconciliation between antagonists we find Muʿāwiya sending a beautiful concubine to al-Ḥusayn (# 4). In another case, ʿAlī himself is presented as testifying to Muʿāwiya being chosen by Muḥammad and God to be the Prophet's scribe (#9). Most importantly, ʿAlī says in this report that he would not have been able to accept such a notion had it not been from Muḥammad and God. This is significant as a point of religious pedagogy: e.g. if ʿAlī could deal with it, then why wouldn't his supporters be able to? An inverse of this example which likely was directed towards a *nāṣibī* audience can be seen in report # 29 where Muʿāwiya is crying over the death of ʿAlī and the loss of virtue and knowledge that went with him. Jaʿfar b. Abū Ṭālib is also featured as another presumed antagonist in congenial relations with Muʿāwiya, even as Muʿāwiya is placed above in station.

In report # 27, the theme of conflict/reconciliation amongst the Companions is most pronounced. Placed in the words of Ibn ʿAbbās, he describes that he was sitting with Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and Muʿāwiya when ʿAlī walked entered. Immediately, one should recognize the sequence of characters as they are presented in this one sentence: Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and Muʿāwiya are presented as a

singular group. This typology corresponds to the Umayyad vision of a pristine past discussed in chapter five, wherein ʿAlī is not yet included among the rightly guided caliphs. It may be the case that his report belonged to a class of materials that stood as intermediaries between the Umayyad-Uthmanid three-caliph thesis and the more refined Sunni four-caliph position that developed later.

More important than the possibility of a fragment of this *ḥadīth* corresponding to an Umayyad historical vision however is that the report as a whole writes the conflict between Muʿāwiya and ʿAlī as part of God's express will. Muḥammad tells the antagonists, "There will be strife between the two of you." After becoming aware that this is part of the God's design, Muʿāwiya says, "We are content with God's decree." On that note, a Qurʾānic verse descends: And if Allah had so wiled it, those who followed after them would not have fought one with another after the clear proofs had come unto them. But they differed, some of them believing and some disbelieving. And if Allah had so willed it, they would not have fought one with another; but Allah doeth what He will. This is the only time in al-Saqaṭī's text that an occasion of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) is recorded.

With regard to the prohibition of cursing or maligning any of Muḥammad's associates, al-Saqaṭī's compilation also contains relevant materials. In reports # 11 and 15, believers are warned of grueling punishment in hell for those who curse Muʿāwiya. The former promises a necklace of 300 enflamed devil-adorned branches. The latter guarantees blue eyed dogs as overlords of a special section of hell for those who cursed Muʿāwiya. In on e of the most ideologically transparent reports in al-Saqaṭī's collection we find Ḥusayn visiting the Damascus mosque while Muʿāwiya is

delivering a sermon.Ḥusayn testifies to Muʿāwiya being the *kātib al-waḥī* and the uncle of the believers. In the end of the report Muʿāwiya asks him who the true "*shīʿat āl Muḥammad*?" Ḥusayn responds, "Those who do not curse the two shaykhs Abū Bakr and ʿUmar and don't curse ʿUthmān, and don't curse my father, and don't curse you, oh Muʿāwiya."

That some of the materials in al-Saqaṭī's text were fabricated in the late third/ninth century seems beyond doubt given that the content corresponds to doctrines and ideas that likely did not emerge until that time. For example, the first report in the compilation portrays Muʿāwiya appearing on the Day of Resurrection wearing a silk sash laced with pearled brocade. Written upon it are the names of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. We also see in report # 12 Muʿāwiya's addition to the ten companions guaranteed paradise (*al-ʿashara al-mubashara*). Other materials seem to have been in fairly wide circulation and were accepted regardless of their seeming oddity. For example, in report # 24, Awf b. Mālik al-Ashajaʿī relates the story of rising from sleep while at the Umayyad mosque to find a lion speaking to him. The lion tells him that he was sent from God to tell Awf that Muʿāwiya was among the people of heaven. Abū al-Qāsim b. al-ʿArabī testifies to the authenticity of this report even as sneers that the Muʿtizilites wouldn't agree. The theme of Muʿāwiya being accepted in paradise, however, is pervasive throughout al-Saqaṭī's text.

Thus far, the materials surveyed do not depart from conventional Sunni representations of Muʿāwiya; instead, they actually fit within broader Sunni sensibilities about his place within the early Muslim community. The more striking features of al-Saqaṭī's compilation, however, are the depictions of Muʿāwiya as a

distinguished devotee of Muḥammad entrusted by God himself to protect the Qurʾān and Islam. Juxtaposed with the report in *Saḥīḥ Muslim* provided above these reports can be seen as an elaboration on the Sunni notion that Muʿāwiya was the scribe of revelation. Whether these materials predate or postdate the *ḥadīth* reports in Sunni literature that identify Muʿāwiya as a scribe remains to be seen. Here a few notes on the unique nature of these reports are provided.

Whereas conventional Sunni representations of Muʿāwiya remain ambiguous on his status as Muḥammad's scribe, the materials in al-Saqaṭī's text are an unequivocal testament of Muʿāwiya's centrality in the divine revelation of Islam. In report # 6 Muḥammad identifies seven trustees (*umanāʾ*) of God. On the Day of Resurrection God begins by asking the Pen to whom he discharged the revelation, the Pen says that he gave it to the Tablet (*al-lawḥ*). This pattern of inquiry continues through the angels Isrāfīl, Michael, and Gabriel, until it reaches Muḥammad who says that he gave it to Muʿāwiya. God reassures Muḥammad and says that Muʿāwiya is "trustworthy in this world and the hereafter." In report # 7, Gabriel delivers a gold pen to Muḥammad sent by God himself from atop his throne. The pen is destined for Muʿāwiya who is entrusted to record the Verse of the Throne, after which he will receive blessings every time it is recited by Muslims until the Day of Resurrection. Report # 10 provides us with a description of Muḥammad arising from a revelation searching for Muʿāwiya. Finding him, he calls him to approach until they are sitting knee to knee. Muḥammad then tells Muʿāwiya to record the verse he just received. Report # 20, depicts a similar level of intimacy with the Prophet brushing Muʿāwiya's hair with his hand. Likewise, in report #s 17 and 20, Muḥammad feeds Muʿāwiya

hand to mouth. In report # 17, he refers to Gabriel as the prince of angels, himself as the chief of the Prophets, Jaʿfar as the prince of the martyrs, and Muʿāwiya as the prince of the trustees. In report # 19, we are told that Muʿāwiya was almost sent as a Prophet on account of his excessive forbearance.

We began this review of al-Saqaṭī's text by presenting a report in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim that it weaves together the scribal authority of Muʿāwiya with his proximity to the Prophet through marriage to Umm Ḥabība. We have argued this report contains themes that converge with materials in al-Saqaṭī's text, one of the most clear examples is in report # 32 in which Muḥammad tells Umm Ḥabība about Muʿāwiya's scribal authority. Given their thematic proximity, it would be easy to assume that the two reports share a similar provenance. Upon review, however, the two reports' *insads* show little convergence. Not until a Baghdadī Ḥanbalī milieu do we see a shared socio-political context for the reports. A review of the isnāds is provided here in order to show the widespread circulation of pro-Muʿāwiya discourse.

The report in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* demonstrates a largely Basran origin. After Ibn ʿAbbās the report is transmitted by Abū Zumayl Samāk b. al-Walīd who lived in both Baṣra and Kūfa and allegedly recorded from a number of important figures as Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn ʿUmar, and ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr and thus served as an informant to early transmitters and jurists such as the ʿShuʿba and the Syrian giant al-Awzāʿī (d. 157/776).[31]

---

[31] Tahdhīb al-Kamāl, vol. 8, pg. 134

Ḥanafī and al-Yamāmī; the former referring to his tribal affiliation—the Banū al-Ḥanifa and the latter to his place of birth. If the link to al-Awzāʿī is genuine it likely occurred while the Syrian jurist served the Umayyads in government service in al-Yamāma (find date).[32]

The next transmitter in the chainʿIkrima b. ʿAmmār (d. 159/ --) described in some as the shaykh of al-Yamāma whose prayers were answered (*mustajāb al-duʿā*).[33] He lived in Baṣra, appears as a regular transmitter in Bukharī, and was an important source to Sufyān al-Thawrī, Wakiʿ b. Jurāḥ and Shuʿba. Abū Zuraʿ al-Dimashqī who we encountered in the last chapter as having rejected the validity of ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭalib's Caliphate, defends ʿIkrima b. ʿAmmār over criticisms against him leveled by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. [34] On the next level of the isnād is al-Naḍr b. Muḥammad al-Yamāmī, also described as the Shaykh of the ahl al-Yamāma. Though no death date is given to for him he is credited with having transmitted more than a thousand ofʿIkrima's reports than anyone else. He shares a hometown with the previous personalities in this chain, but more importantly he is said to have been a client of the Banū Umayya.[35]

The biographers offer little information about Samāk's life or career more generally other than that he was originally from al-Yamāma and settled in Kūfa. Some accounts mention that he also spent time in Baṣra. He is given the *nisbas*, al-

[32] Al-Awzāʿī, *EI2*

[33] Tahdhīb al-Kamāl, vol. 13, pg. 159-162.

[34] ibid.

[35] Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb, vol. 6, pg. 70.

Report # 32 in al-Saqaṭī's seems to have been in fairly wide circulation before it ended up in his compilation. It may have been first recorded by al-Ṭabarānī who claims to have heard it directly from Aḥmad, though it does not appear in either his *Musnad* or his *Faḍāʾil*. It is nonetheless likely that Aḥmad carried the tradition given that it also appears in al-Khallāl's *al-Sunna*. The Ḥanbalī milieu of pro-Muʿāwīya traditions expected, it thus was also recorded in al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*.

In all of the sources the isnād's stem which begins with Aisha, continues through ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr, and his son Hishām b. ʿUrwa (d. 146/763) branches out to various transmitters. Hishām of course holds an undisputed place in the sciences of *ḥadīth*: Ibn Maʿīn allegedly did not distinguish between him, his father, or al-Zuhrī.[36] Interestingly, after Hisham—the common link—are a group of transmitters[37] who all share a family relationship with a certain Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar b. Abī Kathīr.[38] Known as a the Qarī of the Ahl al-Medina and allegedly having heard from influential transmitters such as ʿAbd Allah b. Dīnār and Mālik b. Anas, he settled in Baghdad and was considered a reliable by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Abū Zūraʿ, and al-Nisāʾī.[39]

It seems that al-Naḍr b. Muḥammad is the common-link or carrier of this report. It is interesting that the report travels along the same socio-political patronage links as those identified in the review of the *jamāʿa* reports discussed in chapter three, which were identified as Umayyad above in the

---

[36] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 6, pgs. 137-8.

[37] In the isnāds of al-Balādhurī and Abū al-Qāsim al-Saqaṭī it is ʿAbd Allah b. Kathīr for whom see Tahdhib al-Tahdhīb, pg. 291 identified as al-Umayyad origin in the isnād of al-Ṭabāranī it is another nephew, Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr, for whom see: Thiqat b. Hibban vol. 7, pg. 596. The figure in Khallāl's isnād is yet another nephew, Kathīr b. ʿAbd Allah, for whom little is known.

[38] Tahdhīb al-Kamāl vol. 2, pg. 149-50. Tarikh Baghdad, vol. 6, pgs. 216-19.

[39] Tahdhīb al-Kamāl, vol. 2, pg. 150. It is important also to point out that he allegedly recorded hadith from a certain Ḥamīd al-Ṭawīl, who appears on multiple occasions in the isnads of Abū al-Qāsim's text, see…try to find out who he was a tutor (yadabbaan) to? Ali b. al-Mahdi, ibn Zayṭa or Ibn Zura?

After the various transmitters associated with Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar the insād again stems out in a number of different directions: through al-Khallāl, Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd Allāh who is remembered as a close companion of the top shaykhs of the Ḥanbalī guild such as Abū Muḥammad al-Barbahārī,[40] and Binān b. Yḥyā who intersects with al-Saqaṭī's isnād. The proximity between al-Khallāl and al-Saqaṭī's insads for this report is to be expected given their shared marginal Ḥanbalī status. In al-Ṭabarānī the transmitter after the Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar link is al-Sarī b. ʿAṣim who is discredited by Ibn Hajar.[41] It is on al-Sarī's weak status that the report seems to have been marginalized by Sunni ḥadīth specialist, yet survives in Ḥanbalī circles.

The review of the *isnāds* of these two similar reports shows an uncommon origin in the first centuries yet a shared convergence in Baghdad later. Why it was the case that narratives sympathetic to the Umayyads and ʿMuʿāwiya slowly gathered around the students of Aḥmad remains to be seen. The diverse origins yet similar content of these two reports indicate, nonetheless, a fairly wide circulation of pro-Umayyad discourses outside of Baghdad which further affirms our basic contention that the materials in al-Saqaṭī's compilation should be seen in continuity with conventional Sunni tradition concerning ʿMuʿāwiya rather than in terms of disjuncture.

---

[40] Tabaqat al-Hanabila, vol. 2, pg. 122.

[41] Lisan al-Mizan vol. 3, pg. 16

Conclusion

We argued earlier in this chapter that al-Saqaṭī's compilation represented the views of an opaque movement known to modern historians only through the antagonistic labels given to them by the *Muʿtazilites*. Known variably as *al-Nābita* or *al-Ḥashwiyya*, a number of their characteristics were identified. In addition to their pro-Muʿāwiya leanings, they were said to have been radically anthropomorphic. Al-Maqdisī records an instance when travelling through al-Wāsiṭ where he heard a *ḥadīth* that portrayed Muʿāwiya sitting next to God underneath a veil and is then presented to the world.[42] Though that report does not appear in al-Saqaṭī's collection, similar visibly anthropomorphic tendencies are contained in the text. In report # 5 for example, Muḥammad and Muʿāwiya are standing between God's two hands. God smiles upon hearing Muḥammad's satisfaction with Muʿāwiya as a trustee of the world. In report # 13 Muʿāwiya tells his companions in paradise that God had taken him and enveloped him in his hand as a reward for his service to Islam. It is reasonable to conclude that al-Saqaṭī's materials had a number of corollaries around the early Islamic empire, though they are largely lost to us now.

The *Faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya* has a long and complicated history. Ibn al-Jawzī, when commenting on these reports in his book on fabricated *ḥadīth*, was quick to dismiss them as pure fabrications intended only to spite the Shīʿite. While that may have been the case with many of the materials found in Abū al-Qāsim al-Saqaṭī's text, we hope to have shown that although their provenance may be hard to determine and will

---

[42] Elon, "Al-Farabi's Funny Flora," pg. 240.

require much more work than is possible here, they are best understood in terms the consolidation of the Ḥanbalī madhhab in tenth-century ʿAbbasid Baghdad.

The story of the *faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya*, that is as a long running tradition and not just al-Saqaṭī's text, as we have seen however does not end in the tenth or even eleventh centuries. Instead, throughout Sunni history on various occasions and in various contexts Muʿāwiya is turned to as a figure that exemplifies the ethos of political wisdom, sound administration, and the defense of Islam as an imperial project. It is perhaps this logic that allows Ibn ʿAsākir to justify writing such an effusive biography of Muʿāwiya. Indeed, aside from treatises discussing forged *ḥadīth* reports, the only place one may find a number of al-Saqaṭī's texts is in Ibn ʿAsākir's *Tārīkh Madinat Dimashq*. We have also yet to mention the work of Ibn Hajar al-Haytamī's (d. 974/1567), defense of Muʿāwiya, published today as an appendage to his well known anti-Shīʿite polemic, *al-Ṣuwāq al-Muḥriqa*.

In the present day there seems to be a growing resurgence of positive Sunni representations of Muʿāwiya. Given the sectarian tensions in the Arab world following the Iranian revolution it may be expected that Muʿāwiya's popularity would rise.[43] However, it is interesting to see that the well-known British convert and translator ʿĀʾisha Bewely has recently published a treatise on the founding Umayyad caliph, *Muʿāwiya, the Restorer of the Muslim Faith*.[44] The relationship between al-Saqaṭī's text, the formation of the Ḥanbalī *madhhab*, and Sunni historical visions

---

[43] For example see Maḥmūd Imām Āl Muwāfī (ed.), *Iskāt al-Kilāb al-ʿāwiya bi-faḍāʾil khāl al-muʾminīn Muʿāwiya* (Medina: Maktabat al-ʿUlūm wa-al-Ḥikam, 2005); Ṣalāḥ Muḥammad Shaykh Ikraiyim, *Musnad Muʿāwiya Ibn Abī Sufyān fī al-ḥadīth al-nabawī* (Damascus: Dar al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 2008).

[44] Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley, *Muʿāwiya: Restorer of the Muslim Faith* (London: Dar al-Taqwa, 2002).

awaits much needed future research. However, given that many of the sectarian tensions that are imbued in the memory of Muʿāwiya and early Islamic history, it is safe to say that given today's heightened Islamic sectarian environment, the *faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya* need not be treated only as an exclusively historical issue.

VII

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to review some of the implications of this study and identify some untouched areas that should receive further consideration. More importantly, however, I would like to link this study to ongoing conversations about the study of Islam in the current political moment and what that might hold for the direction of our field.

We have argued in this study that the origins of Sunni Islam as a distinct sectarian identity and collective affiliation must be approached as a protracted, incremental process that took place along the backdrop of shifting religious and political circumstances in the middle Abbasid period. In doing so, we explored the ways in which collective identity is inextricably bound to historical consciousness and collective memory. We also argued that historical discourse was inherently agonistic because it constantly forms in dialectical opposition to competing senses of history. For the purposes of our study Shīte narratives of Islamic history provided that pivot against which Sunni historical discourses eventually congealed. This thesis

revealed a number of recurring rhetorical patterns of Sunni self-identification and orthodoxy/heresy formations.

One of the conclusions of this argument was that the appropriation of the discourse of *al-jamāʿa* by emerging Sunni exegetes in the Abbasid period simultaneously assumed the political prerogatives of the Umayyad imperial project. Here, I argued that understanding the concept of orthodoxy in terms of the political power of an imagined Sunni community tells us more about the endurance of sectarian boundaries than does an inquiry into creedal formulation or jurisprudential methodology. Because Shīʿite political challenges remained a constant force throughout the Abbasid period and beyond, we found in chapter four that the same concern for *jamāʿa* unity led historical thinkers in the ninth-century, whether operating in the fields of history or *ḥadīth*, to favor narratives about early Muslim discord that countered Shīʿite claims. Over time this led to the convergence of otherwise disparate narratives and thus allowed for the appearance of new social formations. For example, ʿUthmānī discourse as seen in Sayf b. ʿUmar's compilation were fused into al-Ṭabarī's historical vision and thereafter into Sunni discourse writ large. A consequence of this was the categorization of Shīʿite critiques of history as being foreign in origin, anti-*jamāʿa*, and perpetually deviated.

In chapter five we saw the way Sunni scholars managed to elide the conflicts between Muʿāwiya and ʿAlī through a range of discursive techniques. Here, we found that the not only was the idea of the Rightly Guided Caliphs one of the most pronounced examples of this protracted effort, but that as a discourse of historical

revision and sectarian identity in and of itself, it is one of the most persistent examples of Sunni performances of orthodoxy. Moreover, given the way in which ninth and tenth-century historical categories anachronistically color the historical data in our possession, we discovered just how difficult it is for modern scholars to write a positivist history of the first two centuries of Islam. In chapter six we explored the unmarked category of the "*Shiite Muʿāwiya*." That is, one of the necessary conditions of the formation of Sunni Islam was the suppression of the pro-Umayyad camp which seemed to remain in the circles of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*. By exploring the *faḍāʾil Muʿāwiya* tradition as a way to gain insight into that process we conducted a historical archeology of sorts which portrayed the founding Umayyad king in a radically different light than that conventionally depicted by Sunni chronicles.

However, there are many unexplored areas that can further contribute to this study of Sunni historical category formation. A probe into the discourse of *al-jamāʿa* would need to include a discussion of violence and aesthetics—how did the Abbasid house define the boundaries of the polity and identify and punish outsiders without laying claim to an imamate or absolute caliphate? In this respect, how did physical space help define community; how did, for example, Friday prayers correspond to the emerging ideological and sectarian divisions in Muslim society?

Another area that merits further exploration is the relationship between *ḥadīth* criticism and hagiography. In chapter five, we saw the way in which particular narratives of ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib were either suppressed or highlighted based on the alleged integrity, or lack thereof, of the historical report that described the tradition.

In doing so we recognized a small example of the way in which *ḥadīth* served as revisionist history and counter pedagogy. To explore these findings further an investigation into the way in which Sunni exegetes manage other controversial figures at the center of Sunni-Shīʿite polemics such as Fāṭima, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, and Abū Ṭalib is needed. While deconstructing these hagiographical profiles, the formation of conventional narratives will naturally be brought to light. Such a study promises to shed new light on issues such as the oasis of Fadak and the conflict between Fatima and Abū Bakr, the religious status of Abū Ṭālib, and the Sunni reception of Ḥusayn's death at Karbala. It also will bring to light further examples of dynamics of *rijāl* criticism and orthodoxy Sunni formation similar to the ways in which the confusion over the identities of Ḥammad b. Salama and ʿAlī b. Zayd was demonstrated.

The discourses of the *ṣaḥāba* and the *ahl al-bayt* in Sunni Islam have also remained unexplored and deserve further attention than was given to them in this study. If the aforementioned conclusions can be countenanced, then we must explore how, when, and in what capacity Muḥammad's family becomes a site of reverence and devotion in Sunni religious practices. Likewise, the origins of the companions as a category need to better understood in terms of *al-jamaʿā* in order to avoid reifying another Sunni historical category. An enumeration of various discourses in Sunni Islam that can speak to the process of orthodox formation, however, could go on indefinitely.

Nonetheless, what can be taken away from the conclusions presented throughout this study is that the categories of Sunni and Shīʿa, far from being mutually exclusive and far from developing in isolation from one another are, in fact, best understood as being mutually embedded in each other's very formation. These questions remain important to contemporary students of Islamic history precisely because of their enduring significance. That is, because Sunni Islam has claimed the identity of so many adherents around the world for so many centuries and because its collective impulse remains operative today as an imagined community, it is imperative that contemporary students of Islam recognize the ways in which patterns of Sunni discourse reemerge, adapt, and endure throughout history and into the present.

Moreover, it is obvious that Islamic sectarianism is not simply a historical problem. While bringing the intimate interdependence of Sunni and Shīʿite discourses to light could be seen as a means to alleviate sectarian tension, a more uncomfortable historical pattern seems to be in place. Because Sunni senses of self are so intimately related to the negation of Shīʿite claims, the articulation of conventional Sunni self-understanding retains a constant potential to identify ʿShīʿa (whatever that may stand for at various points in time) as an irreconcilable other. At various times throughout history this rhetoric has contributed to violent persecution. Though all such moments remain contingent and uniquely contextual, the current political climate in particular places in the Muslim world such as the Arab Middle East and the Indian subcontinent seem to be hosts to renewed sectarian discord and communal violence.

One of the clearest examples of the reemergence of classical sectarian rhetoric can be seen in contemporary Iraq. After the United States' invasion in 2003, Shīʿite political parties managed to mobilize enough resources and votes to take firm control of the Iraqi state apparatus. Extremist Sunni political groups who did not recognize the legitimacy of the new government or the American occupation quickly deployed existing anti-Shīʿite rhetorical themes and imagery in order to mobilize forces on their side of the developing civil war. Radical Sunni insurgents quickly labeled Iraqi Shīʿites the "sons of Ibn Alqami"—a reference to the infamous Abbasid vizier Muʾayyad al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Alqāmī (d. 656/1258) who treasonously courted Hūlāgū and his troops prior to their pillage of Baghdad that brought an end to the Abbasid Caliphate.[1] Not long thereafter, Abū Musʿab al-Zaraqāwī (d. 2006), the self-proclaimed leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq made the eradication of Shīʿites and Shīʿism a central axis of his insurgent ideology.

In an insightful article in an otherwise questionable journal, Nibras Kazimi analyzed the rhetorical foundations and structures of al-Zarqāwī's anti-Shīʿite tirade.[2] Drawing upon a variety of sources from classical Islamic texts to contemporary Wahhabi authors, Kazimi demonstrates how al-Zarqāwī's alarmism participates in a long running tradition that links Shīʿite political ambitions to their Jewish, anti-Islamic origins. In a haunting echo from the mid-Abbasid period, al-Zarqāwī proclaims,

---

[1] J. Boyle, "Ibn al-Alqāmī," *EI2*

[2] Nibras Kazimi, "Zarqawi's Anti-Shi'a Legacy: Original or Borrowed?" in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 4, (Nov. 2006), pp. 53-72.

the roots of the *rafidha* and the roots of the Jews are one and thus much of the teachings of the *rafidha* are highly similar to the teachings of the Jews, and their secret meetings and conferences and their use of *taqiyya* [dissembling] to show something other than what they really harbor towards Muslims, is the same as with the Jews…. And he who is aware of what came in the protocols of the Jews and the teachings of the Talmud toward nations other than the Jews will find a complete overlap with the *fatwas* of the Ayatollahs and Seyyids of the *rafidha* towards the Muslims in particular.[3]

Without doubt Kazimi's findings are significant not just for their contemporary relevance but also for their historical genealogies.

However, the contemporary student of Islamic history and Muslim societies writing in the current political environment is struck with a variety of options and pressures when presented with a text like al-Zarqāwī's. This is especially so in light of the research conducted in this study. On the one hand, the theoretical tools of religious studies have allowed us to understand such comments in the *longue durée.* For example, one cannot help but be struck by the way in which Jonathan Z. Smith's notion of lists in the formation of canon converges with Hayden White's concept of *emplotment* in this example. On the other hand, given the overriding association of between Islam and violence in contemporary political discourse, the Islamic studies scholar may be justified in reserving caution when identifying such themes throughout Islamic history. They may even be compelled to ignore such data altogether as a subject of inquiry.

---

[3] Kazimi, p. 60

This dilemma of representations and the perennial ethical question of research's obligation toward its living subject are precisely where this study began and where the study of Islam in the contemporary academy currently stands in an impasse. In a recent and thought provoking essay, the respected scholar of religion, Robert Orsi, brought to the foreground what many students of Islamic history often overlook in the research process: the human subjects to which our "data" presumably correlate. Piercingly, he reminds us,

> Scholars of religion think *with* other people's lives. Sometimes we do this explicitly; at other times, the lives we think with are hidden deep in our assumptions and conclusions. But other people's lives are always there, in one way or another. This is true even when the matters we are thinking about are huge and abstract, when we ask questions about religion and the state, for instance, or religion and violence. There are always lives within our ideas…We go on to make something of other people's experiences and imaginations that they themselves may not have made and may not recognize when we are done. This is a risky business. How do we know when we are making something that we need of them, or that we think the world needs, rather than describing and thinking about them—and engaging them—in the particular details of their circumstances?[4]

---

[4] Robert Orsi, "Theorizing Closer to Home Scholars of religion must become subjects again" in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin,* Vol. 38, Nos. 1 & 2 (Winter/Spring 2010).

By focusing on the origins of Sunni identity formation in middle Abbasid period as a socio-religious discourse at the intersection of myth and history, this study has made clear, deliberate, and "risky" choices. To be sure, where most Sunni Muslims recognize little to no influence of the Umayyad Empire on their religious communitarian sensibilities, I have argued that its short reign has, in fact, left an indelible stamp on Sunni identity. Likewise, I have argued that ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib, whom Sunnis recognize as their fourth and last rightly guided caliph was actually a late appendage to sacred history that served contingent political demands. Along with many other arguments throughout this study, these claims run counter to what most "insiders" would recognize as their tradition. In that light, it may the case that a study like this one would be open to Orsi's criticism about how scholars use other people to fit their own ends and agendas.

However, how should scholarship on Islam manage the inherent ethical tension of representing Muslims and their religious traditions in any instance, much less the current moment? For is it not the case that *any* representation of Islam is determined to be imbued with a range of political and ethical consequences? I do not believe there is a singular answer to these questions and I will surely avoid trying to posit one here. Suffice it to say, though, that as public interest in Islam increases and the demand for both specialists and broadly trained scholars continues to grow, the student of Islamic societies must be prepared for a variety of pedagogical environments and professional challenges. More importantly, those conducting Islamic studies in the field of religious studies must also chart a fairly stable trajectory of inquiry in order to meet the demands of the current moment.

If that research agenda is overly determined with answering the many crises that unfold on newspaper headlines daily then it will surely lose its long-term relevance. An equal disservice however would be if the research agenda of a new generation of scholars simply ignores the continuity (and change) between classic Islamic modes of being and contemporary formations. Likewise, scholarship that does not engage with the interdisciplinary theoretical conversations that occupy our colleagues across the social sciences and humanities promises to perpetuate Islam's otherness in the contemporary academy, which would be an ironic reflection of the impoverished state of public discourse.

This study has attempted in earnest to manage the many contradictory forces at play in the study of Islam today. By combining the theoretical and methodological insights introduced by the linguistic turn in the last few decades, as well as mining the textual and historical data of the vast Islamic literary tradition, this study has attempted to bring together some of the best components a contemporary graduate education in religious studies has to offer. While the findings of this study will surely be contested by many, I am confident that it is but a preliminary humble contribution to an exciting and developing field—a field whose future is perhaps as uncertain as that of its data.

Bibliography

al-Askar, ʿAbd Allah. *Al-Yamāma in the Early Islamic Era*. Ithaca: Ithaca Press, 2002.

Abrahamov, Binyamin. *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.

Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī, *Tārīkh* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutūb al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996)Afsaruddin, Asma. *Excellence and Precedence: Medieval Islamic Discourse on Legitimate Leadership.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002.

Afsaruddin, Asma. *The First Muslims: History and Memory*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007.

Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. *Musnad*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.

_____. *Faḍa'il al-Ṣaḥāba*. Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risala, 1983.

al-ʿAlī, Muḥammad Muhanna. *Ṣirāʿinā maʿ al-Yahūdiyya bayn al-Ṣilāḥ al-Mustaḥīl wa al-Muwwājaha al-Ḥatmiyya*. Riyāḍ: Dār Umayya, 1993.

Alon, Ilai. *"Farabi's Funny Flora: Al-Nawabit as Opposition." Arabica* 37 (1990).

Ankersmit, Frank. *Historical Representation.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

Ankersmit, Frank. *A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language.* Boston: Springer, 1983.

Antrim, Zayde. "Ibn ʿAsākir's Representations of Syria and Damascus in the Introduction to the Taʾrīkh Madinat Dimashq." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006).

Asad, Talal. "The idea of an anthropology of Islam." In *Occassional Papers.* Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1986.

al-Ashʿarī, Abū al-Ḥasan. *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn*. Vol. 2. Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍa al-

Miṣriyya, 1969.

al-ʿAskarī, Murtaḍā. *Abdallah b. Sabaʾ.* Cairo: Maṭbūʿāt al-Najāḥ, 1961.

Azīzī, Hussayn, Pīrūz Rustegār, and Yūsef Bayān, eds. *Raviyān Mushtarak.* Vol. 2. Qum: Būstan Kitāb, 2001.

al-Azmeh, Aziz. "Orthodoxy and Hanbalite Fideism." *Arabica* 35 (1988).

al-Baghawi, Abū Muḥammad. *Tafsīr al-Baghawī al-musammā al-mʿālim al-tanzīl.* Vol. 2. Beirut: Dar al-Maʿrifa, 1987.

al-Baghdādī, Al-Khaṭīb. *Tarīkh al-Baghdād.* Vol. 8. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.

al-Barūsuwī, Ismāʿīl. *Tafsīr Ruḥ al-Bayān.* Vol. 2. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1985.

Bellamy, James. "Pro-Umayyad Propaganda in Ninth-Century Baghdad in the Works of Ibn Abī Dunyā." In *Preʾdication et propaganda au Moyen Age; Islam, Byzance, Occident.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983.

Berg, Herbert. *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period.* Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000.

Berkey, Jonathan. *The Formation of Islam.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Berlinerblau, Jacques. "Toward a Sociology of Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Doxa." *History of Religions* 40, no. 4 (2001).

Bewley, Aisha Abdurrahman. *Muʿāwiya: Restorer of the Muslim Faith.* London: Dar al-Taqwa, 2002.

Bonner, Michael. *Aristocratic violence and holy war: studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier.* New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1986.

Bowersock, G. W. and Peter Robert Brown, and Oleg Grabar, eds. *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post-Classical World.* Cambridge MA: Belknap, 1999.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Boyle, John. "Ibn Al-Alḳamī." *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New ed.* Vol. 3. Edited by B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, and E. Lévi-Provençal. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Brooks, Ernest Walter. *Chronica Minora III.* Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1955.

Brown, Jonathan. *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.* Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Brown, Jonathan A.C. *Ḥadīth: Muḥammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Brown, Jonathan A.C. "How We Know Early Ḥadīth Critics Did *Matn* Criticism and Why It's So Hard to Find." *Islamic Law and Society* 15, no. 2 (2008).

Brown, Jonathon A. C. "Review of The Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith." Journal of Islamic Studies 19, n. 3 (2008).

Bruner, Jerome. *Acts of Meaning.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Bruner, Jerome. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Bruner, Jerome. "The Narrative Construction of Reality." *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (Autumn, 1991).

Bulliet, Christopher. *View from the Edge.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Burns, Robert M. *Historiography: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies.* New York: Routledge, 2006.

Busse, Herbert. "Monotheismus und islamische Christologie in der Bauinschrift des Felsendoms in Jerusalem." *Theologische Quartalschrift* 161 (1981).

Busse, Herbert. "Omar's Image as Conqueror of Jerusalem." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986).

Calder, Norman. *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Cameron, Averil, ed. *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Middle East: States, Resources and Armies.* Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1992.

Cameron, Averil and Lawrence Conrad, eds. *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Middle East: Problems in the Literary Source Material.* Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1992.

Cameron, Marianne Engle. "Sayf at first: The Transmission of Sayf ibn ʿUmar in al-Ṭabarī and Ibn ʿAsākir." In *Ibn ʿAsākir and Early Islamic History* Edited by James E. Lindsay Princeton: The Darwin Press, 2001.

Carr, David. *Time, Narrative and History.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Churchill, Ward. "Sam Gill's Mother Earth: Colonialism, genocide, and the expropriation of Indigenous spiritual tradition in contemporary academia." *American Indian Culture and Research* 12, no. 3 (1988).

Cobb, Paul M. *White Banners: Contention in 'Abbasid Syria, 750-880.* New York: State University of New York Press, 2001.

Cobley, Paul. *Narrative*, *The New Critical Idiom.* London: Routledge, 2001.

Cook, Michael. *Commanding right and forbidding wrong in Islamic thought*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Cook, Michael. *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Cook, Michael. "The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition in Early Islam." In *Studies in the Origins of Early Islamic Culture and Tradition.* Burlington, VT: Ashgate/Variorum, 2004.

Cooperson, Michael. "Baghdad in Rhetoric and Narrative." In Muqarnas. Vol. XIII. Edited by Gülru Necipoglu. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996.

Coupe, Laurence. *Myth*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Courtright, Paul. *Ganesa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Crone, Patricia. *God's Rule: Government and Islam, six centuries of Islamic political thought.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Crone, Patricia. "*Kitāb al-Ridda wa'l-futūḥ and Kitāb al-Jamal wa masīr ʿA'isha wa ʿAlī. A Facsimile edition of the fragments preserved in the University Library of Imam Muhammad Ibn Sa'ud Islamic University in Riyadh, Sa'udi Arabia*. 2 Vols. By Sayf B. 'Umar Al-Tamimi." Edited by Qasim al-Samarrai. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 6:2 (1996).

Crone, Patricia. "On the Meaning of the ʿAbbasid Call to al-Rida." In *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis*. Edited by C.E. Bosworth *et al.* Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press 1989.

Crone, Patricia. "ʿUthmāniyya." *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New ed*. Vol. 10. Edited by B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, and E. Lévi-Provençal. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006.

Crone, Patricia and Michael Cook. *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Dakake, Maria M. *The Charismatic Community: Shiʿite Identity in Early Islam.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.

Danto, Arthur C. *An Analytic Philosophy of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965.

Danto, Arthur C. *Narration and Knowledge*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Danto, Arthur C. "Narrative Sentences." *History and Theory* 2:2, (1962).

al-Dhahabī. *Siyar ʿIlām al-Nubalā'.* Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1997.

Doniger, Wendy. *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Donner, Frederick M. *The Early Islamic Conquests.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

Donner, Frederick M. *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Donner, Frederick M. *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the beginnings of Islamic historical writing.* Princeton University Press, 1998.

Donner, Frederick. "Sayf b. ʿUmar." *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New ed*. Vol. 9. Edited by B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, and E. Lévi-Provençal. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006.

Donohue, John J. *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq.* Leiden: Brill, 2003.

al-Dūri, Abdul ʿAzīz. *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Elad, Amikam. "Why Did ʿAbd al-Malik Build The Dome Of The Rock? A Re-Examination of Muslim Sources." In *Bayt Al-Maqdis: ʿAbd al-Malik's Jerusalem* Part 1. Edited by J. Raby & J. Johns. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

El-Cheikh, Nadia M. *Byzantium viewed by the Arabs.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

El-Hibri, Tayeb. "The Redemption of Umayyad Memory by the ʿAbbāsids." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 61, no. 4. (2002).

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzche, Genealogy, History." In *The Foucault Reader*. Edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" In *The Foucault Reader*. Edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Fowden, Garth. *Empire to Commonwealth: The Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Fuller, Jim. "In Search of Knowledge about Narrative: An Annotaded Bibliography." *The English Journal* 83:2 (1994).

Gill, Sam. "The Academic Study of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62 (Winter 1994).

Gill, Sam. *Mother Earth: An American Story.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Goldziher, Ignaz. *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law.* Translated by Andras and Ruth Hamori. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981.

Hallaq, Wael. "On the Authoritativeness of the Sunni Consensus." *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 18:4 (1986).

Hallaq, Wael. *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Hallaq, Wael. "Was al-Shafi'I the Master Architect of Islamic Jurisprudence?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25 (1993).

Ḥanbal, ʿAbd Allah b. Aḥmad. *Kitaab al-Sunna.* Vol. 5. np,. al-Haythami, Majmuʿ al-Zuwāʾid. Dar al-Fikr, 1996. '8911

Hazāyimah, ʿIṣām Muṣṭafá. *Thalāth rasāʾil fī faḍāʾil Muʿāwiyah.* Edited by ʿIsāmʿUqla and Yusef Aḥmad Banī Yasin. Irbid: Muʾassasat Ḥamādah lil-Dirāsāt al-Jāmiʿīyah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2001.

Henderson, John. *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and Early Christian Patterns.* New York: State University of New York Press, 1998.

Higgins, Andre. "The Lost Archive." *The Wall Street Journal.* Janurary 12, 2008.

Hinds, Martin. "The Murder of the Caliph ʿUthmān." *International Journal of Middle East Studies.* 3:4 (1972).

Hinds, Martin. "Sayf ibn ʿUmarʾs Sources on Arabia in Studies." In *Early Islamic History.* Edited by Martin Hinds, Jere L. Bacharach, Lawrence I. Conrad, and Patricia Crone. Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1996.

Hodgson, Marshall. "How did the early Shiʿa become sectarian?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75:1 (Jan. - Mar., 1955).

Hodgson, Marshall. *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in World Civilization*: *The Classical Age of Islam* 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Humphreys, Stephen. *Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān: From Arabia to Empire.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995.

Ibn Abī-Shayba, ʿAbdallāh Ibn Muḥammad. *al-Muṣannaf*. Riyadh: Maktabat ar-Rushd, 2004.

Ibn Abī Yaʿlā. *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*. Vol. 2. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1952.

Ibn al-Arabi, Abū Bakr. *al-ʿAwāṣim min al-Qawāsim*, ed. Muhib al-Din al-Khatib. Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1989.

Ibn ʿAsākir, ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥasan. *Tarkih Madinat Dimashq*. Damascus: Majmaʿ al-Lughah al-ʿArabiyah bi-Dimashq, 1997.

Ibn Bakkār, Zubayr. *Jamharat Nasab Quraysh wa Ākhbārihā.* Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-ʿŪrūba, 1961.

Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī. *Lisān al-Mizān*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1971.

Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*. Vol. 2. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 1993.

Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*. Vol. 6. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 1993.

Ibn Isḥāq, *Sirat Rasūl Allāh*. Edited by A. Guillaume. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955.

Ibn-Katīr, Abu-'l-Fiḍā' Ismā'īl. *al-bidaya wa-l nihaya.* al-Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat Kurdistān al-Ilmīya, Maṭbaʿat as-Saʿāda, ca. 1929-1939.

Ibn Khallikān, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad. *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa anbā' abnā' al-zamān*. Vol. 2. Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1976.

Ibn al-Nadīm, Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq. *Kitâb al-Fihrist*. Frankfurt am Main: Institute for the history of Arabic-Islamic science, 2005.

Ibn Najjār, *Dhayl Tarīkh al-Baghdād*. Baghdād: Wazarat al-I'lām, 1974.

Ibn Rajab. *Dhayl ʿalā Tabaqat al-Hanabilah*. Al-Riyad: Dar al-Asimah, 1988.

Ibn Saʿd, *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*. Beirut: Dar Sadin, 1960.

al-Iṣfahānī, Abū al-Nuʿaym. *al-Imāma wa al-Radd ʿalā al-Rafīḍa*. Edited by ʿAlī al-Faqīhī. Medina: Maktabat al-ʿUlūm wa al-Ḥikam, 1987.

al-Iṣfahānī, Abū al-Nuʿaym. *Tathbīt al-Imāma wa Tartīb al-Khilāfa.* Edited by Ibrāhīm ʿAlī Tuhāmī. Beirut: Dar al-Imām Muslim, 1986.

Jackson, Sherman. *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

al-Jarallah, Sulaiman Muhammad. "The origins of Ḥadīth : a critical appraisal of a Western approach to the subject." Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1991. PhD Thesis.

Jocks, Christopher Ronwaniènte. "American Indian Religious Traditions and the Academic Study of Religion: A Response to Sam Gill," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 65 (Spring 1997): pp. 169–76.

al-Jumaylī, Abd Allāh. *Badhl al-majhūd fī ithbāt mushābahat al-Rāfiḍah lil-Yahūd*. Medina: Maktabat al-Ghurubāʾ al-Athriyya, 1994.

Juynboll, G. H. A. *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge, 1983).

Juynboll, G. H. A. "Some Isnad-Analytical Methods Illustrated on the Basis of Several Woman-Demeaning Sayings from Hadith Literature," in *al-Qantara,* X (1989), 343-84.

Kansteiner, Wulf. "Hayden White's Critique of the writing of history" in *History and Theory* 32:3 pp. 273-295.

Kazimi, Nibras. "Zarqawi's Anti-Shia Legacy: Original or Borrowed?" in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* , vol. 4 (2006).

Kennedy, Hugh. *The Early ʿAbbasid Caliphate: A Political History* (London, U.K.: Croom Helm, 1981).

Kennedy, Hugh. *When Baghdad ruled the Muslim world: The Rise and Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2005).

Khalidi, Tarif. *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

al-Khallāl, Abū Bakr. *al-Sunna.* Vol. 1. Cairo: al-Faruq al-Hadith, 2008.

Landau-Tasseron, Ella. "Sayf Ibn ʿUmar in Medieval and Modern Scholarship" in *Der Islam* 67 (1990) 1-27.

Laoust, Henri. "Al-Barbahārī." *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New ed.*. Eds. B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, and E. Lévi-Provençal. Vol. 1. Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 2006. al-Barr, Ibn ʿAbd. *Al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995).

Lassner, Jacob. *Islamic revolution and historical memory : an inquiry into the art of ‘Abbāsid apologetics* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1986).

Lecker, Michael. "Review: *Kit̄ab al-ridda wa'l fut̄uh and Kit̄ab al-jamal wa mas̄ir `̄A'isha wa `Al̄I*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119, no. 3 (1999) p. 533.

Lincoln, .Bruce*Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Lindsay, James. Ibn ʿAsākir, His Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq and its Usefulness for Understanding Early Islamic History" in *Ibn ʿAsākir and Early Islamic History* edited *idem* (Princeton: Darwin Press 2001).

Little, Donald P. "Coptic Conversion to Islam under the Baḥrī Mamlūks, 692-755/1293-1354" in *The Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39, no. 3 (1976), pp. 552-569.

Lucas, Scott. *Constructive Critics, Ḥadith Literature, and the Articulation of Sunni Islam*, (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

Mack, Burton. *Who Wrote the New Testament: The Making of the Christian Myth* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995).

Madelung, Wilfred F. "The *Hāshimiyyāt* of al-Kumayt and Hāshimī Shiʿism," *Studia Islamica,* no. 70 (1989).

Madelung, Wilfred. *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Makdisi, George. "Ashʿarī and the Ashʿarites in Islamic religious history," *Religion, Law and Learning in Classical Islam* (Great Britain: Variorum, 1991).

Makdisi, George. "Ḥanbalīte Islam" in *Studies on Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

Marsham, Andrew. *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

Martin, Richard. *Defenders of Reason in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997).

Melchert, Christopher. *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th-10th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

McCutcheon, Russell. *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

McCutcheon, Russell. *Critics not Caretakers*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2001.

McCutcheon, Russell and Paul B. Courtright. "'It's a lie. There's no truth in it! It's a sin!' : On the limits of the humanistic study of religion and the costs of saving others from themselves," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 3, pp. 720-756.

McQuillan, Martin. (ed.), *The Narrative Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Melchert, Christopher. *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th-10th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

Middle East Media Research Institute, The. "Qatari Intellectual on the Islamic Roots of Antisemitism and 9/11 Conspiracy Theories." Accessed June 4, 2009. http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP79204,

Mizzī, Yūsuf ibn al-Zakī ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl*. Vol. 19. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1980.

Momen, Moojan. *An Introduction to Shiʿite Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shiʿism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

Mortel, Richard. "Zaydi Shiʿism and the Hasanid Sharifs of Mecca" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 4 (1987).

Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992.

al Muwāfī, Maḥmūd Imām, ed. *Iskāt al-Kilāb al-ʿāwiya bi-faḍāʾil khāl al-muʾminīn Muʿāwiya* (Medina: Maktabat al-ʿUlūm wa-al-Ḥikam, 2005).

Nādā, Muḥammad. *Jināyyāt Bani Isrāʾil ʿala al-Din wa al-Mujtamaʿ*, (Riyadh: Dar al-Lawāʾ, 1984), pp. 320-27.

Nagel, Tilman. "Buyids" *Encyclopedia Iranica* 4 (1990)

Nagel, Tilman. trans. Thomas Thorton, *The History of Islamic Theology: From Muhammad to the Present* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000).

al-Najafī, ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad al-Amīnī. *al-Ghadīr fī al-Kitab wa al-Sunna wa al-Adab*, (Tehran: 1952).

Nawas, John. (1996). "The Mihna of 218 A.H./833 A. D. Revisited: An Empirical Study". Journal of the American Oriental Society (Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 116, No. 4) 116 (4): pp. 698–708.

al-Nisābūrī, Al-Ḥakim. *al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn.* Vol. 2. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990.

Noth, Albrecht. *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source Critical Study,* trans. Lawrence Conrad. Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994.

Orsi, Robert. "Theorizing Closer to Home Scholars of religion must become subjects again" in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin,* Vol. 38, Nos. 1 & 2 (Winter/Spring 2010).

Pandrey, Gyanendra. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Patton, Laurie. "Dis-Solving a Debate" in *Religion and Practical Reason*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and David Tracy. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

_____. *Myth as Argument: The Bṛhaddevatā as Canonical Commentary*. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996.

Pellat, Charles. "Le Culte du Muʿāwiya au III siècle de le hegira," *Studia Islamica* 6 (1956): 53-66.

al-Qāḍī, Wadād. "The Earliest 'Nābita' and the Paradigmatic 'Nawābit'." *Studia Islamica* 78 (1993): 27-61.

al-Qurṭubī, Abū ʿAbd Allah. *al-Jamiʿ al-Ahkām al-Qurʾān.* Vol. 6. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1958.

al-Rāzi, Fakhr al-Dīn. *Tafsīr al-Kabīr au Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*. Vol. 16. Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1990.

Reynolds, Gabriel. *A Muslim theologian in a sectarian milieu: ʻAbd al-Jabbār and the critique of Christian origins.* Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, vols. 1-3. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984-1988.

Roberts, Geoffrey. "J. H. Hexter: Narrative History and Common Sense" in *The History and Narrative Reader*, London: Routledge, 2001.

Robinson, Chase. *Islamic Historiography*, Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Ronen, Ruth. "Paradigm Shift in Plot Models: An Outline of the History of Narratology" in *Poetics Today* 11:4 (Winter, 1990).

Rosenthal, Franz. *A History of Muslim Historiography*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1968.

Safi, Omid. *The Politics of Knowledge in Pre-Modern Islam*: *Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

al-Samarqandī, Abū Layth. *Tafsīr al-Samarqandī al-musammā, Baḥr al-ʿulūm.* Vol. 1 Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1994.

al-Sāmarrāʾī, Qasim. "A Reappraisal of Sayf as a Historian in Light of the Discovery of the discovery of his work *Kitab al-Ridda wa-l-Futuh.*" In *Essays in Honor of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munnajid.* London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2002.

al-Sāmarrāʾī, Qasim. "Sayf ibn 'Umar and ibn Saba': a New Approach." In *Israel and Ishmael: Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations.* Edited by Tudor Parfitt. Richmond: Curzon, 2000.

Sayf b. ʿUmar al-Tamimi. *Kitāb al-Ridda waʾl-futūḥ and Kitāb al-Jamal wa masīr Aʾisha wa-ʿAlī,* al-Sāmarrāʾī, ed. Leiden: Smitzkamp Oriental Antiquarium, 1995.

Schoeler, Gregor. *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam.* London: Routledge, 2006.

Scott, David. "The Tragic Sensibility of Talal Asad" in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors,* ed. David Scott and Charles Hirschkind. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Shaykh Ikraiyim, Ṣalāḥ Muḥammad. *Musnad Muʿāwiya Ibn Abī Sufyān fī al-ḥadīth al-nabawī* (Damascus: Dar al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 2008.

Sharon, Moshe. *Black Banners from the East: The Establishment of the 'Abbasid State* Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983.

Sharon, Moshe. *Revolt: The Social and Military Aspects of the 'Abbasid Revolution* Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983.

Shoshan, Boaz. *The Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing al-Tabarī's History*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Ṣiddīqī, Muḥammad Zubayr. *Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development, and Special Features*. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993.

Sizgorich, Thomas. *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

Smith, Jonathan Z. "Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon" in *Imagining Religion: From Jonestown to Babylon*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Sourdel, Dominique, (1962), "La Politique du Calife Abbasid al- Ma'mun", Revue des etudes Islamiques, No. 30

Stewart, Devin J. *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Shi'ite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998.

al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr. *Between Civil Wars: The Caliphate of Muawiyah*. Translated by Michael G. Morony. Albany: State University of New York, 1987.

al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr. *Biographies of the Prophet's Companions and their Successors.* Edited by Ella Landau-Tasseron. Albany: State University of Albany Press, 1998.

al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr. *The Challenge to the Empires.* Edited by Khalid Yahya Blankinship. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr. *The Crisis of the Early Caliphate.* Translated by Stephen Humphrey. Albany: Albany State University of New York, 1990.

al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr. *The History of al-Ṭabarī.* Vol. I. Translated by Franz Rosenthall. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Jarīr. *The History of al-Ṭabarī.* Vol. XVI. Translated and edited by Adrian Brockett. New York: State University of New York Press, 1997.

al-Ṭayālisi, Abū Dāwūd. *Musnad*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Lubnāniyya, 1990.

al-Tirmidhī. *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*. Vol. 10. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub alʿIlimiyya, 1994.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1997.

Van Ess, Joseph. *The Flowering of Muslim Theology.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Van Koningsveld, PS. "*Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas*," JSAI 20 (1996), pp. 200-228.

Vann, Richard. "The Reception of Hayden White" in *History and Theory* 37:2, pp. 143-61.

Wasserstrom, Stephen. *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Watt, Montgomery. *The Formative Period of Islamic* Thought. Oxford: Oneworld, Oxford University Press, 1998.

Watt, Montgomery. *Islamic Philosophy and Theology. Edinburgh*: Edinburgh University Press, 1985.

Watt, Montgomery. *Muhammad at Mecca*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

Watt, Montgomery. *Muhammad at Medina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

White, Hayden. "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth" in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. Geoffrey Roberts. New York: Routledge, 2001.

White, Hayden. "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" in *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. Geoffrey Roberts, 223 (New York: Routledge, 2001).

White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.

White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse.* Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 1978.

White, Hayden. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" in *The Content of the Form*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Yaʿlā, Abu. *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, Cairo: 1952.

Zaman, Qasim. *Religion and politics under the early ʿAbbāsids : the emergence of the proto-Sunnī elite*. Leiden: Brill, 1997.

Zayyāt, Ḥabīb. "Al-Tashayyuʿ li-Muʿāwiya fi ʿAhd al-ʿAbbāsiyyin," *Al-Mashriq* (1928): pp. 410-414.

al-Zoghbī, Fatḥī Muḥammad. *Ghulāt al-Shiʿa wa Tāʾthrihim bi al-adiyan al-Mughāyra lil-Islam, al-Yahudiyya, al-Masihiyya, al-Majusiyya.* n.l.: Maṭābiʿ ghubāshī, 1977.