

THE *KHAWĀRIJ* AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY FORMATION

IN EARLY ISLAM

A Thesis

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by

© Rodney L. Thomson

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APPROVED BY THE INTERIM DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES:

Sharon Barrios, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Kate Transchel, Ph.D.
Graduate Coordinator

Najm al-Din Yousefi, Ph.D., Chair

Jason Nice, Ph.D.

Kate McCarthy, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, partner, and child. All three have provided invaluable inspiration and support during my late-in-life reinvention as a historian.

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This project would never have come to fruition without the expertise and guidance of Dr. Najm al-Din Yousefi. A gifted scholar and teacher, he provided constant support throughout. I am happy to have him as my academic mentor and friend.

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PREFACE

This thesis discusses the first people to separate themselves from the majority of the Islamic community yet still identify as Muslim, the *Khawārij*.¹ It evolved from a fourteen-page paper I wrote for a graduate research seminar in fall 2014. Like that effort, this one is long on research and shorter on conclusion, a consequence of the nature of the sources for early Islam. Unlike its Abrahamic cousins, documents that purport to preserve the nascent Muslim community are legion. In the case of Christianity, very few documents that have anything to say about the foundation and earliest formation of that faith survive. But the history of early Islam from the days of the Prophet Muḥammad are preserved in rich and voluminous traditions of biography, historiography, and sayings literature that overflow with the names of participants and the presence of minutiae largely absent from the Jewish and Christian traditions. Not only did the early Muslim community preserve the sayings and deeds of the Prophet, they recorded what he wore, his eating habits, how he moved his body when praying, the names and genealogies of those who accepted the faith and the order in which they did so, their physical descriptions, how many camels were distributed as loot after battles, and a host of other detail the quantity of which presents a treasure trove of information for the reconstruction of Islam in its early years.

But this abundance is illusory. The surviving sources date, at the earliest, to the mid-second century of the Islamic calendar and, while they claim to get their material via a meticulously transmitted oral tradition, scholars have long recognized that much of it was forged during later struggles over which particular expression of the faith could

¹ *Khawārij* is the plural form; the singular and adjectival form is *Khārijī*. While not used in this paper outside of quotations, the anglicized forms are Kharijites and Kharijite, respectively.

claim orthodoxy and the attendant cultural and socio-political benefits. While similar situations impact the history of other religious traditions, for Islam the problem is particularly acute. Worse, it appears chronic.

Since the later-nineteenth century CE a few specialists have proposed possible solutions to overcoming this enormous problem, however, the general trend has been to admit to its existence but largely ignore it in practice. The best resolution suggested, from the perspective of the present author, is to apply the tools used by Biblical scholars in the analysis of Jewish and Christian scriptures, apocrypha, and other early texts. Considering the nature of the Muslim sources, these tools should provide similarly fruitful results in the analysis of Islam. Unfortunately, few people have attempted to do so because the sheer volume of the material represents far more than a single person could possibly tackle in one lifetime. Those who have made partial attempts—Wellhausen, Schacht, and van Ess among them—have provided major contributions to the understanding of the faith and its doctrinal evolution, but no one has done so for the historiographical materials.

The present work is my small contribution to addressing this situation. I do not provide an exhaustive examination of the entire tradition, not even as it applies to the sectarian group in question. Rather, I intend to shed some light on how Khārijī identity evolved from both external and internal perspectives, and use the sect as an example of the applicability of the analytical tools of the Biblical scholar to the earliest sources. Can they produce fruitful results? I believe they can, and that the present work demonstrates that to be the case. This study also utilizes social identity theory to try and isolate reports more likely to accurately represent the Khawārij. I do not recall how a copy of L.

Stephanie Cobb's *Dying to Be Men* ended up on my bookshelf, but am happy it did.²

While working on the penultimate chapter of the present work, I opened Cobb's book for the first time and realized that she had applied social identity theory to the interpretation of early Christian martyrologies. That she did such admirable work along the same lines validated my approach and provided some encouragement in tackling the more-challenging portions of the Khārijī narrative. Similarly, Adam Gaiser's *Shurāt Legends, Ibādī Identities: Martyrdom, Asceticism, and the Making of an Early Islamic Community* came out last year and he touches on some of the same themes found herein.³ He likewise sees Khārijī identity formation and doctrinal development as a long-term process, contrary to the narrative that eventually found full expression at the hands of the heresiographers.

Many limitations restrict the possibilities of this endeavor, some endemic to the sources, some specific to the author. As well-over a century of Western study demonstrates, the surviving documents tend to reveal what we want to see in them thanks to their nature and volume. Once again turning to the Christian tradition for analogy, the voices represented by the New Testament and scant early writings number relatively few. But for Islam the voices number in the hundreds *at least*, and they represent many different perspectives and biases. As a result, the historian has to exercise great caution to avoid cherry-picking data to force a conclusion. I have done my best to avoid this pitfall and consider evidence that appears to contradict my arguments. Equally hazardous is the temptation to read more into the sources than they allow thanks to their structure and

² Stephanie L. Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

³ Adam Gaiser, *Shurāt Legends, Ibādī Identities: Martyrdom, Asceticism, and the Making of an Early Islamic Community* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2016).

often open-ended construction or presentation. “Reading between the lines” is often code for arguing *a silentio*, but read between them we must if we wish to avoid the overly-simplistic, Manichean interpretations that have dominated Khārijī studies in the past.

The scope of the present work is not unproblematic; focusing on Muslims alone is no more productive than focusing on Nestorians or Manicheans or Pagans or Zoroastrians without consideration of the greater Late Antique world of which they constituted but one part. To fully place the Khawārij in context is a mammoth undertaking that, to do properly, requires competency with various languages and cultures of the Late Antique world. While my Latin is acceptable, my Greek is elementary, and my Syriac, Persian, and Armenian future fantasies of linguistic competency. Fortunately, interest in this period and region remains vital, and the most-important texts now exist in translation. I have placed a greater emphasis on the influence of Arabian tribal culture on the formation and evolution of Islam, an unavoidable conclusion regardless of how one interprets the sources. Furthermore, some of the questions I have raised others have raised before, including devout Muslim scholars who recognized early in the faith's history that not everything handed down could be taken at face value. 'Āsim al-Nabīl said *circa* the turn of the third century AH, "In nothing do we see pious men more given to falsehood" than in the promulgation and redaction of the sayings of the Prophet.⁴ Nowhere else is that more evident than in the traditions that purport to remember the objects of the present study.

Some technical minutiae are in order. The transliteration system of the *Journal of Islamic Studies* is utilized herein. All Arabic words are thus transliterated, with

⁴ Alfred Guillaume, *The Traditions of Islam: An Introduction to the Study of the ḥadīth Literature* (Beirut: Khayts, 1966), 78-79.

the exception of a few that have made it into everyday English usage (e.g. jihad), and anglicized place names (Oman, Basra, Kufa, et al.). Dates are most often provided in the format *Anno Hegirae* (AH)/Common Era (CE), with chapter 5 an exception as it deals entirely with events before the development of the Islamic calendar. Regnal dates are taken from C. E. Bosworth's *The New Islamic Dynasties*, an enormously-useful reference work no student of the Late Antique and Medieval Near East should be without.⁵ Equally valuable is Guy Le Strange's *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, which I have relied upon in describing locations.⁶ Another standard reference work, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* is referred to simply as *EI*² throughout the present work.⁷

No one can answer more than the most basic questions in regard to early Islam with any certainty. The sources simply will not allow it, and specialists have long recognized this as a hazard endemic to this field of study. Hopefully, the present contribution supports the suggestion that the study of early Islam would benefit significantly from application of the tools utilized in Biblical studies. While the present author agrees with those who have observed the enormous difficulty in such an undertaking, the field will not reach its potential without it.⁸

Even should such an undertaking come to fruition, Khārijī self-identity will retain most of its mystery. They are in good company; a laundry list of sectarian movements from early Christianity share the same fate: Ebionites, Luciferians, Donatists,

⁵ Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties: A Chronological and Genealogical Manual* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

⁶ Guy Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate: Mesopotamia, Persia, and Central Asia from the Moslem Conquest to the Time of Timur* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1905).

⁷ P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, 12 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1960-2007). N.b. rare references to the first and third editions of this work are abbreviated, respectively, *EI*¹ and *EI*³.

⁸ E.g., Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 12-17.

Marcionites, and others, all remembered only by heresiographers and only as objects of scorn.

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ABSTRACT

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The problems inherent to the sources for early Islam continue to challenge scholars when it comes to making positivist statements regarding the formation of early Muslim identity. Specialists have long recognized that the polemical struggles for orthodoxy and legitimacy in the Abbasid period plague the *akhbār* and *ḥadīth*. This problem is particularly acute for the *Khawārij*, the first recognized sectarian division in Islam. The present author examines the sources using social identity theory and the analytical tools of the Biblical text critic, both of which find fruitful application to the early Muslim sources. Further support derives from an understanding of the Late Antique and tribal environments prevalent in the first *Hijri* centuries. Through careful application of these tools, the present author deconstructs the Khārijī master narrative to separate later inventions or redactions from those more likely to represent the sectarians as they actually existed. Akhbār, poetry, and apologetic literature ascribed to the Khawārij are then analyzed to show how the sectarians' early self-identity did not stray far from its pre-Islamic heritage, but evolved over time to include detailed religious justification. The

author concludes with the suggestion of a new Khārijī narrative in which the sect's dissent stemmed principally from complaints fully coherent with the Arabian tribal milieu, to which members only later developed doctrine to legitimate their separatism.

Chapter I

Introduction

On October 15, 2006, Abū ‘Ayyūb al-Maṣrī established by fiat *Dawlat al-‘Irāq al-‘Islāmiyya*, the Islamic State of Iraq, a territory that nominally consisted of the governorates in proximity to and north of Baghdad.⁹ Over this new organization al-Maṣrī placed Abū ‘Umar al-Baghdādī, an individual who probably owed his appointment to his claimed ancestry from the Banū Hāshim, the Arabian clan of Islam’s foundational figure, the Prophet Muḥammad.¹⁰ Previously unknown, al-Baghdādī’s birth name was Hamīd Dāwūd Khalīl al-Zāwī, a former small-town police officer who possessed no notable leadership skills and had lost his previous job thanks to his ultraconservative beliefs. Members of the Islamic State expressed confusion over al-Maṣrī’s decision, but they still referred to al-Baghdādī as *‘amīr al-mu’minīn*, “commander of the faithful.” A state in name only at its founding, the organization floundered for several years under al-Maṣrī’s behind-the-scenes leadership, but people flocked to the group’s black banner regardless. Besides Jihadi-Salafists,¹¹ many other disaffected individuals joined, including former members of Saddam Hussein’s security and military establishments who did not appreciate the reversal in fortunes they had experienced with the toppling of the regime.

⁹ Cole Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State*, The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Analysis Paper No. 19, March 2015, 17. In April 2013 the group changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (or Levant). Because that is the name by which the group is best known in the West, the abbreviation ISIS is used herein to represent the group in all its manifestations.

¹⁰ “Banū” literally means “sons of” and is often used to form a tribal patronym. In this case, Banū Hāshim is a subtribe (sept) of Quraysh, the tribe from whence all legitimate caliphs are supposed to descend.

¹¹ Bunzel’s definition of Jihadi-Salafism is useful here. It is “a distinct ideological movement in Sunni Islam... The movement is predicated on an extremist and minoritarian reading of Islamic scripture that is also textually rigorous, deeply rooted in a premodern theological tradition, and extensively elaborated by a recognized cadre of religious authorities” (Bunzel, *Paper State to Caliphate*, 7). The shortened term “Jihadi” is used synonymously herein.

The violence that ensued was both inter- and intra-sectarian as ISIS command pursued an extreme-fundamentalist agenda spurred by al-Maṣrī's apocalyptic beliefs which predicted an imminent end of days.¹²

In the face of increasing unrest and dissatisfaction among the Iraqi people at the behavior of the Islamic State, and to counter the complaints of local tribal leaders, on March 13, 2007, al-Baghdādī issued the first version of the group's "creed and path," a policy statement based on religious principles cherry picked from a variety of sources. Among the nineteen points were: a mandate for iconoclasm; declarations that the Shi'a, and the United States and everyone who aids it are, categorically, apostates; confirmation of the duty to kill apostates and abide by Shari'a in matters of jurisprudence; the identification of jihad as a necessary duty for all Muslims; and revocation of the protected status of the *dhimmi*, those monotheistic non-Muslim communities traditionally granted protection in return for the payment of a poll tax—Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Sabeans.¹³ As ISIS took control of areas, it instituted the *ḥudūd*, corporal and capital punishments mentioned in the Qur'an and various *ḥadīth* as transgressions against God's boundaries.¹⁴ This did nothing to help the group's already-lagging popularity, and they further alienated other jihadist groups by insisting that, if the latter did not pledge

¹² William McCants, *The Isis Apocalypse: History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015), Kindle ed., locs. 235, 511, 523-43, and 579.

¹³ 'Abu 'Umar al-Baghdādī, "Some of our Fundamentals," March 13, 2007, translated and cited in Bunzel, 38-41.

¹⁴ The *ḥudūd* (singular: *ḥadd*) include a variety of punishments for offenses from intoxication and adultery to rebellion. *Ḥadīth* are the collected reports of the words, deeds, and habits (collectively the *sunna*) of the Prophet. Generally accepted as second in importance only to the Qur'an for determining matters of Islamic law, there are multiple collections and variants possessing varying degrees of authority for the different schools of jurisprudence. Coherent with common practice, the present author uses *ḥadīth* for both the singular and plural.

allegiance (*bay‘a*) to ISIS, then they too were guilty of apostasy and subject to summary execution.¹⁵

By the time al-Maṣrī and al-Baghdādī died in a joint U.S.-Iraq raid outside Tikrit on April 18, 2010, the Islamic State existed on little other than paper, but it enjoyed a resurgence and period of notable success under its new leader, Ibrāhīm ‘Awwād Ibrāhīm al-Badrī. A soccer aficionado with a Ph.D. in Qur’anic Sciences, al-Badrī, like his predecessor, adopted a new name with his new title: Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī.¹⁶ Unlike the former al-Baghdādī, the new commander of the faithful proved a more-capable leader, one who took advantage of the chaos caused by the rebellion against President Bashār al-Āssad in neighboring Syria to expand operations and increase ISIS’s attractiveness as an organization to other Jihadi-Salafists. After significant expansion into Syria and western Iraq in the summer of 2014, Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī took to the pulpit at the great mosque in Mosul to give his first public speech, in which he upgraded the Islamic State to Caliphate, and declared himself the titular Caliph Ibrāhīm.¹⁷ With the announcement came new demands. All Muslims worldwide now owed the Caliphate their bay‘a, including all jihadis, many of whom disagreed with the Caliphate’s methods and high-handedness. This created rifts in the jihadi community, making cooperation between the Caliphate and other groups difficult at best, and eventually led al-Qaeda to officially sever its ties with the Islamic State.¹⁸ And Caliph Ibrāhīm’s successes of 2014 have not continued, thanks in part to strategic decisions based on his desire to kick start the

¹⁵ McCants, *Isis Apocalypse*, locs. 279, 543, and 560.

¹⁶ William McCants, *The Believer: How an Introvert with a Passion for Religion and Soccer Became Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Leader of the Islamic State* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2015), Kindle ed., locs. 74-89, 149, and 178.

¹⁷ Bunzel, 31.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

apocalypse by proactively fulfilling prophecies from the sunna, regardless of their questionable real-world strategic value.¹⁹ By the summer of 2016 the Caliphate had lost approximately 45 percent and 20 percent, respectively, of the territory it once controlled in Iraq and Syria, and the ability of its fighters to operate in the open has been much reduced by an international coalition led by the U.S., one that incorporates local tribespeople and Muslims from other sects in battling the jihadis.²⁰

The wanton violence and brutality that accompanies the presence of the Islamic State has horrified many in the Muslim world, and some have taken steps to distance what they consider “true Islam” from the practices of the Caliphate. Interestingly, many have looked to the first sectarian division in Islam as an exemplar by which to evaluate ISIS. That sect, the Khawārij, has provided an example from the nascent days of the faith which a host of religious scholars, social commentators, and concerned bloggers have used to delegitimize the Caliphate as rebellious and anathema to the traditional precepts of Islam. In the Muslim tradition, the Khawārij are often presented as the worst of sectarians, living by an over-strict interpretation of only those parts of the Qur’an and sunna that support their fanatical ideology. Perceived as possessing single-minded devotion to their cause, they claim to be pious aesthetes with only one goal—entry into paradise by giving their life to God in jihad. But their extremist beliefs and practices make them hypocrites in the faith from the perspective of outsiders because they condone rebellion against any leader they themselves deem impious, and judge Muslims guilty of grave sin to be unbelievers, a practice called *takfīr*. Furthermore,

¹⁹ McCants, *ISIS Apocalypse*, loc. 1772.

²⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, “Iraq and Syria, ISIS’s Areas of Influence, August 2014 Through April 2016,” *Operation Inherent Resolve, Targeted Operations Against Terrorists*, accessed August 18, 2016, http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814_Inherent-Resolve.

the Khawārij practiced *isti' rād*—the killing of other Muslims without justification.²¹

Interestingly, while such beliefs and practices certainly find parallels in those of ISIS, apologists for that group have publically divorced the organization from the Khawārij. In his 2007 policy statement, Abū 'Umar al-Baghdādī claimed the ideology of the Islamic State “is a middle way between the extremist Kharijites and the lax Murji'ites,” a definition which from his perspective made his group a moderate and therefore the only true expression of Islam.²²

One of the many fascinating aspects of this ongoing debate is that both sides tend to speak of the Khawārij in the present tense, as a contemporary scourge that continues to plague the Muslim world. Yet the group has not existed for hundreds of years outside of a quietist sub-sect, the *Ibādīyya*, today based primarily in Oman and which in practice looks nothing like its allegedly-extremist ancestors. Furthermore, both sides are only partially correct in their allegations. While traditions about the Khawārij

²¹ One need do little more than perform a Google search for the term Khārijī or Kharijite to find a host of examples of this discourse. *Exempli gratia*: Aaron Wannamaker, “Khawarij: A History of Violence,” *IslamiCity*, November 18, 2015, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://www.islamicity.org/9647/khawarij-a-history-of-violence/>; Abu Amina Elias, “Dangers of the Khawarij Ideology of Violence,” *Faith in Allah*, June 24, 2014, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://abuaminaelias.com/dangers-of-the-khawarij-ideology-of-violence/>; Shaykh Abu Aaliyah Surkheel, “Khawarij Ideology, ISIS Savagery: Part II,” *Muslimmatters.org*, October 8, 2015, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://muslimmatters.org/2015/10/08/khawarij-ideology-isis-savagery-part-ii/>; Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari, “The Distinguishing Features of the Khawarij,” *Al-Islam.org*, accessed August 20, 2016, <https://www.al-islam.org/polarization-around-character-ali-ibn-abi-talib-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/distinguishing-features>. These sources and others either make a direct or implied connection between ISIS and the *Khawārij*.

²² Al-Baghdādī in Bunzel, 38. The *Murji'ūn* (sing. *Murji'a*) are an example of the impact that the Khawārij had on identify formation in the Islamic community. In reaction to an understanding of Khārijī doctrine as mandating proactive works in order to claim Muslim identity (an understanding not shared by all branches of the Khawārij), Murji'a doctrine took a diametrically-opposed stance, teaching on the sufficiency of faith and the deferred judgment of sinners by God, hence the label Murji'a (“Postponers”). See: Josef van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 122-23; Salvador Gómez Nogales, “Sunni Theology,” in *Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period*, ed. by M. J. L. Young, J. D. Latham, and R. B. Serjeant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3-4; and J. Meric Pessagno, “The Murji'a, Īmān and Abū ‘Ubayd,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95, no. 3 (July-September 1975): 382-394. For a description of other sects' relationships to the Murji'a, see: W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998), 119-23.

present that group as militant and not-infrequently homicidal, its concepts of leadership and community were quite different from those of the Islamic State, nor did the former oppress or brutalize the dhimmī in their midst. Many Khārijī groups tried to separate themselves from the greater *umma* with which they could not agree. On the few occasions Khawārij did form their own polities, they behaved more-or-less like their non-sectarian neighbors.²³

Finally, the comparison of ISIS to the Khawārij also raises questions about the accuracy of the original sources, questions endemic to the study of early Islam. Those that perceive more similarities than differences between the two groups often rely on traditions that are either polemical or apocryphal. And the fact that early Muslim chroniclers related multiple variants of many events—often with significant differences to the point of being mutually exclusive—only creates further confusion for the modern historian. But the power of the Khārijī legend remains strong, and continues to find traction in the dialectical struggle over which group or groups can legitimately claim orthodoxy in Islam today.

The ISIS controversy is only the most recent in an ongoing process of identity creation and evolution among different Muslim groups, in which each defines itself in contradistinction to outsiders, particularly those that differ significantly in doctrine or praxis. In Islam, the process goes back to the days of the Prophet Muḥammad and the first three *rāshidūn* caliphs,²⁴ when those who identified with the nascent faith defined

²³ *Umma* means “community” and is used to refer to the collective community of Islam.

²⁴ The *rāshidūn* caliphs are the “rightly-guided” successors to Muḥammad. Indicative of the identity conflicts that took place during the first centuries of Islam, variant lists developed in different parts of the Muslim world existed until the eventual dominance of the Sunni tradition. Afterwards, the general consensus includes the first four caliphs as *rāshidūn*: Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, and ‘Alī ibn ‘Abī Ṭālib (Van Ess, *Flowering*, 124-25).

their new religion against existing Arabian traditions, citing similarities with some groups—those that shared a revealed monotheistic religion, the *ahl al-kitāb* (“people of the book”)—and differences with others—the idolaters and polytheists (*mushrikūn*). But the crisis of the First *Fitna*²⁵ and events at the Battle of Şiffīn in 37/657 turned the process of identity creation inward, because the appearance of the Khawārij led to divisions within the community of believers and raised a question which no one had thought to ask before: What, precisely, does it mean to identify as Muslim?

The intent of the present work is to explore Khārijī identity formation from both external and internal perspectives. Far more material survives in regard to the former because the sectarians’ claims to orthodoxy and orthopraxy forced outsider groups to address the question of Muslim identity themselves. But enough of what the Khawārij generated survives to support the contention that the master narrative is largely inaccurate in representing how the sect saw itself. While at some point Khārijī groups did develop doctrine of their own, at the beginning their motivations stemmed from a perceived failure of the caliphate and its representatives to adequately distribute resources—physical and cultural—in the manner expected. Further justification for unrest developed over time, and took the form of religious discourse that ultimately begged the question of identity in Islam. In the process, the Khawārij presented themselves as the true keepers of the faith, the only ones entitled to wear the label Muslim. By painting themselves in the colors of orthodoxy, they forced the hands of other Muslims to respond in kind.

In the long process of identity formation that followed, those outside the Khārijī sects came to define themselves in opposition to the seceders. While the Khawārij

²⁵ The word *fitna* connotes the ideas of temptation, trial, infatuation, intrigue, sedition, and civil strife. In regard to the present work, it refers to the early civil wars fought among the umma.

opposed the caliphate as corrupt and moved to divorce themselves from it, other Muslim groups developed religious justifications that allowed them to live peacefully under the current 'amīr al-mu'minīn and in the constant presence of those with whom they disagreed on doctrinal matters. By the sixth/twelfth century, long after all but the quietist 'Ibāḍiyya had disappeared, those identified with what had evolved into Sunni Islam came to apply the label Khārijī with a rather broad brush:

Whoever rebelled against the legitimate *imām* accepted by the people is called a Khārijite, whether this rebellion took place at the time of the Companions against the rightfully guided imāms, or against their worthy successors, or against the imāms of any time.²⁶

In other words, anyone who rebelled against the government was, is, and will be by definition a Khārijī, regardless of specific beliefs, doctrines, or other considerations. As already seen, this understanding, the result of a long process of external identity formation, remains alive and well today and has been applied to ISIS in a manner identical to that suggested by the sixth/twelfth-century author of the above quotation.

It should come as no surprise that the Khawārij saw themselves quite differently, regardless to which sub-sect they claimed membership. While any attempt to try and extract Khārijī self-identity from the early historical sources is fraught with the kinds of hazards inherent to the study of all ancient minority groups, some poetry purportedly from the ranks of the Khawārij survives. This corpus presents a remarkably consistent sense of self-identity, one largely at variance with that presented in the master narrative extracted from the historiographies and heresiographies, yet one coherent with the cultural values of the Arabian tribes before Islam.

²⁶ Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects in Kitāb al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, trans. by A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn (Boston: Kegan Paul International, 1984), 98.

The present work approaches the problem of identity formation in early Islam by using the Khawārij to address two questions: How did Khārijī identity form from an external perspective; and how did it form from an internal perspective? The first chapter discusses the Khārijī master narrative and argues that it is the product of external identity formation. It appears the sectarians themselves contributed little in the way of input to its creation, but it provides a useful point of reference and an example of how group identities are created by outsiders.

The second chapter looks at the sources, the challenges inherent in their use, and their interpretation by historians since the later-nineteenth century. Khārijī studies until relatively recently have mired in an either-or dichotomy first forwarded by scholars of the German school, their analyses informed by Enlightenment-era understandings of religion versus state and a failure to adequately account for contextual and cultural factors. The influence of these studies proved chronic. Throughout the twentieth century, the majority of scholarly work on the sectarians has produced the same Manichaean results, with researches declaring Khārijī motivations either purely secular *or* religious, their concerns either worldly *or* pietistic, with no allowance for shades of gray in between. In the end, such analyses reduce the sectarians to overly simple, one-dimensional caricatures. Recently, a new generation of scholars has challenged these traditional interpretations in a variety of ways and with varying degrees of success. Some of their efforts play an important role herein to support this author's contention that Khārijī dissent originally stemmed from concerns grounded in tribal culture, and that only later did the sectarians rely on religious justification for their separatism. For this

they relied principally on a literalist interpretation of the closest thing to law at the time—the Qur'an.

The third chapter discusses the tools used herein to evaluate the sources. The first such tool is social (or group) identity theory. In this regard the work of a number of social psychologists provides a useful interpretive framework and sheds some light on the identity conflicts that occurred between the minority sectarians and the majority they opposed. The analytical criteria utilized by Biblical critics also proves useful to the task at hand. Long proposed but seldom applied, the present author believes they can help separate historically-useful grains from the polemical chaff that makes up so much of the master narrative.²⁷

This is followed by a description of the cultural and historic context of the world of the Late Antique Near East in the seventh century CE. Critical to the present work is an understanding of the socio-political environment and, more so, the Arabian tribal milieu and its influence on the evolution of Muslim thought and identity. Contrary to some claims, the continued presence of inter- and intra-tribal competition, animosity, and conflict had a significant influence on the development of both the early Islamic polity and its religion, and these struggles provided motivation for and helped to define the Khawārij.

Next comes an evaluation of the so-called primary sources as they relate to the Khawārij from that group's genesis to the end of Umayyad dynasty (ca. 150/767), using the aforementioned interpretative tools to explore the process of external identity formation of that sect. The penultimate chapter applies the same methods to surviving

²⁷ Some Orientalists applied these methods to the Prophetic traditions, most notably Wellhausen and Goldziher, and later scholars have used them in studying the historiographical sources as literature, several of whom are discussed in chapter 3.

Khārijī sources to determine how that sect came to identify itself. Central to this understanding are the evolution of ‘Ibādī identity and that tradition’s conflicting needs to both identify with and distance itself from the early seceders. A brief conclusion wraps up the present discussion, and the author makes suggestions for a new narrative of Khārijī identity formation.

The issues discussed herein are not unique to Islam. Sectarian divisions occur in all religions, created by differences of opinion over matters of doctrine, praxis, and the infinite personal vagaries inherent to faith in a higher power. What is unique, however, is that in Islam the identity crisis created by the appearance of the Khawārij has reentered contemporary public discourse in what amounts to a new round in the contest for orthodoxy. A legacy of ham-fisted colonial rule, the establishment of post-World War I authoritarian regimes, the destabilization created by Cold War politics, and recent military incursions have combined to provide both impetus and opportunity for new sectarian divisions to form in the Middle East. While most Muslims divorce themselves from any association with the first seceders from Islam, thanks to a long process of external identity formation the quietist majority can point to groups like ISIS and state with a sincere conviction: “They are Khawārij.” In order to appreciate how this understanding developed, we must first turn back to the long-accepted narrative of that sect's appearance and early history.

Chapter II

The Khārijī Master Narrative

The popular understanding of the Khawārij and their history derived initially from oral sources handed down over time and eventually collected by those engaged in the early Islamic historiographic tradition. While a discussion of specifics related to this process is deferred until the next chapter, at this point it is appropriate to note that those involved appear to have desired to preserve a record of events more or less as they actually occurred, although they did not do so without bias, a trait shared by all historians in all periods. The impact of those biases increased over time as later authors conflated the works of their predecessors with Prophetic traditions. The Khārijī master narrative achieved its ultimate shape by the sixth/twelfth century and it continues to represent the popular understanding of the sectarians today, thanks primarily to the long-lasting influence of Muslim heresiographers. Although individual authors relate it with varying degrees of nuance, the following represents the key elements of the master narrative.

In the year 8/630, not long after securing the city of Mecca for Islam, the Prophet Muḥammad moved his forces against the tribes of Hawāzin and Thaqif. After a resounding victory at the Battle of Ḥunayn, the Muslim community found itself in possession of an extraordinary amount of booty taken from the defeated tribes. Per custom, the Prophet divvied up the spoils among his warriors and allies, but a number of participants felt that he had rewarded them inadequately. One in particular, a man from Banū Tamīm known as Dhū al-Khuwayṣirah, (his birth name was Hurqūs ibn Zuhayr),

called Muḥammad unjust in front of the gathered masses.²⁸ The Prophet, instead of increasing the complainant's reward as he had done for others who had griped, instead prophesied that al-Khuwayṣirah would come to lead a religion of his own, a superficial one with a very short lifespan and no lasting impact or legacy.²⁹ As it must, the prophecy later came to fruition when Hurqūs/al-Khuwayṣirah turned out to be the very first Khārijī.

However, the sect did not start to coalesce until the caliphate of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (r. 24-36/644-56), when the initial stirrings of dissent manifested among a group remembered as the *qurrā'*, those men known for their ability to recite the Qur'an from memory.³⁰ After the murder of the third caliph and the ascent of 'Alī to the position of commander of the faithful, this dissatisfaction grew and was soon redirected against him and Mu'āwiya ibn 'Abī Sufyān, the powerful governor of Syria. The latter refused to recognize 'Alī's leadership because the latter made no move to punish the murderers of 'Uthmān, Mu'āwiya's cousin. In the conflict that followed—the first Muslim civil war—the forces met in the summer of 37/657 near the banks of the Euphrates at a place called Ṣiffīn. After several days of fighting, when it appeared 'Alī's forces stood on the brink of victory, one of Mu'āwiya's advisors, the crafty 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, suggested a ruse to his superior. The Syrian governor's men raised the *maṣāḥif* (all or part of the Qur'an) on the ends of their lances and asked 'Alī to accept arbitration based on the received word of God. No fool the fourth caliph, he wanted to decline and go forth to victory, but the

²⁸ An individual's membership in a tribe is often designated by the addition of the tribe's name to the person's name, with the definite article ("al-") and a *nisbah* ending. For example, our complainant in this case is remembered as Dhū al-Khuwayṣirah al-Tamīmī, "Dhū al-Khuwayṣirah of Banū Tamīm."

²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *The Last Years of the Prophet*, trans. Ismail K. Poonawala, vol. 9 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 26-38.

³⁰ The *qurrā'*'s connection with Qur'an reciters is deeply entrenched in the master narrative. However, as will be seen, that identification has been much debated by specialists, starting with M. A. Shaban in 1971, and is by no means settled today. If the *qurrā'* were in fact reciters, it remains unknown whether they could recite only certain chapters (*sura*, pl. *suwar*) or the entire corpus.

qurrā' in his own ranks pressured him otherwise. "“Alī,” they cried, “respond to the Book of God when you are called to it. Otherwise we shall indeed deliver you up entirely to the enemy or do what we did with Ibn ‘Affān,” a transparent reference to the murder of ‘Alī’s predecessor.³¹ The caliph reluctantly acquiesced and, under further pressure, likewise caved in with regard to the arbitrator demanded by the qurrā’, Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī. This turned out disastrous both for ‘Alī and the future unity of Islam because Abū Mūsā proved himself not the intellectual equal of Mu‘āwiya’s man, ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ. The latter eventually duped his opposite in the arbitration when they agreed that both Mu‘āwiya and ‘Alī would relinquish their claims to the caliphate so that a council could select a new commander of the faithful.³²

For obvious reasons, this decision did not sit well with the current caliph, and he hesitated to comply. Meanwhile, a group of qurrā' in his camp experienced a change of heart and now regretted their previous demands. Shortly before the arbitration they had come to the conclusion that God’s will would have been asserted on the battlefield, and by resorting to negotiations the participants had subsumed divine judgment with man’s. This constituted grave sin, and qurrā' demanded ‘Alī back out of the arbitration because “judgment belongs to God alone”; he understandably refused.³³ This only increased tensions between the caliph and those who saw him in an increasingly unfavorable light. As many as twelve thousand had left ‘Alī’s camp and gone to Harūrā, a village near Kufa, and promoted their own leaders whom they selected for their penchant for

³¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *The First Civil War*, trans. G. R. Hawting, vol 17 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 77-79.

³² *Ibid.*, 109.

³³ *Ibid.*, 110-11. Scholars abbreviate the slogan with which the Khawārij became inextricably tied, "*lā ḥukma illā lillāh*" ("no judgment but God's"), as "*lā ḥukma*." The Khārijī quote refers to claims in the Qur'an which ascribe final judgment to God, e.g. 12:40.

“commanding the good and the prohibiting of what is reprehensible.”³⁴ While Abū Mūsā and Ibn al-‘Āṣ negotiated, the qurrā’ elected ‘Abdallāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī to lead them to Jisr al-Nahrawān, where the group encamped and was joined by like-minded men from Basra.³⁵

Back in Kufa, ‘Alī decided it time to put an end to Mu‘āwiya once and for all and set about to raise an army, which he only managed to accomplish after a lackluster initial response by the Kufans and Basrans. Once assembled, however, his men insisted on going after the seceders at al-Nahrawān first, before tackling Mu‘āwiya. ‘Alī conceded yet again, this time motivated at least in part by the homicidal behavior recently exhibited by some of the Khawārij who had murdered a caliphal emissary and ‘Abdallāh ibn Khabbāb and his family, including his unborn child.³⁶ The Battle of al-Nahrawān (38/658) proved a decisive victory for the fourth caliph. He lost fewer than ten men from his army of 68,200, while Khārijī losses were near total: less than ten survived unscathed from an original four thousand.³⁷ Among the casualties were Hurqūs ibn Zuhayr/Dhū al-Khuwayṣirah, and two other men remembered only by their nicknames, Dhū al-Thudayyah and Nafī al-Mukhdaj. They shared a common bond besides their affiliation with the Khawārij: ‘Alī had predicted all their deaths in some detail prior to the battle.³⁸

The defeat at al-Nahrawān did not put an end to the Khawārij, however. Those that survived bided their time, their dissent fermenting as they attracted new converts and

³⁴ Ibid., 99.

³⁵ Ibid., 114-16. “Jisr al-Nahrawān” is a town near a system of two major irrigation canals (*nahrawān*) originally dug by the Sasanians. The town must have been the site of a bridge (*jisr*) over the canal.

³⁶ The saga of Ibn Khabbāb and its historiographical implications are discussed in depth in the following chapter.

³⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War.*, 122-40; and ‘Abd al-Qāhir ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghādī, *Moslem Schisms and Sects, Al-Fark Bain Al-Firak: Being the History of the Various Philosophical Systems Developed in Islam*, trans. by Kate Chambers Seelye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920), 80-81.

³⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 133-4.

plotted blood vengeance. In 40/661, a Khārijī assassin named ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam al-Murādī struck down ‘Alī as he exited the great mosque in Kufa.³⁹ Other Khawārij made similar attempts against Ibn al-‘Āṣ and Mu‘āwiya. While both men survived those attacks, the caliph did not and died shortly thereafter. Mu‘āwiya took the title for himself, an action that birthed the Umayyad dynasty. He quickly consolidated power, but not without occasional interference from Khawārij who had either survived or abstained from participation at al-Nahrawān. One such band, which had decided not to fight against ‘Alī, came to a consensus in regard to the new caliph and determined to wage jihad against him. On the plains of Sharazūr they routed Mu‘āwiya's Syrian cavalry, an unexpected outcome which led the caliph to call on the Kufans to "deal with [their] own misfortunes" and eliminate the rebellious group themselves, a task they accomplished in 41/662.⁴⁰

This proved only the first of many encounters between the Umayyads and putative Khārijī rebels, and it set the stage for more than a century of sporadically-proactive unrest. Mu‘āwiya's governor in Kufa, al-Mughīrah, pursued a don't-ask, don't-tell policy in regard to religious dissent in his city. This proved conducive to the Khawārij who met clandestinely to plot future action, which manifested in the revolt of al-Mustawrid in 42-43/662-63. The rebels numbered some 300, and played a game of hit-and-run with their opponents. But, sandwiched between a combined force of Kufans and ‘Alids on one side, and Basrans on the other, al-Mustawrid's band eventually suffered

³⁹ Ibid., 211-18.

⁴⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Between Civil Wars*, 12. Sharazūr is located in the southeastern portion of Iraqi Kurdistan, not far from the Iranian border.

near-total annihilation, and their leader died a heroic death in a manner similar to that of the eponymous king in *Le Morte D'Arthur*.⁴¹

Khārijī uprisings accelerated after the appointment of Ziyād ibn ‘Abī Sufyān as governor of Basra in 45/665.⁴² Unlike al-Mughīra, Ziyād had no patience for dissent, a fact he made clear in his inaugural speech to the Basrans in which he promised harsh reprisals for scofflaws. But Ziyād's iron hand did not curtail Khārijī activity. A small rebellion broke out in 50/670 which his deputy, Samurah ibn Jundab, squashed, and this was followed by proactive persecution of anyone associated with the Khawārij. To accomplish this, Ziyād bullied the people of Basra into cooperation by threatening to withhold their stipends if they did not exterminate the dissenters from their midst.⁴³ But even this big-brother policy failed to stave off further uprisings. In 53/672-73 the maternal cousins Qurayb ibn Murrah and Zaḥāf ibn Raḥar al-Ṭā’ī with a band of some 70 fellow Khawārij rose up in Iraq against the governor and "put to the sword everyone they met on their way without distinction."⁴⁴ They shouted the *lā ḥukma* as they entered the mosque of the Banū Qutay'a where they attacked the worshipers there before turning upon the homes of the Banū ‘Alī. Under pressure from Ziyād, the combined efforts of those two clans and Banū Rasib put an end to Qurayb, Zaḥāf, and their uprising by the end of the night.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Ibid., 33-68.

⁴² Ziyād was originally called “ibn Abīhi” (“son of his father”), an allusion to his bastard birth. This genealogical nomenclature changed when Mu‘āwiyah adopted him as a brother, a move considered scandalous by many contemporaries and later commentators alike, e.g. Ibn Kathīr ad-Damishīqī, *From the Beginning to the End*, trans. by Rafiq Abdur Rahman, 4 vols. (Karashi, Pakistan: Darul Ishaat, 2014), 2.775-76.

⁴³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Between Civil Wars*, 100-101.

⁴⁴ Al-Baghdādī, 82-83.

⁴⁵ Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt. *History on the Umayyad Dynasty (660-750)*, trans. by Carl Wurtzel (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 76-80. Al-Ṭabarī does not mention this rebellion.

The governor passed away later that year and was replaced by his son, 'Ubaydallāh ibn Ziyād, who turned out to be woven of the exact same cloth as his father. The Kufan Khawārij rebelled in 58/678, and Ibn Ziyād responded by sending an army which killed all the seceders.⁴⁶ Back in Kufa, the governor imprisoned those he suspected of holding Khārijī sympathies. He executed many, including the quietist 'Urwah ibn Udayyah who had accused Ibn Ziyād of impiety. The latter ordered 'Urwah's hands and feet chopped off and then asked him what he thought of his new condition. "I think that you ruined this world for me and ruined the other world for yourself," replied the victim, an observation which resulted in the removal of his head and, for good measure, that of his daughter too.⁴⁷ This led another quietest Khārijī, Mirdās ibn Udayyah, brother of the slain 'Urwah, to turn activist in his dissent. He and a group of forty followers removed themselves from Kufa and went to Ahwaz, where they lived as peaceful outlaws in protest of Ibn Ziyād's cruelties.⁴⁸ The latter sent an army of two-thousand after Abū Bilāl and his men, but they defeated it with a bold charge. A second army, fifty-percent larger than the first, was not so easily cowed and the Khawārij were slain to a man in a battle outside the town of Tawwaj in the year 61/681.⁴⁹

To this point, Khārijī uprisings were characteristically small, with the exception of the first group of seceders who encamped at Harūrā. They numbered twelve

⁴⁶ Ibid., 193-95.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 196-98.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 198. Mirdās is often called by his patronymic, Abū Bilāl. Ahwaz is in southern Iran, inland from the northernmost point of the Persian Gulf.

⁴⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *The Caliphate of Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiyah*, trans. I. K. A. Howard, vol. 19 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 183-84. Tawwaj is near the city of Shirāz in southwestern Iran, a region historically renowned for its wine production. The historian Ibn Khayyāṭ discussed the Battle of Tawwaj under the reports for the year 64/684, but he does so in the context of a discussion of events that occurred under the "governorship of Ziyād over Iraq." It is clear from the report that the author meant Ibn Ziyād, who governed from 53 until the death of Yazīd I in 64/683-84, the upshot of which is that Ibn Khayyāṭ's dating of the death of Abū Bilāl does not necessarily contradict that of al-Ṭabarī (Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ, 111-12).

thousand at one point, but only one-third that by the Battle of al-Nahrawān. And the expression of proactive dissent had always been a localized affair, limited to the province of Iraq and parts of Persia. But after Mu‘āwiya died in the spring of 60/680 and the caliphate passed to his son, Yazīd, revolt spread throughout the central and eastern parts of the Arab empire. These incidents were not limited to the Khawārij, and some proved significant in both size and impact. The most notable such effort was that of Ibn al-Zubayr. He refused to take the oath of allegiance to the new caliph, and, after the death of al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī at the Battle of Karbalā’ in the fall of 61/680, Ibn al-Zubayr started to receive the oath of allegiance from others who likewise opposed Yazīd.⁵⁰ These included groups of Khawārij who had come from Iraq to Mecca to join Ibn al-Zubayr in his opposition to the Umayyads. Yazīd dispatched an army from Syria to put an end to the growing dissent in the Hijaz and its environs. This force defeated Ibn al-Zubayr at the Battle of al-Harra in the summer of 63/683, and this led to the capture and sacking of Medina, the city of the Prophet. Yazīd followed up by laying siege to Ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca, but the unexpected death of the caliph in 64/683 effectively ended the investiture of that city and allowed Ibn al-Zubayr to declare himself caliph. It was at this juncture that some of the Khawārij who supported him throughout the battles against Yazīd approached him with the question, "What do you have to say concerning 'Uthmān?"⁵¹ In other words, did he agree with the sectarians in their opinion of the third caliph? When Ibn al-Zubayr testified, "I am a friend of Ibn ‘Affān in this world and in the next, and a friend of his friends and an enemy of his enemies," the Khawārij left him, some going to

⁵⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Caliphate of Yazīd*, 189.

⁵¹ Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 108.

Basra under the leadership of Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq, others to al-Yamāma under Najda ibn Āmir.⁵²

The split between Nāfi' and Najda set a pattern for future subdivisions of the Khawārij because, not only did they not agree with the views of Ibn al-Zubayr, they also disagreed with one another over doctrinal matters. Nāfi' held that those who did not join the Khawārij and proactively participate in jihad were polytheists and, as such, legitimate targets of violence and plunder, even their women and children. This proved too extreme for Najda, who declared Nāfi' an unbeliever in response. After the split, both garnered substantial eponymous followings, the Najdāt and Azāriqa.⁵³

Of the two, the Azāriqa held the more extreme views. Nāfi' reinterpreted the Qur'an to make 'Alī the "most contentious of opponents" mentioned in 2:204, and his assassin, Ibn Muljam, was "the one who sells himself, seeking the approval of God" in 2:206.⁵⁴ The Azāriqa also held that the children of unbelievers earned hell's eternal punishments along with their parents, and considered it permissible to confiscate a sacred endowment (*waqf*) established by anyone outside the sect.⁵⁵ The group quickly acquired a reputation for violence, even within its own ranks. When a potential member arrived, the Azāriqa put him through the so-called "trial of a soldier," in which he was asked to summarily execute a captive to prove his loyalty. He gained admittance to the group only if he followed through with the grisly task. If not, the sect branded him a heretic and

⁵² Al-Ṭabarī, *The Collapse of Sufyānid Authority and the Coming of the Marwānids*, trans. G. R. Hawting, vol. 20 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 98-102. Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt typically provides a pithier version of this exchange: op. cit., 108-109. Al-Yamāma is the area in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, immediately east of the Najd plateau.

⁵³ Al-Baghdādī, 83-91.

⁵⁴ Al-Shahrastānī, 103.

⁵⁵ Ibid.; and Al-Baghdādī, 83-85.

killed him instead.⁵⁶ The first revolt of the Azāriqa broke out in the environs of Basra, where they "engaged in indiscriminate massacre."⁵⁷ Nāfi' himself did not survive the second major battle which took place near a village called Dūlāb in Ahwaz, a bloody affair for both sides but one in which the rebels carried the field.⁵⁸ These Khawārij continued to enjoy success against their enemies until the arrival of al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra in the year 65/684. Appointed by Ibn al-Zubayr, who at the time claimed *de facto* caliphal authority over the entire Muslim world but for central and southern Syria, al-Muhallab defeated the Azāriqa in Ahwaz the following year, driving them into Kirmān and Iṣfahān in southeastern and central Persia.⁵⁹ These Khawārij, now under Qaṭarī ibn al-Fuja'a, continued their duel with al-Muhallab in the east until 77/696 when the Azāriqa experienced serious internal dissent that resulted in division of their ranks. Now split into two factions, they turned on one another. Al-Muhallab bided his time and let his enemies exhaust one another before advancing on the rebels under 'Abd Rabb al-Kabīr, destroying them in a series of battles in western Persia.⁶⁰ Qaṭarī fled with his small following to Ṭabaristān, a province on the southern edge of the Caspian Sea. There, an army sent by al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, governor of the eastern half of the caliphate, defeated the last of the Azāriqa that same year.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Al-Baghdādī, 83. The author presented the participants in this (most-likely apocryphal) ritual as entirely male in gender.

⁵⁷ Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 112.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 112-13; and Al-Ṭabarī, *Collapse of Sufyānid Authority*, 164-66. Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt uniquely locates the battle in Dastuwa' (which the present author failed to identify), but others agree with al-Ṭabarī on Dūlāb (e.g. Ibn Khallikan, *Biographical Dictionary*, trans. by William MacGuckin de Slane [New York: Cosimo Classics, 2010], 2.66).

⁵⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Collapse of Sufyānid Authority*, 166-75.

⁶⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *The Marwānid Restoration*, trans. by Everett K. Rowson, vol. 22 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 150-61.

⁶¹ Ibid., 162-65.

The story of the Najdāt unfolded in a similar manner to the West. After splitting from Nāfi', Najda became head of a Khārijī state in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula that eventually extended south to Oman and east to Bahrain. He eclipsed Ibn al-Zubayr in power, and rivaled that of the new caliph, 'Abd al-Malik (r. 65-86/685-705) who, lacking the military might to confront Najda, attempted negotiations instead.⁶² But internal dissent visited the Najdāt more quickly than the Azāriqa. Within five years of the split with Ibn al-Zubayr, one of Najda's commanders, 'Aṭīyya ibn al-Aswad, left and tried to take Oman for himself. Failing there, he led his faction to Kirmān in southeastern Persia from whence he was pursued and eventually killed by al-Muhallab.⁶³ While 'Aṭīyya may have left for reasons of personal aggrandizement, further discontent brewed within the ranks of the Najdāt, heated by a belief that Najdā was too quick to forgive those who sinned thanks to their ignorance of Islamic precepts. This led first to Najda's removal as leader of the sect in 72/691, and his subsequent murder at the hand of his replacement and rival, Abū Fudaik. The assassin survived a counter-assassination attempt but, thanks to a shift in the balance of power in Arabia, 'Abd al-Malik sent a force which killed Abū Fudaik, destroyed his army, and eliminated the Najdāt threat in Arabia once and for all.⁶⁴

It is at this point that the master narrative typically tapers off. It most commonly ends with statements to the effect that further rebellions continued to break out into the early Abbasid period, but that further dissent and disagreement over religious

⁶² Al-Ṭabarī, *Caliphate of Yazīd*, 197; Al-Ṭabarī, *The Victory of the Marwānids*, trans. by Michael Fishbein, vol. 21 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 119; and 'Abd al-Ameer 'Abd Dixon, *The Umayyad Caliphate, 65-86/684-705: A Political Study* (London: Luzac & Co., 1971), 169-73.

⁶³ Abd Dixon, 171.

⁶⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Victory of the Marwānids*, 206, and 232-33; and 'Abd Dixon, 174-76.

doctrine continued to divide the Khawārij into more sects. This discord eventually led to their extinction by the third-Hijri century outside of southern Arabia and Northern Africa. There, the Ibāḍiyya continue to live side-by-side with “mainstream” Muslims thanks to the formers’ formulation of dogma that allows them to both accept and live within a larger world in which they constitute a minority.

The master narrative has created a number of impressions which have left an indelible mark on the understanding of the Khawārij. First, it supports the contention that their motivations were purely religious, whether in their disagreements with the government or each other. Second, they adhered to a strict, fundamentalist interpretation of the Qur’an. Third, they took their piety to ridiculous and often-dangerous extremes, leading to the deaths of others and, ultimately, their own destruction. Fourth, they were a cancer within the community, and that justified their violent excision by the caliphs and their representatives. This narrative continues to find its way into modern scholarly literature. For example, Gerhard Endress accepts it without question in his 2002 textbook, *Islam: An Historical Introduction*. He defines the sect as an expression of “radical Puritanism,” and ascribes religious concerns as their sole motivation.⁶⁵ The author condemns southern Arabia as a “backwater of heterodoxy” thanks to the presence of Khārijī sects like the Najdāt and Ibāḍiyya.⁶⁶ While he does allude to the dialogue fostered by the appearance of both the Khawārij and Shi‘a, he uses them to segue into a traditional discussion of the Murji‘a and *Mu‘tazila*.⁶⁷ Daniel W. Brown likewise hesitates to step outside the bounds of the master narrative in his 2009 text, *A New Introduction to Islam*.

⁶⁵ Gerhard Endress, *Islam: An Historical Introduction*, 2nd. ed., trans. by Carole Hillenbrand (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 36.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 43-44, and 48. The *Mu‘tazila* were a rationalist school of theology that upheld, among other things human free will in contradistinction to the Murji‘a (Nogales, “Sunnī Theology,” 4-7).

Therein he claims that the Khārijī "withdrawal [from 'Alī] was a political act, but based on a theological premise," yet the factors he cites as motivation for the sectarians are all religious.⁶⁸ He does use a different descriptor than Endress, however, calling the Khawārij "principled egalitarians" based on their so-called theory of the caliphate, an interpretation that found traction in the early twentieth century among missionaries, and later during the Cold War when some scholars saw in the sect a form of proto-democracy.⁶⁹

Overall, however, both Endress and Brown take the master narrative at face value, and in this regard they appear to have approached the Khawārij through the interpretations of the fifth-sixth/eleventh-twelfth-century Muslim heresiographers. It is primarily their selection, interpretation, and redaction of earlier sources that informs the received tradition today. Many who have since commented on the Khawārij have justified their interpretations with a handful of stock quotations taken from the medieval heresiographical corpus, a testament to the long-lasting influence of the orthodox apologists of the later Abbasid period on Muslim thought. As a consequence, the first sectarians of Islam have reified into mono-dimensional extremists whose only concern is the proper application of doctrine, regardless of the human cost.

The present author generated the preceding version of the master narrative by beginning with the heresiographic tradition and working backwards to the earliest sources—presumably those whom the heresiographers used themselves. By approaching it in this manner, several issues come to light. Foremost, the master narrative fails to take into account many people and events, the inclusion of which results in a very different

⁶⁸ Daniel W. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 179.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

impression of the Khawārij. Not all presumptive Khārijī uprisings looked, sounded, or acted the same. They varied in size from a handful of participants to movements large enough to conquer, establish, and maintain their own states. They espoused different interpretations of Islam, and they pursued their goals with varying degrees of aggression. In fact, the only thing they held in common across all expressions was an intense dissatisfaction with the current caliphate.

As it turns out, they also shared this view with many contemporaries who likewise instigated rebellions of their own. These incidents of proactive dissent looked for all intents and purposes like Khārijī uprisings, the only difference being in how the groups justified their activism. Besides that of Ibn al-Zubayr, al-Mukhtār ibn Abī 'Ubaydah al-Thaqafī staged a pro-ʿAlid rebellion that took control of at least part of Kufa in 66-67/686-87, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ashʿath started a revolt against the Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj in the east between 81-83/700-703 that began in Sijistān and eventually threatened Basra.⁷⁰ Both men justified their rebellions with religious dialogue. Al-Mukhtār claimed to seek vengeance for the death of al-Ḥusayn, alleging that the slain was the Mahdi, the redeemer of Islam.⁷¹ And the followers of al-Ashʿath called al-Ḥajjāj a "devilish infidel.... Satan's friend," guilty of "unbelief after belief."⁷² But for their labels, these two rebellions look remarkably like Khārijī uprisings in motivation and expression.

The master narrative commits other sins of omission, in that it ignores the secular complaints of the Khawārij. Prior to the split with ʿAlī, several tribal leaders

⁷⁰ Kalifa ibn Khayyāt, 121-23, and 145-55. Sijistān is an older name for Sīstān, a province in eastern Iran.

⁷¹ Ibn Khallikan, 4.577.

⁷² Al-Ṭabarī, *The Zenith of the Marwānid House*, trans. by Martin Hinds, vol. 23 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 7.

associated with the qurrā' in Kufa expressed increasing unrest at a land-swap engineered by 'Uthmān with the Medinese nobility, a deal that resulted in a greater proportion of the *fay'* (usufruct from immovable spoils) leaving the region instead of being distributed among the people of Kufa.⁷³ This led to low-level violence perpetrated by "inveterate malcontents" and "innately rebellious individuals" that resulted in their chain banishment from one community to the next with no governor caring to have them in his own territory.⁷⁴ They eventually ended up back in Kufa where their de facto leader, Malīk al-Ashtar, accused the governor there of turning *fay'* lands into "the private garden of Quraysh."⁷⁵ While the Khawārij would later justify their dissent with Qur'anic verse, in this proto-Khārijī phase their grumblings were based on more-mundane issues. It is worth noting that the same sorts of complaints came from the mouths of later rebels not identified with the first sectarians. Those who flocked to the standard of Ibn al-Ash'ath voiced similar concerns in regard to losing what they believed rightfully theirs thanks to their participation in military expeditions for al-Ḥajjāj. They feared that further expansion for that governor would take them into unfavorable territory and place them in dangerous tactical situations and, if they did succeed, he would "devour the territory and appropriate [its] wealth, thereby extending his dominion" while leaving nothing for them.⁷⁶

The master narrative focuses on the early Khawārij, the later Azāriqa and their disagreements with the Najdāt, and further fracturing among the sectarians over doctrinal minutiae. It also tends to favor the more sensational traditions, those that portray the

⁷³ While the definitions of *fay'* are multiple, in this case the term refers to the usufruct from the lands formerly controlled by Persian nobility who had abandoned them in the face of the Arab Conquests (see *EI2*, s.v. "Fay").

⁷⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *The Zenith of the Marwānid House*, trans. by R. Stephen Humphreys, vol. 15 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 112-23.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 133-34.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

sectarians displaying extreme behavior.⁷⁷ But even in this regard, the Khawārij end up looking a lot like many others in what can be accurately described as a milieu of unrest and rebellion. The murder of Ibn Khabbāb⁷⁸ and the massacre of village populations by the Azāriqa are often held up as epitomes of the type of extremist behavior attributed to the sect in general, yet this behavior does not appear abnormal when juxtaposed with the actions of others not identified with the Khawārij. In a heavy-handed application of *lex talionis* ‘Alī used the murder of a single emissary to justify bringing over sixty-thousand men to al-Nahrawān to massacre less than three-thousand seceders. Likewise the hunt for and battlefield execution of Abū Bilāl and his band of forty fellow non-violent dissenters at the hands of three-thousand soldiers sent by Ibn Ziyād. Even incidents not involving the Khawārij had a tendency for exceptionally cruel resolution, a fact which undermines any attempt to justify anti-Khārijī reprisals with claims to political realism. In this environment of rebellion against centralized government, violence was a reality that touched everyone. This does not justify any atrocities committed by the Khawārij—or any of their contemporaries who acted likewise—but it does explain them by placing them in their appropriate historical context, and it illustrates that the sectarians represented just one form of popular dissent against the greatest innovation to evolve from early Islam: the caliphate.

The question as to who felt it necessary to portray the Khawārij as they are in the master narrative has been ably addressed by others.⁷⁹ A consensus has developed that

⁷⁷ While examples of this interpretation in the historiography are legion, one need look no further than G. Levi Della Vida's article on the sect for a representative example in: *ET*², s.v. "Khāridjites."

⁷⁸ The multiple-versions of the murder of this otherwise-unknown individual are discussed in the next chapter.

⁷⁹ Although he had both feet firmly planted in the camp that holds Khārijī motivations as purely religious, the work of A. J. Wesinck remains useful in its description of the impact that the seceders' doctrine had on

points to the theological and political conflicts of the Abbasid era, in which the caliphate's need for legitimacy and its struggles with the increasingly powerful class of religious scholars—the *'ulamā'*—fueled a debate in which the seceders evolved into Muslim bogey-men, a task made easier by their increasing marginalization once they ceased to be an effective socio-political force in the heart of the empire. They also proved an excellent polemical target for other reasons. Although the Khawārij justified their opposition to the caliphate with religious dialogue, the discourse had shifted with the arrival of the Abbasids and Khārijī doctrine lost much of its relevance as a result. Combined with their near extinction in the heartland of the caliphate, they no longer presented a threat either ideologically or physically. These changes made them a safe target from the perspective of those who wanted to define orthodoxy in Islam. As Aaron M. Hagler notes, the Khārijī master narrative evolved into a tool used to justify "the rightness of 'Alī, the wrongness of Mu'āwiya, [and] the foolishness of Abū Musā," as much as to vilify the sectarians.⁸⁰ Over time, they came to represent something not unlike the Platonic form of rebellion in the Muslim world, as witnessed in the heresiographical works of the mid-Abbasid period.

Critical to the present work is the understanding that this transformation from one rebel group among many into a negative ideal was an entirely external process in which outsider groups determined the elements that constituted Khārijī identity. The final product proved so unusual that it prompted fourteenth-century Muslim scholar, Abū al-

the formation of Muslim identity; see: *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), 37-57.

⁸⁰ Aaron M. Hagler, "The Echoes of Fitna: Developing Historiographical Interpretations of the Battle of Šiffīn" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2011), 304.

Fidā' 'Imād al-Dīn Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr,⁸¹ to comment in regard to the Khawārij, "I say that this kind of people is the most strange kind of the children of Adam."⁸² This process of external identity formation has obscured how the Khawārij identified themselves, a problem fostered by the nature of the sources and the early-Muslim historiographic tradition in general. It is to this issue we turn in the next chapter.

⁸¹ Preferring the version of Ibn Kathīr's name given in: Ibn Kathīr, *The Life of the Prophet Muḥammad: Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, trans. by Trevor Le Gassick (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2004), 4.ix.

⁸² Ibn Kathīr, *Beginning to the End*, 2.690.

Chapter III

Sources and Scholars

The sources for the study of early Islam present a number of challenges when it comes to making positivist statements about the foundation and formation of the faith and the polity that eventually evolved around it. A general consensus exists in regard to major events and their chronology, but the historical record as it relates to the words and deeds of important individuals and groups often contains recognizable authorial biases, if not outright polemic. The master narrative of the Khawārij is an archetypal example of this phenomenon, one in which scholars have identified only relatively recently a number of issues that remain unresolved, perhaps irresolvable. While Orientalists of the late-nineteenth century recognized many of the problems endemic to the traditions concerning the Prophet and early community of believers, such awareness developed more slowly when it came to the early Muslim historiographic works. As in many other historical disciplines, it took off in the 1970s as a new generation of scholars devised new interpretations which questioned the traditionally-accepted narrative of Islamic origins. The following decade saw the development of revisionist schools that not only sought to overturn "a rather contradictory and unsatisfactory traditional account of Islamic origins," in varying degrees they doubted whether the sources accurately portrayed events at all.⁸³ Fortunately, it did not take long for the discipline to recover from this encounter with the postmodernist challenge, and many seminal works of scholarship appeared as a result.

⁸³ Carlos A. Segovia, "John Wansbrough and the Problem of Islamic Origins in Recent Scholarship: A Farewell to the Traditional Account," in *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, ed. by Carlos A. Segovia and Basile Lourié (Orientalia Judaica Christiana 3. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2012), xxiv.

This chapter explores some of the most-significant sources on the Khawārij and their inherent problems, then segues to a discussion of the historiography of Khārijī and related studies as they apply to the present work.

The Sources and their Problems

The roots of historical writing in the Muslim world germinated in the first century AH in the shape of *sīra*, biographical literature on the life of the Prophet which of necessity also included information about the early community of believers. The earliest productions do not survive except as excerpts in later works, and even the earliest surviving "complete" Prophetic biography, that of Muḥammad Ibn Iṣḥāq (d. ca. 150/767), exists only in a redacted recension at least two generations removed from the original author.⁸⁴ The culmination of the Abbasid revolution in 132/750 eventually paved the way for the growth of history as a discipline. The new dynasty required legitimation, and that necessitated an equal de-legitimation of its predecessors, the Umayyads, so that the latter's near-total annihilation and the usurpation of power by the new rulers might appear justified.⁸⁵ The long process of formation of sectarian identities—Sunni, Shi‘a, and others—and the appearance of schools of religious thought competing for legitimacy in the eyes of the state likewise fueled the development of historiographical writing. New genres appeared: prosopography and genealogy (*ṭabaqāt* and *ansāb*), military (*maghāzī* and *futūḥ*), martyrologies (*maqātil*), and ambitious annalistic histories (*tārīkh*) that recorded

⁸⁴ M. J. Kister, "The *Sīrah* Literature," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, eds. A. F. L. Beeston, T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant, and G. R. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 352-53; Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998), 147-48; and A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muḥammad: A Translation of Iṣḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), vii.

⁸⁵ Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbāsīd Caliphate: A Political History* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 48-49; and Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 26-27.

the history of the community of believers, at times beginning with creation and often ending with events from the author's own lifetime.⁸⁶

A number of these works are important to the present study. Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ (ca. 160-240/776-855), wrote the earliest surviving annalistic history of the evolving Islamic community. His *Tārīkh* begins in the year that Muḥammad and the *Muhājirūn* migrated from Mecca to Medina.⁸⁷ That event—the Hijra—marked a new beginning for Islam and the starting point of the Islamic Calendar.⁸⁸ Aḥmad ibn Yaḥya ibn Jābir al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892) composed his work on the Arab Conquests, *Futūḥ al-Buldān* (*Conquests of Lands*) motivated at least in part by a need to record the methods by which each city and region had been brought into the young Arab empire, knowledge needed to justify modes of taxation.⁸⁹ Consequently, it has little to say about the Khawārij directly, but al-Balādhurī did discuss some important conflicts within the community of believers that involved tribes with significant Khārijī affiliations. Also of relevance to the present work is his *Ansāb al-Ashrāf* (*Genealogies of the Nobles*), in which al-Balādhurī preserved numerous reports concerning the Khawārij. Last in chronological sequence but first in importance is the *Tārīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk* (*History of Prophets and Kings*) of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (ca. 224-310/839-923). The recent English translation of al-Ṭabarī's *magnum opus* spans 38 volumes in which the author covers the

⁸⁶ Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 28-35.

⁸⁷ The *Muhājirūn* ("emigrants") were those who fled Mecca for Medina along with the Prophet in the year 1/622.

⁸⁸ In the West, the years of the Islamic calendar are noted by the abbreviation "AH" for "Anno Hegirae." The starting date of the AH calendar occurred on July 16, 622 CE per the Gregorian calendar. Based on the lunar cycle, the Islamic calendar loses approximately eleven days to the solar year, and makes a full rotation through the seasons every 32.5 years. Similar to Hebrew reckoning, days begin and end at sunset (G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, *The Muslim and Christian Calendars: Being Tables for the Conversion of Muslim and Christian Dates from the Hijra to the Year A.D. 2000* [London: Rex Collings, 1977], 1-3).

⁸⁹ Philip Khuri Hitti, ed., *The Origins of the Islamic State: Being a Translation from the Arabic Accompanied with Annotations, Geographic and Historic Notes of the Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2011), 6-7.

entirety of history as he understood it, beginning with God's freely-made decision to create the world, told in the best Abrahamic tradition, to the year 302/915, a few years before al-Ṭabarī's passing.⁹⁰ Most of the work—all but six of the English volumes—focuses on the history of the Muslim community, beginning with Muḥammad's prophetic mission. In regard to the Khawārij, the author provided reports in varying degrees of detail on the incidents that involved those sectarians. Following in the annalistic tradition, al-Ṭabarī lumped events together under the year in which they occurred. An impressive body of scholarship by any measure, its preeminence among early-Muslim historiography was signaled by it being known simply as "The History."⁹¹

Other authors also find their way into the present study. Of the early biographers, Muḥammad ibn Saʿd (148-230/764-845) recorded a few Khārijī-related incidents in his prosopographical work, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr (The Book of the Great Classes)*. And the works of several heresiologists reveal the extent to which Khārijī identity had evolved from an external perspective by the fifth and sixth centuries AH: al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), Ibn Ḥazm (384-456/994-1064), and al-Shahrastānī (469-548/1075-1153) all comment fairly extensively on the sect, albeit long after it had ceased to have significant influence in most parts of the Islamic world.⁹² In exploring the process of internal identity formation among the Khawārij, examples from the corpus of Khārijī poetry and surviving excerpts from theological works mentioned in the writings of “orthodox” authors must suffice. While Khārijī theologians appear to have been as

⁹⁰ The collection also includes a translation of al-Ṭabarī's biographical work, *Dhayl al-mudhayyal min ta'rīkh al-ṣaḥābah wa-al-Ṭābi'īn (Supplement to the Supplement: Biographies of Companions and Their Successors)*, and a very helpful index volume.

⁹¹ Franz Rosenthal, *General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, vol. 1, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 130.

⁹² Their full names are, respectively: Abū Mansūr 'Abd al-Qāhir ibn Ṭahir al-Baghdādī, Abū Muḥammad 'Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd ibn Ḥazm, and Tāj al-Dīn Abū Fath Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shāhrastānī.

respected and prolific as any in the second- and third-centuries AH, after their disappearance no one preserved their works except as negative examples in polemical and apologetic literature.⁹³

The historical sources considered herein all date from the third century AH, but the Khawārij initially appeared as a historical phenomena in the year 37/657, and they had their most proactive periods in the first 150 years of the Hijri calendar. This temporal separation between events and their chronicling raises some important questions regarding the use of these authors as primary sources. Foremost, how reliable are they as witnesses to events that took place two- to three-hundred years before, and can they even be identified as primary sources by the current understanding of the term? The practices of the evolving historiographical tradition mitigates these concerns in part. In the Muslim world, history as a discipline developed in the wake of the traditionists, those who collected ḥadīth. Known as the *ahl al-ḥadīth* (people of the tradition), or *muḥaddithūn* (transmitters of Prophetic tradition; sing. *muḥaddith*), they gathered the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad preserved in anecdotes that often included examples of his behavior. Besides having cultural and religious value, the ḥadīth possessed an increasing relevancy to the developing Islamic polity. While considered the principal source for questions of

⁹³ The survival of early heterodox writings depended on their perceived usefulness to the orthodox majority. They might be preserved for a number of reasons, and in this regard Christianity provides a useful comparison. In that faith the writings of the Byzantine Emperor Julian, the last of the pagan emperors, survived thanks to their use in teaching Christian apologetics. The erudition and gravity of his attack on Christian beliefs and teachings made his works the ideal tools for honing the rhetorical skills of those trained to defend the faith. Conversely, the writings of other sectarians that lacked any such cultural value were largely destroyed or otherwise forgotten; those that survive most typically do so only in fragmentary form. This is the case with the texts of the Ebionites, an early (the earliest?) Jewish-Christian sect from the first century. Several early commentators mention it, its doctrines and beliefs, but the only accounts from the sect itself survive in a mere seven fragments from their so-called Gospel of the Ebionites in the heresiography of Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*. In Islam the writings of the Khawārij shared a similar fate, although much more survives than that of the Ebionites. (Wilmer C. Wright, trans., *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, vol. 3 [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913], 315-17; and *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Book I (Sects 1-46)*, 2nd ed., trans. by Frank Williams [Leiden: Brill, 2009], 142-43.)

doctrine and praxis, the Qur'an does not address all issues, particularly those that pertain to running and living within a Muslim empire populated by more peoples than just the Arabs. The collection of ḥadīth was intended to address this shortcoming, particularly in the areas of jurisprudence and religious praxis, but ultimately in all aspects of believers' lives including such mundane minutiae as personal hygiene and table manners.⁹⁴

The collectors utilized a system intended to vet each ḥadīth that traced its passage from the individual who told the traditionist all the way back to the person who originally witnessed the saying or event, noting each person in-between. Called *isnād* (chain of transmission), each ḥadīth begins with one.⁹⁵ They are all similar in format, and one need only open up a collection at random to find a representative example:

Muḥammad ibn 'Umar informed us; (he said): Ja'far ibn Muḥammad ibn Khālīd ibn al-Zubayr related to me on the authority of Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Nawfal, he on the authority of al-Zuhri, he on the authority of 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, he on the authority of 'Āyishah.⁹⁶

In this case the traditionist, Ibn Sa'd, heard the story from Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, who heard it from Ja'far ibn Muḥammad ibn Khālīd ibn al-Zubayr, and so on back to the originator, a woman named 'Āyishah. From that point, the Prophetic story follows. The traditionists evaluated *isnād* in a number of ways. Coherent with the handing-down of knowledge among Arabian tribes before Islam, ḥadīth scholars considered direct oral transmission of greater validity than written.⁹⁷ When it came to those individuals identified in the chain, traditionists placed the greatest confidence in those events traced

⁹⁴ Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 18-19; and Rosenthal, *General Introduction*, 41.

⁹⁵ The plural of *isnad* is *asānid*, however, similar to *hadīth*, the singular also serves as the plural in English scholarship.

⁹⁶ Muḥammad Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, trans. S. Moinul Haq and H. K. Ghazanfar (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2009), 2.291.

⁹⁷ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Chosen Thoughts on the Nomenclature of Ḥadīth Specialists*, in *Ḥadīth Nomenclature Primers*, trans. Musa Furber (n.p.: Islamosaic, 2015), 22-25 (c.f. Ignaz Goldzier, *Muslim Studies*, vol 2, ed. S. M. Stern, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971], 22).

to the Prophet himself, followed by those originating with one of his Companions (*al-Ṣaḥābah*), Muḥammad's close associates in the nascent Muslim community. In the example above, the isnād traced this particular story back to 'Āyishah, one of the Prophet's wives and a very important figure in the early history of the faith. Traditionists placed the third and final tier of reliability on the *Tābi'ūn* (sing. *Tābi'*, "Successor"), those Muslims who did not know Muḥammad personally but did know one or more of the Companions.⁹⁸ Looking again to the example above, 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr was a well-known *Tābi'*, and a nephew of both 'Āyishah and another of the *Ṣaḥābah*, 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr. This system of legitimation effectively established a *terminus ad quem* for the determination of canonical ḥadīth sometime in the mid-to-late second century AH, when the last of the *Tābi'ūn* passed away.⁹⁹

The early Islamic historiographers adopted the same system, with some alterations made necessary by the passage of time and a widening scope of interest. One of the greatest changes came in the nature of the sources. Once historians started to work outside the realm of the lives of the Prophet and the Companions, they no longer relied exclusively on ḥadīth. Instead, they collected *akhbār*, "reports" (sing. *khbar*), hence their title, *akhbārī*, "report collector," or more simply, "reporter."¹⁰⁰ Like the traditionists, the early historians provided an isnād for each *khbar*, their intent presumably to demonstrate the accuracy of their reports by tracing each through a sequence of reliable

⁹⁸ Companion and Successor are capitalized herein to distinguish those individuals for other uses of the terms.

⁹⁹ Ibn Ḥajar, 18-21; *EF*², s.v. "*Tābi'ūn*"; and *EF*², s.v. "'Urwa b. al-Zubayr." There is much more to the "science of ḥadīth" (*ilm al-ḥadīth*) than narrated herein, and it took several hundred years to reach its ultimate form. For in-depth discussions see: Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies* (Muhammedanische Studien), vol. 2, ed. by S. M. Stern, trans. by C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971), 17-251; and G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹⁰⁰ The norm in modern scholarship is to pluralize *akhbārī* in the same manner one would an English word, by adding an "s" to the end—*akhbārīs*.

transmitters to a reliable source. As the discipline of history matured into the third century AH, practitioners took advantage of the works of their predecessors by tracing their own chains of transmission back to or through those of earlier historians. For example, in reporting the earliest activities of the Khawārij, al-Ṭabarī leaned heavily on the writings of Abū Mikhnaf (d.157/774), a prolific second-century akhbārī and muḥāddith who authored a number of works on the Khawārij, their leaders and uprisings.¹⁰¹ Al-Ṭabarī borrowed extensive passages from the earlier historian in relating the sectarians' initial appearance at the Battle of Ṣiffīn, their subsequent divorce from the fourth caliph, 'Alī, and their near-annihilation at al-Nahrawān. In fact, many of al-Ṭabarī's Khārijī-related *isnād* begin with Abū Mikhnaf, an indication that the former took them directly from one of the latter's books. But al-Ṭabarī also listed Abū Mikhnaf's sources. This represented best professional practice, ostensibly added additional layers of legitimation, and effectively got closer to the events discussed in a chronological sense.

For example, in relating the brutal murder of 'Abdallāh ibn Khabbāb, son of one of the Companions, at the hands of a Khārijī band, al-Ṭabarī offered this isnād: "Abū Mikhnaf-'Aṭā' ibn 'Ajlān-Ḥumayd ibn Hilāl."¹⁰² In his multi-volume prosopography, Ibn Sa'd noted that the source of this khabar belonged to the third-generation of Successors, that he reliably transmitted ḥadīth, and that none of his Basran contemporaries possessed more knowledge than he. Based on this glowing recommendation, it would appear that Ḥumayd ibn Hilāl made for a trustworthy source for the story of the death of Ibn Khabbāb. Ibn Sa'd also notes that Ḥumayd died during the governorship of Khālid al-

¹⁰¹ Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Ishaq al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist: A 10th Century Survey of Islamic Culture*, ed. and trans. by Bayard Dodge (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 1998), 201-2.

¹⁰² Al-Ṭabarī, *The First Civil War*, trans. by G. R. Hawting, vol. 17 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 124. N.b. The translators of al-Ṭabarī reduced each *isnad* to the sequence of transmitters, omitting other words to save space.

Qasrī over the province of Iraq, a position he held in 106-20/724-38.¹⁰³ Assuming that Ḥumayd lived to a relatively old age—a reasonable conclusion considering his reputation for sagacity—it is entirely plausible he had met some participants in the critical events of the year 37/658, and there is even an outside possibility he was old enough to have witnessed them personally. It appears, then, that this particular report meets reasonable standards of reliability, making it safe for use as historical fact.

As it turns out, however, this khabar is problematic in spite of its isnād for a number of reasons. First, it is the second version of the same incident reported by al-Ṭabarī. Not an unusual practice, the early akhbārīs often reported multiple tellings of an event, but in this case the two differ significantly in several ways, starting with their isnād. While they both include Ḥumayd ibn Hilāl as part of the chain of transmission, they are otherwise distinct. In the first version it proceeds: "Ya'qūb–Ismā'īl (ibn 'Ulayyah)–Ayyūb (ibn Abī Tamīmah al-Sakhtiyānī)–Ḥumayd ibn Hilāl—a man of the Banū 'Abd al-Qays."¹⁰⁴ While one would expect a different isnād for a different report, the fact that both akhbār include the famous Basran muḥaddith yet differ so greatly in other ways rightly sets off some alarm bells. Why would Ḥumayd ibn Hilāl, a man remembered explicitly for the reliability of his transmissions, pass on two significantly different versions of the same story with the tacit implication they possess equal validity?¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Muḥammad Ibn Sa'd, *Men of Madina [Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr]*, trans. by Aisha Bewley, vol. 1 (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1997), 145; and G. R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750*, 2nd ed. (London: Croom Helm, 2000), 81.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 123

¹⁰⁵ This is a problem from the perspective of the modern historian, but not necessarily from that of the akhbārīs and muḥaddithūn. Compilers deemed those reports and traditions with isnād traced through multiple individuals, classified as *mutawātir*, more reliable because they believed it impossible to get so many people to participate in a known fabrication ('Abd al-Hādī al-Faḍlī, *Introduction to Ḥadīth*, in *Diryat al-Ḥadīth by Al-Shahīd al-Thānī Followed by Introduction to Ḥadīth by 'Abd al-Hādī al-Faḍlī*, trans. by

The contents of both akhbār raise questions of their own. In the first report, the Khawārij found Ibn Khabbāb in a village and recognized him on sight. They asked whether his father had reported a certain ḥadīth, to which the terrified man answered in the affirmative. At this the marauders, angered at the personal implications of the Prophetic saying (it placed them in rather unflattering light), dragged him to the bank of a nearby canal where they decapitated him, then disemboweled his pregnant concubine so that her womb divested of its contents.¹⁰⁶ By contrast, in the second version of the incident the Khawārij encountered Ibn Khabbāb on the banks of al-Nahrawān. They did not recognize the man on sight but, after learning his name, asked him to relate a ḥadīth from his father, which they received without displaying any hint of anger. They next inquired about Ibn Khabbāb's opinions of the first four caliphs. When he failed to criticize 'Uthman and claimed that 'Alī knew more of Islam than did the Khawārij, they bound him and his pregnant wife and took them to the base of a palm tree. There, one of the sectarians picked up a fallen date and began to eat it, but spat it out after his comrades noted he had taken it without paying. Next a pig happened to pass by. A Khārijī dispatched it with his sword then went to find the animal's owner to pay for his loss. This led Ibn Khabbāb and his wife to conclude they had nothing to fear; both acts revealed extreme piety among their captors and, since Muslims did not kill fellow Muslims, there was no justification for harming the couple. A tragic misread on Ibn Khabbāb's part, the Khawārij then murdered him, his wife, and four other women, apparently without cause.¹⁰⁷

Nazmina Virjee [London: Islamic College of Advanced Studies Publications, 2011], 79-80). Just one of many criteria used in evaluating ḥadīth, it avoids entirely the problem of fictitious isnād.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 123-34.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 124-25.

While both akhbār share the same basic story—the unnamed Khawārij interrogated and murdered the son of a revered Companion sometime before the Battle of al-Nahrawān—the differences in detail beg a number of questions. Why did the Khawārij kill their victims, because of Ibn Khabbāb's association with an unfavorable ḥadīth, or for his positive opinions of the third and fourth caliphs? Who precisely was murdered besides Ibn Khabbāb, and where did the crime take place? And why does one version contain the seemingly-incoherent passages about the palm date and the pig while the other does not? But the most important question raised by juxtaposing these two akhbār remains: How can we determine which version to trust in seeking the history of the early Khawārij, or are both unreliable sources?

The story of the murder of ‘Abdallāh ibn Khabbāb illustrates the challenges that face those who try to use the earliest sources for recreating the history of early Islam in general, and that of the Khawārij in particular. Islamic and Western scholars alike have approached these problems from a number of angles in an attempt to get to Ranke's *weis eigentlich gewesen*. Analysis of sources, language, content, and context provides a useful means for evaluating individual khabar for possible authorial biases and cues as to the date of origination or redaction, as can comparative evaluations of report variants. But in many cases such measures, even those made by the most gifted of scholars, fail to get any closer to the reality of an event thanks to a number of problems inherent to the akhbārī tradition.

As it turns out, the short saga of Ibn Khabbāb is just such a case. Looking at the isnād, it is tempting to conclude that al-Ṭabarī's first version is more problematic, because it originates with an anonymous member of Banū ‘Abd al-Qays. Based on the

standards of the traditionists, this automatically makes that report unreliable. However, the akhbārīs had different criteria, and in this case the unknown individual actually may have witnessed the murder first hand. Just such a solution tempts the historian who runs across yet another version of the event found in Ibn Sa‘d’s prosopography. In this catalog of who’s-who in early Islamic society, the author provided brief biographies on literally hundreds of notable Muslim predecessors—very brief in the case of Ibn Khabbāb; the only incident Ibn Sa‘d records about him is his terminal encounter with the Khawārij. The author’s tale has more in common with al-Ṭabarī’s shorter first version than his second, but the core remains the same: A band of roving seceders encountered, interrogated, and killed Ibn Khabbāb. Unsurprisingly, the isnād for Ibn Sa‘d’s version differs from those offered by al-Ṭabarī. The former received his khabar directly from the son of Ḥumayd ibn Hilāl, Ayyūb. In an interesting twist of a type not uncommon to isnād, Ayyūb claimed not to have heard the story from his impeccable father, but from an unnamed man from Banū ‘Abd al-Qays, ostensibly—but not necessarily—the same point of origination as al-Ṭabarī’s first version. However, Ibn Sa‘d added a detail lacking in the *Tārīkh* of al-Ṭabarī: the unnamed man "had been with the Khārijītes and then left them."¹⁰⁸ Unlike either version of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Sa‘d hinted that he traced his version directly to a participant in the event described.

Or did he? When the reader looks closely at the content of each of the versions of Ibn Khabbāb’s untimely end, seemingly acontextual elements come into focus. In the case of Ibn Sa‘d he ended his khabar with a few words from his source Ayyūb who, after describing the murders claimed, "For that reason it is lawful for me to

¹⁰⁸Muḥammad ibn Sa‘d, *Men of Madina* [*Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*], trans. by Aisha Bewley, vol. 2 (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 2000), 157.

fight [the Khawārij]."¹⁰⁹ It is an odd ending to an otherwise fairly-typical report, a tacked-on legal interpretation to justify the categorical killing of separatists based on events almost two centuries prior. Such acontextual oddities litter the ḥadīth landscape, among them the peculiar passages about the date and the pig from al-Ṭabarī's second, longer version. While on the surface they read like mere curiosities, simple factoids of the day recalled by a witness, from the perspective of the religious and political debates of al-Ṭabarī's time, they reflect an evolved understanding of Khārijī doctrine as interpreted by those outside the sect who saw in the Khawārij a tendency to take their self-proclaimed piety to ridiculous and dangerous extremes. Spitting out the unpaid-for date and seeking to remunerate the owner of the spontaneously-slaughtered pig both reflect this later understanding, one that finds its ultimate reflection in the murder of Ibn Khabbāb himself.

In light of this list of uncertainties concerning these akhbār, even the choice of protagonist raises questions. Outside the accounts of his death, ‘Abdallāh ibn Khabbāb receives no noteworthy mention in the historiographic record.¹¹⁰ Not so his father, Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt. One of the Companions, before the Hijra he suffered at the hands of the Meccan Quraysh for his early conversion to Islam. At one point they tried to force him to recant his faith by holding him down in a fire, a torture that left him with scars that blanketed his back. One of the émigrés to Medina, Khabbāb fought alongside the Prophet at Badr and other early battles. He eventually settled in Kufa, the eastern limit of the Arab

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ He is otherwise only mentioned in three akhbār about his father as a source of information on the latter's genealogy, life span, and burial (Muḥammad Ibn Sa‘d, *The Companions at Badr [Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr]*, trans. by Aisha Bewley [London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 2013], 124-27). At least one of these reports is itself problematic, as the source claims to have learned the year of the father's death directly from the son, a chronologically-improbable encounter considering the proximity of their deaths.

Conquests at the time. He died a wealthy man in that city during the First Fitna, and the Caliph ‘Alī personally prayed over his grave after returning from Şiffin.¹¹¹ Although he did not die a martyr's death, the traditions remember Khabbāb as one who suffered greatly for his unswerving faith. Considering the importance of genealogical connections among the Arabs, the possibility that someone intentionally inserted Ibn Khabbāb into the story as its protagonist cannot be discounted. By presenting the Khawārij as the cold-blooded murderers of the son of a revered Companion, the redactor(s) or inventor(s) of these akhbār fulfilled at least one of the political needs of later Muslim society under the Abbasids: justification of the state's occasionally-brutal treatment of dissenters.

More than a few specialists have concluded that reports like that of Ibn Khabbāb's death have more to say about the priorities of the world of the second- and third-century akhbārīs than the early Khawārij. Such issues abound in the sources, a fact long recognized by scholars both Western and Muslim.¹¹² The early authors themselves possessed an awareness of the problematic nature of at least some of the reports they recorded. In his biography of the Prophet, Ibn Ishāq at times questioned his materials. A tradition about Muḥammad's grandfather, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, and a vow he made to sacrifice one of his yet-to-be-conceived sons to God at the Ka'ba in Mecca provides a typical example. In a story rife with allusions to that of the binding of Isaac in the

¹¹¹ Ibn Sa‘d, *Companions at Badr*, 124-27; Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar al-Wāqidī, *The Life of Muḥammad: Al-Wāqidī's Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. by Rizwi Faizer, trans. by Rizwi Faizer, Amal Ismail, and AbdulKader Tayob (New York: Routledge, 2011), 78; Al-Ṭabarī, *Biographies of the Prophet's Companions and their Successors*, trans. by Ella Landau-Tasseron, vol. 39 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 110-11; Al-Ṭabarī, *The Battle of al-Qādisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria-Palestine*, trans. by Yohanan Friedmann, vol. 12 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 160n547; and Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 96

¹¹² For example, see Ignaz Goldziher's commentary on issues with the early Islamic genealogical tradition in: *Muslim Studies*, ed. by S. M. Stern, trans. by C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1966), 1.172-89.

Hebrew Bible, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib was eventually convinced by the founder of Quraysh to seek the advice of an unnamed sorceress in the Hijaz who might know a way to find release from his oath. She relieved the Prophet's grandfather of his onerous burden by suggesting an unusual process of divine negotiation: ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib cast lots to determine the number of camels God required as substitute for his first-born son (they settled on 100—the *hekatomb* of pagan antiquity). Ibn Ishāq indicated his own reservations about this story by beginning the report with the cautionary words, "It is alleged, and God only knows the truth."¹¹³ Other Muslim authors expressed their skepticism in similar ways.

Modern Scholarship

Such problems have proven endemic to the study of early Islam, a condition shared by historians who study ancient cultures in general. In modern historiography, scholars have bandied the issue around since the nineteenth century, at times with considerable energy. Most specialists fall into one of two camps in regard to the reliability of the sources: maximalists, who believe it possible to determine fact from forgery through critical evaluation of the texts; and minimalists, who hold that the entire tradition is so corrupted with polemic, fabrication, and authorial biases that no tools exist to enable the historian to sift wheat from chaff.¹¹⁴ While some shades of grey exist between these Manichaean poles, for the most part scholars lean predominantly in one or the other direction. While all students of early Islam must come to terms with the sources

¹¹³ Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, trans. by A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 66-68.

¹¹⁴ Robinson uses the terms "positivists" for the former and "anti-representationalists" or "post-modernists" for the latter (Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 52). The present author has settled on maximalist and minimalist because they more clearly represent the controversy over the sources.

and their potential usefulness, in the case of the Khawārij the problem has proven particularly acute.

Interpretation of the historical record itself fostered another pair of opposing camps in regard to evaluating the Khawārij and their beliefs: did pious concerns motivate them as much as the sources seem to indicate, or did socio-political factors drive them to dissent? Prior to the waning years of the nineteenth century, Orientalist Sir William Muir discussed the Khawārij as part of his survey-level narrative of the early caliphate. But he discussed them only as opponents of the state, his conclusions often informed by his own Christian beliefs and Western ethnocentrism. In his 1883 *Annals of the Early Caliphate*, Muir referred to the sectarians as “stiff-necked theocrats,” guilty of “aggressive force and stubbornness,” and alleged “it would have been better for the peace of Islam” if ‘Alī had killed them all at al-Nahrawān.¹¹⁵ Muir’s analysis, if one can call it that, reflected a superficial and un-nuanced reading of the sources. It would fall on one of his contemporaries, German scholar R. E. Brünnow, to lay the groundwork for a more detailed study of the Khawārij. In his 1884 dissertation *Die Charidschiten unter den Ersten Omayyaden* he identified the early sectarians as coming from nomadic Arabian tribes that had joined the armies of the Arab Conquest in the east for purely economic reasons, but who later turned to spiritual introspection after the conquest of Iraq. For Brünnow, these raiders-turned-theologians did not coalesce into a recognizable group until the call for arbitration at Şifīn, which the early Khawārij perceived as an affront to their understanding of Islam. In spite of this interpretation, however, Brünnow held that politics—the question of who should lead the community of believers—motivated the

¹¹⁵ William Muir, *Annals of the Early Caliphate from Original Sources* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1883), 395, 397, and 399.

sectarians, and for him that could only be a secular concern as opposed to the distinctly theological concerns that motivated some later groups.¹¹⁶

In 1901 Julius Wellhausen published his response to Brünnow's claims in *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*. Already renowned for his scholarship in the field of Old Testament text criticism—including formulation of the Documentary Hypothesis—this book heralded Wellhausen's entry into the field of Islamic studies.¹¹⁷ Contrary to Brünnow, Wellhausen believed that the Khawārij were motivated principally—if not entirely—by religious concerns. He called the initial separatists "people of deep conviction, much nobler than the Jewish Zealots and no worse than Christian heretics and saints, because they were men of action who found martyrdom not upon the scaffold but upon the battlefield."¹¹⁸ They quickly came to regret their initial support of the call to arbitration made at Şiffīn, and their subsequent actions stemmed from a desire for repentance. According to Wellhausen, "after a fall from grace they regained that energy and certitude which they later held to be the essence of piety. They considered their past vacillation as a disgraceful sin, and now turned all their energy towards expiating it. It was repentance which caused them to appear, and to act."¹¹⁹

One wonders whether Wellhausen applied the same level of critical analysis to the early Islamic sources as he had to the texts of the Hebrew Bible. He largely accepted the reports of al-Ṭabarī and the other Muslim historians at face value, an

¹¹⁶ Brünnow's work is only available in German, a language for which the present author possesses no appreciable skill. The discussion herein is based on the analyses of two authors: Jeffrey T. Kenney, "The Emergency of the Khawārij: Religion and the Social Order in Early Islam," *Jusur* 5 (1989): 8-10; and Hussam S. Timani, *Modern Intellectual Readings of the Khārijītes* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 49-50.

¹¹⁷ Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis is a means with which text critics can identify the sources and redactors of the text of the Hebrew Bible. It is also known as the "JEDP theory," a name it gets from the original sources proposed by Wellhausen.

¹¹⁸ Julius Wellhausen, *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, ed. by R. C. Ostle, trans. by R. C. Ostle and S. M. Walzer (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1975), 39.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

approach that predisposed his conclusions. Furthermore, he avoided discussion of those akhbār in which Khawārij expressed concern about the shrinking fay' and their desire to return to what they perceived as the relatively laissez-faire system of governance practiced by 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb, the second caliph. These and similar issues invite a more mundane interpretation than Wellhausen was willing to entertain. His source analysis did lead him to favor certain akhbārīs over others, Abū Mikhnaf in particular, whom Wellhausen identified as the oldest and most reliable concerning events in early Kufa.¹²⁰ The author based his judgment primarily on the fact that the akhbārī lived in that city and reported extensively on it and its environs. But, while Wellhausen admitted to Abū Mikhnaf's pro-'Alid and anti-Umayyad leanings, the German scholar did not let them interfere with his interpretation of the sources concerning the early Khawārij. Outside criticism of the akhbārī's chronology, Wellhausen took him largely at face value, a decision that effectively canonized Abū Mikhnaf's biases into the master narrative.¹²¹

Ignaz Goldziher, a contemporary of Wellhausen, adopted a similar approach.

In the second volume of his seminal *Muhammedanische Studien* published in 1889-90, Goldziher aired many of the problems inherent in the ḥadīth collections and concluded:

In the absence of authentic evidence it would indeed be rash to attempt to express the most tentative opinion as to which parts of the ḥadīth are the oldest original material, or even as to which of them date back to the generations immediately following the Prophet's death. Closer acquaintance with the vast stock of ḥadīths induces skeptical caution rather than optimistic trust regarding the material brought together in the carefully compiled collections. We... will probably consider by far

¹²⁰ Ibid., 5 and 27; and Julius Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, trans. by A. H. Harley (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1927), vii-viii.

¹²¹ Wellhausen, *Arab Kingdom*, xi and 85; and EI², s.v. "Abū Mikhnaf." Besides the many akhbār preserved in al-Ṭabarī, the list of Abū Mikhnaf's books preserved by al-Nadīm make clear the reporter's interest in Iraq and the 'Alids; see: al-Nadīm, 201-2. As will be demonstrated in chapter 6, the akhbārī's 'Alid proclivities explain the hagiographic nature of the Khārijī master narrative as it pertains to 'Alī.

the greater part of it as the result of the religious, historical, and social development of Islam during the first two centuries.¹²²

He noted the proliferation of false ḥadīth, a phenomenon noticed by early muḥaddithūn such as Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) who admitted that some traditions lacked credibility, and were obvious fabrications based on borrowings from Christianity and Judaism.¹²³

Overall, Goldziher was critical but fair with the ḥadīth as a body of literature, and much of what he argued remains valid today.

Yet, when it came to discussing the Khawārij and their doctrine, he, like Wellhausen, took the historical sources largely at face value, and saw in the early sectarian division purely religious motivations. In his 1910 publication, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, Goldziher called the Khawārij "zealots who made up their minds that the resolution of a conflict over succession to the Prophet's legacy must not be put in human hands, that the bloody ordeal of war must be seen through to the end."¹²⁴ Contra Wellhausen, Goldziher did see an integration of secular concerns into the later Khārijī uprisings, particularly that of the Berbers in North Africa (starting ca. 122/740), but he did not question the narrative handed down by the akhbārīs as he did the ḥadīth.¹²⁵

This remained the general state of affairs for several decades. Historians of early Islam and the Medieval Middle East admitted to and understood the problems with the ḥadīth, but failed to see the exact same issues in the akhbārī tradition. In application this double standard resulted in the repeated regurgitation of an unquestioned master narrative to support a variety of arguments often at odds with one another. Thus firmly

¹²² Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ed. by S. M. Stern, trans. by C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971), 2.18-19.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 2.12

¹²⁴ Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. by Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 170. The German title is *Vorlesungen über den Islam*, published in 1910.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

entrenched, Percy Smith utilized it in his 1922 analysis of an Algerian Ibādī community without hesitation. Unlike Muir some four decades prior, however, Smith saw in these spiritual descendents of the Khawārij much to recommend them in the way of piety and steadfastness, and concluded they would make excellent Christian converts, a not unsurprising conclusion considering his life-long calling as a Methodist minister and missionary.¹²⁶ Conversely, two years after Smith's commentary, Sir Thomas W. Arnold utilized the very same materials to determine that the sectarians represented "the extreme left of Muslim political theory" in regard to their claims that anyone could be caliph regardless of lineage, and that the caliphate did not constitute a *sine qua non* for the Muslim community.¹²⁷ Overall, Arnold judged them political has-beens without any notable successes to their record, an obvious conclusion from Arnold's perspective some twelve centuries after the sect's heyday, but one of no use in reconstructing its history.¹²⁸

Beyond the question of source accuracy, a relative paucity of primary materials regarding the Khawārij has likewise hampered their study by scholars. Because of this, book-length treatments have been few and far between; Khārijī studies have largely taken place as small portions of more general works and in journal articles. In fact, in 1956 Elie Adib Salem wrote the first book-length survey in English devoted to the Khawārij as a historical phenomenon, and it remained unique in this regard until very recently.¹²⁹ As such, Salem's *Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawārij* retains an importance that it would not otherwise deserve; from the vantage point of sixty years on, Salem's investigation appears broad but shallow. While he departed from the common

¹²⁶ Percy Smith, "The Ibadhites," *Moslem World* 12 (1922):281-88; and Rev. Percy Smith obituary by Edwin F. Frease, "Current Topics," *Moslem World* 23 (1933): 91.

¹²⁷ Thomas W. Arnold, *The Caliphate* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), 187.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 188-89.

¹²⁹ Only the first half of Wellhausen's *Religio-Political Factions* concerned itself with the sect.

understanding of the Khawārij as monsters, he held to a view popular with contemporary missionaries who saw the sectarians as examples of devotion and piety in the Christian-martyr mould. Unavoidably influenced by the world of his day, Salem also imagined in the sect a form of proto-democracy. He noted that "The Khawārij, at first dominantly Bedouin, pious and good Muslims, believed that any Muslim regardless of his race and descent could be elected to the caliphate," revealing a superficial and uncritical understanding of Khārijī political theory.¹³⁰

In general, reviewers did not treat Salem's book kindly, calling it "curiously immature," and "an inadequate approach to the problem."¹³¹ In 1962 influential Orientalist W. Montgomery Watt dealt perhaps the harshest blow with his two-word descriptor of the author's research: "elementary survey."¹³² But Salem did depart from his predecessors in one important regard: he called into question the veracity of the sources, most notably the akhbār concerning 'Alī during the call for arbitration at Ṣiffīn and its aftermath.¹³³ But, like the rest of the scholars discussed to this point, Salem took the master narrative largely at face value. He sided with Wellhausen and others who held that religious concerns motivated the Khawārij, not secular or political issues as argued by Brünnow. In this regard, Salem did not interpret Khārijī dissent over the caliphate or payment of the fay' as secular issues, but instead claimed they possessed a "pure doctrinal character."¹³⁴ In some cases, Salem saw in the Khawārij positive practices

¹³⁰ Elie Adib Salem, *Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawārij* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), 14.

¹³¹ Arthur Jeffery, "Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawārij by Elie Adib Salem," *Middle East Journal* 11, no. 2 (Spring, 1957): 215; and Nabia Abbott, "Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawārij by Elie Adib Salem," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 1 (January, 1959): 92-93.

¹³² W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2009), 19.

¹³³ Salem, 16.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

superior to those of the Sunni majority. For example, the sectarians held their religious leaders to the same level of scrutiny as their military chiefs, a trait they shared with the Christian Donatist sect of the fourth century. Conversely, according to the author, any Muslim male can lead the Friday prayer among the Sunni, even the "son of a prostitute."¹³⁵ Their extreme piety revealed in the sources led Salem to conclude that, for the Khawārij, "religion is the starting point of their political theory and paradise the end of their socio-political effort."¹³⁶

However Salem, like Wellhausen, could not avoid identifying non-religious concerns as contributory factors to the genesis of the sect. He claimed their jealousy of the Quraysh and that confederation's growing power and influence in the early-Islamic world fostered the Khārijī doctrines of the caliphate. Many who joined the early Khawārij—including their leaders—came from less-powerful tribes or those disenfranchised through their participation in *al-ridda* on the losing side.¹³⁷ But Salem simplified this complex arrangement by claiming that most of the sectarians came from "Bedouin stock."¹³⁸ According to the author, this ancestry—which has precisely nothing to

¹³⁵ Ibid., 38n61. The Donatists emerged as a result of the Diocletian persecutions of the early-fourth century. They believed that those who dissembled or renounced their faith under persecution could not reenter the Christian community. The practical consequence of this was that clergy who had apostatized but then returned to their ecclesiastical positions could not effectively administer the sacraments, which meant that those under their pastoral care were unable to receive salvation as a result. The principal point of comparison between the Donatists and the Khawārij is in their both holding their religious leaders to extremely high standards of behavior.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 47.

¹³⁷ Ridda (apostasy) with the definite article refers to the Wars of Apostasy fought after the death of the Prophet in 11/632. For the time being, it is sufficient to relate that some tribes severed their ties with the young umma, and this act resulted in a war between them and the tribes that remained loyal to the faith and its new leader, Abū Bakr, the first caliph. For an excellent summary of the conflicts and scholarly opinions thereon, see: Elias Shoufani, *Al-Riddah and the Muslim Conquest of Arabia* (Beirut: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 71-106.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 56.

do with belief in Islam—also resulted in a Khārijī political theory "more consistent with the traditional Arab outlook on political life."¹³⁹

In spite of such inconsistencies in his argument, Salem made some interesting observations that eluded his predecessors. The first is important particularly when trying to define the Khawārij or compare them to other sectarian groups. While they held distinct views and at times rebelled against the state, the majority of Muslims (those who would eventually define themselves as Sunni) held that the seceders were also Muslims and therefore members of the community and a legitimate party within Islam.¹⁴⁰ As such, labeling them "heretics" in the sense used in Christian history, while at times helpful, is not truly accurate. The second observation Salem made took the form of a comparison between his subjects and the Wahhabi sect. He saw many parallels between the two, including shared purpose, doctrine, and "puritanical beliefs."¹⁴¹ As with ISIS, the Wahhabi denial of any commonalities with the Khawārij provides yet another example of the enduring negativity integral to the Khārijī master narrative.¹⁴²

In 1961 Watt entered the debate and offered his own interpretation of the sectarians in his article, "Khārijīte Thought in the Umayyad Period." He argued that the causal factors behind the appearance of the Khawārij at Ṣiffīn must lie in the structure of the caliphate created by 'Umar and 'Uthmān and subsequent resistance from formerly-nomadic Arabs:

Presumably the fact that men accustomed to the free life of the desert were now confined and regimented in camp-cities when they were not away on distant and arduous campaigns. They seem to have felt themselves cogs in a vast administrative machine. They had no rational plan for escaping from the domination of an

¹³⁹ Ibid., 60.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴² Ibid., 24.

impersonal system, since they did not want to return to the Arabian steppes; but they were driven to make a public protest, even if it cost them their lives. So the puny clan-like groups defied the might of the imperial government.¹⁴³

Watt went on to claim that this dissent did not represent a desire to return to the life of the Bedouin, but instead found expression in a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam that arose in reaction to perceived transgressions on the part of ‘Uthmān. The author found evidence in the behavior of the early Khawārij, which for him mirrored that of pre-Islamic Arabian nomads.¹⁴⁴ While his assertion that behavior associated with pre-Islamic Arabian tribal life and structure continued well after the birth of Islam is well attested in the sources, to claim that the sectarians yearned for the good-old days to the point of preferring extinction over a return to the Arabian Peninsula stretches credulity and flies in the face of normative tribal behavior.

Regardless, Watt offered some interesting theories and distillations. He saw confusion in the eventual fracturing of the Khawārij and a kind of identity crisis as questions of proper conduct led to formulations of doctrine that ultimately fostered more questions and dissent.¹⁴⁵ While some early Khārijī sects went extinct thanks to a strict adherence to doctrine that for all intents and purposes mandated death in battle, others adopted more moderate positions in order to survive as a minority within the greater Islamic society.¹⁴⁶ This required reshaping Khārijī identity into a number of new forms that attempted to secure a core of beliefs nuanced just enough to allow members to live alongside those outside the sect. Watt’s most intriguing theory involved the

¹⁴³ W. Montgomery Watt, "Khārijīte Thought in the Umayyad Period," *Der Islam* 36, no. 3 (January 1961): 217.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 217-18.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁴⁶ These trends are mirrored in the sixteenth-century Anabaptists in Europe, another separatist sectarian division.

disappearance of Khārijī groups from the Islamic heartlands. He suggested that, in the theologically-rich milieu of the early Abbasid caliphate, the sect's doctrine of justice was absorbed by the Mu'tazila, while that of suspended judgment (*waqafa*—adopted by a moderate Khārijī sect, the Wāqifīya) was taken up by the Murji'a. This co-opting of Khārijī issues, along with the raising of new questions on which the sect's teachings could shed no light, led to the disappearance of the Khawārij in the important intellectual centers of the Abbasid state, and its eventual demise as a sect of any significance outside the Ibāḍiyya.¹⁴⁷

Watt further traced the evolution of Islamic doctrine the following year in his book, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, and within that greater process he identified Khārijī influence in a number of areas including political theory, divine judgment, the question of free will versus predestination, and the requirements to claim membership in the community of believers—the very heart of Muslim identity. While Watt did not buck the traditional master narrative, he did highlight some points neglected by others. In particular, he noted the rise of a moderate Khārijī community in Basra during Mu'āwiya's caliphate (r. 41-60/661-80) that decided to accept life under the rule of the non-Khārijī majority. This decision required theological justification, and that process fostered an on-going dialogue with those outside the sect that eventually contributed to the establishment of the boundaries of Sunni identity.¹⁴⁸

While Watt did not question the veracity of his sources, his analysis necessitated a new perspective, one hinted at by Brünnow decades before. Watt somewhat cautiously proposed tribal influences on the formation and development of the

¹⁴⁷ Watt, "Khārijīte Thought," 226-31.

¹⁴⁸ Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 14-19.

Khawārij. He noted that they came mostly from three of the northern tribes (the 'Adnāniyya), the so-called Arabized Arabs, and that this point of origination helped explain the sectarians' complaints in regard to the caliphate. Contrary to the southern tribes (the Qaḥṭaniyya), which had traditions of monarchical rule, the northerners possessed a more-egalitarian heritage when it came to leadership, one in which the status of clan chiefs was that of *primus inter pares* rather than overlordship.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, Watt also identified tribal behaviors in the early Khārijī rebels. To him, their military exploits looked more like traditional raids (*ghazawāt*, sing. *ghazwa*) against rival clans than revolutions intended to overthrow the caliphate: they were small, limited in scope, and had a hit-and-run character akin to pre-Islamic tribal warfare.¹⁵⁰ He also pointed out that, toward the end of the seventh century CE, the nature of Khārijī uprisings changed, becoming more moderate in doctrine and much larger in size and scope.¹⁵¹ Although Watt did not question the integrity of the sources, he did use them more critically and with more care than the other authors already discussed.

Simultaneously following in Watts footsteps yet blazing a trail all his own, in 1971 M. A. Shaban published the first volume of his *Islamic History: A New Interpretation*. The author lived up to the claim of his subtitle, for he indeed provided a new interpretation of the traditional sources. Bold in his claims if at times sparse with his evidence, Shaban believed in the potential of the early historiographical works as a basis for making positivist statements about the nascent years of Islam. "There is no doubt," he asserted in his preface, "that Arabic sources contain enough reliable material to provide a

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 9-10.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 18.

good deal more than a broad outline of the history of this period."¹⁵² Bolstered by the strength of his convictions, he identified purely socio-political motivations behind many of the events from the years of the Prophet to the end of Umayyad rule.

This influenced his interpretation of the Khawārij such that he adopted a stance entirely opposite that of Wellhausen, Salem, and others who took the sectarians' religious zealotry as *a priori* fact. Shaban claimed that the fiscal and settlement policies of 'Umar and 'Uthmān created social and economic disparities that exacerbated existing tribal rivalries. Together, these combined to foster unrest with the caliphate and its local representatives in Iraq, where such discrepancies manifested in their most extreme forms. There, a number of segments of Arabo-Islamic society competed for a pool of resources that had ceased to grow thanks to a hiatus in eastern expansion. The *ahl al-ayyām* (“people of the days [of battle]”) represented those who had remained loyal to Islam during the ridda and participated in the conquests. Those forgiven apostates later allowed to participate in the conquests constituted the *ahl al-ridda* (“people of the War of Apostasy”). The later immigrants to Iraq, who arrived sporadically and in varying numbers, received the label *rādifa* (“those who follow”). The important Meccans and Medinans who had returned home after participating in the conquests but still possessed entitlements to significant shares of the agricultural income generated in Iraq were labeled the *ahl al-fay*’ (“people of [entitled to] the fay”). Shaban singled out a subset of the *ahl al-ayyām* as those put in charge of managing—and therefore profiting from—the agriculturally-rich lands abandoned by the Sasanian nobility who fled in the face of Arab

¹⁵² M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation, A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), viii.

expansion. This last group the author identified as the qurrā', a group the sources link with the early Khawārij, particularly in their appearance at the Battle of Şiffīn.¹⁵³

Previously, everyone had understood the term qurrā' to mean "Qur'an readers," but Shaban judged such a definition anachronistic because "it is difficult to accept the idea of thousands of Qur'an readers, organized into separate contingents, all fighting at Şiffīn."¹⁵⁴ For Shaban, it seemed highly implausible for there to be so many literate proto-clergy in existence by that early date, all things considered. Instead, based on the sources' presentation of the qurrā', he proposed that the term had replaced the earlier label ahl al-ayyām.¹⁵⁵ Thanks to 'Uthmān's attempts to assert greater control in Iraq and its rich lands, the qurrā' found themselves taking hits to both pocketbook and prestige.¹⁵⁶ For Shaban, the understanding of qurrā' as Qur'an reader came about later, perhaps in the tenth-century under the influence of the traditionists and akhbārīs.¹⁵⁷

Unfortunately, Shaban did not offer any substantive evidence to support these claims. His lexical proposal lacked any real basis, but his overall argument remains compelling regardless. Reviewer Ira M. Lapidus pointed out that "Even if Shaban is wrong about the derivation of the word, the term qurrā' clearly stands for considerably more than 'Qur'an

¹⁵³ Ibid., 49-51. C.f. see Mayayudin Haji Yahaya, "The People of Al-Ayyam in the Arab Conquest of Iraq," in *Proceedings of the Arabic and Islamic Sections of the 35th International Congress of Asian and North African Studies (ICANAS), Part One*, ed. by Kinga Dévényi and Tamás Iványi (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University Chair for Arabic Studies & Csoma de Kőrös Society Section of Islamic Studies, 1998), 87-92. Yahaya draws some finer distinctions in his more-detailed study of the socio-political groups that developed in Iraq after the Arab Conquest.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 50.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 68.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 51.

reader'.¹⁵⁸ The impact of Shaban's conjecture has endured and fueled subsequent discussions that continue today.

In a remarkable instance of scholarly coincidence, Martin Hinds published his seminal article, "Kufan Political Alignments and Their Background in the Mid-Seventh Century A.D.," at around the same time that Shaban's book came out, and the former discussed many of the same issues that the latter did in regard to the socio-political situation in Iraq, particularly the qurrā' in Kufa.¹⁵⁹ Hinds maintained the qurrā's traditionally-understood role as reciters of Qur'anic verse but, like Shaban, also identified them as early-comers to the city that possessed distinctly-secular concerns vis-à-vis their social status in Iraq and the impact of the caliphate's actions on same. He identified at least some of them as coming from the nobility of smaller, less-influential tribes, men who "lacked status as clan leaders of any importance at all. To someone like Mu'āwiya they appeared simply as greedy and ungrateful parvenus, and he was not slow to say as much to those he deported to Syria."¹⁶⁰ Hinds' qurrā' resented the growing power of larger clan leaders and the caliphal government for allowing that growth to occur, and the reduction of stipends announced in 34/65 AH only made matters worse. Always in the minority, 'Alī's ascension to the caliphate gave some qurrā' the opportunity to improve their status, such as al-Ashtar who sided with the fourth caliph, while others remained unsatisfied with the status quo and eventually became Khawārij.¹⁶¹ Hinds located tribal-competition behind the general unrest in Kufa, and by extension behind the early Khārijī

¹⁵⁸ Ira M. Lapidus, review of *Islamic History: A New Interpretation, A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132)* by M. A. Shaban, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5, no. 3 (June 1974): 376.

¹⁵⁹ There is no evidence that either author consulted the work of the other, or was even aware of it, making this coincidental publication all the more remarkable.

¹⁶⁰ Martin Hinds, "Kufan Political Alignments and Their Background in the Mid-Seventh Century A.D." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2, no. 4 (October 1971): 359.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 359-362.

incidents. As leaders of the smaller tribes, the qurrā' at Ṣiffīn wanted to fight Mu'āwiya because they had everything to gain from a victory in terms of status and wealth. But the leaders of the larger, more influential tribes preferred a wait-and-see game, a position that favored arbitration.¹⁶²

But Hinds' principle point was that, from the murder of 'Alī, there were "three broad political alignments" in Kufa: the Khawārij, the proto-Shi'a, and the tribal leaders—the *ashrāf al-qabā'il*.¹⁶³ The Umayyad caliphs utilized the latter in a system of mutual support in order to govern, one based on traditional clan organization dating from the Jāhiliyya. Hinds defined the first two groups as reactionary and revolutionary, respectively, and he claimed both advocated an Islamic social order as opposed to traditional clan structure. For the author, the Khawārij sought honor (*sharaf*) through Islam as opposed to the traditional tribal hierarchy, and the Shi'a, composed largely of latecomers to Kufa resisted "established tribal leadership in the hope of bettering their condition," as in the case of al-Mukhtār's rebellion in the old part of the city (66-67/685-87).¹⁶⁴ Beyond this somewhat intangible attribution to a need for honor, Hinds pointed to the economic disparity endemic to the socio-political situation in Kufa prior to Ṣiffīn. The first three Rāshidūn Caliphs had tried to institute a new and largely-alien social order based on precedence in Islam called *sābiqa*, and 'Umar monetized that system through the payment of stipends. The muhājirūn and *anṣār* received 3,000-5,000 dirhams per year, and those involved in the early conquests, the ahl al-ayyām, 2,000-3,000. But the late-comers, the *rādifa*, received only 200-1,500 dirhams per annum according to Hinds'

¹⁶² Ibid., 363.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 346.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 347-48.

estimation.¹⁶⁵ Over time, the arrival of more *rādifa* meant reduced stipends, a condition exacerbated by a hiatus on further conquests that essentially created a zero-sum economic situation in Iraq. This led to rising tensions between early- and late-comers, and eventually to the genesis of the *Khawārij*.¹⁶⁶

Hinds provided a refreshing interpretation of the sources, although he stopped short of stretching them beyond their traditionally-recognized purview as had Shaban. But the implications of both these men's works meant that future scholars engaged in *Khārijī* studies would have to address the *qurrā'* issue; there simply could be no avoiding it going forward. Gautier H. A. Juynboll contributed two articles to the debate. In 1973 he sided with Shaban's interpretation that the term *qurrā'* very well could have originally referred to "villagers," and he also noted the sources' use of the term as a pejorative, something akin to country bumpkins or rustics without nobility.¹⁶⁷ According to Juynboll, these people encouraged the (mis)association with Qur'an reciters themselves because of the esteem it brought them. He elaborated this line of thought two years later in a discussion of the recitation of Qur'anic verses prior to battle by the so-called *qurrā'*. He pointed to the "improbably large numbers of people who pretended, or in any case were believed, to be authorities on the Qur'an."¹⁶⁸ Juynboll maintained his "villagers" theory, and further proposed that the term had been redefined in light of 'Umar's concern to

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 349.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 353.

¹⁶⁷ G. H. A. Juynboll, "The *Qurrā'* in Early Islamic History," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 16, no. 2/3 (December 1973): 116.

¹⁶⁸ G. H. A. Juynboll, "The Qur'ān Reciter on the Battlefield and Concomitant Issues," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 125, no. 1 (1975): 16.

compile the Qur'an, an effort he encouraged thanks to his misunderstanding of the nature of the casualties at the Battle of 'Aqraba' (11/632-33).¹⁶⁹

The conclusions of Shaban, Hinds, Juynboll, and others heralded a growing trend in the study of early Islam, one that made use of historical, form, and other critical methodologies for approaching the sources. During the height of the qurrā' debate, Albrecht Noth released his seminal work, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*.¹⁷⁰ For much of the twentieth century, scholars engaged with early Muslim historiography had proposed the existence of several schools of Islamic historical thought, based on geographical affinities. Noth challenged and unseated this contention with the publication of his *habilitationsschrift* in 1972. He asserted therein that no clear evidence existed on which to base a so-called "theory of schools."¹⁷¹ Instead, he pointed to a number of commonalities found throughout the early Islamic historical writings, regardless of their places of origin or the backgrounds of their authors. Noth identified several themes of principal importance to the Muslim traditionists such as apostasy (ridda), conquest (futūḥ), inter-communal strife (fitna), and leadership (*sirat al-khulafā'*).¹⁷² He also observed the common literary forms (documentary, epistolary, rhetorical), and topoi (content-related narrative motifs) utilized by the akhbārīs.¹⁷³ While

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 19-21. In brief, Juynboll proposed that 'Umar understood the term *ḥamalāt al-Qur'ān* to mean "those who have memorized all or most of the Qur'ān," whereas the author contends that it actually meant "carriers of the Qur'ān,"—i.e. those who carried on their person all or part of the scriptures. Since some 400 of these individuals died in the Battle of 'Aqraba' (also known as the Battle of Yamama), 'Umar feared that knowledge of the Qur'ān might be lost if not compiled into a single text. One of the unintended consequences of this decision was the eventual association of the term qurrā' with those capable of reciting the scriptures from memory.

¹⁷⁰ This discussion of Noth's book was first published by the present author in his article, "Muslim Chronicles of the First Crusade: A Transition in Islamic Historiography," *The Chico Historian* 26 (2016): 2-9.

¹⁷¹ Albrecht Noth, and Lawrence I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Traditions: A Source-Critical Study* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994), ix-5.

¹⁷² Ibid., 28-61.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 62-172.

a few fellow specialists have criticized Noth's book on points of scholarly minutiae,¹⁷⁴ it continues to be regarded as an important and influential work that advances the understanding of its subject in a useful and meaningful way. A number of scholars have since adopted and adapted Noth's methodology into their own work.

Norman Calder adopted a different approach when he took the lexical suggestions of Shaban and Hinds regarding the qurrā' cognomen in order to trace the etymology of the Semitic root, q-r-'.¹⁷⁵ In making his analysis, he turned to the *Lisān al-'Arab* of Ibn Manzūr, first published in 1290.¹⁷⁶ Calder observed that the verb form *qara'a* and its derivatives actually originated with another language—either Syriac, Aramaic, or Talmudic Hebrew—and thence entered Arabic as a loan word.¹⁷⁷ Derivatives of the root q-r-' include words with a host of meanings which Calder related to ideas involving “cyclical and recurrent phenomena, including... periods of absence from home (or from the family or the tribe).”¹⁷⁸ This led him to conclude that the label qurrā', as used in relationship to the Battle of Şiffin and its environs, meant “temporary or seasonal troops (tribal levies, militia, conscripts, etc.) as opposed to full-time professionals, the standing army.”¹⁷⁹ Many men, at least on the Iraqi front, did indeed serve sporadically, on a cycle in which the state expected them to participate in eastward raids one year in every four. Calder's thesis jives well with this, and with the demands by participants to keep

¹⁷⁴ For example, Robert Hoyland notes that Noth's conclusions regarding the trustworthiness of the early sources, while plausible, are really nothing more than conjecture on the author's part (Robert Hoyland, "Review of Albrecht Noth: *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 60, no. 1 (1997): 130.

¹⁷⁵ Arabic vocabulary, like other Semitic languages, revolves around a system of root letters, from which words and their derivations emerge through the addition and rearrangement of vowels, prefixes, and suffixes. The root from which qurrā' derives is the three letter pattern *qāf-rā-'ayn*.

¹⁷⁶ Norman Calder, “The Qurrā' and the Arabic Lexicographical Tradition,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 36, 2 (1991): 297.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 305.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*,

time-on-campaign to a minimum.¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, very little evidence exists to support the notion of a "standing army" serving the Caliph 'Alī during the battles of the First Fitna. To assemble enough men to fight the Khawārij at al-Nahrawān, he had to levy troops through the tribal nobility in Kufa—and with their permission.¹⁸¹ It appears that the only units approximating full-time soldiers were Persians who had defected to the Muslims and agreed to fight for them in exchange for homes, tribal affiliation, and hefty regular salaries.¹⁸² In fact, based on the paucity of extant evidence, Calder's proposed definition of qurrā' could apply equally to virtually all the forces fighting under 'Alī in the first civil war. This would explain why there are so many qurrā' mentioned in the sources—the bulk of the caliph's army and certainly many serving with Mu'āwiya qualified as "temporary or seasonal troops." But it fails to account for why only some of them turned to dissent at Şiffīn, and then only against 'Alī and not his rival.

Regardless, Calder represented the developing trend in Islamic historiography to treat the sources with a more-critical eye. This in turn helped foster the so-called revisionist school in the late 1970s, a development typically marked by the publication of two particularly-dense texts by John Wansbrough: *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* in 1977, and *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* the following year. While the author focused on traditions of Qur'anic exegesis in the former, many readers fixated on his supposition that the Islamic scriptures only came about as the result of a long process of attribution of pre-existing materials borrowed from Judaism and modified by a "Muḥammadan gospel,"

¹⁸⁰ See al-Ṭabarī, *Between Civil Wars: The Caliphate of Mu'āwiyah*, trans. Michael G. Morony, vol 18 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 81.

¹⁸¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 121-22.

¹⁸² Hugh Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* (London: Routledge, 2001), 4-5.

a process only completed in the mid-third century AH.¹⁸³ Wansbrough's perspective came from a minimalist's distrust of the traditionists and akhbārīs as reliable sources for factual information, a position he explicated more extensively in *The Sectarian Milieu*. In that work he approached Ibn Ishāq's and al-Wāqidi's biographies of the Prophet as literary constructs, referring to them from the start as "salvation history" more concerned with presenting a teleological message than with historicity.¹⁸⁴ While not the first to question the sources, Wansbrough challenged them on a foundational level that threatened to obviate the work of generations of scholars. While some of his colleagues accused him of academic blasphemy, his doubts proved infectious to others.

Several of Wansbrough's students took up his minimalist challenge to the integrity of the early historiography, and two went so far as to propose relegating the long-accepted master narrative of early Islamic history to the dust bin. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook—both disciples of Wansbrough—released their proposal for what they called a “radically new” narrative in 1977. Entitled *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, it made Shaban's "new interpretation" look *de rigueur* by comparison. Crone and Cook all but ignored the traditional Muslim sources, and instead relied on those from the Syriac, Greek, Coptic, and Hebrew traditions. The authors possessed a plausible-enough rationale: the genesis of Islam occurred in the context of Late Antiquity, and within a distinct time and place in that milieu. The non-Arabic sources did indeed comment on the rise of early Islam in the Near East. Considering the numerous problems recognized within the Muslim historiographical tradition, these previously unexplored avenues

¹⁸³ John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), 82-83.

¹⁸⁴ John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006), 1 and 39.

possessed the potential to correct the long-held narrative with a more-accurate version. Furthermore, the non-Arabic sources were much closer to being contemporaneous to the events they described than the Muslim ones.¹⁸⁵ The authors were aware of the potential pitfalls inherent to their quest—uproar and criticism from old-school Orientalists and the hostility of devout Muslims—but they proceeded, regardless.

The Crone-Cook narrative was a truly-unique construction in the world of scholarly Islamic studies. If not for the authors' credentials, their extensive research, and a very carefully-worded disclaimer, *Hagarism* would have appeared for all intents and purposes as anti-Muslim polemic. In the authors' analysis, Islam did not exist in any recognizable form until the end of the seventh century CE; Muḥammad lived two years longer than noted in the traditional narrative and led the conquest of Syria-Palestine himself; 'Abu Bakr, the first rāshidūn caliph, did not actually exist; and many of the places associated with the birth of Islam were in reality substitutes for locations originally selected based on criteria borrowed from the Samaritan tradition.¹⁸⁶ In regard to the Qur'an, the authors saw many reasons for assigning it a late date, and argued “that the book is the product of the belated and imperfect editing of materials from a plurality of traditions.”¹⁸⁷

That last proposal put forth by Crone and Cook has since been undone through study and analysis of some partial manuscript copies of the Qur'an that date, at the latest, to within less than four decades of the Prophet's death in 10/632, and very

¹⁸⁵ Patricia Crone, and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), vii-viii.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-28.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

likely much earlier.¹⁸⁸ And some of their other arguments suffer from the very same problems that the authors accuse the Muslim sources of possessing. Much of what the duo relied on to support their arguments came from polemical, heresiographical, hagiographical, or other literature tainted by obvious biases. While the authors' evidence did allow them to invent a new narrative of Islamic origins, it rested on ground no more solid than that of the traditional master narrative, a fact pointed out by Wansbrough and others.¹⁸⁹

But *Hagarism* and the work of other revisionists from the minimalist school eventually served a higher purpose. Looking back at the impact of Crone and Cook's book three decades later, Fred M. Donner called it "a very loud wake-up call to the then rather sleepy field of early Islamic studies."¹⁹⁰ The pair challenged the methodological laxity in which the field had wallowed at least since the beginning of the twentieth century. Their work, in spite of its own, rather serious flaws, demanded a new and higher level of scholarly rigor, and a broader scope of examination. Taking the Muslim sources

¹⁸⁸ Carbon dating of the Stanford 2007 folio of the Sana'a Palimpsest gave a 99 percent probability of originating prior to 671 CE, 95.5 percent probability before 661, and 75 percent before 646. (Benham Sadeghi and Mohsen Gourdarzi, "Şan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," *Der Islam* 87, no. 8 [2012]: 8-9).

¹⁸⁹ John Wansbrough, review of *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 41, no. 1 (1978): 155-56. Wansbrough, Crone, and Cook alike received heavy criticism from many of their peers for the works discussed above. Unsurprisingly, much of it centered on the radically-revisionist arguments each proposed. They also received criticism for their use of language; Wansbrough for speaking in a super-technical voice that even confounded many fellow specialists, Crone and Cook for the deliberate use of malapropisms and confusing language. For examples of such feedback, see: Michael G. Morony, review of *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 41, no. 2 (April 1982): 157-59; Oleg Graber, review of *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Speculum* 53, no. 4 (October 1978): 795-99; and Eric I. Manheimer, review of *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (February 1978): 240-41.

¹⁹⁰ Fred M. Donner, retrospective review of *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (December 2006): 197.

alone and at face value would no longer suffice for the struggle to come to grips with early Islam.¹⁹¹

The impact of the minimalist/revisionist challenge to the study of the Khawārij proved two-fold. First, future research into the sect benefitted from the higher academic standards witnessed across the field overall. One of the unintended consequences of the minimalists' argument was a number of fruitful attempts to address the early sources in order to ascertain their potential use by historians, beginning with the English translation and republication of 'Abd al-Duri's *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs* in 1983.¹⁹² Published originally in Arabic in 1960, Duri had raised many of the same questions that the minimalists did two decades later, but had come to entirely different conclusions. He believed it possible to "undertake a truly historical study" after reorganizing the surviving texts according to their sources—as opposed to their compilers, the akhbārīs—and evaluating the materials using historical-critical methods.¹⁹³ The challenges laid down by the minimalist school prompted the rerelease of Duri's book, as it offered a ready-made response and suggested possible solutions.

Similar efforts followed. In 1988 R. Stephen Humphreys' masterful *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* not only discusses the issues inherent to the earliest historiographical materials, it also traces modern historiography on the subject, reviews the sources for later (post-classical) periods, offers a primer for researchers new to the field, and addresses some special problems in Islamic studies such as conversion, the

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 198. Both Crone and Cook eventually moved away from their radical-minimalist positions. For example, in 1987 Crone claimed in her study of Mecca that "I shall accept everything that the Muslims at large remembered as their past, provided that their recollection is not *obviously* wrong or questionable" (Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987], 92).

¹⁹² A. A. Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs*, ed. and trans. by Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

¹⁹³ Ibid., 8-9.

dhimmī, the 'ulamā', and that group largely unrepresented in the historiography of early Muslim society, the peasantry.¹⁹⁴

Following in the trail blazed by Noth, in 1998 Fred Donner sought to identify themes in the early sources, and determine when and why Muslim authors began writing history in the first place in his *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*.¹⁹⁵ While a revisionist himself, Donner leans towards a maximalist understanding of the sources, although he does treat them critically. For example, he applies a lexical approach in order to establish a time frame for authorship of the Qur'an prior to the First Fitna, and identifies three general themes within its corpus: paranetic, legalistic, and anecdotal.¹⁹⁶ He sees piety as the preeminent concern of the Qur'an, its narratives reducing characters to simple Manichean constructs. Donner evaluates the early historiographical works from source- and tradition-critical approaches, and considers their late authorships and socio-political contexts in identifying major literary issues and themes. As in his more-recent work, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Donner sees an overriding concern for piety in the earliest sources, to the extent that he downplays any materialistic influences on the Arab Conquests as incidental.¹⁹⁷ Similar to his evaluation of the Muslim scriptures, he also identifies three

¹⁹⁴ R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). The 1988 edition apparently suffered from what one reviewer called "an unsatisfactory printing" (Ulrich Haarmann, review of *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*, by R. Stephen Humphreys, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 37, no. 4 [1994]: 339).

¹⁹⁵ He also expresses a need to seriously evaluate some recent "radically revisionist interpretations." Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1998), ix.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 61, and 64-70.

¹⁹⁷ In part, *Muhammad and the Believers* epitomizes *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, although the discussion takes a different tack. While, in the former work, Donner admits that materialistic concerns played a part in motivating the Conquests, he only mentions them in passing, obviously favoring his thesis over other, equally-plausible interpretations. This is the weakest point in Donner's otherwise compelling argument. Examples abound that suggest an alternative interpretation. For example, al-Balādhurī's *Futūḥ al-buldān* reports many incidents where a desire for personal enrichment either motivates militant aggression, or

principle themes (arché, preparatory, and boundary), and four major issues (prophecy, community, hegemony, and leadership) throughout the akhbārī literature.¹⁹⁸ For the author, these often-overlapping labels denote different methods of legitimization through the use or creation of historical memory.

Chase F. Robinson helpfully places the original sources in their socio-political context in his succinctly-titled *Islamic Historiography*. The author sees some continuity between the pre-Islamic oral tradition and the efforts of the early muḥaddithūn and akhbārīs, but argues that a major perceptual change occurred as the caliphal bureaucracy developed and with it a need to record the past in a manner at least nominally more immutable than orality.¹⁹⁹ Similar to Humphreys' contribution to the field, Robinson has crafted a very useful synthesis that describes in detail not only the development of historiography in the pre-modern Muslim world, but also its physical aspects, from the pros and cons of early access to paper, to the work habits and cultural impact of the historians themselves. He possesses no delusions in regard to the sources, but his glass is half-full when it comes to their use as objects of historical study:

That the prevailing norms of early Islam valued the adaptation, redaction and reformulation of historical narrative, rather than the preservation of inert, historical data, certainly makes our present work more difficult. But it is far more important to see that they were part of the very dynamism that made early Islam so

comes as a much-appreciated consequence of proactive militancy on the part of the conquerors: Abū Bakr's call for troops to campaign in Syria, and Khālīd ibn al-Walīd's ordering of raids of the old market in Baghdad and, later, against the Banū Taghlib, clearly indicate that personal gain motivated the Arab armies at least as much—if not more—than concerns for righteous behavior. Al-Balādhurī's text is unequivocal; in the first example it accuses the troops as being "actuated by greed," while in the later examples the raiders, "filled their hands with gold and silver," and "enrich[ed] themselves with booty." See: Aḥmad bin Yahya bin Jābir al-Bilādurī [al-Balādhurī], *The Origins of the Islamic State: Being a Translation from the Arabic Accompanied with Annotations, Geographic and Historic Notes of the Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān*, trans. by Philip Khuri Hitti (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2011), 165, 394, and 399. Curiously, Donner includes al-Balādhurī in his consideration of the "beginnings of Islamic historical writing," including him in, "some of the more important works," but excludes him from the "Chronological List of Early Texts" which forms the appendix (Ibid., 132-3, and 297-306).

¹⁹⁸ Donner, *Narratives*, 142-4. As with Noth, Donner discusses many sub-themes as well.

¹⁹⁹ Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 10-11.

spectacularly adaptive and inventive. To make these early authorities objective and reliable transmitters of Islam's origins is not simply anachronistic, it undermines the creativity of early Muslims.²⁰⁰

Robinson argues that some of the issues modern historians see in the sources are actually the results of the early historiographers holding themselves to the best professional practices of their day. They were fully aware of the problems inherent to the ḥadīth and akhbār and knew that forgery and redaction plagued both. The early Muslim historians made judgments as to the reliability of their sources and the stories they related; sometimes they did so openly, as when al-Balādhurī related two versions of an event and claimed one superior to the other, or tacitly, by simply not relating akhbār they found unworthy. And, where one writer might have displayed his biases through the selection of his sources, what he chose to omit another typically decided to include. In other words, the participants in the early Islamic historiographical tradition behaved in a manner not unlike modern historians. Furthermore, the challenges posed by the early sources are no different in character or magnitude than those that face the study of other pre-modern cultures. Instead of declaring the akhbārīs guilty of bias (a case of the pot calling the kettle black to be sure), Robinson proposes that students of early Islam might achieve more fruitful results by looking at the early historiographic tradition *in toto*, and by considering the reception of the texts as much as their authorship.²⁰¹

While the struggle to salvage the historical usability of the early sources in general continued, a new generation of scholars turned to new avenues of approach and new sources to try and make sense of the Khawārij, their actions and beliefs. In her 2001 Ph.D. dissertation, Annie Campbell Higgens focused her attention on Khārijī poetry and

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 54.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 143-55.

proposed that the sect looked to Qur'an 2:207 as the core of their beliefs and self-identity. In that *āya*, after warning the listener against corruption and its fomenters, the text reads: "But among the people (there is) one who sells himself, seeking the approval of God."²⁰² Higgins argued that the Khawārij interpreted the idea of selling one's self as the ultimate sacrifice–martyrdom–and it is this understanding that undergirds Khārijī identity across all sectarian differences, to the extent that they universally adopted the label *shurāt* (sellers or exchangers; sing. *shārī*) for themselves. According to the author, this appellation provided continuity for the seceder community, linking living members with the dead, the founders with those who came later.²⁰³ Higgins looked in particular at those verses of Khārijī poetry that included the concept of exchange, and much to her credit she identified many. But one of the consequences of her exclusive focus on sectarian verse was that she could not help but see the Khawārij as motivated entirely by pietistic concerns, both individually and communally. This led her to adopt *a priori* the traditional interpretation of the qurrā' not just as reciters of Islamic scripture, but as people "who had committed the Qur'an to memory, and for whom the text was a constant companion."²⁰⁴ Some of the poetry examples she utilized, if juxtaposed with Jāhilīyya verse, can equally justify secular motivations.²⁰⁵ And, by not making this comparison, she also failed to see how many of the themes that occupied the pre-Islamic poets were adopted whole cloth by their Khārijī successors. In spite of these shortcomings, Higgins' central argument that the *shurāt* cognomen played an important role in self-identification

²⁰² This and all other citations from the Qur'an are, unless otherwise noted, from the A. J. Droge translation (*The Qur'an: A New Annotated Translation* [Sheffield: Equinox, 2014]). An *āyah* is a single Qur'anic verse (pl. *āyat*).

²⁰³ Annie Campbell Higgins, "The Qur'anic Exchange of the Self in the Poetry of Shurāt (Khārijī) Political Identity, 37-132 A.H./567-750 A.D." (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2001), 6-13.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁰⁵ E.g. *Ibid.*, 84 (the second quoted verse).

among the seceders has much to recommend it and certainly stands on solid ground, although whether scholars will ever prefer it to the long-entrenched Khārijī/Khawārij labels remains to be seen.²⁰⁶

Jeffrey T. Kenney has entered the discussion with a number of noteworthy contributions to the evolving understanding of Islam's first sectarians, first in his 1989 article, "The Emergence of the Khawārij: Religion and the Social Order in Early Islam." Therein, Kenney points to al-Shahrastānī's heresiography as evidence of Khārijī participation in a "continuum of rebellion" throughout the history of early Islam, and he assumes a nearly-clean split between pre-Islamic and post-Islamic Arabian-tribal culture, with *sābiqa* firmly established under 'Umar.²⁰⁷ According to Kenney, it is the failure of this attempt to redefine social order that ultimately led to the dissatisfaction of the proto-Khawārij. He argues that "We can arrive at a more convincing portrayal of the qurra' who became Khawārij [as distinct from those who did not]... if we trace out how the social structure had been Islamized by the authorities."²⁰⁸ The centralized application of *sābiqa* and its subsequent failure to survive (due to the slowing down of conquest, and therefore diminished availability of new sources of *ghanīma* and fay', combined with an attendant

²⁰⁶ The sectarians' proclivity for the term *shurāt* was previously noted, but not developed in: 'Azmi Muḥammad Shafīq al-Ṣāliḥī, "The Society, Beliefs and Political Theories of the Khārijites as Revealed in their Poetry of the Umayyad Era" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1975), 70. Al-Ṣāliḥī's work is interesting in that it approaches Khārijī history and culture from their own literature, as sparse as it is, but his conclusions appear to be heavily influenced by the master narrative. In 1988 another author examined the Khārijī poetry tradition to determine why certain verses and examples survived while others were excised. He concluded that, although the seceders' political messages lost relevance, some of their poetic works could be reinterpreted as "heroic verse," and therefore retained some cultural value in the greater Muslim society (Ghada Bathish Hallaq, *Discourse Strategies: The Persuasive Power of Early Khārijī Poetry*" [Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1988]). The present author, who out of curiosity regularly checks the Wikipedia entry for the "Khawārij", has recently noticed the addition of *al-Shurat* as an alternate identifier for the sect.

²⁰⁷ Jeffrey T. Kenney, "The Emergence of the Khawārij: Religion and the Social Order in Early Islam," *The UCLA Journal of Middle East Studies (JUSŪR)* 5 (1989): 5 and 19.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

loss of status for the so-called qurrā') led to the their dissatisfaction.²⁰⁹ The author's thesis vis-à-vis the proto-sectarians requires some mind-reading, and is self contradictory in places. He claims the qurrā' "were expressing their desire to maintain the established Islamic system of social order," and therefore "their own socioeconomic stability," when they split from 'Alī at Ṣiffīn, but that act both overturned the social order and presumably jeopardized economic stability in the areas that witnessed the most intense Khārijī activity.²¹⁰

Kenney builds his second argument on a more solid foundation. It is his contention that the future Khawārij appreciated life under 'Umar more than they anticipated they would under 'Alī after the latter acquiesced to the Ṣiffīn arbitration agreement, a decision that made it clear that the status quo initiated by the second caliph would not prevail. The expected changes in social order threatened to diminish the qurrā's status in Islamic society even more than it had under 'Uthmān, hence their separation from the community to forge one of their own.²¹¹ From Kenney's perspective, much more lies behind the appearance of the Khawārij than religious concerns, regardless of how they are presented in the sources. Complaints couched in dogmatic language are not necessarily religious at heart, any more than claims by the modern Republican Party to uphold Christian family values make the motives of the party and its members universally religious. One can point to the dissatisfaction expressed by al-Ashtar and the other Kufan qurrā' over 'Uthmān's redistribution of fay' lands in the Sawād and the attendant increase in economic and political power among the Quraysh in 33/653 as an

²⁰⁹ Ghanīma is movable booty taken in battle; see: *EF*², s.v. "ghanīma."

²¹⁰ Kenney, "Emergence of the Khawārij," 23.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

example.²¹² Overall, Kenney has not mitigated any of the issues that plague the sources, but he has provided an intriguing potential link between the qurrā' (whomever they might have been) and the early Khawārij that does not reduce them to one-dimensional religious fanatics.

Two years after publishing his article, Kenney completed his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Entitled "Heterodoxy and Culture: The Legacy of the Khawārij in Islamic History," it traces the historical process by which outside observers "created a category of thought known as the Khawārij," in what amounted to "a *post facto* theological gloss of earlier political actions."²¹³ Building on his earlier arguments in regard to the central role sābiqa played in the first sectarian division, he notes how that system created a faith-based social hierarchy, but that faith was not focused on Islam so much as on sābiqa itself. That system modified and replaced earlier, tribally-based hierarchies with such success that, when threatened by the policies of the third caliph and his successor, 'Alī, those later identified as Khawārij essentially underwent a crisis of faith.²¹⁴ "The reality world into which the Khawārij had been socialized was shattered," and so they created a new one in which they discarded sābiqa as the requisite for membership in the umma and replaced it with personal piety.²¹⁵ Kenney tracks this development in the tradition that eventually became Sunni orthodoxy, and in the works of Ibādī theologians. While in the case of the former the author does not venture into any new waters, his analysis of the quietist Khārijī sect reveals a desire to

²¹² Al- Ṭabarī, *Crisis*, 112-25.

²¹³ Jeffery T. Kenney, "Heterodoxy and Culture: The Legacy of the Khawārij in Islamic History" (Ph.D. diss., UC Santa Barbara, 1991), vi and 4-5.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68-70.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

justify the actions of its earliest ancestors while creating as much distance possible between the Ibāḍiyya and the Azāriqa.²¹⁶

Much of Kenney's dissertation undergirds his third contribution, *Muslim Rebels: Khārijītes and the Politics of Extremism in Egypt*, in which he examines the political and sectarian discourse in late twentieth and early twenty-first-century Egypt, a period in which the descriptor Khārijī has become a pejorative for extremist Islamist movements. As such, the author moves away from dissecting the early sources, although he does make some cogent observations.²¹⁷ Instead, he accepts the Khārijī master narrative as written, because that construction is today accepted as historical fact in the Egyptian-Islamist discourse. In a situation with many parallels to that involving ISIS discussed at the opening of the present work, Kenney notes the traditional role of the Khawārij as Islamic bogeymen has evolved into a tool with which to criticize Egyptian extremists.

Somewhat undeservedly, Hussam S. Timani lumps Kenney in with the greater Western historiographical tradition of Khārijī studies, which that author accuses of ambivalence and of creating an "unfavorable discussion" of the sect.²¹⁸ A not-entirely-inaccurate summation of twentieth-century scholarship, Kenney and other, more recent authors do not merit inclusion in Timani's condemnation. Regardless, he has provided the

²¹⁶ Ibid., 128-85.

²¹⁷ In this regard he offers nothing new. For example, in discussing the master narrative, Kenney sees the theological controversies of the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries behind its formation. The fact that so many of the Khārijī stories recorded by al-Ṭabarī and others sound so formulaic and repetitive (like many ḥadīth) leads the author to conclude, "The lateness of the compilation of our historical sources means that many social, political, and religious issues were the result of a back-reading of more refined theological/ideological views into the narrative stream of early Islamic history. Thus, the early historical record probably reveals more about the attitudes and concerns of those living in the late eighth- and ninth-century Islamic polity than those living in the seventh-century polity" (Jeffrey T. Kenney, *Muslim Rebels: Khārijītes and the Politics of Extremism in Egypt* [Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006], 25). This argument has been made time and again by numerous authors since Goldziher's *Muslim Studies*, without serious opposition.

²¹⁸ Hussam S. Timani, *Modern Intellectual Readings of the Khārijītes* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 75.

first book-length work devoted exclusively to a study of modern historiography on the Khawārij. Timani describes the difference in the sect's perception between Western scholars and those of the Middle East. The former group, still influenced by post-Enlightenment concepts of religion and the legacy of the Christian heresiographical tradition has only relatively recently started to move away from defining the Khawārij as either Islamic heretics or Puritans, notions without any contextual foundation in the Muslim world of the first century AH. On the other hand, the tendency in the modern Middle East has been to use the seceders "to promote and reflect modern ideologies and religious beliefs," in a manner similar to that noted by Kenney in regard to contemporary Egypt.²¹⁹ Timani appears to fall into the maximalist camp relative to the original sources, as he takes them all at face value in relating his summary of Khārijī history, a decision for which the reader can readily forgive the author since his goal is not to write the sectarians' history, but the historiography on the sectarians.²²⁰ Besides providing a useful summary in this regard, Timani also points to the considerable chasm that separates scholarship in the West from that in the Islamic world to the extent that many who live in the former remain ignorant of studies coming out of the latter, particularly those efforts by Arab historians to separate the Khawārij from modern ideological conflicts in order to restore the sect to the Arabo-Islamic heritage and culture from which it first evolved.²²¹

As the attentive reader has noticed, since the minimalist school first appeared study of the early Khārijī movement has tended to not venture far outside the realm of source analysis. In spite of the efforts of Duri, Humphreys, Donner, Robinson, and others, the problems facing the reconstruction of earliest Islam remain largely unresolved.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 1.

²²⁰ Ibid., 6-24.

²²¹ Ibid., 77.

Even Robinson, in his excellent study of the Khawārij in Marwānid-era Jazira, states without equivocation that “there is no certain evidence of pre-Marwānid Khārijites, and indeed we should hardly expect any, since there were no local state structures against which the Khārijite tribesmen might revolt.”²²² And in his dissertation, Kenney argues that

The Arabic sources do not provide sufficient evidence to reconstruct with any high degree of accuracy the events and causes leading up to the Khārijī split, let alone to sort out the social, political, economic and religious tensions which brought to a close the patriarchal Caliphate and ushered in the Umayyads. The best one can hope for is an incomplete or impressionistic picture.²²³

The assessment of the sources by the last author discussed herein is rather less rosy than either Robinson’s or Kenney’s. In her 2015 Ph.D. dissertation, Hanna Lenna Hagemann claims that the akhbār found in the early histories (particularly those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī) lack narrative substance but do contain literary clues and cues that belie the authors’ agendas. This condition “demonstrates the pitfalls of adhering to an unrestrainedly positivist approach to reading and writing (Islamic) history,” particularly in the case of the Khawārij.²²⁴ While the author’s assessment of the sources is not as hostile as Wansbrough’s, she certainly falls into the minimalist camp as to their historical reliability. For her, the condition is chronic, if not fatal:

This does not mean that there is absolutely no historical kernel to the reports that purport to preserve Khārijite history—indeed, it would be absurd to assume that we are confronted with a wholly imaginary narrative of the first two centuries of Islamic history. But there is no getting past the acknowledgment that whatever historical ‘truth’ has survived in the sources is woven into and often buried

²²² Chase F. Robinson, *Empire and Elites After the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 110. As compelling as the rest of Robinson’s discussion is, this particular statement creates too great a distinction between the loose, localized government of the early Islamic world versus the increasing centralization initiated under the Marwānids, a distinction that probably did not exist in the minds of those dissatisfied with the Sufyānids.

²²³ Kenney, “Heterodoxy and Culture,” 2.

²²⁴ Hannah-Lena Hagemann, “History and Memory: Khārijism in Early Islamic Historiography” (Ph.D. diss. University of Edinburgh, 2014), 191.

underneath a complex construct of literary and rhetorical elements many of whose subtleties and double entendres had already been lost to the passage of time when the reports finally found their way into the works of al-Balādhurī and his fellow historiographers.²²⁵

While Hagemann focuses her analysis on narratives involving the Khawārij and their opponents, she has actually challenged the entirety of the early Islamic historiographical tradition in a way not proposed since *Hagarism*.

For the period of time covered by her study—37/657 to 86/705—Hagemann treads in Noth's footsteps in identifying topoi found in the Khārijī reports. Like him, she interprets numerous akhbār as chiefly concerned with propagating a particular topos rather than historical accuracy. Some of the examples she provides are indeed obvious in their authorial agendas, of which one example shall suffice. In a battle outside Kufa in the year 77/696-697 the forces of the Khārijī rebel Shabīb ibn Yazīd fought those of al-Ḥajjāj, the man appointed governor of Iraq by the Caliph 'Abd al-Mālik (r. 65-86/685-705). Shabīb had a mere 200 men, while the governor arrived with 4,000, including some of the Kufan tribal nobility. In spite of the tremendous disparity in numbers, the rebels got the better of their opponents, and drove back some of al-Ḥajjāj's commanders piecemeal. Then, in the midst of the battle and as the rebels stood on the verge of total victory, one of the Khawārij grabbed the bridle of Shabīb's horse and subjected the commander to a spontaneous inquisition regarding the previous Khārijī leader, Ṣāliḥ b. Mussariḥ. Shabīb spoke negatively of Ṣāliḥ, at which the questioner stormed off with almost all of Shabīb's men. While such questionings make frequent appearances in the Khārijī historiographical tradition (and therefore constitute something of a topos themselves if we extend Hagemann's argument), in this case the context makes the

²²⁵ Ibid., 192.

spontaneous inquisition appear completely ludicrous. Hagemann claims that the akhbārī (in this case, al-Ṭabarī) has actually related a topos intended to describe the Khawārij as internally divisive to the extent that it makes success for them unattainable. According to her,

The perpetual disagreements over often minute doctrinal details and the near-impossible requirements imposed on the leader illustrate not only the pettiness of the Khārijite mindset, but—most importantly—point out the inherent fallibility of Khārijism and its obsession with militant piety, which is thus discarded as a viable model for a Muslim way of life.²²⁶

For the author, this and similar stories raise troubling questions about the reliability of the sources and the potential pitfalls of taking them at face value.

But Hagemann's repeated claims that many of the earliest stories involving the Khawārij exist not to "discuss Khārijism as an end in itself but in order to raise other issues" are hardly novel.²²⁷ While the identification of topoi proves useful for source analysis, their existence does not *ipso facto* make the stories they relate apocryphal. Neither does the author's criterion of repetition; that different actors use similar terminology and take similar actions in similar contexts is less a reason to relegate the sources to the dust bin as it is an expression of normative human behavior, completely coherent with group identity formation.²²⁸ A hint of conspiracy theory necessarily undergirds the author's claims, as they seem to necessitate a conscious effort on the part of the akhbārīs to revise or even invent the past. But Hagemann's accusations of authorial biases and their impact on early Islamic historiography are functionally identical to the

²²⁶ Ibid., 207-8, and 212.

²²⁷ Ibid., 222. Hagemann does not hide this fact herself, and points to several other scholars who precede her in taking a literary approach to the sources, in particular: Boaz Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing Ṭabarī's History* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); and Tayeb el-Hibri, *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History: The Rashidun Caliphs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

²²⁸ Hagemann, 65-71.

issues that face historians of all eras, particularly pre-modern ones. No historian writes without bias, and yet other subfields have not found it necessary to take the dramatic linguistic U-turn suggested by Hagemann.

That said, while some of her conclusions overreach, her analysis shines. Hagemann sheds brilliant light on the bipolar divisions witnessed in the modern historiographical tradition by identifying trends found in the akbārī tradition in which different authorial priorities shaped their presentations of the Khawārij in different periods. Between Ṣiffīn and the death of ‘Alī, the major Muslim historiographers offered purely religious motivations for Khārijī actions. This occurred again during the caliphate of ‘Abd al-Mālīk when the rebels claimed that their opponents (the caliph, al-Ḥajjāj, Ibn al-Zubayr, et al.) did not adhere to the Qur'an and Sunna, making jihad against them a responsibility. Yet the complaints of the qurrā’ before ‘Uthmān's murder in regard to their declining status, and the distribution of the fay’ and government posts all reveal secular concerns.²²⁹ In other words, the akhbārīs laid the foundations on which modern historians have constructed their either-or analyses, because the conclusions drawn by any particular scholar depend on the period and sources under examination. While Hagemann ends her analysis just a few years after the Azāriqa-Najdāt split, it could find fruitful application in later periods as well. Coincidentally, her work also goes a long way towards explaining the evolution of the Khārijī master narrative into its present form.

Hagemann begins her dissertation with her central claim that "it is next to impossible to tell who the early Khārijites were and what they hoped to achieve 'in actuality'," and she ends on an only-marginally less-bleak note.²³⁰ She does admit to the

²²⁹ This is the present author's overall impression of chapters 3-5 of Hagemann's dissertation.

²³⁰ Ibid., 8.

existence of a consistent overall narrative among the historiographers of the third century AH, one that presents a general consensus in regard to the sequence of events and list of actors. But they differ markedly in the details.²³¹ It is this difference that leads her to assert that “neither a distinct and well-developed literary Khārijite identity, nor a convincing ‘historical’ one, can be discerned in the accounts’ depiction of the rebels’ thoughts and deeds in the second half of the seventh century CE.”²³² She concludes her extensive (and impressive) literary analysis with a caveat for those who follow: “While I would not agree that it is altogether impossible to reconstruct the events of the formative period of Islam, the present thesis has shown the perils of choosing one set of reports over another.”²³³

Looking to Albrecht Noth and Eckart Stetter for inspiration, Hagemann has subjected the early Muslim historiographers to the scrutiny of literary criticism in an attempt to emancipate the sources from persistent attempts to extract positivist interpretations of the historical events they purport to describe.²³⁴ She and her predecessors borrowed their methodology from the field of Biblical criticism, where literary analysis is just one approach among many to the study of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. The next chapter proposes that some of the other methods from that discipline, in conjunction with social identity theory, can be put to fruitful use in making plausible positivist statements about early Islam and the Khawārij.

²³¹ Ibid., 241-43.

²³² Ibid., 256.

²³³ Ibid., 262.

²³⁴ Stetter's 1965 Ph.D. dissertation, *Topoi und Schemata in Ḥadīth*, preceded Noth in identifying topoi and schemata in the sources. Ibid., 34, and 42-47.

Chapter IV

Analytical Tools

As history continues to evolve into a multidisciplinary effort, the use of analytical tools borrowed from other fields opens the door to new interpretations bolstered by more than just the intellect and intuition of the individual historian. In this chapter, the present author proposes two sets of tools, one borrowed from social psychology, the other from Biblical criticism, for application to the early Muslim historiographical tradition. While they do not find universal use, where applicable they allow for a deeper analysis of the sources, which in turn leads to the creation of a more-probable reconstruction of the Khawārij, their beliefs and motivations, than that offered by the present master narrative.

Social (or Group) Identity Theory

The study of human identity aims to understand the processes through which individuals come to see themselves, and how that perception influences action. Erik H. Erikson, one of the field's first proponents, published his psychohistory of Martin Luther in 1962 in which he used the reformer to explain the developmental path of the young human psyche and the impact of identity crises thereon. In *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, Erikson came to the conclusion that "human nature can best be studied in the state of conflict," and in that regard Luther made an excellent subject.²³⁵ According to the author, Luther's increasing dissatisfaction with contemporary Roman

²³⁵ Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962), 16.

Catholicism, a dissatisfaction fueled by his relationship with his father, led him to rebel.

While Erikson did not set out to study social identity, he did discuss how it relates to identity formation in the individual. Group identity (which the author called “tradition”) must

support the primary function of every individual ego, which is to transform instinctual energy into patterns of action, into character, into style—in short, into an identity with a core of integrity which is to be derived from and also contributed to the tradition. There is an optimum ego synthesis to which the individual aspires; and there is an optimum societal metabolism for which societies and cultures strive. In describing the interdependence of individual aspiration and of societal striving, we describe something indispensable to human life.²³⁶

While many found *Young Man Luther* significantly flawed as a work of history, Erikson's impact on the field of identity theory has endured.²³⁷

The study of identity formation among groups found motivation in the widespread social unrest witnessed in the United States and Europe during the 1960s and 1970s, in particular that expressed by minorities and college-age youths. Since then, a number of approaches or "emphases" to understanding identity construction have evolved: Symbolic, Interactional, Structural, and Perceptual Control.²³⁸ While different researchers have applied their own labels to the elements involved in identity formation, their overall results have proven remarkably similar. In 1979 social psychologists Henry Tajfel and John Turner looked at intergroup conflict as a means of studying the formation and expression of social identity. The duo defined a group as "a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some

²³⁶ Ibid., 254.

²³⁷ For examples of criticism of *Young Man Luther*, see: Yehudi A. Cohen, review of *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* by Erik H. Erikson, *American Anthropologist* 62, no. 3 (June 1960): 547-49; and Donald B. Meyer, review of *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* by Erik H. Erikson, *History and Theory*, 1, no. 3 (1961), 291-97. C.f., see Herbert Hauck, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* by Erik H. Erikson, *The American Scholar* 28, no. 2 (Spring 1959), 246 and 248.

²³⁸ Peter J. Burke, and Jane E. Stets, *Identity Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33-53.

emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership in it."²³⁹ The authors' analysis led them to identify three characteristics inherent to social identity. First, the drive to possess a positive social identity is universal among humans. Second, it derives largely from comparisons between the member group and relevant out-groups in which the former is gauged superior. Finally, social identities that prove unsatisfactory may lead individuals to either leave their current group or take actions to make it appear more positively distinct in comparison to competitive out-groups. Differentiation serves as one of the principal goals of group identity formation in the attempt to establish or maintain perceived superiority over out-groups. At a foundational level, social identity formation is a competitive process that "requires a situation of mutual comparison and differentiation on a shared value dimension" between groups.²⁴⁰

Most importantly, Tajfel and Turner maintained that social identity formation is inherently ethnocentric, which creates favoritism towards the in-group and its members, and a converse discrimination against relevant out-groups. These perceptions exist from the moment of a group's genesis. In this regard, the authors predicted that "Whenever social stratification is based on an unequal division of scarce resources—such as power, prestige, or wealth—between social groups, the social situation should be characterized by pervasive ethnocentrism and out-group antagonism between the over- and underprivileged groups."²⁴¹ In other words, perceived inequalities not only contribute to social identity formation, they also fuel intergroup competition and ethnocentrism

²³⁹ Henry Tajfel, and John Turner. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Monterey: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1979), 40.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

which creates a self-feeding cycle. The more intensely two groups compete with one another, the more that conflict reinforces the morale of each group and solidarity among its members, to the extent that group identity becomes the dominating influence on individual behavior.²⁴²

Other research has by and large confirmed the conclusions of Tajfel and Turner in regard to the formation and expression of group identity. Vladimir J. Konečni's study of aversive events—those occurrences most people would avoid altogether if given the choice—identified motivating factors in intergroup conflict. The author provided an extensive list:

being slighted or humiliated; losing income or property (through others' actions or natural causes); being obstructed in the gratification of basic needs or in the achievement of important goals (by social or nonsocial agents); observing that any of the above has occurred to others with whom one has a positive social/emotional bond.... A real or imaginary threat of such a loss... unequivocally qualify for membership in the class of aversive events.²⁴³

Konečni admitted that aversive events are not necessary to drive intergroup conflict, but they do tend to forge strong memories that affect attitudes and responses to subsequent events, and hence can have “delayed effects on aggression and conflict,” that leave an “evaluative bad aftertaste” capable of breeding aggression and anger.²⁴⁴ The research of Muzafar and Carolyn W. Sherif coincided with Konečni's. The couple looked at the nature of intergroup conflict and surmised that, between groups,

The issues at stake are usually interests of considerable consequence to the groups, if they are to play a part in intergroup relations. They may be a real or imagined threat to the safety of the group as a whole, economic interests, a political advantage, a military consideration, prestige, or a number of others. Once a

²⁴² Ibid., 33-34.

²⁴³ Vladimir J. Konečni, “The Role of Aversive Events in the Development of Intergroup Conflict,” in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. by William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Monterey: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1979), 85-86.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 86 and 88.

particular issue comes to the foreground as the dominant influence in intergroup relations, it may become the *limiting factor*, the main anchorage in interaction processes between them coloring their evaluations of all other issues which arise.²⁴⁵

According to the Sherifs, groups faced with frustrating and competitive situations will form negative impressions of one another which ultimately evolve into stereotypes that create prejudice—even to the point of social exclusion. Conversely, in-group identity tends to focus on self-justification and self-glorification.²⁴⁶ Because group members generally perceive their identity as immutable and therefore eternal, the memory of past instances of intergroup conflict lingers and justifies future clashes. These factors can ultimately lead to a point of no return in which, in the absence of any superordinate goals (i.e. those that supersede the conflicts between groups and require cooperation to achieve), attempts at communication and cooperation tend towards friction and mutual antagonism.²⁴⁷

Further research has revealed the sway social identity holds over the individual. In their 1981 study of how the potential for group reward creates intergroup bias, Graham M. Vaughan, Jennifer Williams, and Tajfel determined that individuals tend to favor choices that provide maximum relative gain for their in-group. Overall, study participants preferred choices that resulted in the greatest difference in reward between in- and out-groups. Surprisingly, the trio found that this condition pertained even in situations where the choice would obviously result in a net loss for the in-group.²⁴⁸ In other words, harm to the out-group proved more influential than benefit to the in-group in motivating action. Gender and age had no notable impact on this outcome. The principal

²⁴⁵ Muzafer Sherif, and Carolyn W. Sherif, "Research on Intergroup Relations," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Monterey: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1979), 10. Emphasis in original.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴⁸ Graham M. Vaughan, Henri Tajfel, and Jennifer Williams, "Bias in Reward Allocation in an Intergroup and Interpersonal Context," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (Mar. 1981): 37-41.

motivator for this behavior was group membership itself, and it likewise created greater discrimination between people of different groups.²⁴⁹ This led the authors to conclude that

an individual's sense of worth is significantly influenced by group membership(s) and by the process of making comparisons with relevant out-groups. Positive aspects of an individual's identity can be enhanced in terms which are socially defined and located within a group, whenever an intergroup comparison points to the in-group as being unique or distinctive in some respects.²⁵⁰

Subsequent research has confirmed these results, and applied them equally to various types of social organizations.²⁵¹

Historians too have utilized the understanding of identity formation developed since Erikson's seminal work to construct their own interpretations of populations long vanished. Robert Markus, in tracing the evolution of the Christian sense of self from the reign of Constantine to the pontificate of Gregory the Great, described it as one long identity crisis in process. With the sanctification of the faith by the first Eastern emperor, members found they could no longer define themselves as they had since the first century CE—as a minority community of the pious oppressed who prioritized life in the next world over that in the present. This change in political status created a situation analogous with Tajfel and Turner's third characteristic feature of social identity: the original group identity, which revolved around persecution and the salvific power of suffering and martyrdom, was no longer achievable; the environment that made it a

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 38-41.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 38.

²⁵¹ E.g.: Blake E. Ashforth, and Fred Mael, "Social Identity Theory and the Organization," *The Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 1 (Jan. 1989): 20-39; Daniel Hart, Cameron Richardson, and Britt Wilkenfeld, "Civic Identity," in *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, ed. by Seth J. Schwartz, Koen Luyckx, and Vivian L. Vignoles, 2 vols. (New York: Springer, 2012); and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Peter L. Benson, and Peter C. Scales, "Spiritual Identity: Contextual Perspectives," in *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, ed. by Seth J. Schwartz, Koen Luyckx, and Vivian L. Vignoles, 2 vols. (New York: Springer, 2012).

reality no longer existed. It had vanished in a flurry of imperial legislation, leaving contemporary Christians with two options: abandon their faith, or redefine what it meant to belong. The latter proved more compelling because Christian identity continued to have social cachet, and indeed membership became more attractive to the majority in the absence of institutional persecution and the presence of imperial patronage. How Christians solved this problem lies at the heart of Markus' book, *The End of Ancient Christianity*. The critical element of that solution involved reinterpreting their communal past in a manner that accommodated their new reality yet maintained the connection to a distinctly Christian history. In summarizing the process, Markus claimed that "a continuous biography is the core of our sense of personal identity. This is true no less of a group's sense of identity. It needs to be able to recognize itself as one and the same group enduring through time, the heir of its own past."²⁵² One need look no farther than fundamentalist religious groups, sports fans, or twenty-first century U.S. politics for contemporary examples of Markus' claim. As shall be demonstrated later in the present work, it is also clearly reflected in Ibāḍī identity formation.²⁵³

Social identity theory helps explain the appearance, activity, and appeal of the Khawārij in the context of the early Islamic world, a time of great change and shifting socio-economic fortunes for many. The collective research of Tajfel, Turner, Konečni, and other social psychologists has received criticism for its inability to consistently predict future behaviors, but it does provide a useful analytical framework for examining past behaviors, as witnessed in Markus' study of Late Antique Christianity.²⁵⁴ In this regard social identity theory has the potential to make sense of historical groups like the

²⁵² R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 85.

²⁵³ See chapter 7.

²⁵⁴ Burke and Stets, 35-36.

Khawārij in two ways: first, it can help identify those akhbār more likely to represent the sectarians as they actually existed; second, an understanding of group identity formation will allow for the isolation of the most-probable motivators for their actions. The relevant criteria of social identity theory to bear in mind when evaluating the Khārijī akhbār are:

1. Group identity *must* have some perceived benefit for members.
2. Group identity is formed in comparison to other groups with which the in-group competes on some level.
3. That underlying goal of group identity is to create distinction between the in-group and out-groups.
4. Competition for resources can foster group identities and increase discrimination between them.
5. Competition takes the form of favoring the in-group and discrimination against out-groups. Favoritism takes the form of positive rhetoric and support of fellow members and the group in general. Discrimination relies on negative rhetoric, and can also manifest as physical separation or confrontation if conditions warrant.
6. When the disparity in access to resources is great, in-group ethnocentrism and out-group discrimination increase, particularly for the disadvantaged group.
7. Past events, especially perceived injustices, have a strong influence on group identity formation and provide justification for further conflict with out-groups.

8. When a social identity no longer meets the needs of a member, that member may suffer an identity crisis, the response to which will either take the form of action to rectify the situation, alter the group identity to make it acceptable under prevailing circumstances, or leave the group.

In subsequent chapters these criteria are applied where relevant, with the intention of identifying those sources that reflect favorably with the tenets listed above. As Cobb has shown for the Christian martyriological tradition, these tools are useful for analyzing the akhbār and ḥadīth as literary constructs that participate in an ongoing dialogue of identity construction.²⁵⁵ Beyond Cobb's utilization, the present author also implements social identity theory to dissect select sources for any signs of historicity.

The Tools of Biblical Criticism

Of course, the analysis just proposed can only accomplish so much when it comes to making definitive statements about the potential accuracy of the early reports. In order to mitigate some of the many uncertainties inherent to that process, the present author makes use of a second set of analytical tools, this time borrowed from the field of Biblical criticism, in order to provide another layer of analysis. While on the surface the sacred scriptures of the Jewish and Christian traditions may not appear to have a great deal in common with the early Islamic historical texts, a deeper look reveals that in fact they are analogous to one another in many respects. Consider Alexander Rofé's description of the historical contexts of the books of the Hebrew Bible:

On the one hand, these works portray, in living color, events that occurred at the dawn of Israelite civilization, as if their authors were contemporaries of the events described. On the other hand, these works were transmitted to us by the Jewish

²⁵⁵ Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*.

community of the Persian and Hellenistic eras. Thus, hundreds of years separate the events from the canonization of the books which describe them; the place and date of authorship of most of these books is indeterminate, with possibilities ranging over hundreds of years, from the era of Israelite origins through the end of the Persian period.²⁵⁶

In other words, the relationship of these Hebrew texts to Israelite identity is chronologically similar to that of the historiographic tradition in Islam and the formation of Muslim identity. In both cases what later interpreters deemed canonical were in fact separated from that decision by multiple generations themselves involved in an ongoing process of identity formation.²⁵⁷

These traditions also share cultural, linguistic, and geographical affinities, and both trace their roots back to early Mesopotamian literature, a connection for which ample attestation exists. Assyriologists have traced the best-known example, the deluge myth, back to the fragmentary *Eridu Genesis* (third millennium BCE), and scholars have identified numerous recognizable descendents: *Atrahasis* (ca. 1640 BCE), the *Gilgamesh Epic* (ca. 1100 BCE), the first book of the Torah (Gen. 6:5-10:1, ca. second-half of the first millennium BCE), Berrosus' *Babylonian History* (ca. 278 BCE), several Greek versions (the oldest of which may date as far back the seventh-century BCE), and a retelling by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (d. 17 CE).²⁵⁸ The Qur'an itself adopts and adapts the Biblical story of the flood myth in two different versions: a detailed retelling in 11:25-48, and a second intended as a protreptic threat of the "shape up or face hell fire" sort in sūra 71. Further justification for using the analytical tools from the field of

²⁵⁶ Alexander Rofé, "Joshua 20: Historico-Literary Criticism Illustrated," in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, ed. by Jeffrey H. Tigay (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1985), 132.

²⁵⁷ While the temporal distance between an event and its recording in the Christian canonical texts is significantly less, it still raises the same sorts of questions.

²⁵⁸ Tawny L. Holm, "Ancient Near Eastern Literature: Genres and Forms," in *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*, ed. by Daniel C. Snell (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 274-75; and Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.274-437.

Biblical criticism is found in the copious and obvious borrowings in the Muslim scriptures from the Jewish and Christian canons.²⁵⁹ This practice also found its way into the ḥadīth, and therefore into the sīra, tārīkh, and other literary genres, as seen in the very-Abrahamic example of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s proposed sacrifice discussed in the preceding chapter. Finally, parallels between Biblical and Islamic literature in terms of form, style, and function also exist, providing further impetus to the proposed analysis.

The analogous nature of the early Muslim historical works to Mesopotamian literature in general and Biblical texts more specifically suggests that a similar avenue of study has the potential to yield fruitful results. In particular, historico-literary criticism plays a central role in the present work.²⁶⁰ Recognizing certain literary elements in the Khārijī akhbār–conflation, assimilation, distinction, difficulty, and analog–adds another layer of interpretation. Borrowed from Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis, conflation occurs whenever a redactor or compiler does one of three things with different tellings of the same event: juxtaposes the versions so that one reinforces the other; treats them as completely distinct and unrelated events; or merges them into a single narrative with elements from both. The first book of the Pentateuch provides examples of these redactional practices. For example, two different accounts of creation are placed one right after another without comment from the anonymous editor-compiler, the second serving

²⁵⁹ For discussions of these similarities, see: Michael Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and Qur’an Side by Side* (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2010); and Marlies ter Bord, *Sharing Mary: Bible and Qur’an Side by Side*, 2nd ed. (Charleston: CreateSpace, 2010).

²⁶⁰ As with literary criticism in general, the terms used by Biblical critics have a tendency towards the mercurial. The present author prefers "historico-literary criticism" over "historical criticism" (although he may use them synonymously at times) because it better represents the process and goal at hand which is, to paraphrase Rofé, to extract from the sources a plausible historical narrative and identity (Rofé, 132). For a useful discussion of the numerous "criticisms" utilized in Biblical studies, see: Richard N. Soulen, and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

to bolster the main idea of the first that the God of Abraham created the cosmos (Gen. 1:1-2:24).²⁶¹

Contrary to conflation, assimilation is the process by which two originally distinct reports bore sufficient similarity that they eventually exerted such literary influence that details from one made their way into the other, and perhaps vice-versa. While similarity and repetition may well be the definitive features of human experience across history, in some instances identical details are best interpreted as the product of such literary merging. In the case of resurrections performed by Elijah and Elisha, sufficient similarity in detail exists to suggest that one tradition borrowed from the other (1 Kings 17:17-24, and 2 Kings 4:8-37).²⁶² Evaluation of these pericopes also makes use of the criterion of distinction, a critical method useful in the evaluation of multiple versions of the same event or in cases of assimilation like these resurrection narratives. In proposing his “new approach” to the Synoptic Gospels, Rudolph Bultmann looked to the foibles of human memory and the inherent desire for greater detail in describing the presence of distinction in the Christian tradition:

Whenever narratives pass from mouth to mouth the central point of the narrative and general structure are well preserved; but in the incidental details changes take place, for imagination paints such details with increasing distinctness. In the later legends it is to be observed, for example, that names are sought for many people whom the Gospels mention without naming them. What was the name of the woman with the issue of blood whom Jesus healed? Who were the thieves crucified with Jesus? What was the name of the captain of the guard over the grave of Jesus? Later legends undertake to tell us.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Jeffrey H. Tigay, "Conflation as Redactional Technique," in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, ed. by Jeffrey H. Tigay (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1985), 54.

²⁶² Yair Zakovitch, "Assimilation in Biblical Narratives," in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, ed. by Jeffrey H. Tigay (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1985), 175-76.

²⁶³ Rudolph Bultmann, "The New Approach to the Synoptic Problem," *The Journal of Religion* 6, no. 4 (July 1926): 345-46.

In other words, the more detail a version of an event contains, the more likely it represents a later telling thanks to the human proclivity to expand rather than epitomize memory. Although it must be used with considerable care, the criterion of distinction has generated fruitful results, including the establishment of Mark as the premier Gospel by general consensus among New Testament critics; and by several ḥadīth scholars who have used it to evaluate differences in isnād found in related traditions.²⁶⁴

The criterion of difficulty as applied herein favors versions of akhbār that cast a negative light on otherwise respected individuals or groups, those that reflect positively on doctrine later deemed heterodox, or reports which might otherwise prove embarrassing to a scribe engaged in the reproduction of a manuscript. The principle behind this criterion, *lectio difficilior probabilior* ("the more difficult reading is the more probable"), assumes that copyists would redact such passages if possible.²⁶⁵ Akhbār in which these challenging materials survive are more likely to reflect actual events, ones so widely known and acknowledged that their deliberate omission or revision by scribes would be noticed and condemned by others. The Christian tradition provides an illustrative example. In comparing the different versions of the encounter between Jesus of Nazareth and the Syrophoenician woman, Mark 7:24-30 presents a rather terse, even dismissive Jesus, who appears to reward the gentile female for her witty rejoinder to his initial rejection of her request to heal her demon-possessed daughter. On the other hand, Matthew 15:21-28 makes this rather-awkward tale somewhat more palatable by having

²⁶⁴ For examples both of where this criterion works and fails in Biblical studies, see Leslie R. Keylock, "Bultmann's Law of Increasing Distinction," in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenney Presented by his Former Students*, ed. by Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1975), 193-210. For a useful discussion of its use in analyzing isnād, particularly by van Ess and Schacht, see Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 107-15.

²⁶⁵ Soulen and Soulen, 100.

Jesus claim he healed the girl because her mother displayed great faith. In this example, Mark's version provides the more difficult reading from the perspective of the faithful, and therefore likely represents the original tradition. Similar internal conflicts exist in the early Islamic historiographical sources, most notably in the case of the Companion-*cum*-Khārijī, Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr. As shall be seen, his dual status as respected contemporary of the Prophet and first-generation sectarian proved an embarrassment to later traditionists and akhbārīs who felt compelled to preserve his memory while somehow explaining his rejection of the fourth caliph.²⁶⁶

The last text-critical tool to find use herein, analog, seeks useful comparisons from other sources. While analogs fall short of providing incontestable proof, they can demonstrate "what is plausible or realistic by showing what has happened elsewhere."²⁶⁷ In other words, they support proposed connections by identifying similar occurrences, even those from other traditions or cultures. Biblical critics look for analogous sources in the greater Greco-Roman milieu as well as in the ancient Near East.

All of these analytical tools find relevant objects in the historical works of the early Muslim world, where examples of conflation, assimilation, distinctiveness, and difficulty abound. So do analogs from both Arabian and neighboring cultures. In the former, poetry during and after the Jāhilīyya provides evidence in regard to the central features of tribal identity formation; in the latter, the polemical works of Christian authors helps frame the debates over Muslim identity, particularly heresiographical and martyriological works. It is essential to note that not all ḥadīth or akhbār will avail

²⁶⁶ Ḥurqūṣ is not alone in occupying an awkward position in early-Islamic history, and the early chroniclers and muḥaddithūn had to come to grips with a number of individuals who had status as both Companions and anti-caliphal rebels.

²⁶⁷ Jeffrey H. Tigay, "Introduction," in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, ed. by Jeffrey H. Tigay (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1985), 17.

themselves to the tools of the Biblical critic for a variety of reasons. This proves most often the case with isolated reports and short narrations that lack detail in the form of dialogue or elements of pathos. Furthermore, some of the tools of scriptural analysis are not appropriate to the present study regardless. The stylistic facets of source criticism do not find a home herein, in part because the author does not possess the requisite knowledge in Arabic linguistics, but principally because such analysis offers little in the way of direct relevance. The criteria of authenticity utilized by New Testament scholars to validate traditions about Jesus likewise do not apply here. On the other hand, while those tools selected for application to the early Muslim sources must be used with care to avoid circular or over-reaching conclusions, some of the distinct features of that tradition eliminate certain obstacles inherent in others. Unlike the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, early Islamic historiography possesses considerable transparency in terms of authorship and redaction thanks to the use of the *isnād* and the *akhbārīs'* predilection for relating multiple versions of the same event. In other words, Muslim compilers often declared openly that which remained unsaid in the other Abrahamic traditions. That many *isnād* resulted from forgery mandates due diligence in their analysis wherever possible before proposing definitive conclusions.

In order to apply the analytical tools discussed in this chapter in a meaningful manner, an understanding of the historical and cultural context of early Islam is essential. That faith's genesis occurred in a complex environment, under influences both internal and external. But the tribal milieu proved the dominant factor. It influenced every aspect of life on the Arabian Peninsula, left an indelible imprint on the nascent religion, and helped foster the dissent that led to the appearance of the *Khawārij*.

Chapter V

Context

In spite of its many shortcomings, the central argument of *Hagarism* remains irrefutable: Islam's genesis occurred in the context of the Late Antique world, a world dominated by the two great Western superpowers: the Byzantine (Roman) and Sasanian (Persian) empires. Until relatively recently, many scholars have tended to treat the appearance of the new faith as largely detached from its pre-Islamic context.²⁶⁸ The reality, of course, is far more complex and only surfaces through a cross-cultural study involving the empires, their client states, the Arabs, and a web of relationships forged between ever-shifting tribal identities.

Romans, Persians, and Arabs

The ongoing conflict between the two principle powers of the Near East provided the single-greatest external influence on life in the Arabian Peninsula. Both

²⁶⁸ This is no doubt due to convenience, but it does tend to divorce the complex world of the pre-Islamic Near East from any study of the nascent faith and its subsequent development. This tendency often takes the form of a brief acknowledgement of the context in which Islam appeared in the early seventh century, perhaps presented with a few convenient bits of data, before the author forges ahead without ever looking back, the net effect of which is to allege some connections without ever explicitly making them. The field abounds with examples, of which a few must suffice here: Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); William Ochsenswald, and Sydney Nettleton Fisher, *The Middle East: A History* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2011); Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). The first three examples provide brief, stock discussions of the pre-Islamic context before moving on to Islam—a particularly disappointing authorial decision in the case of Hourani, considering the title of his book. Rahman limits his discussion of the Middle East before Muḥammad to a single paragraph in the introduction. (C.f., besides *Hagarism* see: Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003]; Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Classical Age of Islam*, vol. 1 of *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); and Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* [Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2004]. These authors provide useful chapters that ground the appearance of Islam in its Late Antique context.)

engaged in active trade with Arab merchants, and with trade came cultural as well as material exchange. The empires also made use of vassal tribes or confederations to provide buffers against one another and to mitigate the impact of raids by the tribesmen themselves. Following a practice initiated by Constantius II (r. 337-61), the Romans made *foederati* (“barbarian” allies of the empire) of the Jafnids, and by extension the Banū Ghassān, sometime in the late-fifth or early-sixth century²⁶⁹ after portions of that tribe migrated from south Arabia to Syria and displaced the previously-dominant tribe of Salīḥ, which until then had itself enjoyed a pact with Constantinople.²⁷⁰ The terms of the treaty between the Jafnids and the Romans included mutual defense, and a promise on the part of the Arabs to not meddle in the empire's Persian affairs.²⁷¹ In return for their loyalty and, by implication, that of their people, Jafnid leaders received various imperial favors. On a material level, Constantinople granted them the *annona*, a material subsidy paid either in specie or goods.²⁷² Less tangible but essential for legitimation of the bond and the authority subsumed by the federate chief over other tribal nobles, the Byzantine emperor also granted titles to his Arab allies. The Jafnid King al-Ḥārith held the Byzantine titles *phylarkos* (phylarch) and *patrikios* under his Greek name, Arethas, when he visited the Emperor Justinian I (r. 527-65) in Constantinople in 564, the purpose of the

²⁶⁹ Since this chapter deals primarily with pre-Islamic events, all dates provided are CE unless otherwise noted. While agreement among scholars has yet to coalesce, Irfan Shahīd argued that the phrase *ton tes thalabanes legomenon* found in the *foedus* (treaty) of 502 refers to the Jafnid al-Ḥārith; see: Irfan Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, vol. 1.1 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 3-8.

²⁷⁰ Greg Fisher, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 95; and *EI2*, s.v. "Salih."

²⁷¹ Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 240-41.

²⁷² Michael C. A. Macdonald, et al., “Arabs and Empires before the Sixth Century,” in *Arabs and Empires Before Islam*, ed. by Greg Fisher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 77.

trip to declare which of the phylarch's sons would succeed him in bearing that title.²⁷³

This meeting was essential to the process, because the Romans forged their alliances with individuals, not polities or groups.²⁷⁴

Analogous to the Jafnids, to the east the Naşrids possessed a similar relationship with the Sasanians.²⁷⁵ Long associated with the Lakhm tribe, recent studies have established that as too facile a connection when in fact the situation in the Naşrid capital, al-Ĥīrah, was in all probability much more diverse thanks to the city's placement on a major trade route along the Euphrates River.²⁷⁶ As with the Romans and Jafnids, the Sasanians maintained a similar treaty with their Arab vassals that allowed the latter to exert some measure of control over their environs in return for mutual aid and support. Consequentially, the Naşrids were able to extend their influence over other tribal confederations, including Ma'add, which effectively increased the reach and power of the Sasanian kings into the Arabian Peninsula.²⁷⁷

More than just military reciprocity defined these imperial-Arab relationships. Religion too played a part, particularly in the west. By the mid-sixth century the Byzantine empire stretched from the eastern tip of the Black Sea to the Strait of Gibraltar in the west and included all of the Italian Peninsula, the Balkans, Egypt, the Levant,

²⁷³ Theophanes the Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor*, trans. by Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 352-53; and Fisher, *Between Empires*, 45. The Romans bestowed the title phylarch on the chiefs of their Arab federate tribes, while patrikios was an honorific with cultural cachet but no specific function (*The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, s.vv. "Phylarch," and "Patrikios").

²⁷⁴ Fisher, *Between Empires*, 3.

²⁷⁵ While loose on details, Procopius provides a sense of the extent to which the Naşrid and Jafnid leaders possessed both responsibility and freedom of action under their respective patrons; see: Procopius, *History of the Wars: Books I-II*, trans. by H. B. Dewing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 157-58, 167-73, and 421-23. For an example of a Sasanian-Naşrid alliance, see: al-Ṭabarī, *The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*, trans. by C. E. Bosworth, vol. 5, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 341-43.

²⁷⁶ Fisher, *Between Empires*, 64-65.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 92-95.

Anatolia, and the northern reaches of the Fertile Crescent. While Christianity as defined at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 was the state religion, other expressions existed, most importantly Monophysite, Miaphysite, and Nestorian.²⁷⁸ These groups suffered occasional persecution, and some members fled to less-hostile states, including Persia, or lived in the further reaches of the empire or even beyond the *limes* in *Arabia Deserta*. Thanks to this sectarian diaspora, Arabs had contact with proselytes from all these traditions as well as the Chalcedonians. Conversion accounts of Arabs to Christianity exist in sufficient quantity to identify a pattern whereby a notable found cause to become Christian after which his tribe followed suit. Fifth-century Palestinian historian Sozomen reported one such case that occurred in the later-fourth century when an Arab chief named Zocomus (or Zocomos), chief of Banū Ṣālīḥ, became Christian. Resolution of his personal "calamity," in this case childlessness, provided the pretext for his change of faith. In regard to the Christianization of the Arabs, Sozomen suggested that

Their conversion appears to have been the result of their intercourse with the priests who dwelt among them, and with the monks who dwelt in the neighboring deserts, and who were distinguished by their purity of life, and by their miraculous gifts.²⁷⁹

According to the author, Zocomus' tribe followed him into the new faith. Sozomen's brief tale has all the characteristics of *topoi*, but it probably reflects reality in general if not in detail nonetheless. A tribal *sharīf* convinced that the Christian deity had intervened for him personally would see the need for some sort of reciprocity. Such was the expected

²⁷⁸ As with all the early Christian controversies, the issues at Chalcedon revolved around Christology, in this case whether Jesus possessed human and divine natures, just one, or some merging of the two. Monophysites generally held that the Christ had only a single, divine nature, while the Miaphysite tradition professed that both exist, albeit merged into a single (*mia*) nature. The Nestorians possessed a duophysite Christology, believing that Jesus had distinct divine and human natures. By the later fifth century, Miaphysitism enjoyed an upsurge in popularity in the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire (i.e. those in direct contact with Arabs), while Nestorianism proved the dominant Christian tradition in Persia (Peter Edwell, et al., "Arabs in the Conflict between Rome and Persia, AD 491-630," in *Arabs and Empires Before Islam*, ed. by Greg Fisher [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015], 215).

²⁷⁹ Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. anonymous (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1846), 319-20.

praxis in the pagan world, where a sacrifice would have been in order. But in Christianity, a profession of faith provided suitable recompense. That some, most, or all of the tribe followed his example is equally unremarkable given the context.

A second, later, and more detailed example further supports this conclusion. In the first-half of the fifth century Aspebetos, a tribal chief who formerly served the Sasanians as a *spahbedh* (a high-ranking military leader), converted to Christianity under similar circumstances as had Zocomus. After Persian resources failed to find a cure for his partially-paralyzed son, Terebôn, Aspebetos dropped everything to take him to Palestine in accordance with a vision in which Terebôn predicted his own healing at the hands of a monk named Euthymius, who at the time was literally holed-up in a cave twelve miles outside of Jerusalem, trying to live a pious life of separation. Unsurprisingly, the aesthetic cured the young man, who then convinced his father to join him in embracing Christianity. Some time later, Aspebetos returned with many people from his tribe who likewise converted. These former "wolves of Arabia" built a church near the monk's cave, and established a tent community around it after which Euthymius made Aspebetos the first "bishop of the encampments."²⁸⁰ Theoderet of Cyrrhus reported similar mass conversions later in the century thanks to the inspirational and no-doubt imposing presence of Simeon Stylites the Elder. While at least some of these Arab conversion stories are no-doubt apocryphal—Simeon allegedly cured the infertility of the "queen of the Ishmaelites" via a long-distance request through intermediaries—those that describe Arab groups or individuals who adopted Christianity suggest that, under

²⁸⁰ Cyril of Scythopolis, *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, trans. by R. M. Price (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 14-17, and 20-21.

favorable circumstances, it happened with some frequency and perhaps a good deal of spontaneity, if not always heartfelt sincerity.²⁸¹

That the Jafnids were significantly involved with Levantine Christianity is attested by inscriptions discovered at a church in Nitl and the village of Sammā' (both in present-day Jordan), and al-Ruṣāfa (Sergiopolis in northern Syria,), the last two convincingly linked with known Jafnid leaders.²⁸² In the past, scholars have identified these foederati with the Monophysites or Miaphysites. While Fisher has observed that no evidence exists to definitively establish such a link, several of the ancient sources hostile to Chalcedonian Christianity believed it true.²⁸³ When in 579/80 al-Ḥārith tried to negotiate peace between the dissenting Miaphysite bishops, Jacob Baradaeus and Paul the Black, he may have been playing the role of phylarch and politician rather than Miaphysite apologist, but John of Ephesus remembered the phylarch as a defender of the faith.²⁸⁴

Similarly, Procopius reported that Justinian ordered that one "Caïsus the fugitive" take command of an army of Banū Ma'add in an expedition against the Persians.²⁸⁵ Caïsus, also known as Amorkesos, a Hellenized form of the name Imrū' al-Qays, may have been the famous pre-Islamic poet and king of Banū Kinda, although that connection remains tentative thanks to the popularity of that particular name. Regardless,

²⁸¹ Theoderet of Cyrrhus, "The Life of Simeon Stylites," in *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, trans. by Robert Doran (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 76-81.

²⁸² Fisher, *Between Empires*, 50-56; and Denis Genequand, "The Archaeological Evidence for the Jafnids and the Naṣrids," in *Arabs and Empires Before Islam*, ed. by Greg Fisher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 175.

²⁸³ Fisher, *Between Empires*, 56-64. Genequand notes that the mention of al-Ḥārith in the Nitl inscriptions has not been conclusively linked with the Jafnid leader (his was a very-popular name), but is probable (Genequand, 179).

²⁸⁴ John of Ephesus, *The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History of John Bishop of Ephesus*, trans. by R. Payne Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1860), 284-87.

²⁸⁵ Procopius, *Wars*, 193. Banū Ma'add was a first-generation branch of 'Adnān, and highly respected for its size and accomplishments.

sometime late in the reign of Leo I (r. 457-74) one Amorkesos captured an island called Iotabe, most likely Jazīrat Tirān at the mouth of the Straits of Tiran if Procopius' description can be trusted. Formerly a Byzantine possession populated by “Hebrews” who probably originated from the kingdom of Ḥimyar in nearby south Arabia, Amorkesos preempted Roman vengeance by appointing a Christian bishop for the island and sending him to Constantinople as an emissary, there to request that Leo make Amorkesos phylarch of the Arab tribes adjacent to the province of *Arabia Petraea*. This action, followed by a personal visit to the emperor and a profession to Christian faith by Amorkesos, legitimated his conquest and the considerable status granted him, most likely because Leo saw in him a potentially useful ally against the Sasanians.²⁸⁶ This particular Imrū' al-Qays (regardless of any association with the Caïsus of Banū Kinda) appears to have adopted Christianity as a clever political ruse, one intended to deflect imperial anger and perhaps open the door to future self-aggrandizement, or at least that is what the Byzantine chronicler Malchus would have his readers believe.²⁸⁷

At least some cultural syncretism resulted from the political relations between the contemporary super powers and the Arab tribes. In particular, allied tribal leaders

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 179; Malchus, *The Fragmentary Classicizing Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus, and Malchus*, ed. and trans. by R. C. Blockley (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1983-2009), 2.405-07; Fisher, *Between Empires*, 40 and 156-57; Macdonald, et al., “Arabs and Empires,” 85-86; and Greg Fisher, Philip Wood, et al., “Arabs and Christianity,” in *Arabs and Empires Before Islam*, ed. by Greg Fisher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 278.

²⁸⁷ Fisher and Edwell both point out the problems with associating the Kindite king, Imrū' al-Qays, with the character(s) in these stories, but the connection is possible nonetheless, and perhaps even probable. Just as the Romans offered the Jafnids foederati status after they defeated their Salīḥ predecessors, so could Justinian have desired that Amorkesos, as the latest power player in south Arabian politics, take charge of an anti-Sasanian program in that region. While much if not all of the Imrū' al-Qays al-Kindī story reads like a typical topos of the prodigal-son-turned-noble variety, not all of it constitutes a ninth-century fabrication because Procopius related its core elements in the mid-sixth century (Fisher, *Between Empires*, 157; Edwell, et al., “Arabs in Conflict,” 221 and 233; and Procopius, *Wars*, 193; for a distillation of the full story of Imrū' al-Qays al-Kindī as it had evolved by the ninth century, see Lady Anne Blunt, and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, trans., *The Seven Golden Odes of Pagan Arabia, Known also as the Moallakat* [London: Chiswick Press, 1903], 1-3).

adopted methods of legitimation common to their patrons. A number of inscriptions indicate that the Jafnids participated in the construction of at least several churches and a monastery (Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī in Syria), and possessed sufficient status as benefactors to be considered worthy of mention by others. Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, a fourth/tenth-century Iranian historian, listed many other Jafnid structures in his *Ta'rīkh sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa-al-anbiyā* (*History of the Dynasties of the Kings of the Earth and of the Prophets*). While many of the sites mentioned by al-Iṣfahānī have yet to be identified by archaeologists, and at least a few are actually of Umayyad construction, combined with epigraphic and other literary evidence it appears certain that the Jafnids engaged in construction on a significant level as a form of patronage, one that conformed to Byzantine norms.²⁸⁸ Genequand points out that "no Jafnid 'dynastic architecture' defined by shared common elements" exists, and that remains instead conform to "regional late Roman styles."²⁸⁹ Not only did Jafnid phylarchs choose to mimic the architectural styles of their patrons, they also located their structures in the same areas as those of Roman officials and aristocrats, a sure sign of cultural intermingling.²⁹⁰

The situation in the Naṣrid capital, al-Ḥīra, is less clear thanks to a paucity of archaeological work due to the political instability endemic to Iraq since the early 1990s. Those excavations that have taken place reveal a sprawling and prosperous city that grew organically over several hundred years, with at least two Christian (Nestorian) churches, and what is probably a monastery, along with numerous lightly-fortified luxury residences (*quṣūr*, sing. *qaṣr*). These were generously spaced apart from one another, and

²⁸⁸ Genequand, 181-85. The present author relies on Genequand's discussion of al-Iṣfahānī as he did not have the latter's text available.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 185-86.

al-Balādhurī mentioned several by name in his *Futūḥ*: al-Qaṣr al-Abyad, Qaṣr ibn-Buqayla, and Qaṣr al-'Adasiyyīn.²⁹¹ Most of the published excavation work to date reveals "a strong Christian character" beginning at least in the seventh century CE.²⁹² Outside the quṣūr, al-Ḥīra lacked defensive works, a fact that explains the city's quick capitulation in the face of the army of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd during the initial phase of the Arab Conquest of Sawād in 12-13/633-34.²⁹³ But, similar to those buildings linked with the Jafnids, church construction that can be plausibly associated with the Naṣrids appears to share regional architectural features rather than representing attempts to create a distinctly Naṣrid monumental style.²⁹⁴

The privilege that both the Jafnids and Naṣrids enjoyed came to an end on the eve of Islam. John of Ephesus and Michael the Great recorded how the Arab dynasty allied with Constantinople fell out of favor ca. 580 after a failed expedition against the Sasanians in which the Roman *Caesar* of the east, Maurice, accused the Jafnid phylarch al-Mundhir ibn al-Ḥārith of betraying the Byzantine strategy to the Persians.²⁹⁵ This ultimately precipitated the collapse of Jafnid authority after the Emperor Tiberius II sent al-Mundhir and his son, al-Nu'mān into exile. Although the Banū Ghassān survived in the region and eventually converted to Islam after the Arab conquest of Syria, the

²⁹¹ Ibid., 207-12; C. E. Bosworth, "Iran and the Arabs Before Islam," in *The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 3(1), the Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian Periods*, ed. by Ehsan Yarshater (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 594; and al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 391. Donner notes the prominence of Nestorian Christianity in pre-Islamic Iraq, including "a prominent Nestorian preacher in al-Ḥīra," although Judaism was also strong in the region, and Miaphysitism had likewise made some inroads through the followers of Jacob Baradaeus, the so-called "Jacobites" (Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981], 168-69).

²⁹² Genequand, 211-12.

²⁹³ All of the akhbār provided by al-Balādhurī agree in regard to the city's near-instant capitulation at the appearance of Khālīd's army (*Futūḥ*, 390-93).

²⁹⁴ Genequand, 213; and Bosworth, "Iran and the Arabs," 612.

²⁹⁵ John of Ephesus, 236-42, and 413-14; and Michael the Great, *The Chronicle of Michael the Great, Patriarch of the Syrians*, trans. by Robert Bedrosian (Longbranch, NJ: Sources of the Armenia Tradition, 2013), 127.

dissolution of the Jafnid phylarchate resulted in a fracturing of its allied tribes as each sought to forge new alliances and find new sources of patronage in the highly competitive environment of the Late Antique Middle East.²⁹⁶ The Naṣrid dynasty suffered a similar end. Around the turn of the seventh century, the last king of al-Ḥīrah, al-Nu‘mān ibn al-Mundhir, managed to draw the ire of the Sasanian king, Khosrow II (Kisrā in Arabic; r. 590 and 591-628), although for what reason remains unclear. According to al-Ṭabarī, the Persian took an immediate dislike to the young Arab, and made him king of al-Ḥīrah only because he promised to control the tribes and keep them from raiding Sasanian lands.²⁹⁷ Unfortunately for al-Nu‘mān, some years later he earned Khosrow's wrath when the latter instigated a search for new wives and concubines that resulted in the Naṣrid's arrest and eventual death by plague; that, at least, is the story according to al-Ṭabarī.²⁹⁸ Similar in structure and content to other Near Eastern tales wherein a subject runs afoul of his monarch, its content may have more topos than fact in content.²⁹⁹ Regardless, something did occur by the year 602 to terminate the Sasanian-Naṣrid relationship, although exactly what remains open to debate, with specialists pointing to al-Nu‘mān's professed Christianity, increasing signs of Naṣrid independence, or a Sasanian desire to expand westwards as motivators.³⁰⁰ As with the abolishment of Jafnid leadership, it appears that the consequences in the east were regional destabilization which led to tribes uniting

²⁹⁶ Michael the Great, 127. Michael's history is perhaps a bit over-specific in claiming that the former Jafnid allies "split into fifteen different factions," but his claim that various tribes sought patronage under the Persians and the southern kingdom of Ḥimyar, while a few chose to remain under Byzantine authority is quite plausible within the contemporary tribal milieu.

²⁹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Sāsānids, Byzantines, Lakhmids, and Yemen*, 343.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 352-58.

²⁹⁹ E.g. the story of David and his pursuit of Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite in 2 Sam. 11.

³⁰⁰ Fisher, *Between Empires*, 184-86.

against the Persians instead of under them, as witnessed in later raids that culminated with the defeat of Sasanian forces at the so-called battle of Dhū Qār, ca. 609.³⁰¹

Somewhat ironically, and perhaps predictably, the two Near Eastern superpowers suffered themselves thanks to their disassociation from their Arabian confederates. For the Byzantines, the western expansions under Justinian I stretched resources too thin for his successors and this opened the door for Sasanian aggression from 572. The revolt and usurpation of the Roman crown by Phocas (r. 602-10) further destabilized the empire. His successor, Heraclius (r. 610-41), could not halt significant Persian advances into the Levant, an assault that might have been averted or blunted had the Jafnids still been in place as phylarchs. To the east the Sasanians did not fare so well. Khusrow II's attempts at westward expansion mirrored those of Justinian in the previous century in that, while initially successful, it made the Sasanians vulnerable to a number of factors which lead to serious reverses starting around 626.³⁰² Adding to Khusrow's discomfort, nothing stood in the way of raids into Persian territory without the Naṣrids and their influence over the tribes. In the case of both empires, after decades of war with one another, neither could offer much in the way of effective resistance to the early waves of the Arab Conquests, a situation summed up nicely in the *Cambridge Medieval*

History:

The balance of power in the Near East, sustained for so many centuries by the rivalry of Rome and Persia, had been destroyed by the catastrophic events of [Heraclius'] reign. Disorganized and exhausted by their internecine struggle, neither

³⁰¹ Very little of substance is recorded about this encounter, for which Bosworth suggests that the descriptor "battle" might be "too grandiose a word." All that can be said with any degree of certainty is that the Persians suffered a defeat at the hands of Arab raiders, and the event went on to assume a place of importance in later Islamic myth (Bosworth, *Sāsānids, Byzantines, Lakhmids, and Yemen*, 338-39, and 338n794).

³⁰² Parvaneh Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 140-41.

of the two ancient empires was in a position to offer effective resistance to the fresh and vigorous forces of Islam.³⁰³

The Sasanians succumbed to the Arab Conquests by the mid-seventh century, and the Byzantines suffered devastating losses in territory and resources, although that empire would not finally fall for another eight-hundred years.

The Roman and Persian empires both influenced life in the Arabian Peninsula by their presence, touching the lives of many through trade and their Arab vassals who made use of imperial means of legitimation to justify their roles as leaders among the tribes. The vacuum created by the withdrawal of both super powers likewise influenced the unfolding of events in the Near East, a vacuum made more compelling by the disappearance of an important Arab kingdom in the course of the sixth century.

Arab Kings

The southern portion of the Arabian Peninsula served as home to a number of ancient kingdoms. The oldest known, that of Saba' (aka Sabean), originated no later than the eighth-century BCE, and was eventually joined by the nearby polities of Qatabān, Ḥaḍramawt, and Maʿīn.³⁰⁴ An agriculturally-fecund region—hence the Roman appellation *Arabia Felix* (fertile or fortunate Arabia)—it prospered thanks to the export of aromatics via the caravan trade and, later, by shipping. In the Late Antique period, in the last quarter of the third century, these and other South Arabian kingdoms were absorbed by that of Ḥimyar.

³⁰³ H. St. L. B. Moss, "The Formation of the East Roman Empire, 330-717," in *The Cambridge Medieval History: The Byzantine Empire*, vol. 4.1, ed. by J. M. Hussey, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 30.

³⁰⁴ Hoyland, *Arabia*, 38-39; and Christian Julien Robin, "Before Ḥimyar: Epigraphic Evidence for the Kingdoms of South Arabia," in *Arabs and Empires Before Islam*, ed. by Greg Fisher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 94-96.

In the first century CE, Pliny the Elder called the Ḥimyarite tribe "the most numerous... their lands are fruitful in palms and shrubs, and... their chief wealth is centered in their flocks."³⁰⁵ Archaeological and epigraphic evidence indicates a sudden conversion to an informal expression of Judaism by the rulers of Ḥimyar sometime around 320. Prior to this date the Ḥimyarites practiced polytheism, but so full was the change that no evidence of paganism exists after 380.³⁰⁶ The speed of the Ḥimyarite conversion is particularly impressive in comparison to that witnessed in the Roman empire, where worship of the old gods continued for hundreds of years after the acceptance of Christianity as the state religion in the late-fourth century.³⁰⁷ Eventually the kingdom's association with Judaism led it into conflict with the Christian kingdom of Akhsūm across the Red Sea at the outset of the sixth century. The latter came out on top of the conflict, and controlled Ḥimyar for approximately twenty years. In the third decade of the sixth century, the client king Yūsuf As'ar Yath'ar rebelled against Akhsūmite rule. Remembered in Arabic sources as Dhū Nuwās, he proceeded to oust his overlords from the southern Arabian Peninsula and, in the process, tried to eliminate Christianity as a source of external influence in Ḥimyarite affairs.³⁰⁸ This policy led to an anti-Christian pogrom—probably not the first—the most notorious incident of which occurred in Najrān near the present-day border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Both Nestorian and Miaphysite communities called that city home, thanks to previous efforts on the part of

³⁰⁵ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 6.32.

³⁰⁶ Christian Julien Robin, "Ḥimyar, Akhsūm, and *Arabia Deserta* in Late Antiquity: The Epigraphic Evidence," in *Arabs and Empires Before Islam*, ed. by Greg Fisher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 129. Al-Ṭabarī, records a mythical version of the tribe's conversion: Al-Ṭabarī, *Sāsānids, Byzantines, Lakhmids, and Yemen*, 170-71.

³⁰⁷ See Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*.

³⁰⁸ Klaus Schippmann, *Ancient South Arabia: From the Queen of Sheba to the Advent of Islam* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001), 65-66. For al-Ṭabarī's account of Dhū Nuwās, see: *Sāsānids, Byzantines, Lakhmids, and Yemen*, 190-212.

Ctesiphon and Constantinople to influence local politics.³⁰⁹ Dhū Nuwās had the Miaphysite population of Najrān exterminated, likely due to their association with the Byzantines, a relationship shared by Ḥimyar's enemy, Akhsūm. But this led to another invasion by the latter, and a second period of Akhsūmite control that lasted until later in the sixth century when internal forces asked for and received Sasanian assistance in overthrowing the conquerors. These efforts succeeded but, when the individual put in charge of Ḥimyar declined to cooperate with his Persian superiors, the latter took control of the kingdom, a situation that remained in effect until the Arab Conquests.³¹⁰

Like the Romans and Persians, the Ḥimyarites held an interest in the affairs of the Arabian tribes, particularly those to the north of their kingdom, in the central regions of the peninsula. Ḥimyar had a vassal tribe of its own, Kinda, and in the fifth century it forged alliances through a line of descendents of that group's founding family, that of Ḥujr Ākil al-Murār. The Arab Kinda originated in the south but through the fourth and fifth centuries migrated into the central and northern parts of the peninsula where it came to dominate Ma'add, another large tribal group that traced its lineage to the eponymous Ma'add ibn 'Adnān. Irfan Shahīd pointed out that Kinda's expansion represented the "first attempt, however forcible, to impose unity on the tribes of central and northern Arabia," a feat accomplished only with Ḥimyarite support.³¹¹ The early Ḥujrids helped establish and maintain Ḥimyar's influence in Najd (the heart of the Arabian Peninsula), where Qaryat Dhat-Kahl (today Qaryat al-Fāw) served both as an important and prosperous

³⁰⁹ Robin, "Ḥimyar, Akhsūm," 145-48; and A. F. L. Beeston, "The Martyrdom of Azqir," in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabia Studies*, vol. 36, ed. by Rob Carter and St. John Simpson (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2006), 113-15.

³¹⁰ G. W. Bowerstock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 111-21; and Hoyland, *Arabia*, 53-57.

³¹¹ *EI2*, s.vv. "Kinda," and "Ma'add." Fisher points out that the exact composition of Ma'add remains a mystery. The present author accepts this, but will continue to call it a "tribal group" or similar herein as it eases communication without doing harm (Fisher, *Between Empires*, 86).

caravan hub and as a base for Kinda.³¹² Ḥujr's direct descendents, the Banū Ākil al-Murār, enjoyed considerable success under Ḥimyarite patronage, and later under that of Constantinople and Ctesiphon, but fratricidal conflict broke out between his great-grandsons. Although Justinian bolstered the tribe's fortunes in the mid-sixth century by making it another foederati to use against the Sasanians, Kindite hegemony in the north and central regions ultimately dissolved, probably in conjunction with the decline and demise of Ḥimyar.³¹³

The dissolution of Ḥujrid leadership over the major northern tribal groups contributed to the increasing instability witnessed in the Near East in general, and in the Arabian Peninsula in particular.³¹⁴ Certainly the reduction in patronage from external sources in the form of material support exacerbated the situation. In times of want or insecurity, tribes in need often turned to raiding, within *Arabia Deserta* and across its borders into imperial lands. The Metropolitan of Nisibis, Barṣauma, reported of long-term and extensive raids into Roman territory in the late fifth century, motivated by drought:

For two successive years we have been afflicted by a shortage of rain and a lack of necessary commodities. The mob of the tribes from the south has assembled, and because of the multitude of people and animals, they have destroyed the villages of the countryside and of the mountain. They have dared to pillage and capture animals and people, even in the land of the Romans.³¹⁵

The extent of the chaos and destruction wrought by the marauding tribesmen motivated the Romans and Persians to come together to resolve the crisis as it impacted both

³¹² Hoyland, *Arabia*, 50.

³¹³ Irfan Kavar [Shahīd], "The Arabs in the Peace Treaty of A.D. 561," *Arabica* 3, fasc. 2 (May 1956): 181-82.

³¹⁴ Bowerstock, *Adulis*, 121-22.

³¹⁵ Barṣuma, "Letter 2," in *Synodicon Orientale*, trans. by J. B. Chabot (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 526-27, quoted in Edwell, "Arabs in Conflict," 217.

polities negatively. But, while the Sasanian *marzban* played host to the Byzantine *dux* during negotiations, Arab allies of the Persians raided their counterparts in Roman territory.³¹⁶ This derailed the talks in Nisibis, and provided an opportunity for counter-raids justified by tribal concepts of blood vengeance.³¹⁷ These were not exclusively-local incidents. Isaac of Antioch, a contemporary of Barṣauma, and Theophanes the Confessor reported similar circumstances throughout the Near East.³¹⁸ Suppressing this unrest required considerable expenditure of Byzantine military resources, and the chaos likely contributed to the demise of Banū Ṣalīḥ as a Roman foederati and the consequent rise of Ghassān and Kinda.

The tribal unrest witnessed in the closing years of the fifth century derived from competition over scarce resources. Another form of scarcity evolved with the dissolution of the large Arab vassalages, a change that must have been accompanied by the termination of the subsidies paid by their respective patrons. While no hard data exists, this probably resulted in a significant reduction in wealth coming into the Arab tribes, particularly those of *Arabia Deserta* where natural resources and agricultural potential were minimal. While client kings used this income to support and legitimate their own dynasties, they did so by distributing it among their clients in various ways. When the Jafnid ruler al-Mundhir ibn al-Ḥarīth requested gold from Emperor Justin to recruit troops, he may have done so to fulfill his duty as phylarch to defend the eastern borders of the empire, but that money would have found its way into the purses of the

³¹⁶ The equivalent titles of *marzban* and *dux* were given to border commanders who often also had civil administrative responsibilities.

³¹⁷ Edwell, et al., "Arabs in Conflict," 217.

³¹⁸ Macdonald, et al., "Arabs and Empires," 88; and Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 216.

Arab tribesmen hired for that purpose.³¹⁹ Likewise the subsidies paid to the vassal tribal confederations and the income generated from lands granted them for support. These resources, distributed as they were by the Jafnids, Naṣrids, Ḥujrids, and other vassal chiefs through stipends, gifts, and community philanthropy, provided a means for the maintenance of a measure of stability in hard times, and helped support the political status quo among allied tribes in general.³²⁰

The instability created by the collapse of the political authority of the major tribal confederations and the attendant reduction in stipendiary income from imperial sources offers a plausible explanation for the level of contemporary inter-tribal competition testified to in Arabic poetry and the early Islamic literary and historiographic traditions on the eve of Islam. Such competition largely disappeared during the height of the Arab Conquests, when wealth flooded into the nascent Muslim community via what were essentially large-scale raids, but it returned once again when that flow slowed during 'Uthmān's reign, with consequences both dramatic and disastrous for the umma.

Tribal Life and Structure

The relationship between the tribes, their imperial neighbors, and the latter's Arab federates contributed significantly to the complex political, economic, and cultural environment extant in the peninsula at the opening of the seventh century, but tribal life

³¹⁹ John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 372.

³²⁰ While the reader might justifiably question the historicity of John of Ephesus' report—his biases as an anti-Chalcedonian are well known—the relatively-sparse epigraphic and archaeological evidence is supported by sufficient literary evidence to conclude that the Jafnids engaged in what appeared to be Roman-style patronage. While excavations of communities linked with the Naṣrids has been minimal, there is no reason to doubt that they participated in providing a similar level of local patronage as they faced similar needs and challenges. This conclusion is further supported by the nature of inter- and intra-tribal support and relations between the ashraf and clan members relations among the Arabs themselves. For patronage among the Byzantines, see: *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, s.vv. “Patrons and Patronage,” “Philanthropy,” and “Poor.”

itself played the most influential role on subsequent events. Comprehension of contemporary Arabian culture and society is essential to a historical understanding of the appearance and evolution of Islam in its early phases because competition between and within the tribes did not abate with the birth of the new faith. Over time Islam would provide a new paradigm within which to frame and justify dissent, but beneath the surface of this new mode of discourse lay the same motivators that fueled tribal competition before Muḥammad received his first revelation in a cave outside Mecca ca. 610.

At the most-basic level, tribes are extended kinship groups based on ties of common descent. Those ties may be biological in nature, based on blood; or fictive, forged through adoption or alliance. Unfortunately, no common nomenclature for tribal units and sub-units exists, not even among the Arabs themselves. And the designator "tribe," problematic for various reasons, tends to connote a culture somehow inferior to others. Regardless, in the absence of a sensible substitute, that word finds liberal use herein to designate extended kinship groups in general among the peoples of the Late Antique Near East and modern Middle East, without pejorative implication. When necessary to discuss intra- and inter-tribal relations, the present work utilizes those labels suggested by Jibrail S. Jabbur in his 1988 study of the Bedouins of Syria, from the largest to smallest unit: tribe (*qabīlah*); clan, subtribe, or sept (*‘ashīra*); subclans (*buṭūn*); sections (*afkhādh*), sub-groups or sub-sections (*badā’id*); and the tribal “nuclear family” (*humūla*), led by a patriarch (*rabb*) who provides support, guidance, and protection for his children and their families.³²¹

³²¹ Jibrail S. Jabbur, *The Bedouins and the Desert: Aspects of Nomadic Life in the Arab East* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 268 and 287. For another labeling system, see: William H.

The tribe of the Prophet offers an illustrative example of this structure, and of its fluidity. He belonged to the family of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the Prophet’s paternal grandfather who, as chief of Banū Hāshim, provided protection for the orphaned Muḥammad. The Hāshimites were a subclan of Quraysh, but several other clan identities lay between the two. The Banū Hāshim derived from Banū ‘Abd Manāf, which came from Banū Kilāb via ‘Abd Manāf’s father, Quṣayy. The male ancestors of Banū Kilāb were, in ascending order, Murrah, Ka’b, Lu’ayy, and Ghālib the son of Fihir, the ancestor of Quraysh with which all these individuals and their families identified.³²²

This particular group identity illustrates the difficulty in assigning labels to Arabian tribal structure, and their inconsistent application. For example, although Lu’ayy ibn Ghālib sired three sons who had families of their own, they did not together constitute a cohesive “Banū Lu’ayy.”³²³ Whether a particular family line generated its own unique tribal or clan identity had everything to do with the political success of its patriarch as a leader, and that usually depended on the size of his family (counted in sons), and his

Lewis, “Feuding and Social Change in Morocco,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 5, no. 1 (March 1961): 43.

³²² Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, *Genealogisch Tabellen der Arabischen Stämme und Familien* (Göttingen: Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1852), tab. O; and Ibn Iṣḥāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, trans. by A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3. Tribal designators are most often based on an eponymous founder, real or legendary. In the pre-Islamic period one encounters names potentially derived from pagan totems, such as Banū Kalb, the “sons of dog.” See: Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 269-70; and W. Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1885), 17.

³²³ Cf., in a verse attributed to Quṣayy, he exclaimed “I am the son of the protectors, the Banū Lu’ayy” (Ibn Iṣḥāq, 54). But, citing Watt and Werner Caskel, Donner points out that the identifier Banū Lu’ayy was a synonym for Quraysh, particularly those who represented the elite of Mecca (al-Ṭabarī, *The Conquest of Arabia*, trans. by Fred M. Donner, vol. 10, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993], 82n533). Watt and McDonald provided a useful Quraysh family tree that identifies those groups “commonly spoken of as clans” in: al-Ṭabarī, *Muḥammad at Mecca*, trans. by W. Montgomery Watt and M. V. McDonald, vol. 6, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), xxx. The label Banū Lu’ayy seems to have provided a popular alternative to Quraysh for poets. For another example besides the sources already cited in this note, see: J. E. Montgomery, *The Vagaries of the Qaṣīdah: The Tradition and Practice of Early Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2015), 226.

diplomatic, military, and economic fortunes.³²⁴ By the seventh century, the descendants of Quraysh enjoyed local hegemony thanks to their mercantile activities centered on the city of Mecca.³²⁵ But the Prophet's lineage represents only a single line of Quraysh, of which many existed by his lifetime, among them: Banū Taym, from which Abu Bakr, the first caliph, derived; Banū 'Adiy, the ancestors of 'Umar the second caliph; Banū Umayyah, the family of the third caliph, 'Uthmān, and of the first Islamic dynasty; and Banū 'Abbās, the line through which the Abbasids legitimated their own rule.³²⁶

Lineage and family identity were not set in stone, and could change for a variety of reasons, external and internal. The descendants of Sāma, a son of Lu'ayy ibn Ghālib, wished to legitimate their Qurayshite ancestry after moving to Basra, most likely for the prestige and increased share of the fay' it would bring them.³²⁷ Basran genealogists, probably with the support of the majority in Quraysh, provided a narrative in which Sāma died before he could impregnate his wife, Nājiya, who subsequently became pregnant by a second husband who hailed from Bahrain. However, after returning to Mecca, Nājiya pretended that her first husband had sired her son Ḥārith. The "truth" thus revealed, the Quraysh denied the alleged descendants of Sāma ibn Lu'ayy, who thenceforth instead were known as Banū Nājiya, a somewhat less prestigious association considering the context. This incident of external identity formation may have cleared up the matter for some, but it did not for other genealogists who continued to

³²⁴ Jabbur, 290-91, and 301-2.

³²⁵ For a detailed and useful description of the rise of the Quraysh in Mecca, see: Mahmood Ibrahim, "Social and Economic Conditions in Pre-Islamic Mecca," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14, no. 3 (August 1982): 343-58.

³²⁶ Wüstenfeld, *Genealogisch Tabellen*, tab. O.

³²⁷ The present author could not identify precisely when the descendants of Sāma relocated to Iraq, but it had to predate the death of 'Alī in 40/661, probably by several years at least.

uphold Banū Sāma's legitimacy, including some Qurayshites who saw in that subtribe potential allies against 'Alid claims of authority.³²⁸

Of course, tribal identity formation also occurred internally, and could do so with as much conscious direction as the case just described. The label Quraysh appears to be a nickname generated around the time of Quṣayy ibn Kilāb, the great-great-great grandfather of the Prophet, who seized control of Mecca sometime in the first part of the sixth century. According to typical tribal nomenclature practices, one would expect the collective name Banū Fihr instead as Fihr ibn Mālik is the commonly acknowledged progenitor of the tribe.³²⁹ Early Muslim genealogists puzzled over this issue. Some proposed that Quraysh came from the word for shark, *qirsh*, but the majority concluded that it derived from *taqarrush*, which implies an association or banding together of some sort.³³⁰ This latter provides the more plausible connection, considering Quṣayy's representation in the *tārīkh* and *sīrah* literature. According to Ibn Ishāq, Quṣayy decided to take control of Mecca and the Ka'ba, an important pilgrimage site long before Islam and a source of both prestige and income.³³¹ His allies included other clans that identified Fihr as an ancestor, and Kināna, an old tribe from the north. Interestingly, it appears Fihr himself identified as a member of that latter tribe, probably because Kināna ibn Khuzayma was his great-grandfather.³³² In spite of this connection, Quraysh did not identify as part of Banū Kināna, even though the former's members were technically direct descendants of that family. Instead, the subtribes allied with Quṣayy in his bid to

³²⁸ Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 1.173-75. An example of the Banū Nājiya's opposition to 'Alī and their resultant persecution at his hands is discussed in chapter 6.

³²⁹ Daniel Martin Varisco, "Metaphors and Sacred History: The Genealogy of Muḥammad and the Arab 'Tribe'," *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (July 1995): 148.

³³⁰ *EI2*, s.v. "Quraysh"; and Watt and McDonald, *Muḥammad at Mecca*, xxix.

³³¹ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muḥammad at Mecca* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1979), 8-9.

³³² Ibn Ishāq, 3.

take control of Mecca and its assets, and joined him in the formation of a new identity, one based on a bond of kinship yet distinct from other branches of the greater tribe. While the reader might question the details of the story, later history confirms that someone did indeed unite several groups who self-identified as descendents of Fihir, and the likely time period of Quṣayy's activity jives well with the rise of Qurayshite power in Mecca as recorded in various sources.³³³

While the actions of Quṣayy set the stage for his creation to achieve local hegemony in Mecca, and eventually over several important trade routes that passed through the Arabian Peninsula, they also sowed seeds of future internal discord.³³⁴ He settled the clans of Quraysh into various areas of the city in an organized fashion in which some lived in the immediate vicinity of the Ka'ba (*Quraysh al-Biṭāh* - composed of the descendants of Ka'b ibn Lu'ayy) and those who lived in the outskirts (*Quraysh al-Zawāhir*). This resulted in the introduction of a socio-economic class structure into the community in which the former group enjoyed greater prestige and therefore political power. When conflict broke out within Quraysh, it did so among the clans of this group which divided into two factions: *al-Ahlāf* ("the allies" or "confederates") and *al-Muṭayyabūn* ("the perfumed") who vied for access to the important offices of the city.³³⁵ Competition manifested in a number of forms, sometimes in an appeal to an arbitrator to determine which clan had the "right" (culturally defined as the one with the most prestige and power) to own a particular position in the city's socio-religious hierarchy. This allowed for titles to change hands peacefully, if not without acrimony. Such practices

³³³ *EI2*, s.v. "Quraysh." Several versions of Quṣayy's story—including those told by Ibn Ishāq—are related in: al-Ṭabarī, *Muḥammad at Mecca*, 19-26.

³³⁴ The rise of Qurayshite power over regional trade was in part due to the collapse of Ḥimyar to the south: Ibrahim, "Pre-Islamic Mecca," 344, and 347-50.

³³⁵ Watt, *Mecca*, 5-7; and Ibrahim, "Pre-Islamic Mecca," 350-51.

appear to have derived from a shared desire of all Qurayshite groups to get along for the sake of commercial success.³³⁶ This did not preclude them from constant participation in political machinations aimed at benefiting one clan at the expense of others, but it did tend to avert significant violence among Quraysh in the pre-Islamic period.

In this regard Quraysh may have been an exception rather than an exemplar, because violence constituted part and parcel of the contemporary tribal structure, most famously in the application of *lex talionis*. While anarchic from a modern perspective, blood vengeance and other forms of personal retributive justice helped to maintain relative peace and stability by establishing boundaries within which individuals might achieve some measure of satisfaction when wronged. Not peculiar to nomadic cultures, it fulfilled similar needs in pre-Classical Greece, and in the empires of the Ancient Near East where rulers attempted to codify it in the earliest extant legal codes of the likes of Ur-Nammu, Lipit-Ishtar, and Hammurabi.³³⁷ While it disappeared as an accepted practice in areas where settled populations became the norm, in the Arabian Peninsula, where extensive nomadism persisted thanks to climate, geography, tradition, and the absence of any centralized political authority, blood vengeance continued to serve a useful societal function. This applied to Bedouin and settled alike, as most tribes consisted of a mixture of both. Beyond blood vengeance, which could take the form of reciprocal violence (*qiṣāṣ*) or acceptance of wergild (*diyya*), a tit-for-tat understanding existed in the case of raids. A response to scarce resources, they also served as a common means of income

³³⁶ Watt, *Mecca*, 19.

³³⁷ For examples from these cultures, see: Hubert J. Treston, *A Study in Ancient Greek Blood-Vengeance* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1923); “Code of Hammurabi, c. 1780 BCE,” *Ancient History Sourcebook*, trans. by L. W. King, accessed August 13, 2012, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/hamcode.asp>; and Samuel Noah Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer: Thirty-Nine Firsts in Recorded History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1956), 51-55. Contrary to popular understanding, Ur-Nammu and Lipit-Ishtar both precede Hammurabi by approximately 300 and 150 years, respectively.

generation and wealth redistribution among the Arabs who typically targeted tribes or clans not affiliated by family or alliance. When one group raided another it provided an excuse for a retributive raid if within the target-group's capabilities.³³⁸

As a result of these and related practices, the tribes lived in a state of tension with one another where powerful groups often controlled access to resources while weaker clans and septs either accepted their lot or looked for opportunities to advance their status through alliances or scheming. While the potential for retribution generally kept things in check, at times the system accomplished the opposite by fueling a cycle of escalating hostility until violence resulted. The alliance of Quraysh and Kināna engaged its competitor, the large tribal confederation Qays-‘Aylān, in low-level scuffles in the later part of the sixth century that turned into warfare after a member of Kināna assassinated ‘Urwa al-Raḥḥāl. ‘Urwa belonged to Banū Āmir ibn Ṣa’ṣa’a, a sept of Banū Hawāzin which itself constituted a significant part of Qays-‘Aylān.³³⁹ Warriors from Hawāzin sought vengeance for their slain kinsman, and came across its enemies at a place called Nakhla where they routed the Quraysh-Kināna forces who then took refuge in the sacred environs of Mecca. This did not settle the affair, however, and the hostiles fought a second battle near the ‘Ukāz market in Mecca the next year in which Hawāzin came out the victor once again. Two more battles fought over two more years followed in which Quraysh and its ally won the first and Hawāzin the last. Collectively called the “Sacriligious War” (*Harb al-Fijār*) because the battles took place during the sacred

³³⁸ Sadik Kirazli, “Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the pre-Islamic Arab Society,” *Islamic Studies* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 36; and

³³⁹ Ella Landau-Tasseron has pointed out the inconsistencies between the various versions of these events, including the number of engagements and their participants. She also notes that, while Quraysh was only involved in one of three of the initial clashes—scuffles really—that group did play the role of arbiter in the other two (Ella Landau-Tasseron, “The Sinful Wars: Religious, Social, and Historical Aspects of the *Ḥurūb al-Fijār*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 [1986]: 37-38).

months when fighting was nominally prohibited, these engagements lasted four years in total. But, like Gavrilo Princip's assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, the murder that precipitated this series of tribal conflicts in reality may have merely provided a convenient excuse for a long-brewing war. Watt suggested that control of the trade routes through the region was the real cause. When killed, 'Urwah was leading a Naṣrid caravan from al-Ḥīrah bringing goods to sell at the 'Ukāz fair, a physical manifestation of the commercial competition Quraysh and its associates wished to remove from the scene. Likewise, Qays-'Aylān's cries for blood vengeance provided some legitimacy for their attempts to forcefully eliminate its increasingly powerful opponents. Conversely, Crone suggested that Meccan merchants did not push their commercial interests to such extremes, and that the incident evidences typical tribal behavior and nothing more.³⁴⁰ Landau-Tasseron instead proposes that the murder of 'Urwa actually ran counter to Qurayshite interests in Mecca, and that their alliance with Banū Bakr ibn Kināna derived from cultural expectations and the former's desire to retain its prestige.³⁴¹ Regardless of whose interpretation one prefers, the Sacrilegious War illustrates the potentially volatile compound of tribal relations and traditions of retributive justice.

Other paths to conflict existed. Because a tribe's honor contributed to its status and therefore its political power, seemingly trivial issues had the potential to destroy stability. Even genealogically-related groups might succumb, as Quraysh nearly did during the rebuilding of the Ka'ba in the opening years of the seventh century. The existing structure had relatively low walls and no roof, conditions that allowed for the theft of relics from its interior—two gazelle sculptures and a special stone, perhaps the

³⁴⁰ *ET*², s.vv. "Fidjār" and "Hawāzin"; Ibn Ishāq, 82; and Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 145-46.

³⁴¹ Landau-Tasseron, "Sacrilegious War," 51-56.

sacred black stone.³⁴² After recovering the artifacts, and amputating the thief's hand, the Qurayshites decided to rebuild the shrine and make it more secure with the addition of a roof. Negotiations resulted in the various clans each taking responsibility for building a wall or a portion thereof but, when it came time to set the black stone, "they started to split up into factions, to form alliances, and to make agreements among themselves in preparation for battle" to determine which sept would have that honor.³⁴³ Violence was only averted by the future Prophet, who had each clan participate in lifting the stone so that no one group contributed more than any other.³⁴⁴ While the story of the rebuilding of the Ka'ba well may be a whole or partial fabrication, it illustrates how questions of tribal honor could precipitate outbreaks of violence, even among kin groups.

The Arabian tribal system contained an interesting dichotomy. Technically, a tribe existed for its own sake, with individual identity subsumed to that of the community. On the other hand, an individual's autonomy of action possessed considerable cultural cachet, but extreme manifestations of self interest had the potential to create conflict.³⁴⁵ Quṣayy's assumption of power in Mecca provides an excellent example of how personal interest could guide communal affairs. While the other clans that comprised Quraysh undoubtedly benefitted from Quṣayy's leadership, such altruism was not his only motivator, a conclusion suggested by the fact he kept all the important political and religious positions for himself instead of dividing them up among the other Qurayshite shaykhs and aḥsrāf as might be expected in the tribal milieu. This eventually

³⁴² al-Ṭabarī, *Muḥammad at Mecca*, 53n72.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

³⁴⁵ Williams Lancaster and Fidelity Lancaster, "Concepts of Leadership in Bedouin Society," in *Elites Old and New in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, ed. by John Haldon and Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2004), 32; and Jabbur, 259-60, and 264.

led to conflict among his grandsons, as the line of ‘Abd al-Dār ibn Quṣayy continued to hold all these titles while the sons of ‘Abd Manāf ibn Quṣayy insisted they should possess them instead. This generated the aforementioned division of most of Quraysh into al-Aḥlāf and al-Muṭayyabūn, in which the Banū ‘Abd Manāf ended up with the most lucrative positions as a result.³⁴⁶

Conflict also occurred across a greater cultural divide, between nomads and settled populations, the desert and the sown. As previously noted, while all Bedouins belonged to a tribe, not all members of a tribe were necessarily nomadic pastoralists. By Late Antiquity, tribespeople pursued a variety of livelihoods, of which the patterned wanderings of the Bedouin represented but one. The various clans or sub-groups of a greater tribe often consisted of settled as well as transhumance populations, agriculturalists as well as pastoralists, merchants and mercenaries, and those engaged in the production of crafts or provision of services.³⁴⁷ In general, however, settled populations maintained an edge over nomads because the former possessed resources the latter needed, while the latter often only had supplementary goods to offer. This did not keep some Bedouins from acquiring wealth, but economic conditions favored established communities that relied on agriculture and/or trade. The situation also created disparity in access to resources, which fostered potential for further conflict. This typically manifested in the form of raids on settled populations during hard times, as witnessed in Barṣauma’s reports of Arab marauders motivated by need created by a long period of draught.

³⁴⁶ Ibn Ishāq, 56-67. N.b. the historicity of the Quṣayy story is not critical to the present argument as it represents acknowledged behavior within the pre-Islamic tribal context.

³⁴⁷ Retsö, *Arabs in Antiquity*, 581.

The relatively-harsh life lived by many in the Late Antique Near East, particularly on the Arabian Peninsula, contributed to the creation of the tribal mindset witnessed in the examples discussed herein. An individual's tribe provided refuge from enemies and ready allies in battle. It also fostered generosity on a competitive level, even to complete strangers. These seemingly diametrical aspects stemmed from the unavoidable need to rely on others for survival, at least on some level, even for the most powerful. The demands of tribal life also contributed to the notion of *mūruwah*, the Arabian version of machismo, in which bravery, endurance, compassion for those in need, and defiance of stronger parties were among the most-valued of traits. Persistence in seeking revenge was another.³⁴⁸ Since justice was both retributive and personal, the most noble of men was he who pursued it to the end. These cultural beliefs inextricably entangled *murūwah* with *sharaf* and tribal identity, a condition attested to in works of contemporary verse:

Take for your brother whom you will in days of peace,
 But know that when fighting comes, your kinsman alone is near.
 Your true friend is your kinsman, who answers your call for aid
 With good will, when deeply drenched in bloodshed are sword and spear.
 Oh, never forsake your kinsman even when he does you wrong,
 For what he has marred he mends thereafter and makes sincere.³⁴⁹

The attitude expressed in this poem of tribal valor places kinship over all else, including any putative notions of right or wrong. A second example admits as much without mincing words:

I am but of the clan of Ghazīya, going astray
 If it errs, and let right if it keeps on the way.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ Watt, *Mecca*, 20; and Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 82-86, and 93-100.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 84. Nicholson extracted this verse from the anthology of Abū Tammām, *Kitāb al-Ḥamāsa*, originally compiled sometime in the ninth century CE.

³⁵⁰ Abū Tammām, *Ḥamāsa*, 1.343, cited in Jabbur, 267.

This statement makes perfect sense in a world where association with a tribe provided the surest means of survival, but this single-minded devotion to group identity also contributed to the foment of conflict in the pre-Islamic Near East.

Anthropological and sociological studies of nomadic groups in the modern Middle East and North Africa³⁵¹ reveal that, while much about tribal society has evolved, a great deal remained essentially unchanged well into the twentieth century. The formation of nation-states has had the greatest impact in that the still-young governments have largely assumed the role of protector formerly played by tribal leaders. As witnessed recently in the territories taken over by ISIS, however, the tribes are ready and willing to step in as protectors once again should the need arise.³⁵²

But in other aspects the tribal structure and life witnessed in the pre-Islamic period have carried on with little in the way of substantial change. Jabbur studied the Bedouins of Syria throughout a career that spanned more than six decades of the twentieth century, and his research revealed that many of the tribal values described in the present chapter existed at least into the waning years of the Cold War. Generosity remained paramount, and men were still expected to display bravery in battle, protect the weak, and act honorably. Competition in the form of raiding also continued well into the last century, even after governments outlawed such practices. When Bedouin men participated in raids—as they were expected to do by the age of 14—they did so for largely the same reasons as had their distant ancestors: competition for resources, redistribution

³⁵¹ Collectively the MENA.

³⁵² See the introduction to the present work.

of wealth, honor, and vengeance.³⁵³ William H. Lewis' research of nomadic life in Morocco in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries arrived at similar conclusions. In that community, "sanctioned patterns of conflict were traditional," and usually involved disputes over resources (water and pasturage), violations of tribal holy space, other insults to clan honor, or fighting to gain prestige and thereby enhance political status.³⁵⁴ Blood vengeance also persisted. In one case the tribe of Iburāsan went to war with their rival Aith al-Qāsim after a member of the latter killed a dog that belonged to a guest of the chief of the former group and refused to pay blood money. This unrepaired insult to the chief's honor as protector and host led to a shooting war in which the combatants killed more than one-hundred men over the ensuing years.³⁵⁵ Although a somewhat extreme example from a famously fractious culture, it demonstrates the long-term existence and continuity of tribal life and tribal strife in the Middle East and North Africa.

This is important to the present work because it suggests an unbroken connection between tribes in the pre-Islamic Near East and twentieth-century Bedouins which allows for making analogous comparisons between the latter—whose practices and identities are well documented by modern researchers—and the former, which are only remembered in problematic documentary sources. This in turn allows for the identification of events in the historiographic record that justifiably can be ascribed to tribal or tribe-like behaviors, and for the isolation of contextually-common motivations

³⁵³ Jabbur, 298-302. A similar overall situation existed in Oman where tribes retained significant political influence until at least 1970; see: "The Past and Future of Tribes in Oman," *Fanack Chronicle of Middle East and North Africa*, August 11, 2016, <https://chronicle.fanack.com>. Jabbur pointed out that governments had cracked down on raiding, apparently during his lifetime, although the tribes resisted this change—sometimes violently.

³⁵⁴ Lewis, "Feuding and Social Change," 44.

³⁵⁵ David M. Hart, "An Ethnographic Survey of the Riffian Tribe of Aith Wuryaghil," *Tamuda* 2, (1954): 51-86, cited in Lewis, "Feuding and Social Change," 46.

where the sources suggest pietistic ones of questionable validity. In the case of the objects of the present study—the Khawārij—this contextual understanding provides one more tool in uncovering probable contributors to the appearance of that sect and the formation of its identity.

Likewise the political interactions between Arabs and their neighbors in the years before Muḥammad’s prophetic mission. Whether reduced imperial interest in *Arabia Deserta* and the collapse of the federate client kingdoms opened the door for the rise of Islam and the Arab Conquests is less relevant to the present work than are the relationships between these agents. Their creation, interaction, and dissolution reveals typical behaviors in contemporary inter-group dynamics, behaviors one can justifiably expect to see reflected in the early Muslim sectarian conflicts. Just as with Arabian tribal culture, useful analogs can be made between these polities and the Khawārij, a discussion taken up in the next chapter.

Chapter VI

Khārijī Identity from the Outside

The Khārijī master narrative derives almost exclusively from ḥadīth and akhbār generated from outside that sect. In other words, it is the result of a process of external identity formation and, as such, contains ample evidence of out-group discrimination. In the early-Islamic historiographic tradition, the majority of akhbār that concern the Khawārij generally involve them in one of three activities: verbally expressing dissent with their political superiors, and planning or actually engaging in proactive rebellion. In itself this predilection should not cause concern because the akhbārīs focused on these sorts of events overall, not just in regard to the sectarians; as with historians in general, conflict of one sort or another was the *raison d'être* for the early Muslim chroniclers. But other observable trends exist in the Khārijī akhbār that stand out. For example, the reports exhibit a differential in detail over time. Surprisingly, this pattern flows in the opposite direction of that which one logically might expect: the earlier reports on the Khawārij tend to have much greater detail than those from closer to or even within an akhbārī's own lifetime. Coherent with this trend, earlier reports tend towards the passionate, in the sense that they contain stirring (or perhaps disturbing) speeches and extended conversations, as well as a relatively-high level of detail in comparison to records of later events.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ Hagemann notes that in al-Baladhuri's *Ansāb al-Ashrāf* the author maintains a higher level of detail in the Khārijī-related akhbār he records versus al-Ṭabarī, a result of the former's desire to cast the Umayyads in a negative light. Hagemann bolsters her analysis with the fact that al-Baladhuri omits commentary unfavorable to the Khawārij in his account of the revolt of al-Mustawrid, a tale discussed briefly towards the end of the present chapter (Hagemann, 157-59, and 173). However, her point might be stretched too thin. Al-Ṭabarī, who reports the same series of events, says nothing demonstrably negative about the rebel and his militant band either.

The Khārijī akhbār discussed herein are presented in chronological groupings for two reasons. First, this arrangement provides the clearest sense of the progression of the movement's external identity over time. Second, it aids in analysis of the reports themselves, as those from the same time period or which discuss the same event usually share features that make analysis of the individual akhbār with the tools of the text critic more fruitful. This periodization breaks down as follows:

1. The pre- or proto-Khārijī period, which includes all accounts connected with the sect prior to Ṣiffīn, 8-31/630-57. These reports are largely later fabrications and therefore create an anachronistic understanding of the sectarians.
2. The initial appearance of the Khawārij at the Battle of Ṣiffīn through the assassination of the fourth caliph, 37-40/657-61. The akhbār from this period contain a great deal of pro-‘Alid apologetic material in which the sectarians play the part of foils to ‘Alī. While the words that emanate from the sectarians’ mouths are of doubtful veracity, the actions attributed to them suggest a different story than that of the master narrative.
3. The years between the First and Second Fitnas, characterized by low-level dissent and localized rebellion, 41-60/661-79. The uprisings described for this period were small and characterized by tribal behavior. The sources lack much of the polemic characteristic of the periods that bracket this one, and reveal nothing of the dogma later ascribed to the sect other than dissatisfaction with the caliphate.
4. The period of the Second Fitna, years that witnessed significant Khārijī activity in the heart of the Islamic world as well as in the east, including the formation of the first proto-states identified with the sect, 61-79/680-98. Characteristic of the

politicized narratives that describe this conflict is the presentation of the Khawārij as inherently fractious, destructive, and unreasonable, often to their own detriment. The present author focuses on the Azāriqa to show that the bloodthirsty reputation of that sub-sect cannot be justified from a close reading of the historiography.

5. The waning of the Umayyad dynasty, 122-50/739-67. The early years of this time span witnessed the spread of Khārijī doctrine to North Africa where some important Berber tribes joined the ranks of the Ibāḍiyya and Ṣufriyya. To the east other Khawārij rebelled against the caliph or his agents, and again enjoyed considerable, if not permanent, success. With a few exceptions, the sources' presentation of these uprisings makes them look virtually indistinct from those of other groups likewise disaffected with the government. Furthermore, they betray a growing acceptance of the Khārijī identity as a legitimate means of expressing dissent against the caliphate.

The bulk of this chapter focuses on the first four periods for two reasons: First, the sources generally present the uprisings of the late-Umayyad era as less concerned with questions of religious orthodoxy and more with political self-determination and freedom from taxation. Second, and more important, external Khārijī identity evolved almost exclusively from the perception of events that occurred during the first four periods.

Pre- or Proto-Khārijī Period, 8-31/630-57

The earliest sources make no mention of the Khawārij during this time period, but later authors eventually interpolated them into the ḥadīth and akhbār. One of the

more-obvious examples of this occurs in the many tellings of the story of the division of spoils after the Battle of Ḥunayn in the year 8/630. Shortly after Mecca capitulated to Muḥammad, Banū Hawāzin, still harboring some hostility towards Quraysh after the Ḥarb al-Fijār, joined forces with Banū Thaqīf, intent on a preemptive strike against the Muslims.³⁵⁷ But the Prophet received word of the pending attack and moved to intercept. The opponents met in Wadī Ḥunayn where, after an initial repulse, Muḥammad and his men carried the day. The booty gathered after the battle was considerable to say the least; the warriors of Hawāzin brought their families, livestock, and all their possessions with them, and it fell into the hands of the victorious Muslims. After an unsuccessful attempt to take the nearby city of al-Ṭā'if from Banū Thaqīf, the Prophet headed northeast of Mecca to al-Ji'rāna, there to distribute the spoils taken from Hawāzin at Ḥunayn. By all accounts, Muḥammad favored the new and politically-useful Qurayshite converts to Islam, giving them larger shares of the booty "in order to conciliate them and to win over their hearts."³⁵⁸ While some of those who had served alongside the Prophet since before the conquest of Mecca expressed dissatisfaction at this obvious favoritism towards a recent enemy, Muḥammad handled the situation with characteristic political acumen.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ *EI*², s.v. "Hawāzin."

³⁵⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *The Last Years of the Prophet*, vol. 9 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by Ismail K. Poonawala (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 32. In a ḥadīth traced to 'Abdallāh Ibn Abī Bakr (a Tabi'un, ca. 60-130/679-747 [Ibn Sa'd, *Men of Madina*, 2.310]), he explicitly claimed that the Prophet favored "men of eminence" in this distribution of war booty. For his part, Muḥammad appears to have unintentionally laid the groundwork for dissatisfaction among his followers by requesting the return of at least some (Ibn Kathīr claims all: *Beginning to the End*, 1.943) of the Hawāzin captives to their tribe, depriving the victors of their slave-spoils. The Prophet mitigated much of the subsequent discontent by offering to replace each slave with a number of camels for those who objected to the return.

³⁵⁹ Several marginalized parties expressed desire for a greater share of the loot, including some Bedouins who forcibly pinned the Prophet against a tree and took his cloak, and the Anṣār, who the Prophet assuaged by pointing out the special relationship he had with them. 'Abbās ibn Mirdās al-Sulamī was so dissatisfied with his portion—a meager four camels compared to the one-hundred given to Mu'āwiya and other recent Qurayshite converts—that he composed a verse complaining of Muḥammad's stinginess toward those who had battled on his behalf. Al-Ṭabarī, *Last Years*, 26-37; Ibn Ishaq, 594-7; and al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghazī*,

In relationship to the present study, the most interesting incident during the division of the Ḥunayn spoils occurred when a particular man vocalized his dissent. The earliest version of the story survives in Ibn Hisham's recension of Ibn Iṣḥāq, whose isnād originates with ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās.³⁶⁰ According to him,

A man of [Banū] Tamīm called Dhū al-Khuwayṣira came and stood by the apostle as he was making gifts to the men and said, "Muḥammad, I've seen what you have done today." "Well, and what do you think?" he answered. He said, "I don't think you have been just." The Prophet was angry and said, "If justice is not to be found with me then where will you find it?" 'Umar asked to be allowed to kill [al-Khuwayṣira], but [Muḥammad] said, "Let him alone, for he will have a following that will go so deeply into religion that they will come out of it as an arrow comes out of the target; you look at the head and there is nothing on it; you look at the butt end and there is nothing on it; then at the notch and there is nothing on it. It went through before flesh and blood could adhere to it."³⁶¹

As the oldest surviving version, Ibn Iṣḥāq's is the closest thing to an Urtext that exists for this particular tradition.³⁶² It identifies the antagonist, Dhū al-Khuwayṣira, by nickname (his name means "he with the narrow waist"), and the only other piece of personal information offered is his affiliation with Banū Tamīm. But at some point, later authors associated al-Khuwayṣira with the Khawārij, either implicitly or explicitly.

The first to do so may have been Abū ‘Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Yazīd ibn Mājah al-Rabī al-Qazwīnī (d. 274/887), a muḥaddith of Persian descent. In a tradition traced back to Abū Ṣa‘īd al-Khudrī, Ibn Mājah's version lacks all the original contextual

ed. by Rizwi Faizer, trans. by Rizwi Faizer, Amal Ismail, and Abdulkader Tayob (New York: Routledge, 2011), 462-64.

³⁶⁰ ‘Abdull ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās was a Companion remembered for his virtue and honest transmission of Prophetic traditions (Ibn Sa‘d, *Men of Medina*), 1.306.

³⁶¹ Ibn Iṣḥāq, 595-96.

³⁶² Ma'mar ibn Rashīd, a contemporary of Ibn Iṣḥāq, also wrote a Prophetic biography, entitled *Kitāb al-Maghāzī (Book of the Expeditions)*. Preserved in a recension by his student, ‘Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī, Ma'mar included the battle of Ḥunayn in his sīra, but did not mention any of the dissent expressed over the division of spoils. See: Ma'mar ibn Rashīd, *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muḥammad According to the Recension of ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī*, ed. and trans. by Sean W. Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 104-109.

elements from Ibn Isḥāq's and records only the prophetic portion.³⁶³ But instead of it being in reference to the future followers of the mysterious Dhū al-Khuwayṣira, this version asserts that the Prophet actually spoke in regard to the Khawārij.³⁶⁴ While it is remotely possible this ḥadīth recalls an entirely different event, the two predictions are nearly identical in substance. According to Ibn Mājah, Abū Ṣa'īd recalled that he heard the Prophet claim that the Khawārij

will pass through Islam like an arrow passing through its target, then he (the archer) picks up his arrow and looks at its iron head but does not see anything, then he looks at the shaft and does not see anything, then he looks at the band: that which is wrapped around the iron head where it is connected to the shaft, then he looks at the feather and is not sure whether he sees anything or not.³⁶⁵

This version uses the same metaphor of an arrow passing through game, and does so to convey the exact same message as that related by Ibn Isḥāq: religious sectarians would appear in the future, but leave no lasting impression on Islam. The major difference between the two lies in the prophetic objects: the earlier version targets the otherwise unknown al-Khuwayṣira and his future, unidentified followers, the latter the first sectarians in Islam. Further evidence of redaction in Ibn Mājah's version exists in the inclusion of a statement to the effect that Khārijī piety would appear greater and more intense than that of other Muslims. As with the date and pig inserted into the story of Ibn Khabbāb, this addition represents a later, external understanding of the Khawārij, who eventually were identified with engaging in rebellion all day and praying all night, an

³⁶³ An Ansār but too young to participate in the battle of 'Uḥūd (3/625), Abū Ṣa'īd al-Khudrī later made a name for himself as a transmitter of ḥadīth. He died in Medina in 74/693-94 (Ibn Khallikan, 2.208).

³⁶⁴ Abū 'Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Yazīd ibn Mājah al-Rab'ī al-Qazwīnī, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, n.t. (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 1.1.169, English translation retrieved from <http://www.sunnah.com>. In this ḥadīth, the Khawārij are referred to as the Ḥarūriyya (the people of Ḥarūrā), an alternate name most often associated with the very first seceders who, upon leaving 'Alī's camp at Ṣiffīn, established their own at the village of Ḥarūrā (al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 90n365).

³⁶⁵ Ibn Mājah, 1.1.169.

impossible-to-maintain lifestyle in reality for more than very brief periods, but one presented as truth by critics of the sect.

Evolutions of this ḥadīth continued to appear for several hundred years. Contemporary with Ibn Mājah, Persian scholar Imām al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) preserved another redaction in his *al-Adab al-Mufrad (The Manners of the Individual)*. More terse than the previous two discussed herein, it still revolved around the prediction of a future sectarian division, using the arrow metaphor. As in Ibn Mājah, al-Bukhārī's version revised the identity of the tradition's intended target, calling him "the hypocrite" (*al-munāfiq*) instead of Dhū al-Khuwayṣira. While *munāfiq* is most-often translated as hypocrite, its use in the Qur'an and numerous ḥadīth translates more accurately as "dissenter."³⁶⁶ This definition seems particularly apropos to the tradition under discussion when one considers the Prophet's words regarding the hypocrite, who "is with his followers who recite the Qur'an and it does not go beyond their throats."³⁶⁷ The early-Muslim historiographic tradition associated those who recited the scriptures with the *qurrā'*, some of whom in turn were identified with the early sectarians.³⁶⁸ Considering these issues and the ḥadīth's obvious similarities with the preceding versions, it appears the redactor meant the reader to understand this prophetic saying to refer implicitly to the Khawārij.

Another muḥaddīth, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad ibn Shu'ayb ibn 'Alī ibn Sīnān al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915), recorded perhaps the longest version of the division-of-

³⁶⁶ EI², s.v. "Munāfiqūn."

³⁶⁷ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mughīra ibn Bardizbah al-Ju'fī al-Bukhārī, *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*, n.t. (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 33.774. English translation retrieved from <http://www.sunnah.com>.

³⁶⁸ Regardless of where one stands on the *qurrā'* question, it is clear they did not represent a homogenous group. While some joined the Khawārij, others sided with 'Alī or Mu'āwiya.

spoils tradition in his *Sunan*. While Ḥunayn is not mentioned, the context involves Muḥammad distributing wealth to his followers. The source of the ḥadīth, Abū Barza, associated it explicitly to the Khawārij, but recalled the prophetic saying thusly:

A people will come at the end of time; as if he [the man complaining about Muḥammad's fairness in dividing the spoils] is one of them [the Khawārij], reciting the Qur'an without it passing beyond their throats. They will go through Islam just as the arrow goes through the target. Their distinction will be shaving. They will not cease to appear until the last of them comes with *Al-Masīḥ Al-Dajjāl*. So when you meet them, then kill them, they are the worst of created beings.³⁶⁹

Here elements from several earlier versions come together, including the appearance of the sectarians, their lack of lasting impact, and their association with the always-problematic qurrā'. This tradition adds a physical characteristic shared by the future sectarians—shaving of the head—and a somewhat less-optimistic prediction about their longevity from the perspective of the quietist majority. In al-Nasā'ī's ḥadīth, the Khārijī sect will persist until the advent of the eschaton. Furthermore, in an ending similar to that already witnessed in one of the versions of the murder of Ibn Khabbāb, this tradition includes a prophetic commandment to destroy the sectarians.

The increasing distinction introduced into the story of the division of spoils post Ḥunayn continued with 'Alī ibn Ahmad al-Wāhidī (d. 467/1075), who actually named an identifiable individual in the version he offered in his *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (*Occasions of Revelation*), a seminal work in which the author linked "historical"

³⁶⁹ Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad ibn Shu'ayb ibn Alī ibn Sīnān al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*, n.t. (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 5.37.4107, English translation retrieved from <http://www.sunnah.com>. This ḥadīth links the saying to the seceders in its opening line, where the narrator says "I used to wish that I could meet a man among the Companions of the Prophet and ask him about the Khawārij," the rest of the tradition reporting the fulfillment of that desire. Abū Barza was a Companion who fought alongside the Prophet at several battles, and later retired to Basra (Ibn Sa'd, *Men of Medina*, 1.4, and 1.227). Al-Masīḥ Al-Dajjāl is the last in a line of predicted false prophets found in some Islamic eschatological traditions, comparable to the Christian notion of the anti-Christ.

happenings to the revelation of Qur'anic verse. In his ascription of events that precipitated the original recitation of sura 9:58,³⁷⁰ al-Wāhidī claimed:

While the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, was dividing alms, Ibn Dhū al-Khuwayṣira al-Tamīmī (Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr, the origin of the Kharijites) came to him and said: "Be fair with us, oh Messenger of Allah!"³⁷¹

The interpolation provided by al-Wāhidī that al-Khuwayṣira was one and the same person as Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr is not the only revision found in this version, but it is the most important one for the purposes of the present study. Al-Ṭabarī records Ḥurqūṣ's association with the Khawārij in his *Tārīkh*, and notes his status as one of the Companions, but does not equate him with the events at Ḥunayn.³⁷² Neither did al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), but in his book on Islamic sects and schisms, *Al-Farq Bayn Al-Firaq*, he did associate Ḥurqūṣ with another individual remembered only by nickname, Dhū al-Thudayya, "the one with the woman's breast."³⁷³ He, the second mystery man linked to the Khawārij, originally appeared in a khabar on the Battle of al-Nahrawān wherein 'Alī predicted that individual's death. Regardless of whether al-Wāhidī possessed any awareness of al-Baghdādī's claims regarding al-Thudayya, the former's connection of al-Khuwayṣira with Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr is strikingly similar in a number of ways.

Fellow heresiographer al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) agreed with al-Baghdādī's proposition that Ḥurqūṣ and Dhū al-Thudayya were one and the same person. In regard to Dhū al-Khuwayṣira, al-Shahrastānī accepted the early traditions of the division of

³⁷⁰ "(There is) one of them who finds fault with you [the Prophet] concerning freewill offerings. Yet if they are given (a share) of it, they are pleased, but if they are not given (a share) of it, they are angry."

³⁷¹ 'Alī ibn Ahmad al-Wāhidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, trans. Mokrane Guezzou (Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008), 88.

³⁷² Al-Ṭabarī, *The Conquest of Iraq, Southwestern Persia, and Egypt*, trans. by Gautier H. A. Juynboll, vol. 13 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 121.

³⁷³ 'Abd al-Qāhir ibn Ṭāhir Al-Baghādī, *Moslem Schisms and Sects, Al-Farq Bain Al-Firaq: Being the History of the Various Philosophical Systems Developed in Islam*, trans. by Kate Chambers Seelye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920), 77.

Ḥunayn spoils, but came to his own conclusions: Dhū al-Khuwayṣira and Dhū al-Thudayya were, respectively, the first and last of the first generation of Khawārij, the so-called Muḥakkima.³⁷⁴ The author's version of the ḥadīth includes his commentary and yet another new element:

With respect to this community [the umma] it is no secret that its errors arose from the errors of hypocrites at the time of the Prophet, who did not accept his judgment in what he commanded or forbade, and began to reason on their own accord where there was no scope for reasoning, asked questions in fields in which it was forbidden to enter or enquire, and disputed baselessly where dispute was not permitted. Consider [for example] the tradition about Dhū al-Khuwayṣira al-Tamīmī when he said, "Do justice, O Muḥammad, for you have failed to do justice." Whereupon Muḥammad replied, "If I do not do justice who will?" But the accursed man reiterated what he had said, and went on, "This is a distribution in which the thought of God was not present." This was a clear rebellion against the Prophet. If then a person who has criticized a true imām becomes a Khārijite, how much more fitting it is that one who has criticized the Prophet should be called a Khārijite?³⁷⁵

In this variant of the Ḥunayn-spoils tradition, al-Khuwayṣira is more persistent, and even goes so far as to accuse the Prophet of impiety. Although al-Shahrastānī does not link the dissenter with the Khawārij within the tradition itself, he does in his analysis. If someone guilty of truculence against "a true imām" like ‘Alī is identified as a seceder, then surely someone guilty of the same transgression against the founder of the faith merits the same label.

Al-Shahrastānī's definition of a Khārijī, mentioned in the introduction to the present work, deserves repeating here:

Whoever rebelled against the legitimate imām accepted by the people is called a Khārijite, whether this rebellion took place at the time of the Companions against the rightfully guided imāms, or against their worthy successors, or against the imāms of any time.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ Al-Shahrastānī, 17, and 99-100.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 17.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 98.

The author's interpretation had a significant and lasting impact on the master narrative, and it continues to do so today. It also represents the maturation of the external understanding of the sect: anyone who engages in proactive rebellion against the leadership of the umma is, by definition, a Khārijī. Kenney calls al-Shahrastānī's interpretation a "highly abstract and transhistorical notion" of the Khawārij, part of an effort by Sunni apologists to control the discourse of orthodoxy during the medieval period under the Abbasids.³⁷⁷

The evolution and multiplication of the traditions related to the dissent over the division of the Ḥunayn spoils are part of a centuries-long process of external identity formation, one that remolded the memory of Islam's first sectarians into something of greater use to those who needed a foil against which to justify the status quo. More to the point, the juxtaposition of these traditions creates an opportunity to apply the criteria borrowed from Biblical criticism with fruitful results. First, the criterion of increasing distinction is clearly evident in the chronological presentation recounted above. Ibn Iṣḥāq, who provided the earliest surviving version of the ḥadīth, did not relate it to the Khawārij in any ascertainable manner. Neither did al-Wāqidī (ca. 130-207/747-823), who also authored his sīra in the second century AH. But that author did use the label "hypocrite" in a separate-but-related ḥadīth in a way similar to that witnessed in al-Bukhārī several decades later.³⁷⁸ By the following century Ibn Mājah made the connection with the Khawārij explicit. His contemporary al-Nasā'ī preserved a version that modified the prophecy so that it fit more coherently with a reality in which the sectarians appeared a permanent fixture. His variant also included a physical identifier

³⁷⁷ Kenny, *Muslim Rebels*, 31.

³⁷⁸ Al-Wāqidī, *Life*, 464-65.

and a prophetic injunction to destroy the rebels. Al-Baghdādī 's tradition offered a different descriptive nickname of the original dissenter while al-Wāhidī's ḥadīth equated the culprit with a known individual, Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr. The addition of multiple distinctive elements to the Ḥunayn Urtext after the second century AH is obvious.

Second, the evolution of this tradition also reveals conflation, particularly in later versions. Al-Shahrastānī's, quoted in full above, merges together separate ḥadīth found in Ibn Ishāq, al-Wāqidī, and other authors. Approximately two centuries later, Ibn Kathīr (ca. 700-74/1301-73) provided a veritable host of variants that revealed the extent to which the various strands borrowed from or merged with one another in his universal history, *Al-Bidāyya wa al-Nihāyya (The Beginning and the End)*. Ibn Kathīr arranged them into twelve categories, based on their chains of transmission, in what amounted to an unintentional exercise in conflation and assimilation. The basic elements shared by all are the presence of the Khawārij—either in person or as a topic of conversation—and a prophecy that predicts the sect's appearance. Further details differ, but fall into a few easily-identified topoi endemic to this family of ḥadīth. The prophecies come in two forms: either the sectarians come and go without impact, or they continue to appear until the end of days. Some versions claimed that true believers could recognize the rebels by a physical characteristic possessed by one of their number: a growth like a woman's breast, deformed hands, a missing limb, or black skin. All in all, the nearly two-score ḥadīth Ibn Kathīr narrated in whole or part provide multiple examples of conflation and assimilation within the larger tradition.³⁷⁹

The third criterion to find use in the Ḥunayn-spoils narrative is that of difficulty, and it does so in the person of Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr al-Sa'dī, the Companion

³⁷⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Beginning to the End*, 2.695-2.700.

turned Khārijī. As the only contemporary of the Prophet to openly rebel against the rāshidūn caliphs—he allegedly participated in the murder of 'Uthmān and led the Khārijī infantry at al-Nahrawān—Ḥurqūṣ presented a problem to Muslim theologians and other thinkers not unlike that created by Judas Iscariot for Christianity: How could a member of the nascent umma, the first and noblest generation, abandon his faith in favor of the extremist views of rebellious sectarians? Curiously, Ḥurqūṣ appears to be *persona non grata* in the early literature. Of all the sources utilized herein that discuss the nascent Khawārij, few explicitly note his association with the sect.³⁸⁰ Al-Ṭabarī mentions Ḥurqūṣ in association with events in Basra when al-Hurmuzān, a former commander in the Persian army, threatened rebellion against his new Muslim associates. According to the akhbārī, the caliph 'Umar sent Ḥurqūṣ to reinforce the Basrans in stopping al-Hurmuzān. Ḥurqūṣ enjoyed considerable military success, conquering the Persian city of Sūq Ahwaz and much of present-day southwestern Iran. He collected the poll tax on behalf of the caliphate, sent one-fifth of the total to 'Umar and presumably kept one fifth for himself, likely becoming quite wealthy in the process.³⁸¹ All of this took place in the year 17/638, but his prosperity appears to have been short-lived; conflict resurfaced in Ahwaz that necessitated the sending of further caliphal forces, none of which note his presence.

Until that point, Ḥurqūṣ behaved in a way coherent with that expected of one of the Ṣaḥāba. But that changed when, in the year 35/656, he participated in the murder

³⁸⁰ Key word searches of the ḥadīth collections stored at www.sunnah.com do not locate him under any spelling of his name, or in any of the many traditions associated with Ḥunayn. He is likewise absent from Ibn Ishāq's, Ma'mar ibn Rāshid's and al-Wāqidī's sīrāt, Ibn Sa'd's prosopography, and the conquest (futūh) literature of al-Balādhurī and al-Wāqidī. Al-Suyūṭī omits the Companion from his history of the caliphate, and even Ibn Kathīr, who gathers together more than thirty prophetic predictions involving the Khawārij in his universal history, never mentions Ḥurqūṣ. According to a list by L. Veccia Vaglieri in *EF*², the connection between Ḥurqūṣ and Dhū al-Khuwayṣira al-Tamīmī is made by later authors (al-Damīrī, Ibn Ḥajar, and Mubarrad—Vaglieri did not mention al-Wāhidī) who date from the fifth century AH and later (*EF*², s.v. "Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuyahr al-Sa'dī").

³⁸¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Conquest of Iraq*, 121-23.

of the third caliph, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān. Al-Ṭabarī's version of the story spans 79 pages in its English translation, in which the author relates numerous akhbār from a variety of sources. In all that material, Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr is mentioned precisely one time:

The Baṣrans set out in four companies, led by Ḥukaym ibn Jabalah al-'Abdī, Dhurayḥ ibn 'Abbād al-'Abdī, Bishr ibn Shurayḥ al-Ḥuṭam ibn Ḍubay'ah al-Qaysī, and Ibn al-Muḥarrish ibn 'Abd 'Amr al-Ḥanafī. Their number was the same as that of the Egyptians, and *Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr al-Sa'dī was in command over them all, save for those among the people who followed after them.*³⁸²

The future Khārijī is not mentioned again in the context of 'Uthmān's killing, and in fact does not reappear until the following year when he is sole survivor of the blood vengeance exacted by the murdered caliph's relatives, the Banū 'Umayya, an incident which precipitated the Battle of the Camel (36/656) and the First Fitna.³⁸³ Chased by those in pursuit of *lex talionis*, he took refuge with his own clan, the Banū Sa'd, a sept of the large and wide-ranging Banū Tamīm, a tribe ubiquitous in the Khārijī master narrative.³⁸⁴ Eventually the leader of Banū Sa'd in Basra, al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays, sided with 'Alī in the fitna, an alliance that saved Ḥurqūṣ from further reprisals from the Banū 'Umayya who engaged the fourth caliph in civil war under the leadership of Mu'āwiya.

The reports that pertained to Ḥurqūṣ in the proto-Khārijī period troubled at least one Muslim akhbārī. Either al-Ṭabarī or one of his sources inserted his own voice into a report regarding a prediction made by 'Umar.³⁸⁵ In the year 17/638, that caliph allegedly advised Ḥurqūṣ not to create hardship for any Muslim, or allow "indifference or hastiness" to guide his actions lest he betray any chance at heavenly reward.³⁸⁶ The

³⁸² Al-Ṭabarī, *Crisis*, 159-60. Emphasis added.

³⁸³ Al-Ṭabarī, *The Community Divided*, vol. 16 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by Adrian Brockett (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 70-73.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 72 and 97; and Wüstenfeld, Table K.

³⁸⁵ It was probably Sayf ibn 'Umar, an infamous character in terms of his historiographical habits. He is discussed in greater detail, below.

³⁸⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Conquest of Iraq*, 125-26.

akhbārī responsible followed this report by jumping 19 years into the future to provide a brief comment on Ḥurqūš's association with the first Khawārij and his death at al-Nahrawān.³⁸⁷ The juxtaposition of this foreshadowing with the reports of Ḥurqūš's military success in southwestern Iran reveal the difficulty involved with the memory of this individual. It is as if the author wanted to remind the reader that there was nothing to revere about this particular Companion, who would eventually undo his own, considerable accomplishments by turning against the caliphate.

The very oddness of the presentation of Ḥurqūš ibn Zuhayr in the few sources that mention him explicitly, combined with his total invisibility in the rest of the historiographic tradition, leads the present author to conclude that the Companion existed and did in fact side with the early Khawārij against the caliph, a conclusion based on the criterion of difficulty. Like Judas Iscariot, Ḥurqūš simultaneously possessed both prestige as one of the early converts to Islam, and ignominy for his association with the faith's first sectarians. This Janus-like character created the cognitive dissonance witnessed in the aforementioned editorial comment to the report in al-Ṭabarī; mention of the Companion's accomplishments necessitated mention of his future betrayal. The mystery author at least deserves credit for not avoiding the subject entirely, a tactic adopted by the majority. Ḥurqūš's eventual integration into the Ḥunayn narrative likely represents the efforts of later authors to make sense of this culturally-troubling character.

The facile connection between the memory of an early convert who later betrayed the community and a growing tradition of Prophetic utterances in regard to future sectarian divisions seems natural enough, but the obvious increase in distinction, conflation, and assimilation between the near-two-score versions of the Ḥunayn-spoils

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 126.

story discussed herein can be interpreted only as later fabrications. In analyzing the earliest surviving version, that found in Ibn Isḥāq, there is no clear connection to the Khawārij or Ḥurqūṣ.³⁸⁸ Application of the criterion of difficulty suggests that the expression of dissent over the manner in which Muḥammad divided up the spoils actually did occur. Furthermore, the behavior exhibited in that tradition appears consistent with that among tribespeople in general. The Prophet acted as a shaykh was expected to act, making gifts in a manner intended to strengthen loyalty among his more influential allies—there is absolutely nothing unusual about that when taken in context.³⁸⁹ Those who felt slighted likewise responded in a culturally appropriate manner by voicing their discontent and demanding a share commensurate with their self-perceived worth. But any association with the sectarians who appeared almost thirty-years after Ḥunayn represents a later interpolation, one that linked the dissatisfaction over Muḥammad's distribution of war booty with that felt by some over leadership of the umma under the third and fourth caliphs.

Not all of the few proto-Khārijī akhbār that survive are so problematic or obviously infused with polemic from later generations. As previously noted, the eastern expansion of the caliphate had come to a standstill under 'Uthmān and this, combined with further migration to Iraq and that caliph's decision to exchange fay' lands there for those held by Qurayshite ashraf in central Arabia resulted in reduced stipends for many.

³⁸⁸ The Qur'an tersely mentions the Battle of Ḥunayn in 9:25-27, ascribing the victory to divine intervention. However, it makes no mention of the subsequent unrest over the division of spoils. The Qur'an does not hesitate to mention incidents of ideological opposition to the Prophet and his mission, which makes the absence of any proto-Khārijī presence further evidence that the event did not unfold as described by later authors.

³⁸⁹ This continued to be one of the expected duties of tribal or clan chiefs among the Berbers of Morocco at least until 1975; see: David Hart, *Dadda 'Atta and his Forty Grandsons: The Socio-Political Organization of the Ait 'Atta of Southern Morocco* (Cambridge: Middle East and North African Studies Press, 1981), 90.

That in turn led to grumbling, particularly among the nobility of less-influential tribes.³⁹⁰ In an environment already plagued by inter-tribal violence, these disenfranchised ashraf made their discontent known in the home of Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ, the governor of Kufa, when they assaulted two of his guests after they commented favorably on the generosity of Quraysh, presumably in reference to 'Uthmān's land swap.³⁹¹ Sa'īd exiled the ten malcontents involved in the attack, sending them to Mu'āwiya in Syria, but by the next year (34/654) they had found their way back to Kufa where their de facto leader, Mālik al-Ashtar, incited the people by claiming that the caliph's representative intended to reduce the pay of the veterans by one-third and eliminate entirely that of the female nobility.³⁹² Further dissent over issues of economic entitlement arose in the aftermath of 'Uthmān's murder, when the leaders of those seeking blood vengeance refused to pay bonuses to some of their allies. As a result of this insult to prestige and purse, Banū 'Abd al-Qays and part of Banū Bakr ibn Wā'il defected to join 'Alī in the days before the Battle of the Camel.³⁹³ Consistent with this pattern, al-Ṭabarī reports via Sayf ibn 'Umar al-Tamīmī that 'Alī did not confiscate the possessions of the vanquished after that engagement. Naturally enough, some of those who had fought for him asked, "What allows us to kill them but forbids us their money?"³⁹⁴ By denying the taking of any spoils, the fourth caliph violated a tradition that went back uncounted generations. To justify his decision, he responded, "Those who fought you are like you. Those who make peace with

³⁹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *The Crisis of the Early Caliphate*, trans. R. Stephen Humphreys, vol. 15 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 60-61.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 112-25.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 133-34.

³⁹³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Community Divided*, 73-73.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

us are one of us, and we are one with them... you are in no need of their fifth."³⁹⁵

According to Sayf, "It was on that day the Khawārij began talking among themselves."³⁹⁶

Sayf's somewhat-tarnished reputation as an akhbārī and his conspiratorial sidebar notwithstanding, the allegation in his khabar that the sectarians' dissatisfaction stemmed from purely secular concerns stands in full coherence with the akhbār related above, and with numerous other examples of economically-motivated dissent found in the sources.³⁹⁷ In fact, in the proto-Khārijī period, allegations of pietistic concerns associated with the future sectarians are absent outside incidents of later interpolation, as starkly evidenced in the Ḥunayn traditions. Based on reports of events pre-Ṣiffīn, if one eliminates those sources obviously polluted or invented by later polemicists, this researcher must conclude that the Khawārij manifested in response to worsening economic conditions and related consequences which they blamed on the caliphate and its agents. The next generation of reports, however, paints an entirely different picture.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 167.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Sayf's surviving reports are preserved by later akhbārīs and in two damaged manuscripts of Sayf's own work discovered by Qasim al-Samarrai in 1991, *Kitāb al-Ridda wa-l-futūḥ* and *Kitāb al-jamal wa-masīr 'Ā'isha wa-'Alī* (*Book of the Wars of Apostasy and Conquest* and *Book of [the Battle of] the Camel and the Marching of 'Ā'isha and 'Alī*, respectively). Modern scholars have deemed Sayf's akhbār problematic for a number of reasons: he may have conflated his reports from numerous sources; his isnād often trace to or through unknown, perhaps fictitious, individuals; he was biased towards the Companions, particularly the Quraysh and Umayyads, but against the 'Alids; his reports include a great deal of material not found elsewhere, which raises the question of invention; and favoritism towards the province of Iraq in general, in particular his home city of Kufa. Scholarly discussions of Sayf's heritage are legion, e.g.: Sean W. Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Saba' and the Origins of Shī'ism* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 15-16, and 19-22; and Khalid Yahya Blankinship, *The Challenge to the Empires*, , vol. 11 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), xv-xxviii.

The First Khawārij, 37-40/657-61

Without doubt, reports on the Khawārij from the sect's appearance at Šiffīn in 37/657 through the assassination of ‘Alī in 40/661 are the most polemically-tainted of the entire Khārijī narrative, a result of attempts by various parties to legitimate themselves while denigrating their foes during the struggles of the third century AH.³⁹⁸ Most importantly for the present study, the Khawārij found use as a foil to the fourth caliph. As Hagemann observes, "in all his debates with the Khārijites, ‘Alī is portrayed as a victim both of his own followers [from whom the Khawārij emerged] as well as his Syrian opponents and subsequently excused from all allegations leveled against him."³⁹⁹ While this complicates interpretation of the earliest akhbār concerning the sectarians, it also provides plausible explanation for some of the more peculiar reports, such as those that relate the murder of Ibn Khabbāb.

The present author has already discussed some of the hermeneutical challenges inherent to those particular akhbār in some detail.⁴⁰⁰ While none of them mention the fourth caliph explicitly, it is not outside the realm of possibility that the stories of Ibn Khabbāb's death at the hands of a roving Khārijī band were constructed from whole cloth to justify ‘Alī's seemingly-brutal suppression of the first-generation seceders at al-Nahrawān.⁴⁰¹ After the murder, he sent a messenger to the sectarians to "enquire about what he had heard concerning them and to write back about it fully and without concealment," but when he arrived at the canal the messenger suffered the same

³⁹⁸ Such understanding goes back at least as far as Goldziher, who noted the existence of what he called "political ḥadīths" crafted by all the major factions of the first three hijri centuries: *Muslim Studies*, 2.89, and 2.99-115.

³⁹⁹ Hagemann, 104.

⁴⁰⁰ Chapter 4.

⁴⁰¹ The relationship of the Ibn Khabbāb murder narratives to other reports is discussed later in this chapter.

fate as Ibn Khabbāb.⁴⁰² Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr remembered the unfortunate envoy as al-Ḥārith ibn Murrah al-‘Abdī, but in his *Kitāb al-Akhhbār al-Tiwāl* al-Dīnawarī gave the name of the victim as Faq’as ibn Ṭarīf al-Asadī.⁴⁰³ While their nisbas indicate distinct tribal affiliations which played opposing roles at the Battle of Karbala, the seminal event of Shi’i identity formation, the crucial point is that the murder of an emissary of ‘Alī justified the latter’s confrontation with the Khawārij at al-Nahrawān. The remainder of the tale serves to further salve the caliph’s reputation through his persistent demonstrations of personal piety on the way to the battlefield, and his deliberate rejection of pagan influence.⁴⁰⁴ The akhhbār overflow with excuses for ‘Alī, distancing him from any responsibility for the massacre at the canal: It was the caliph’s men, not the caliph, who vocalized the desire to prioritize the Khawārij over Mu‘āwiya as their military target, and ‘Alī repeatedly tried to convince the rebels to return to the fold, clearly spelling out the consequences should they refuse.

Beyond these issues, the question of blood vengeance enters the picture with the first murder. Khabbāb and his family belonged to Banū Tamīm, one of the largest and most widely-spread tribes, particularly in the east where it had a strong presence even before the conquests.⁴⁰⁵ Surely the whimsical murder of one of its members, a man with a prestigious pedigree, would have resulted in the wrath of Tamīm descending on the killers in short order. The murderers could not have been ignorant of the consequences of their actions, a fact which makes them appear self-destructive as well as homicidal.

⁴⁰² Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 125-26.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 125 and 125n516; and Ibn Kathīr, 2.692.

⁴⁰⁴ Some versions of the story have an unnamed astrologer warn ‘Alī to travel only at a certain time each day or "meet a dire evil." The fourth caliph deliberately avoided taking that advice because, if he had taken it and then won the impending battle with the sectarians, his own men might have taken it as proof of the efficacy of astrology (Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 126; and Ibn Kathīr, 2.692).

⁴⁰⁵ *EF*², s.v. "Tamīm b. Murr."

While such behavior conforms with that of modern jihadi-salafists who engage in suicide attacks, those individuals are fueled at least in part by indoctrination into an ideology developed over a long period.⁴⁰⁶ One wonders whether the first Khārijī generation, not more than one year old when the alleged murders occurred,⁴⁰⁷ had sufficient time to foster and inculcate such extremist views into its members, especially considering that killing the son of a Companion gained them nothing, but risked everything. Furthermore, such behavior contradicted that exhibited by the majority of the early-Khārijī community, which at the time had separated from ‘Alī but otherwise did nothing to proactively oppose him.⁴⁰⁸ Similar observations avail themselves in the story of the murder of ‘Alī's emissary by the Khawārij, and their rejection of the caliph's request to turn over those

⁴⁰⁶ For a description of the formation of modern martyr identity in Islam, see: David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 135-64. Also useful is: James M. Poland, "Suicide Bombers: A Global Problem," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 27, no. 2 (2003): 112-13. For more research that indicates that the behavior of the Khawārij in the Ibn Khabbāb akhbār is implausible, see: Arie W. Kruglanski, Xioyan Chen, Mark Dechesne, Shira Fishman, and Edward Orhek, "Fully Committed: Suicide Bombers' Motivation and the Quest for Personal Significance," *Political Psychology* 30, no. 3 (June 2009): 348-50; and Robert J. Brym, "Six Lessons of Suicide Bombers," *Contexts* 6, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 40-45.

⁴⁰⁷ Like the majority of the critical events in the history of early Islam, the sources provide what Wellhausen called an "unsatisfactory" representation of the temporal relationship between Šiffīn and al-Nahrawān. In al-Ṭabarī, Abū Mikhnaḥ dates the latter in the same year as the former (37/657), but al-Balādhurī dates it approximately one full year later, in early 38/658. Discounting al-Wāqidī's later and impossible-to-reconcile dating for the Battle of the Canals (Sha'bān 38/January 359), even al-Balādhurī's schema must locate the murder of Ibn Khabbāb and the following events within a year of the appearance of the Khawārij at Šiffīn (Wellhausen, *Arab Kingdom*, 87-90).

⁴⁰⁸ By their silence, the sources suggest that the majority of those identified with the early Khawārij did not engage in proactive violence. In fact, al-Ṭabarī mentions only one other example of sectarian violence before al-Nahrawān, when approximately 500 Khawārij from Basra, under the command of Mis'ar ibn Fadakī al-Tamīmī, attacked people "indiscriminately" on their way to join their fellows at the canal (al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 118). According to Michael Morony, the *Kitāb al-Akhhbār al-Ṭiwāl* of al-Dīnawarī (212-81/828-95) claims that the Khawārij on their way to al-Nahrawān "are said to have killed any Muslim they found who supported the arbitration" (Michael Morony, *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest* [Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005], 470). However, this latter khabar sounds like a case of increasing distinction building on the minimalist-version found in al-Ṭabarī. It may also represent the interpolation of a later, external understanding of Khārijī doctrine regarding the application of isti'rāḍ, a term which in relationship to the Khawārij implies the interrogation of fellow Muslims as to their particular beliefs, and the subsequent execution of those who do not conform to the tenets of the sectarians (*ET*², s.v. "Isti'rāḍ").

responsible.⁴⁰⁹ While all these speculations cannot prove anything, they do raise further doubts regarding the historicity of the sequence of events in the lead-up to al-Nahrawān. All things considered, it appears the saga of Ibn Khabbāb is most likely a means for segueing into a story about the fourth caliph, one filled with pro-‘Alid apologetic generated long after the purported events described.

The memory of Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr may have been co-opted for similar reasons. In the proto-Khārijī period, the sources discuss the Companion only in the abstract, as someone commented upon but without a voice of his own. That changes after Ṣiffīn when Ḥurqūṣ reappears for the first time since his flight from 'Uthmān's avengers as part of a two-man delegation sent to ‘Alī to plead with him to renege on his pledge to arbitrate his dispute with Mu‘āwiya. The first words out of Ḥurqūṣ's mouth were the *lā ḥukm*, directed at the caliph, followed by "Repent of your sin, retract your decision, and come out with us against our enemies whom we will fight until we meet our Lord."⁴¹⁰ This invitation did not have the intended effect, however, and instead provided ‘Alī with an opportunity to chastise the seceders on a number of counts, the net effect of which was to redirect blame for the call to arbitration and everything associated with it entirely back on the Khawārij. The caliph argued circles around Ḥurqūṣ, who quickly fell silent and soon left with his associate, the *lā ḥukm* the best Parthian shot the two could muster.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 128-30; and Ibn Kathīr, 2.693. Further evidence of the many paradoxes in the greater Ṣiffīn narrative is found in a report in which Mu‘āwiya sends an envoy to ‘Alī with an identical request—turn over 'Uthmān's murderers or face blood vengeance. ‘Alī's response is to insult the envoy and send him back to his master (Ibn Kathīr, 2.662).

⁴¹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 111. In this case, "our enemies" also happen to be those who want Ḥurqūṣ's head in retaliation for his part in the death of the third caliph.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 110-11.

The isnād al-Ṭabarī provided for this khabar proceeds: "Abū Mikhnaf–Abū al-Mughaffal–‘Awn ibn Abī Juḥayfah [al-Suwāṭī]."⁴¹² While Abū Mikhnaf is generally considered a reliable akhbārī, translator G. R. Hawting called the second name "doubtful."⁴¹³ The originator of this report, ‘Awn, was the son of a Companion who handed down a few ḥadīth related to the appearance and habits of the Prophet—how he ate (he did not lean), his motions when calling people to prayer (turning right and left), and the color of his clothing (red).⁴¹⁴ ‘Awn served as a connection to his father in the ḥadīth literature, and also provided four akhbār for al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*, all of which deal with the actions of parties in rebellion against the caliphate. This similarity in theme places this khabar about Ḥurqūṣ within Ibn Abī Juḥayfah's typical purview.⁴¹⁵ However, ‘Awn died in 116/734, approximately 80 years after the event in question.⁴¹⁶ For him to have witnessed the meeting between the caliph and the Khārijī at an age at which he could recall the words between them with any accuracy, he must have lived to a very ripe age indeed. Similar to the case of the Ibn Khabbāb akhbār traced to Ḥumayd ibn Hilāl, it is remotely possible, but unlikely.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹² Ibid., 110.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 110n. 445.

⁴¹⁴ Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā al-Sulamī al-Ḍarīr al-Būghī al-Tirmidhī, *Shamaʿil Muḥammadiyah* (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 8.61, and 23.130, English translation retrieved from <http://www.sunnah.com>; and al-Nasāʿī, 1.7.644.

⁴¹⁵ Besides the khabar under discussion, see: al-Ṭabarī, *The Caliphate of Yazīd b. Muʿāwiyah*, trans. by I. K. A. Howard, vol. 19 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 61 and 64; and al-Ṭabarī, *The Collapse of Sufyānid Authority and the Coming of the Marwānids*, trans. by G. R. Hawting, vol. 20 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, ed. by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 130. ‘Awn's three other reports fall between the years 60-65/680-85, a tight chronological clustering which raises further doubts as to the veracity of the Ḥurqūṣ khabar.

⁴¹⁶ Ursula Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf: Ein Beitrag zur Historiographie der Umayyadischen* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 190, cited in al-Ṭabarī, *Yazīd b. Muʿāwiyah*, 61n216.

⁴¹⁷ This problem would disappear if ‘Awn received the report from his father. Unfortunately, the isnād begins with the son, with no indication that he learned it from anyone else.

Issues with that isnād aside, more questions arise in comparing this khabar with other akhbār that place ‘Alī in dialectical opposition to Khawārij who, like Ḥurqūṣ, allegedly attempted to get the caliph to see things their way. In four separate reports, ‘Alī defended himself from accusations of impiety leveled at him by sectarians. Transmitted via Abū Mikhnaf, each follows the exact same pattern, one similar to that found in the Ḥurqūṣ-‘Alī encounter wherein one or more Khawārij interrupts the caliph while he gives a public address. All take place in a mosque, one explicitly and the rest implicitly located in Kufa. In three of the four akhbār the sectarians open with the *lā ḥukm*, to which ‘Alī responds with criticism of the Khārijī stance in regard to the arbitration, admitting the soundness of their message but not their intentions. In two versions a sectarian quotes sūra 39:65⁴¹⁸ against the caliph, to which the latter responds with sūra 30:60.⁴¹⁹ In three he also makes a promise to the effect that, if the dissenters stay out of trouble, they will continue to enjoy the benefits and privileges that come with membership in the umma, but will become licit targets should they prove openly rebellious.⁴²⁰ Most of those engaged with ‘Alī in public debate remain unnamed. In only a single case do any speak words of their own, when the otherwise unknown Yazīd ibn ‘Āṣim al-Muḥāribī leapt to his feet and angrily addressed the caliph:

Praise be to God! Our Lord is not to be set aside nor dispensed with. Oh God, I take refuge with you from perpetrating shameful behavior in our religion. That would be falling short in the affairs of God and a baseness that subjects those who do it to God's wrath. ‘Alī, do you threaten us with killing? By God, I hope that we will

⁴¹⁸ "You have been inspired, and those who were before you: 'If indeed you associate, your deed(s) will indeed come to nothing, and you will indeed be one of the losers'," implying that, by resorting to arbitration in determining who would be caliph, ‘Alī had made the arbitrators associates (equal) with God, the sin of *shirk* (polytheism or idolatry).

⁴¹⁹ "So be patient! Surely the promise of God is true. And (let) not those who are uncertain unsettle you." It appears the caliph is implying that the Khawārij are guilty of violating this injunction.

⁴²⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 111-14.

strike you with the swords after a little while, with their edges, not their flats. Then you will know to which of us hell's burning is most due.⁴²¹

A stirring speech, one filled with righteous indignation and a closing allusion to a Qur'anic verse concerned with divine judgment in which those found wanting are consigned to eternal damnation.⁴²² All said, these akhbār uniformly present the Khawārij in the days immediately preceding al-Nahrawān as concerned with one thing and one thing only: piety. And these are not the only examples of such reports. The works of the akhbārīs contain many tales with similar structure and content, not just that of al-Ṭabarī: al-Balādhurī, Ibn Khayyāṭ, al-Ya'qūbī, Ibn A'tham, Ibn Muzāḥim, al-Mas'ūdī, and al-Dīnawarī collectively provide numerous such reports.⁴²³

A remarkable amount of continuity exists in the Khārijī narrative as it pertains to events from their appearance at Ṣiffīn through 'Alī's assassination less than three years later. The sources uniformly present the sectarians' concerns as pietistic in nature, their resolution absolute but misguided, their literal understanding of scriptural injunctions flawed and at times tinged with irony. Yazīd ibn 'Āṣim's condemnation of the fourth caliph bears witness to this understanding; his insinuation to sūra 19:70 is no doubt more appropriately applied against the speaker than his object. In all these debates between the Khawārij and 'Alī and his representatives, the former always come out the losers. Not only that, they often appear incompetent. Their dialectical opponents tend to argue circles around them or cite the more-appropriate verse, and the Khārijī interlocutors often lack much in the way of rhetorical skill and often fall prey to their own flawed reasoning.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 112.

⁴²² Qur'an 19:70, which reads, "Then indeed We [God] shall know those who most deserve burning with it [Hell]."

⁴²³ Hagemann, 106-20.

This is certainly the case in the khabar of Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr's alleged encounter with 'Alī described above, and with those reports that relate the fourth caliph's debates with sectarians both named and anonymous in the days of unrest before al-Nahrawān. In fact, this lop-sided situation exists from the first appearance of the Khawārij on the field of Ṣiffīn, when they insisted that 'Alī accept the call to arbitration proffered by Mu'āwiya's men. At the very moment when the caliph's army stood on the verge of total victory over its enemy, it promptly halted, without the least hesitation, when confronted by copies of the Qur'an. If one takes the master narrative at face value, these are the very same people who started plotting against 'Alī when he denied them spoils after the Battle of the Camel. At Ṣiffīn, the decision to stop fighting in the face of imminent victory would result in the exact same outcome—no booty for the victors—yet halt they did, according to the sources.⁴²⁴ The caliph pleaded with them, pointing out that those who asked for arbitration were "men without religion and without Qur'an" who lacked honor or probity, but the dissenters refused to listen.⁴²⁵ One group of qurrā' demanded that 'Alī submit to arbitration or face the same fate as his predecessor, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, a thinly veiled threat indeed. In response, the caliph predicted a future time in which he would tell them, "I told you so."⁴²⁶ Of course, his moment arrived soon enough—and in multiple variations—after those who first demanded arbitration changed their minds and insisted 'Alī do likewise. The tradition of akhbār that relate purported debates between the caliph and the Khawārij started with Ṣiffīn.

⁴²⁴ They were also the same people who spread dissent in Iraq thanks to the shrinking stipends under 'Uthmān and his policy of redistributing fay' lands to favored Qurayshites.

⁴²⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 79.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

The sources continued this particular motif to the last possible moment, when ‘Alī questioned the Khārijī who struck him the blow that claimed his life. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam and his co-conspirators had agreed to exact blood vengeance on the caliph for the slaying of their fellow sectarians at al-Nahrawān and for their dissatisfaction with caliphal governance in general.⁴²⁷ In a suspiciously-detailed khabar, al-Ṭabarī relates how Ibn Muljam came to Kufa with the intent to murder ‘Alī and, after a brief distraction to enjoy the charms of the beautiful Qaṭāmi bint al-Shijnah, succeeded in striking a blow with a poisoned blade that ultimately resulted in the caliph's death. As the blood flowed from his wounded skull into his beard, ‘Alī questioned the assassin, who had been hamstrung and captured in the scuffle. "Enemy of God," the caliph asked, "did I not do good to you?"⁴²⁸ Ibn Muljam answered in the affirmative, but then added, "I sharpened my sword for forty mornings and I asked God to kill the worst of His creatures with it," a statement that simultaneously reflected the attacker's belief in his own piety (a piety curiously absent from his infatuation with Qaṭāmi) and insulted that of his victim.⁴²⁹ But, as in all the other akhbār that feature ‘Alī in debate with the Khawārij, the caliph got the better of his opponent: "But I think you must be slain with it," he retorted, "for you must be one of the worst of His creatures."⁴³⁰ Not his best rejoinder perhaps, but one entirely consistent with the greater topos to which it belongs.

Most of the akhbār that relate to the early Khawārij read like the examples discussed above, and their obviously pro-'Alid biases have been observed by many scholars. Hagemann refers to these reports collectively as "Apologia for ‘Alī ibn Abī

⁴²⁷ "They decried their governors and talked about the people killed at the canal, asking God's mercy for them" (Ibid., 213).

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 216.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

Ṭālib," an apt designation all things considered.⁴³¹ Even if one omits the prophetic utterances and near-omniscience attributed to the fourth caliph, the narrative contains much that is problematic, and in many places reads more like hagiography than history.⁴³² It would have the reader believe that, in the blink of an eye, the dissenters-cum-Khawārij turned from their preoccupation with stipends and sharaf to an obsessive desire that everyone in the umma adhere to a narrow and inflexible interpretation of Muslim scripture on pain of death. This glaring contradiction first appears in the raising of the maṣāḥif at Ṣiffīn, and it continues to echo throughout the akhbār that relate events of the years 37-40/658-60. Not only does this sudden change in priorities run counter to the image provided by the proto-Khārijī akhbār, it flies in the face of centuries of tribal culture in which the issue of access to resources consistently provided the greatest motivation for inter- and intra-tribal strife.⁴³³ One need look no further than al-Aḥlāf of the Quraysh, the Bedouin raids mentioned by Barṣauma, or to the relationships of the Jafnids, Naṣrids, and Ḥujrids with their respective patrons in the pre-Islamic period. When taken as part of the larger picture, at the very least many of the reports that involve the Khawārij during the caliphate of ‘Alī appear incredulous, if not absurd, yet they form the heart of the Khārijī master narrative. This brief, three-to-four year period dominated the formation of the sect's identity from an external perspective, resulting in an

⁴³¹ Hagemann, 103.

⁴³² Besides being made to appear faultless in the events of the First Fitna, ‘Alī predicts the deaths of many of the sectarians, and his own at the hands of Ibn Muḥjam, and always assesses the character of individuals with complete accuracy.

⁴³³ Crone pointed out similar infelicities in a khabar that attests al-Ḥajjāj forced discontented *mawālī* (clients) out of Basra and back to their original villages, an edict that resulted in the exiles devolving back into country bumpkins over the course of a mere 15 years. The author rightly asserts that the reported time span "hardly suffices for the transformation of cultural leaders into Nabaṭī peasants"; see Patricia Crone, "Were the Qays and Yemen of the Umayyad Period Political Parties?", *Islam* 71 (1994): 21-22.

extremely-biased interpretation of the Khawārij considering they continued to be active for hundreds of years.

Application of the tools borrowed from Biblical text criticism reveals extensive conflation and assimilation as various akhbār, nominally distinct from one another, actually share common elements. Those stories that juxtapose ‘Alī and his confederates against Khārijī dissenters possess a formulaic quality, each telling essentially the same story in which the former encounter the latter in debate and come out on top. In every case, the akhbār deflect blame from the caliph and place it entirely on the sectarians. While increasing distinction appears in the earlier historiographic works—e.g., some reports name individual Khawārij while others leave the interlocutors anonymous—by the end of the eighth/fourteenth century these akhbār burst at the seams with tantalizing detail. At some point, ‘Alī’s assassin received a physical description: Ibn Muljam allegedly had brown skin, a handsome face and long hair, and he bore marks on his forehead from repeated prostration in *ṣalāt* (prayer), sure evidence of his extreme piety. These later versions claimed he actually married Qaṭāmi instead of merely dallying with her. One of his accomplices, Shabīb, gained the epithet *ḥarūrī*,⁴³⁴ which indicated his status as one of the very first to secede from ‘Alī post-Ṣiffīn. And, before his execution, Ibn Muljam related to Umm Kulthūm bint ‘Alī that he spared no expense in preparing for the assassination, and he struck her father such a powerful blow that it could have killed an entire city full of people.⁴³⁵ These details serve to enhance the

⁴³⁴ "The man from Ḥarūra," the place where the first Khawārij encamped after leaving ‘Alī.

⁴³⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Beginning to the End*, 770-23. This muḥaddith also relates that, just before the fatal attack on ‘Alī, Qaṭāmi gave the conspirators "an innervating drink of *harir*. It had its effect on them" (2.721). *Ḥarīr* is the Arabic word for silk, and in al-Ṭabarī it is said that Qaṭāmi bound the torsos of the attackers in that cloth before they set out on their mission. While the translator, G. R. Hawting, admits to not understanding the point of that ritual, it appears similar to the practice of Moro *juramentados*, who bound themselves tightly in cloth to limit bleeding during their suicide attacks against Christians in the Philippines, essentially

hagiographic aspects of the fourth caliph's death, and therefore his life. Ibn Muġjam becomes much-like ‘Alī in his ability and devotion. Unlike many of his Khārijī brethren, he lacks physical imperfections, and wields a sword as mightily as the caliph, himself renowned for his skill in battle. The distinctive elements added to this tradition imply that ‘Alī died at the hands of one imminently capable of the act, as opposed to earlier versions where he became the victim of small-time schemers with a half-baked plan. In other words, the memory of Ibn Muġjam evolved to the point where it might find use in glorifying that of ‘Alī as a noble and manly martyr, an identity integral to Shi‘i self-understanding.

Further evidence of the early Khārijī narrative's heavy infusion of pro-'Alid propaganda is found by comparing it with the stories of early-Christian martyrs. The two traditions derive from distinct historical contexts. Prior to the triumph of Constantine in the early fourth century CE, Christians suffered sporadic but at times terrible persecution at the hands of the authorities. While Islam does have martyrs who suffered similarly for their faith (e.g. Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt), more common are those who proactively sought martyrdom in pursuit of jihad, striving in the path of God, and that often took place on the field of battle.⁴³⁶ David Cook argues that this difference derives from the fact that the foundational figure in Islam, the Prophet Muġammad, had authority in all matters, religious, political, and military, while in Christianity Jesus of Nazareth had only

a means of tourniqueting wounds in advance. The root for ḥarīr, *ḥā-rā-ra*, also implies heat, warmth, or passion. It appears that the khabar in Ibn Kathīr shared Hawting's confusion, and therefore equated ḥarīr with a beverage. While in Morocco the national dish is a soup called *ḥarīra* named for its silky texture, Ibn Kathīr's khabar implies the use of a stimulant or other drug. In this case, it may have been *Terminalia*, known as "harar" in Southeast Asia, a herb with stimulant properties used in ayurvedic medicine, which can explain the khabar's comment "it had its effect on them." See: al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 215-16, and 216n853; and Donald Smythe, "Disarming the Moros," *Pacific Historical Review* 31, no. 3 (August 1962): 242. N.b., the story of Ibn Muġjam's mighty sword blow is also found in al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 216.

⁴³⁶ Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 23-28.

religious authority, and then over a very small community of followers.⁴³⁷ In spite of this difference, however, the respective traditions treat their martyrs in a very similar manner, "as active participants in a fight for honor" in defense of group identity.⁴³⁸ Cobb points out the centrality of idealized masculinity in the construction of Christian martyr narratives, regardless of the gender of the victim. Women as well as men displayed perfect mastery over their emotions and their bodies, not responding to injury and withstanding suffering beyond that expected of any mortal. Finally, these narratives present the victims as largely in control of their own fates.⁴³⁹

Similar values are on display in the martyrdom of ‘Alī. In earlier versions, the caliph bore his fatal wound without complaint, and even organized and attended the morning prayer before he allowed anyone to remove him to a bed. He debated with and dominated Ibn Muljam, but did not deviate from cultural norms in sentencing the culprit. In an idealized application of *lex talionis*, ‘Alī declared that Ibn Muljam was to be executed only if the caliph died from his wounds.⁴⁴⁰ Later traditions granted ‘Alī even more control over the event. Several ḥadīth have him predict his own death, but refuse to take any measures to avoid it, and in some he even welcomes it.⁴⁴¹ This finds parallels in Christian martyrologies where the victims often have the opportunity to change their fate but opt to stay the course. In the *Acts of Perpetua and Felecityas* Perpetua’s relatives and the Roman Procurator begged her to deny her faith, if not to save her own life then for the sake of her aged father and infant son. But she refused, and went on to a death worthy of

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁴³⁸ Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 33.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 23, and 62-70.

⁴⁴⁰ This is a starkly-different decision from the one made before al-Nahrawān, where ‘Alī decided, perhaps reluctantly, to annihilate the Khawārij.

⁴⁴¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Beginning to the End*, 718-20. A few traditions, their authors perhaps uncomfortable with ‘Alī displaying such prescience, attribute the prophecy to Muḥammad instead.

a martyr, one in which she, like ‘Alī, had full control so that she suffered an idealized end.⁴⁴²

However, a few reports stand out from the rest, and they demand detailed examination. First is a long khabar that al-Ṭabarī took from Abū Mikhnaf, who claimed to have received it from ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Abī Ḥurrah al-Ḥanafī.⁴⁴³ What makes this report of particular interest is that it describes conversations among the early Khārijī leaders, a feature which makes this khabar something of a rarity. In the first instance, the Khawārij meet in the Kufan home of ‘Abdallāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī, a first-generation Ṭābi’ and former participant in the conquest of Iraq and soldier for ‘Alī.⁴⁴⁴ In this account, the host gave a stirring speech in which he described a fully-developed form of Khārijī doctrine and encouraged his comrades to leave Kufa, "whose people are wicked," and relocate to some remote site where they might live a life as pious separatists.⁴⁴⁵ Ibn Wahb is followed by the closest thing to a stock character in the story of the early Khawārij, Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr. He agreed with the former's words, and paraphrased them thus:

The delights of this world are few and separation from it is imminent. Do not let its fineries and delights tempt you to stay in it or turn you from seeking what is true and rejecting evil. "God is with those who fear, and they are those who do good."⁴⁴⁶

This first meeting of the Kufan Khawārij concluded with the election of a leader, someone to guide the sectarians in battle and prayer. After several people rejected the

⁴⁴² *Acts of Perpetua and Felicity*, 6. While certainly a topos of its own, this particular literary construction finds confirmation in the early-second century CE letters between Pliny the Younger and the Roman Emperor Trajan. The former indicated that his policy in dealing with alleged Christians included three interrogations in which he asked the accused to recant their faith. He had only those who refused all three opportunities executed (Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, 10.96).

⁴⁴³ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 114.

⁴⁴⁴ *ET*², s.v. "‘Abdallāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī."

⁴⁴⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 114.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 115. The last sentence, in quotation marks, is sūra 16:128.

position Ibn Wahb agreed to take command. In a subsequent meeting, the newly selected leader brought up once again the idea of leaving Kufa for friendlier lands. After some discussion, the group decided to relocate to Jisr al-Nahrawān, and from there to encourage their fellows in Basra to join them.⁴⁴⁷

We shall return to this khabar, but the story so far raises some questions best addressed immediately. First, in regard to the isnād, its originator, ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Abī Ḥurrah al-Ḥanafī, was the source for a handful of reports that involve events in the east during the First Fitna. Otherwise unknown, he left no way for the reader to determine how he came to know about these conversations between the sectarians, and in such detail. A few akhbār exist wherein the source admitted to once belonging to the Khawārij, but that is not the case in this khabar. Second, Ibn Abī Ḥurrah's recall was not limited to activities among the sectarians: he also narrated speeches made by others, including a lengthy one by ‘Alī, and he shared the text of a letter the caliph sent to the Khawārij in their camp on the banks of the canal.⁴⁴⁸ How did this individual come by his information? It appears that the source for this report was tacitly guilty of what Thucydides admitted to openly in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. While the exact words spoken might not be remembered, "the speeches are given in the language in which, as it seemed to [the author], the several speakers would express, on the subjects under consideration."⁴⁴⁹ In other words, Ibn Abī Ḥurrah placed the words he thought most appropriate into the mouths of the sectarians. That does not make this source different from any of his contemporaries—the same observations apply to most, if not all, of the early historiographic tradition—but in this case it further muddies the already-cloudy waters of

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 118-19.

⁴⁴⁹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 22.1-2.

early Khārijī history. Most likely, the originator of this khabar wanted to explain how the sectarians managed to end up in al-Nahrawān, and to do that he needed to provide motivation for them to leave Kufa, a departure that would result in their disqualification from receiving any future share of the fay'. In other words, the transition required a justification that trumped wealth and its practical applications in this world, and that necessitated an appeal to the next one.

Another problematic feature of this khabar is its presentation of Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr. In his speech in the house of Ibn Wahb, Ḥurqūṣ displayed a willingness to give his life in pursuit of heavenly reward, a willingness he showed once before in his brief debate with the fourth caliph, already discussed.⁴⁵⁰ What both these reports have in common is a complete reversal of the rebel's attitude towards his own life. He had spent much of the previous two-to-three years running and hiding from those desirous of blood vengeance for the death of 'Uthmān, even jeopardizing his own clan mates in Banū Sa'd in the process. Yet these akhbār would have the reader believe that Ḥurqūṣ experienced a sudden and total change of heart because the caliph and his opponent wanted to settle their differences via arbitration rather than on the field of battle. This is a very drastic and sudden shift in attitude for one who, until very recently, had been preoccupied with his own survival.

In spite of these and other issues⁴⁵¹ with this khabar, it does contain a few tidbits of information that do not appear connected to any larger polemical causes or a need for greater distinction. For example, after the Kufan Khawārij left for the canal, some others sympathetic to their cause tried to follow and join them, but were stopped by

⁴⁵⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 111.

⁴⁵¹ For example, 'Alī predicts the death of yet another future Khārijī on the field of al-Nahrawān, and the sectarians are often found citing scripture; see *Ibid.*, 116-17.

fellow family members who made them turn back. ‘Alī likewise forbade Sālim ibn Rabī‘a al-‘Absī from joining the sect, a temporary palliative only in his case.⁴⁵² In regard to the separatists' actions, this khabar related an encounter they had with the forces of the prefect of Madā’in, Sa‘d ibn Mas‘ūd, in which the latter's five-hundred men fought the thirty Khawārij under Ibn Wahb without the slightest enthusiasm, and eventually let them go without harm. Finally, this report briefly tells of the Basran Khawārij under Mis‘ar ibn Fadakī of Banū Tamīm. On the way to join their fellows at al-Nahrawān, these five-hundred seceders "began attacking people indiscriminately," and continued to do so until they reached their destination.⁴⁵³

Unlike the other incidents he narrated, the akhbārī described all of these events tersely, without elaborate speeches or dogmatic sayings. The sectarians never resort to scriptural citations, and debate of any sort is uncharacteristically absent. In fact, they are very much unlike the bulk of the early Khārijī narrative. The present author proposes that these briefly-described incidents represent actual events that occurred in the lead up to the massacre at the canals. Treating them in order, civil war and religious dissent create intra-family strife, and both existed at the time. One need look no further than the experience of Jesus of Nazareth for an analogous example. In his early ministry, he had to defend himself against charges made by his own family who came to "take charge of him," claiming he was "out of his mind."⁴⁵⁴ That Muslim families tried to keep fellow members from joining the sectarians is plausible enough given the context. On the

⁴⁵² Ibid., 117. Sālim joined the Khawārij under Ḥayyān ibn Ḍabyān in al-Rayy, a city in northern Iran far enough away from the strife taking place in the heart of the caliphate. He came to regret his association with the separatists and rejoined the umma by no later than 43/663 (al-Ṭabarī, *Between Civil Wars*, 22 and 44).

⁴⁵³ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 118.

⁴⁵⁴ Mark 3:21. Biblical scholars tend to interpret this passage as true thanks to the criterion of difficulty.

other hand, the actions of ‘Alī in regard to Sālim ibn Rabī’a run counter to that caliph's dealings with the Khawārij in every similar circumstance. With the exception of this one case, ‘Alī universally allowed the sectarians to make their own decisions, and even influence his own. But in the case of Sālim, the caliph ordered him to stay home, end of discussion. According to the criterion of difficulty, the very oddness of this incident and its preservation suggest that it actually occurred. This analytical tool also finds use in interpreting the encounter between the Khawārij and the men of Madā’in. That eastern city did not have the reputation for rebellion and dissent as did Kufa and Basra. The fact that men with at least some loyalty to the caliphate refused to fight a force they outnumbered by more than sixteen-to-one must have created some embarrassment, if not for the caliph then for the city of Madā’in and its prefect at least. Again, that this story was preserved in spite of its troubling undertones suggests that it actually took place.

That brings us to the Basran Khawārij and their indiscriminate attacks. The context established in the brief report has the governor of Basra, ‘Alī's cousin ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbās, sending an unnumbered group of men after the sectarians, whom they encountered at a bridge. There followed an un-described confrontation, after which the Khawārij continued their journey to al-Nahrawān, during which they attacked an unknown number of unnamed people. This story contains notable parallels with those concerned with the murder of Ibn Khabbāb. In fact, thanks to the rather-loose chronology provided by the narrative of the early Khawārij, and considering the nature of the akhbārī tradition in general, it is entirely possible that the story of Ibn Khabbāb's untimely end is the same event, whole or in part, as that described in the khabar of the Basran rebels. At

least one report suggests this interpretation by referring to his killers as “the Khawārij who came from al-Baṣrah.”⁴⁵⁵

More important to the present study, these reports highlight the difficulties in judging the entire community of early seceders as pious killers. There are only three reports of violent activity on the part of the sectarians in the period between Ṣiffīn and al-Nahrawān: the murders of Ibn Khabbāb and ‘Alī’s emissary, and the undetailed violence of the Khārijī Basrans just described. If, as the present author proposes, the first killing is actually the result of conflation and/or distinction with the last event, then only two independent cases remain. Furthermore, those Khawārij who engaged in violence against other Muslims appear to have represented a minority of the first-generation sectarians. The khabar numbers the contingent from Basra at five hundred. Those reports that discuss the deaths of Ibn Khabbāb and the caliph’s messenger do not mention how many participated; however, since the first murder very likely took place at the hands of those led by Mis’ar ibn Fadakī, and since it appears ‘Alī’s emissary met his end only after that same group arrived at the Khārijī camp at the canal, the present author believes it safe to assume the Basrans responsible for all three events. Even if they did not share in the second killing, it would not have taken more than a handful of men to do the job. Therefore, the number of early Khawārij that the sources ascribe to violent events with any clarity is reasonably estimated at approximately five hundred at most.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 124. N.b. although this report mentions the garrison city, it does not connect them specifically with Mis’ar ibn Fadakī.

⁴⁵⁶ The problems with numbers in ancient and medieval texts are well known, and the early Muslim sources are not free from the exaggerations found in other Near Eastern literature. In making these calculations, the present author assumes that any inflation of numbers of men involved in these events is relatively similar across the board and, since we are concerned with ratios and not absolute numbers, the results represent the best possible under the circumstances.

Based on the numbers provided in al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*, the total number of seceders at the canal initially numbered four thousand.⁴⁵⁷ Of this number, the Basrans made up a mere 12.5 percent. This calculation alone suggests that the bulk of the Khawārij did not have a doctrine that mandated violence against those outside their group. This conclusion finds further support in the pre-battle negotiations that took place between the representatives of each side, in which 'Alī's man told his opposite "whoever of you goes back to al-Kūfah or al-Madā'in and abandons this party, he has safe conduct."⁴⁵⁸ Many of the Khawārij availed themselves of this opportunity. One hundred joined the caliph's army, five hundred headed northeast with Farwa ibn Nawfal al-Ashja'ī, and approximately six hundred returned to Kufa.⁴⁵⁹ Basra is not mentioned, either in the negotiations or in the list of those who left the Khārijī camp at al-Nahrawān. Considering this evidence, the present author suggests that the Basrans remained to fight under the leadership of Ibn Wahb. This, of course, proved the worst decision possible from the perspective of self preservation, because 'Alī's army outnumbered the rebels by a ratio of more than twenty-to-one.⁴⁶⁰

Why would the Basrans remain to fight in the face of such impossible odds? The answer appears to lie in an increasing dissatisfaction with the caliph felt by citizens of that city. The sources all suggest that Kufa, in spite of being a center of support for the caliph, served as the primary breeding ground for early Khārijī dissent, with Basra a secondary theater. That may well have been the case, but a close reading of some akhbār gives the impression that unrest in that city was likewise significant. The departure of the

⁴⁵⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 130.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Based on the khabar in al-Ṭabarī, which states only 2,800 of the original Khārijī forces remained on the field under 'Abdallah ibn Wahb (Ibid., 130-31).

⁴⁶⁰ Based on the caliph having 68,200 men under his command (Ibid., 122).

500 under Mis'ar to join the Khawārij at the canal supports this conclusion. They appear to have represented the most-radical elements of dissent in that city, but other evidence exists that points to more wide-spread dissatisfaction. In the process of mustering his forces, 'Alī sent a letter to his Basran governor, Ibn 'Abbās, ordering him to bring his forces and join the caliph at his camp at al-Nukhayla, near Kufa. But the Basran chief received a less-than enthusiastic response from the Arab tribesmen living in his city. At first, only 1,500 answered Ibn 'Abbās' summons, a lack-luster commitment that prompted the governor to make a public statement in which he threatened to punish those who did not respond to his call to arms. In spite of this threat, only 1,700 more opted to join the caliph. The poverty of this turn-out, 3,200 men out of the more than 60,000 available, indicates the lack of support the caliphate enjoyed among the people of Basra.⁴⁶¹ According to the sources, the Basran contingent that fought under 'Alī at al-Nahrawān made up only 4.6 percent of his total force. Considering the lop-sided nature of the pending battle, and the attendant acquisition of spoils for comparatively little effort, it appears that the people of this garrison town had an axe to grind with the caliph and his government.

Further analysis suggests a plausible explanation as to why the Basran contingent under Mis'ar ibn Fadakī al-Tamīmī perpetrated the violence ascribed to them on the way to the canal. As a member of Banū Tamīm, Mis'ar's election as leader of the group insinuates that it included many fellow tribesmen, and they likely constituted a majority. The sequence of events provided in the khabar that relates their departure has them first engaged in battle with men sent by Ibn 'Abbās, only after which the Khawārij began their indiscriminate violence. If the Basran contingent did in fact include a

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 120-21.

significant Tamīmī presence, and the sequence of events took place as described in the report, then it is entirely within the realm of possibility that the subsequent violence enacted by the sectarians was actually an expression of blood vengeance, targeted at those who maintained their allegiance to the caliph. Their justification would be found in any casualties suffered at the hands of Ibn ‘Abbās’ men, and also in the very act of trying to stop the seceders from leaving Basra unmolested. Freedom of action, including the right to relocate when circumstances warranted, was part and parcel of Arabian tribal culture. To try and keep someone from exercising this prerogative violated an entitlement possessed by all persons above the status of slave. The relocation of the Jafnids, who only ended up Roman federates after they fled from unfavorable conditions in the southern peninsula, provides one example, but history abounds with others. During the life of the Prophet, Banū Bajīla had to disperse and accept protection from other tribes as a result of ongoing feuds.⁴⁶² Even non-Arab peoples from the period covered by the present study fled in the face of unfavorable circumstances, as when dhimmī living in the villages of Iraq relocated to the garrison cities and declared themselves Muslim in order to avoid having to pay the *kharāj* (land tax).⁴⁶³ More recent examples include the Banū Ṣakhr, which migrated from the Ḥijāz to Syria in the tenth/sixteenth century, and Banū Mawālī, which repulsed other tribes from its part of the Syrian Desert over a period of several hundred years until it too was forced to relocate north.⁴⁶⁴

The example of the Basrans—both the proactive dissenters under Mis’ar and those who adopted a quietist approach by ignoring the order to fight for ‘Alī—and the

⁴⁶² *EI*², s.v. "Badjīla."

⁴⁶³ Al-Ṭabarī, *The Zenith of the Marwānid House*, vol. 23 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by Martin Hinds (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 67.

⁴⁶⁴ Jabbur, 281-82.

comparatively few among the early Khawārij who actually participated in the violence since ascribed to the entire sect, contradict the presentation provided in the master narrative. So does the abandonment of the field just before the Battle of al-Nahrawān by those who accepted the offer of amnesty. This behavior clearly does not reflect a single-minded devotion to the cause of fundamentalist piety with which outsiders have traditionally associated the sect. Another early Khārijī, Yazīd ibn Qays of Banū Hamdān, provides yet another example. He had sided against ‘Uthmān during the dissent against that caliph and, in the midst of the chaos between Ṣiffīn and al-Nahrawān, Yazīd reappeared in Iraq as a preeminent Khārijī leader.⁴⁶⁵ In spite of this association, he accepted assignment as governor of Rayy and Iṣbahān when ‘Alī made the offer, and left for those greener—and safer—pastures.⁴⁶⁶ Yazīd’s decision does not reflect the understanding of Khārijī piety regurgitated by the master narrative, but instead looks like the sort of careerist move expected of a noble within the Arabian tribal milieu. That the caliph bought his loyalty implicates rather impious priorities on the part of Yazīd.

One series of akhbār from the early-Khārijī period remains, saved for last because of its *bizarrierie*. As has so often proved the case throughout human history, violent repression of dissent failed to quench it in its entirety. After al-Nahrawān, revolts against the caliphate broke out in a number of locales, including Ahwaz, Basra, Fārs, and the “outlying provinces,” in rebellion against ‘Alī for the massacre of the Khawārij, which in turn provided justification to refuse to pay taxes.⁴⁶⁷ In the midst of this chaos, al-Khirrīt ibn Rāshid of Banū Nājiya turned against the caliph. To summarize a long series of reports, al-Khirrīt exclaimed his dissatisfaction with ‘Alī and soon thereafter left

⁴⁶⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 21n92, and 102.

⁴⁶⁶ This is the last we hear of Yazīd in al-Ṭabarī.

⁴⁶⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 183.

with some three-hundred fellow clansmen, and headed east from Kufa in the direction of Niffar. On the way the band encountered one Zādhān Farrūkh, a professed Muslim, whom they inquired as to his opinion of the current caliph. When Zādhān responded “I say that he is commander of the faithful and the lord of mankind,” some of the Nājiya attacked and killed him.⁴⁶⁸ When ‘Alī received word of this, he sent his loyal follower, Ziyād ibn Khaṣafa, after the malcontents. He caught up with them at a place called Jarjarāyā⁴⁶⁹ and, after negotiations failed, attacked with his small force of men from Banū Bakr ibn Wā’il. After the energetic-but-inconclusive melee that followed, Ziyād returned to Basra to lick his wounds and al-Khirrīt led his men to Ahwaz, where the general dissatisfaction with the caliphate might provide him safe haven. Once there, many locals joined him, including bandits, nomads, Kurds, and non-Arab Muslims eager to avoid the land tax (*kharāj*). Meanwhile, ‘Alī sent a second, much-larger force after al-Khirrīt under the command of Ma’qil ibn Qays. They met somewhere on the northeastern shores of the Persian Gulf, and in the ensuing battle al-Khirrīt was slain, his men killed and his allies dispersed, and the dependents of Banū Nājiya taken captive.⁴⁷⁰

The akhbār do everything possible to make al-Khirrīt’s actions look like a Khārijī rebellion, but fall short of actually applying the label. He allegedly declared his rebellion in the immediate aftermath of the appointment of the arbitrators, and the murder of Zādhān looks for all intents and purposes like that of Ibn Khabbāb. And at times the rebel makes statements that suggest his affinity for the sectarians. While in arbitration with Ziyād prior to their skirmish, he informed the caliph’s representative, “I decided that

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 176.

⁴⁶⁹ According to Le Strange, Jarjarāyā is a town on the Tigris, approximately 48 miles southeast of Baghdad (Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphates*, 36-37).

⁴⁷⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 171-89.

I would go apart and join those who call for consultation,” an idea with affinity for alleged early Khārijī doctrine.⁴⁷¹ About the only thing that al-Kharrīt does not do to identify himself with Islam’s first sectarians is recite the *lā ḥukm*, but the akhbār never go so far as to make that association, regardless. In fact, one khabar made it clear that al-Kharrīt did not identify as a sectarian, although he was not averse to fighting alongside them.⁴⁷²

The story of this rebellion of the Banū Nājiya suggests that the dissatisfaction expressed by the Khawārij was widespread and that other groups shared at least some of their complaints. While it appears that al-Kharrīt’s followers never numbered many, perhaps a few hundred at most, that he attracted support from diverse populations supports this contention, as does application of the criterion of difficulty. Much of this narrative derives from sources sympathetic to the caliph ‘Alī, including ‘Abdallah ibn Wa’l al-Taymī, ‘Amīr ibn Sharāḥīl al-Sha’bī, and ‘Abdallah ibn Fuqaym al-Azdī. The first later identified with the *Tawwābūn* (“penitents”), a group of pro-‘Alids who coalesced over their regret to support the uprising of Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī in 61/680.⁴⁷³ The second individual, a muḥaddith from Kufa who died there ca. 103/721, preserved reports that reflected very favorably on the fourth caliph.⁴⁷⁴ The last man provided most of the narrative involving Ma’qil’s pursuit of al-Kharrīt, and claimed to have participated himself under ‘Alī’s commander.⁴⁷⁵ Considering the enmity between the supporters of that caliph and the Khawārij, and the fact that these sources did not call al-Kharrīt a

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 180.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 187.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 176n699; and *EF*², s.v. “Tawwābūn.”

⁴⁷⁴ Imām ‘Alī ibn Abū Tālib, *Path of Eloquence: Nahjul Balagha*, trans. by Yasin T. al-Jibouri (Bloomington: Authorhouse, 2013), 1.20-21, Kindle ed.

⁴⁷⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 183.

Khārijī in spite of the many similarities between his revolt and those of the sectarians heightens the probability that such a distinction did indeed exist. Likewise the widespread dissatisfaction with the caliphate. These three narrators with pro-‘Alid sentiments did not see fit to whitewash this situation, in spite of its negative reflection on the memory of the fourth caliph, and that suggests that the contextual elements of their narratives contain at least some truth.

In general, the story of the early Khawārij wallows in so much polemic concerned with later religious debates that to extract anything positivist from it must rely largely on conjecture and supposition. Discarding all of the apologetic material related to the fourth caliph leaves little to work with, and when those reports that represent probable fabrications are likewise discounted—such as the speeches “remembered” by ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Abī Ḥurrah al-Ḥanafī—the narrative becomes quite sparse indeed. Regardless, the gist of the Khārijī master narrative derives principally from these problematic reports, so they must be either discarded or deconstructed to allow for the isolation of those elements that can be deemed with some certainty as historically accurate.

To summarize, the presentation of the response to the call for arbitration at Ṣiffīn contradicts everything that preceded it as well as the expected behavior of Arabian tribesmen, and therefore well may be apocryphal, a later invention to palliate ‘Alī’s complicity in the affair. The present author suggests that war weariness provided the more-likely influence for negotiation. The Battle of Ṣiffīn dragged on for at least two months, and the sources described the days that immediately preceded the call for arbitration as the most bloody of them all. In particular, the night before the alleged raising of the Qur’an is remembered as *laylat al-ḥarīr*, the “night of the howling,” a title

that alludes to the wounded men left on the battlefield who cried out in pain.⁴⁷⁶ Similar incidents have traumatized soldiers throughout recorded history, and there is no reason to doubt similar results here.⁴⁷⁷ Combined with the general distaste that many tribesmen had for extended campaigning and risking their lives unnecessarily, the intense fighting and suffering witnessed may have drained any desire to continue from warriors on both sides, leading to the truce and subsequent decision to arbitrate the affair. Unrest between Şifīn and al-Nahrawān increased, however, and may have been further flamed by those who had more to lose should the results prove unfavorable to ‘Alī. Yazīd ibn Qays and Ḥurqūş ibn Zuhayr fall into this category. Both had sided against ‘Uthmān, and Ḥurqūş at least had participated on some level in the siege of that caliph’s home in Medina; therefore neither would be particularly happy to see Mu‘āwiya or any other member of Banū ‘Umayya become ‘amīr al-mu’manīn. It appears there also existed a growing population of those unhappy with the caliphate in general. While the sources do not clearly identify the cause of their dissatisfaction, it may well have involved the very same concerns expressed by the lesser ashraf living in Iraq under ‘Uthmān: ever-shrinking stipends and a reduction in status thanks to the preferential treatment granted Quraysh. The sources make no mention of ‘Alī taking any significant steps to rectify those conditions.

In response to these complaints, those most dissatisfied with the present state of things did what would be expected of any contemporary Arab tribe: relocate away from the source of the problem in search of more-favorable circumstances. Meanwhile,

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 70n288.

⁴⁷⁷ For example, during the American Civil War, at the Battle of Cold Harbor Union commander Ulysses S. Grant refused to agree with his opponent, Robert E. Lee, to allow for the removal of casualties during the multi-day battle. As a result, casualties—including 7,000 from the Union side alone—lay on the killing field for four nights, their cries demoralizing men on both sides; see: James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), loc 12325, Kindle ed.

plenty of quietist malcontents remained in the garrison towns of Kufa and Basra, perhaps because their unhappiness had not yet reached a point to demand rebellion, or perhaps so that they might continue to collect their stipends. In the end it was the caliphate that fired the first shot in the sectarian war that followed when ‘Alī’s man in Basra, Ibn ‘Abbās, sent a force to stop the five-hundred malcontents from leaving (a decision paralleled in the al-Kharrīt narrative). It was only after that event that the Khawārij engaged in any violent attacks on fellow Muslims, and even then such actions appear to have been few and perpetrated by a small minority, and can not be said to represent the entire community of early seceders. After the one-sided affair at al-Nahrawān, rebellions against the caliphate broke out in Iraq and further east in which groups expressed complaints similar to those of the Khawārij, while others took it as an opportunity to avoid paying taxes to the centralized government. Ultimately, ‘Alī suffered the same fate as his two predecessors: death at the hands of a malcontent.

Admittedly, this reconstruction of early Khārijī history possesses some of the same problems as Shaban’s “new interpretation”: it reads a lot into the sources and must make some arguments from silence. But it does have a basis in contemporary context. More importantly, it also forms a coherent interpretation when considered in conjunction with the rest of the story of the Khawārij, a story largely glossed over by the master narrative, but one which offers a different understanding of this sect and its motivations.

Between Civil Wars, 41-60/661-79

Al-Baghādī mentions five Khārijī uprisings that took place between al-Nahrawān and ‘Alī’s assassination, under the following leaders: al-Ashras ibn ‘Awf from

Basra; Hilāl ibn 'Ullafa al-Taymī in Masabadhān; al-Ash'hab ibn Bishr of the tribe of Bajīla in Ḥarjarāya; Sa'd ibn Qufl of the sept of Tha'laba, Taym-Allah, in Mada'in; and Abū Maryam al-Sa'dī in the environs of Kufa.⁴⁷⁸ All were small, 200 men or less, took place in Iraq or its immediate environs, and all were suppressed by forces sent by the caliph. This same pattern maintained throughout the caliphate of Mu'āwiya (r. 41-60/661-80), during which 16 Khārijī uprisings occurred.⁴⁷⁹

The earliest examples of Khawārij in rebellion against the new caliph involved those who had opted to leave their fellow sectarians at al-Nahrawān after the pre-battle negotiations with 'Alī's emissary. Five hundred of them under Farwa ibn Nawful of Banū Ashja'ī decided that, "Since someone about whom there is no doubt has come, [let us] march against Mu'āwiya and wage jihad against him."⁴⁸⁰ In the summer of 41/662 they soundly defeated a force of Syrian cavalry sent by the caliph. Frustrated at this turn of events, Mu'āwiya then placed the onus of stopping the sectarians on the Kufans, who only agreed to do so under threat. They annihilated the Khawārij at al-Nukhayla, a mustering grounds for military expeditions outside Kufa. Farwa was killed in the battle, along with fellow Khārijī leaders, 'Abdallah ibn Abī al-Ḥurr Ṭā'ī and Ḥawthara ibn Waddā' al-Asadī.⁴⁸¹ Although the sources do not agree on the exact sequence of events or the names of those involved, the essential point is that the issue involved few dissenters who the forces fighting on behalf of the caliphate squashed with relative ease. This revolt, regardless of whether a singular event or a series, proved the largest one associated with the Khawārij during Mu'āwiya's reign.

⁴⁷⁸ Al-Baghādī, 81-82, using the name spellings found in Watt, "Kharajite Thought," 215. None of these events are mentioned by al-Ṭabarī.

⁴⁷⁹ Total derived from Watt, "Kharajite Thought," 216-17.

⁴⁸⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Between Civil Wars*, 12.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 12-13; Khalīfa, 53-54; and al-Baghādī, 82.

The sources do not spill a lot of ink in relating Farwa's rebellion, and that is generally the case for the Khārijī revolts between the years 41-60/661-80. This terseness makes sense when one considers that the typical outcome for these events was one-hundred-percent casualties among the sectarians, leaving no one to tell their side (and making the recollection of any words they said among themselves probable fabrications). But the uprising under al-Mustawrid ibn 'Ullifa al-Taymī provides an exception. In a mini-epic that spans forty pages of al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*, al-Mustawrid's band of 300-400 horsemen managed to evade armies sent from Kufa, Basra, and Madā'in in which, at a minimum, outnumbered the sectarians by twenty to one. In a letter to the governor of that last city, Simāk ibn 'Ubayd al-Absī, al-Mustawrid claimed "we take revenge on behalf of our folk for the tyranny in judgment, failure to enforce prescriptions [al-ḥudūd], and the monopolization of the fay' ".⁴⁸² While their leader admitted his desire to become a martyr, not all of his companions felt likewise and they proposed a number of alternatives to fighting an enemy with such superior numbers. Typical for leaders of tribesmen, al-Mustawrid compromised, and decided to try and isolate one of the three groups pursuing them so as to better the odds from impossible to merely terrible.⁴⁸³ This strategy worked for awhile, but in the end the pursuers under Ma'qil ibn Qays—the same man who hunted down al-Kharrīt—got the better of Khawārij. In the final battle Ma'qil and al-Mustawrid killed each other in a duel, a fate shared by all but a handful of the sectarians.⁴⁸⁴

While the most prolix of all the Khārijī accounts during this period, the story of al-Mustawrid differs little in substance from the rest: participants numbered few, and the outcome did not differ. Like the early Khawārij who expressed their dissatisfaction

⁴⁸² Al-Ṭabarī, *Between Civil Wars*, 46.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 64 and 68.

with ‘Alī through relocation, neither Farwa or al-Mustawrid's movements initiated violence. They simply declared their dissent and left. That was not the case with all Khārijī uprisings during Mu‘āwiya's caliphate, however. In the year 50/670 seventy men rebelled under the maternal cousins Qarīb of Banū Iyad ibn Sud, and Zuḥḥāf of Banū Tayyi'.⁴⁸⁵ In this case, they made no attempt to relocate, but instead simply attacked.⁴⁸⁶ Thanks to multiple and conflicting akhbār, it is difficult to determine what motivated the cousins and their followers. The one version related by al-Ṭabarī appears to contain the core of the story. It has them mistakenly murder a shaykh of Banū Ḍubay‘a, believing him to be the chief of the governor's police force, Ibn Ḥiṣn. After this, the group dispersed and some took sanctuary in a mosque. That did not save them from the Banū ‘Alī and Banū Rāsib, who hunted down the killers that night. No distinctly Khārijī words are put into the mouths of the rebels except in one version recorded by Khalīfa in which they spouted a gratuitous *lā ḥukm*.⁴⁸⁷ However, that khabar multiples the atrocities committed considerably, and appears to be the victim of increased distinction and conflation when compared to the other versions. Regardless, the akhbārīs remembered this event as a Khārijī uprising, perhaps because it resulted in harsher treatment of the Khawārij by the governor, Ziyād. Abū Bilāl, the former activist-turned-quietist Khārijī, reportedly opined, "Qarīb—may God not accept him! I swear, I would rather fall from heaven to earth than do what he did."⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 100. Khalīfa times the event to the year 53/672-73, and offers slightly different names for the Khārijī leaders, albeit ones based on the same jidhr: Khalīfa, 76.

⁴⁸⁶ None of the akhbār specify the location where the attacks occurred, but it must have been within a day's ride of Kufa, based on the timing of the arrival of Ziyād ibn Abīhi, the governor of Kufa and Basra at the time.

⁴⁸⁷ Khalīfa, 77.

⁴⁸⁸ Khalīfa, 79; and al-Ṭabarī, *Between Civil Wars*, 100.

It appears that the majority of Abū Bilāl's fellow sectarians felt the same, a fact which makes the Qarīb-Zuḥḥāf event an anomaly during this period. 'Abdallah ibn 'Utba al-Ghanawī, one of the few who participated in al-Mustawrid's revolt and survived, related a series of meetings that took place in 58/677-78 between Kufan Khawārij whose dissatisfaction with the situation in Iraq had only increased with time. They agreed they should engage in jihad against the "aggressive oppressors," but held different opinions as to the best way to accomplish that goal.⁴⁸⁹ They originally opted to follow the plan of their elected leader, Ḥayyān ibn Ḍabyān, to go outside the city and there fight the forces of the governor until slain. At the eleventh-hour, however, they revised their strategy after further discussion, and instead opted to go to a more remote location, knowing full well that men would be sent against them as soon as word got out of their separation from the community. Once again, the sectarians opted not to initiate violence, but waited for government forces to do so. And, as in other examples from this period, they were killed to a man.⁴⁹⁰

The last example of Khārijī revolt during Mu'āwiya's rule also turned out to be the smallest, and it provided yet another instance of this desire to take the higher path when it came to expressing dissent against the caliphate and its administrators. In the same year as the rebellion of Ḥayyān ibn Ḍabyān, Abū Bilāl, the quietist sectarian in Kufa who commented unfavorably on the violence perpetrated by Qarīb, decided to leave the city and return to a nomadic style of living as a form of protest against the cruelty of 'Ubaydallah ibn Ziyād, governor of Iraq after his father starting in 54/673-74. 'Ubaydallah had Abū Bilāl's brother, 'Urwa ibn Udayya executed after he insulted the governor, an

⁴⁸⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Between Civil Wars*, 195.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 193-95.

unjust punishment by any measure. He also had Abū Bilāl imprisoned. But the prisoner became a trusted friend of the jailer, who later arranged for his charge's release.

Afterwards, the Khārijī gathered a group of 40 like-minded men, and they all left Kufa for Ahwaz. 'Ubaydallah, not content to leave well enough alone, sent an army of two-thousand men after the small band, but the latter managed to defeat the former with a sudden and brave charge.⁴⁹¹ Abū Bilāl's group managed to hold out for awhile, living off *ṣadaqa* (charity) offered by kindly passers-by. Apparently living a peaceful existence, 'Ubaydallah sent a second force against them nonetheless, and it overcame the rebels who died to a man.⁴⁹²

The obvious similarities between the akhbār that relate Khārijī activity during Mu'āwiyah's reign may be problematic for some scholars, but they fit well into the contemporary historical and cultural context. In each case, the incidents involved few sectarians, and they all occurred in the east where the centralized government was weakest and unrest more the order of the day. The situation also availed itself of one of the most-common tribal solutions to insoluble issues and dissatisfaction with the status quo: relocation. Hagemann claims that al-Ṭabarī's presentation of the Khawārij is colored by that author's desire to reveal "the dangers of Khārijite piety" to his readers, but her analysis relies on a couple of editorial comments and a heavy-handed interpretation of some passages without regard to context.⁴⁹³ For example, she claims that the terse reports in regard to the sectarians' annihilation in battle is al-Ṭabarī's way of illustrating the

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 196-98.

⁴⁹² Al-Ṭabarī, *The Caliphate of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiyah*, vol. 19 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by I. K. A. Howard (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 183-84; and Khalīfa, 111-12. Al-Ṭabarī places Abū Bilāl's death in 61/680, but Khalīfa discusses it in 64/683 (Khalīfa, 111-12), an unimportant distinction to the present work. Curiously, al-Baghdādī reports the deaths of the brothers in reverse order, with Abū Bilāl's first (al-Baghdādī, 92-93).

⁴⁹³ Hagemann, 139.

dangers of adherence to Khārijī doctrine.⁴⁹⁴ But she fails to consider that they are always outnumbered by a wide margin, a disparity that makes their destruction quite plausible, if not probable.⁴⁹⁵ Nor does she note that the sectarians merely left, and that others initiated combat in all cases but one, an observation that runs counter to her identification of al-Ṭabarī's motivation. Hagemann is correct in that the sources for this period contain much of a problematic or apocryphal nature, but to limit the possibility of any fruitful interpretation to literary analysis alone results in an over-focus on the akhbārīs rather than their akhbār, and a final structure built on the same unstable foundations as those she critiques.

Watt made a more-useful observation in regard to the 'Umayyad-era Khārijī uprisings when he noticed

Certain resemblances to a nomadic tribe or clan. In size the Khārijite bodies were comparable to the effective groups in nomadic life.... They [the Khawārij] had a pride in their group analogous to that of a nomad in his tribe.⁴⁹⁶

While one must take care not to place too much value on the alleged quotations of speeches made by Khawārij, some of the words placed in their mouths give the impression of a more generalized dissatisfaction than one based purely on pietistic concerns. Two of the three justifications for rebellion allegedly offered by al-Mustawrid to the governor of Madā'in fall into this category. The Khawārij's desire to "take revenge on behalf of our folk," and for "monopolization of the fay'," sound exactly like a desire for blood vengeance and a fair share of the spoils of war. In other words, they represent a

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 149-50.

⁴⁹⁵ The annals of history are filled with last-stand battles, where the vastly outnumbered succumb *in toto* or nearly so: Thermopylae, Masada, Alamo, Camaron, Little Big Horn, and Shiroyama were all similar in terms of odds and outcome to the Khārijī uprisings during Mu'āwiya's caliphate.

⁴⁹⁶ Watt, "Kharijite Thought," 217. The portion omitted via ellipse contains comments relevant to the author's belief that piety motivated the sectarians, an odd juxtaposition considering the rest of his statement.

continuity with tribal tradition rather than the creation of any new and distinct religious doctrine. The one-night uprising by Qarīb and Zuḥḥāf may have had similar motivation. In the most-basic version of the story,⁴⁹⁷ it appears they set out with the intent to murder Ziyād's chief of police, Ibn Ḥiṣn. This is supported by the report that they then dispersed, ostensibly to flee reprisals, and initiated no further attacks. If one considers this khabar on its own, then the event looks suspiciously like an act of revenge targeted either at Ibn Ḥiṣn or through him at the governor. While the sources make no mention of this connection, Ziyād's heavy-handed treatment of his subjects makes it plausible at least. Regardless, in this version reported by both al-Ṭabarī and Khalīfa, nothing exists to indicate that the antagonists identified with the Khawārij outside an insinuating editorial comment included only by al-Ṭabarī, to wit: "They were both the first ones to rebel after the people of al-Nahr."⁴⁹⁸ This statement proves problematic because: 1) it contradicts other akhbār which described several small rebellions that occurred prior to this one; and 2) it does not assert that Qarīb and Zuḥḥāf actually claimed to be Khawārij. Later versions did make this connection explicit by ascribing multiple homicides to the dissidents and putting the *lā ḥukm* in their mouths in a rather formulaic and forced manner, but these very likely represent later interpolations intended to add distinction and firmly connect this unfortunate event with the sectarians.

The lack of rhetoric and the behavior of most of the purported Khawārij does not look much like the sectarians of later legend. If, as the above analysis suggests, the association of Qarīb and Zuḥḥāf with the Khawārij evolved later, then these reports

⁴⁹⁷ The version that contains the elements most common to all, the implication being that the other versions are victims of added distinction, conflation, and assimilation.

⁴⁹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Between Civil Wars*, 100. "Al-Nahr" means "canal" (singular) and is an alternative name for the Battle of al-Nahrawān (which uses the dual form—"two canals").

represent the back-reading of later Khārijī identity as understood by outsiders into these narratives. This is not a new or particularly exciting conclusion. Instead, the present author suggests that this story illustrates the ongoing influence of tribal culture in early Islamic society, a trait shared by the bulk of the Khārijī-uprising narratives during Mu‘āwiya's reign.

These reports also shed some light on the evolution of Khārijī identity as a useful political tool in expressing dissatisfaction against the caliphate and its representatives. Over time, it came to provide ready-made legitimation for proactive dissent. The story of Yazīd ibn Mālik al-Bāhilī and Sahm ibn Ghālib al-Hujaymī hints at this process in what appears to have been the most insignificant of all the so-called rebellions of the period presently under consideration. In the year 41/661 the two went to the outskirts of Basra and there murdered 'Ibādah ibn Qurṣ al-Laythī while he worshipped. The two then asked the governor, at that time ‘Abdallah ibn Āmir, for a "guarantee of safe conduct," and it was granted in spite of the victim's status as a Companion.⁴⁹⁹ Like the Qarīb and Zuḥḥāf story, this khabar does not equate Yazād and Sahm explicitly with the Khawārij. And the fact that Ibn Āmir was a nephew of 'Uthman, one of the caliphs the sectarians loved to hate, but granted the pair amnesty regardless likewise suggests that the pair did not identify as Khārijī. But this changed some five years later, when the pair started to espouse the *lā ḥukm* in response to Ziyād's harshness as governor. Easily the most ineffective of all Khawārij, the duo accomplished nothing of note. Sahm reportedly left for Ahwaz and "caused mischief," while Yazād stayed in

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 19.

Basra, apparently content with reciting the Khārijī slogan.⁵⁰⁰ In the end, Ziyād had them both executed.

While the story of these two offers little on which to base positivist interpretations, it does suggest that Khārijī identity was in the process of attaining value in and of itself. Neither Ibn Āmir nor Ziyād cared for the sectarians, and the latter had a reputation for treating them harshly. But that Sahm and Yazīd opted to come out as Khawārij under Ziyād as a form of personal rebellion hints that they perceived that sectarian identity favorably, and saw it as a means of providing distinction between themselves and a governor with whom they felt no satisfaction.

This does not mean that the Khawārij possessed anything like the coherent doctrine ascribed by outsiders but more likely developed later. Based on the reading of the sources proposed herein, it appears the sectarians at most had a rationale for dissent against centralized government, identified loosely as the caliphate and its representatives, and justified it with a vague understanding that the structures in power were not operating in accordance with the will of God. Behind this lay traditional tribal grievances that pertained to the distribution of resources and therefore sharaf. In other words, the complaints voiced by the proto-Khawārij continued to pertain during Mu‘āwiya's caliphate and beyond. They provide one of the few constants of the overall narrative, witnessed yet again in the Second Fitna when Khārijī rebellions ballooned to sizes not witnessed previously. This change in magnitude allowed the sectarians to form their own Islamic states, but also created tensions among the Khawārij themselves that resulted in division and, eventually, the formulation of distinct doctrine.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 89-90.

The Second Fitna, 61-79/680-98

Similar to the Khārijī akhbār of the first civil war, those that relate events in the Second Fitna tend to possess more detail than those that deal with the caliphate of Mu‘āwiya, the result of polemical redaction which made use of the sectarians as foils to the various actors on the larger political stage. The death of Mu‘āwiya and the ascension of his son, Yazīd, as head of the Islamic empire proved the motivating factor for this second war within Islam. Both Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī and ‘Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr refused to give the oath of allegiance to the new caliph and fled to Mecca to claim sanctuary.⁵⁰¹ Ḥusayn's death at Karbala in the first month of the year 61/680 precipitated Ibn al-Zubayr to declare himself caliph in opposition to Yazīd after the pretender received the allegiance of the Meccans.⁵⁰² The revolt of Ibn al-Zubayr attracted support from far and wide, including that of many people from Iraq who identified as Khārijī.

As previously noted, the most prominent of these people in terms of their long-term impact on the formation of Khārijī identity, both internal and external, were Najda ibn Āmir and Nāfi’ ibn al-Azraq, the eponymous founders of the Najdāt and Azāriqa sects.⁵⁰³ The context preserved in the sources was one of proactive oppression against dissent in Iraq under the governor ‘Ubaydallah ibn Ziyād. In the year 60/679-80 he put the prefects (*‘arīf*) of the various districts on notice that, if they did not identify all the "strangers, those among you who are sought by the Commander of the Faithful, those among you from Ḥarūriyya [i.e. Khawārij], and the troublemakers whose concern is discord and turmoil," then he would remove their districts from the *dīwān* and have the

⁵⁰¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Caliphate of Yazīd*, 10.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 189-97.

⁵⁰³ See chapter 2.

prefects exiled or crucified on their own doorsteps.⁵⁰⁴ Such harsh treatment provided motivation for rebellion, and the chaos of the Second Fitna provided Najda and Nāfi' with the opportunity to engage in proactive dissent against the Umayyad caliphate and its representatives by joining Ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca, where they defended Islam's holiest city from their mutual enemies.

As with the history of the early Muslim community in general, establishing what exactly happened and when proves a nigh-impossible task in regard to the actions of the Khawārij and to what extent they cooperated with Ibn al-Zubayr. At first, al-Ṭabarī suggested that Najda revolted independently, but the akhbārī provided no details. Instead, the Khārijī appeared suddenly in Mecca when he came from Medina to help defend the Ka'ba during the first siege in 64/683. The ever-terse Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt did not make these distinctions, and instead began the story of the Khawārij in Mecca with their decision to interrogate and separate from Ibn al-Zubayr. This event occurred after the death of Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya that same year, which precipitated the withdrawal of the Syrian army besieging Mecca.⁵⁰⁵ With the greater enemy temporarily out of the picture, the Khawārij decided they should cross-examine their ally to make sure his beliefs coincided with theirs. As with all other akhbār that claim to preserve interrogations by the sectarians, they asked Ibn al-Zubayr his opinion of the third caliph. Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt and al-Ṭabarī provide essentially the same story. The object of interrogation realized the jig was up and politely asked the Khawārij to come back later after he had time to consider his answer. When they returned, Ibn al-Zubayr, now protected by his faithful bodyguards, provided an honest response: "I acknowledge him as caliph, living or

⁵⁰⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Caliphate of Yazīd*, 34-35. The dīwān in this case is the register of those entitled to receive stipends.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 197; and Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 108-9.

dead."⁵⁰⁶ At this, the sectarians disassociated themselves from the anti-caliph and left Mecca. In both Khalīfa's and al-Ṭabarī's narrations, the sectarians soon disagreed with one another and went their separate ways.

The most-detailed portions of the story related by al-Ṭabarī allegedly derive from a Khārijī source, Qabīṣa ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Quḥafī of Banū Khath'am, who claimed to have witnessed the encounter between Ibn al-Zubayr and the sectarians.⁵⁰⁷ Qabīṣa provided no clues as to how he recalled the speeches given by the Khārijī representative and his opponent, both of which he related in full in his khabar. Perhaps he had access to transcripts, a claim he later made when recalling a speech given by Ṣāliḥ ibn Musarriḥ al-Tamīmī, leader of the Khawārij who rebelled in 76/695.⁵⁰⁸ Not only did Qabīṣa provide the full text of two page-length orations, he also offered a lengthy list of the sectarians who disagreed and split from one another that included their full names and tribal associations. The passage is striking for its detail:

The group [of Khawārij formerly with Ibn al-Zubayr] split up. Nāfi' al-Azraq al-Ḥanzalī, 'Abdallah ibn Ṣaffār al-Sa'dī of Banū Ṣarīm ibn Muqā'is, 'Abdallah ibn Ibād, also of the Banū Ṣarīm, Ḥanzalah ibn Bayhās, and the sons of al-Māḥūz ('Abdallah, 'Ubaydallah and al-Zubayr) of the Banū Salīṭ ibn Yarbū', departed and eventually reached [Basra]. Abū Ṭālūt of the Banū Zimmān ibn Mālik ibn Ṣa'b ibn 'Alī ibn Mālik ibn Bakr ibn Wā'il, 'Abdallah 'Aṭīyyah ibn al-Aswad al-Yashkurī went to the Yamāma. There they joined Abū Ṭālūt in revolt, but afterwards agreed on Najda ibn Āmir as leader. As for those of them from [Basra], they went [there], sharing the ideas of Abū Bilāl.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁶ Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 109. As to be expected, al-Ṭabarī's version says the same thing in more words: "I am a friend of Ibn 'Affān in this world and the next, and a friend of his friends and an enemy of his enemies" (al-Ṭabarī, *The Collapse of Sufyānid Authority and the Coming of the Marwānids*, vol. 20 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by G. R. Hawting [New York: State University of New York Press, 1989], 101). Ibn Kathīr does not mention Ibn al-Zubayr's bodyguard, but instead ascribes his survival in the face of a Khārijī inquisition to the strength of his "faith, truthfulness, justice, kindness, etc." (Ibn Kathīr, *Beginning to the End*, 2.894). Overall, Ibn Kathīr does not have much to say about the Khawārij after the death of 'Alī, and often limits his comments to epitomes of akhbār taken from al-Ṭabarī.

⁵⁰⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Collapse of Sufyānid Authority*, 99.

⁵⁰⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *The Marwānid Restoration*, vol. 22 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by Everett K. Rowson (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 33.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 101-2.

Certainly Qabīṣa possessed an impressive memory. But there is more going on here than merely listing the names of sectarians, because all of those individuals are associated with the foundation or leadership of different Khārījī sub-sects, not just Nāfi' and Najda.

'Abdallah ibn Ṣaffār allegedly founded the Ṣufriyya, 'Abdallah ibn Ibād the Ibāḍiyya, Ibn Bayhās the Bayhāsiyya, all known for their relative moderation. As noted in the above passage, Abū Ṭālūt started a revolt in the Yamāma later taken over by Najda, who lent the group his name, the Najdāt. 'Aṭiyyah later separated from Najda and, after some misadventures, ended up in Sijistān where a sect allegedly coalesced around him, the 'Aṭawiyya.⁵¹⁰ And the al-Māḥūz brothers led the Azāriqa some time after Nāfi's death.⁵¹¹

Questions of the accuracy of Qabīṣa's memory aside, his khabar conflicts with other reports, in particular those that claim or infer that Najda had previously begun his own revolt in central Arabia, and with one that places the Khawārij alongside Ibn al-Zubayr during the second siege of Mecca later that same year.⁵¹² It actually appears that the portion of Qabīṣa's khabar quoted above served to provide an etiology in regard to the foundation of these various Khārījī sub-sects. While its claims do not lie outside the realm of possibility, it does offer a questionably-tidy explanation of later events. And these alarm bells only chime louder in light of the subsequent narrative in al-Ṭabarī. The isnād for the following events began with an anonymous male from Basra, and claimed to relate how Nāfi' ibn Azraq came to feel differently from his fellow Khawārij in that city later in 64/683-84.⁵¹³ At first, the sectarians in Basra collectively decided together that some of them would rebel to make up for the fact that none of them had done so in recent

⁵¹⁰ Al-Baghdādī, 88.

⁵¹¹ Al-Shahrastānī, 102.

⁵¹² Al-Ṭabarī, *Collapse of Sufyānid Authority*, 115.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 102.

memory. So they put three-hundred men under the command of Nāfi', who led them in revolt during a time of great upheaval and chaos in Basra.⁵¹⁴ According to the anonymous source, however, the Basrans stopped their feuding long enough to band against the Khawārij. Like an angry mob, the united tribes did not limit their attacks to the activists under Nāfi', but likewise persecuted any quietist Khārijī they found. This drove the latter into joining the activist elements, and before long Nāfi' had a sizeable following. A thoughtful man, after some reflection on his own beliefs, he came up with the doctrine that came to be associated with the Azāriqa: those that did not follow him in revolt would receive no salvation, and the faithful were to have no association with them on any level. In practical terms this meant that the Azāriqa identified as polytheist anyone who did not subscribe to Azrāqī beliefs, making their blood licit, including women and children. When Nāfi' sent a letter that described his unique interpretation of Muslim doctrine to Ibn Ṣaffār and Ibn Ibād, they both agreed to disagree with Nāfi', but in the process had a falling out themselves.⁵¹⁵

Similar to Qabīṣa's report, this khabar offers a curiously-pat explanation for the fallout between the Basran Khawārij and Nāfi'. Unlike the former report, however, this one relied on an unknown whose alleged residency in Basra appears to provide his only claim to legitimacy. Like so much of the akhbārī tradition, this story may be true, but it certainly sounds too good to be. More likely, someone felt it necessary to craft an explanation for the division of the sectarians into multiple, disagreeing groups. Working backwards from the results—in this case the existence of several sects believed to have

⁵¹⁴ Ibid. Nāfi's revolt took place in the wake of the assassination of Mas'ūd ibn 'Amr, who 'Ubaydallah ibn Ziyād placed in charge of Basra in his absence. Further complicating matters was the aftermath of the Battle of Marj Rāhiṭ (summer of 64/684), the results of which created a blood feud between the tribes of Qays and Kalb and their allies; see: *ET*², s.v. "Mardj Rāhiṭ."

⁵¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Collapse of Sufyānid Authority*, 103-4.

originated in Basra and the legacy of success ascribed to the Azāriqa—it would be a simple matter to create a plausible-enough genesis narrative. But much exists to recommend against its historicity, foremost that Khawārij who allegedly shared the quietist piety of Abū Bilāl decided to start a rebellion that did not involve relocation far from the garrison cities to live a quiet, nomadic existence. That the Basran group opted to do the exact opposite, albeit with only a fraction of its numbers, contradicts other parts of the Khārijī narrative, but it does coincide with how outsiders later perceived the sect.

Over time, Nāfi's revolt came to represent the standard of behavior among the sectarians from the perspective of nonmembers. While the Azāriqa enjoyed notable military success over their brief existence, it was their reputation for excessive violence that captured the imaginations of the akhbārīs and heresiographers. According to Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, the Khawārij under Nāfi' "engaged in indiscriminate massacre," but the historian provided no details to support that claim.⁵¹⁶ Likewise al-Ṭabarī, who provided lots of detail but still made no mention of any atrocities on the part of the Azāriqa who served under Nāfi'. That akhbārī merely related how the sub-sect came into existence, described above, and how Nāfi' died in the second major battle against the united Basrans at Dulāb in Ahwaz in 65/684-85. The first khabar in al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* to ascribe to the Khawārij violence against women and children does not occur until the year 68/687-88, when the Azāriqa returned from the east to Iraq where they conducted raids. Now led by al-Zubayr ibn al-Māhūz, the sectarians attacked Madā'in, allegedly "killing children, women, and men, and ripping open pregnant women.... Then they went to Sābāt and used their swords on the people, killing a slave woman who had borne a child to Rab'ah ibn Nājīd, and also killing Bunānah, the daughter of Abū Yazīd ibn

⁵¹⁶ Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 112.

‘Āṣim al-Azdī.”⁵¹⁷ Later, in the village of Jawbar near Baghdad, the sectarians murdered the mentally-ill Simāk ibn Yazīd and his young daughter.⁵¹⁸

As with the Khārijī narrative in general, this khabar may reflect actual events on some level, but it contains many elements questionable in nature. The isnād provided by al-Ṭabarī traced this report through Abū Mikhnaf to one Abū al-Mukhārīl al-Rāsibī who, according to Ursula Sezgin, was a lesser muḥaddith from Kufa who had some familiarity with the governorship of Mus’ab ibn al-Zubayr in Iraq.⁵¹⁹ Abū al-Mukhārīl’s report regarding the return of the Azāriqa shifts between the political and the personal, the less and the more detailed. He provided no specificities for the attack on Madā’in, but mentioned a number of names in regard to Sābāt where he included dialogue between the sectarians and their victims. This disparity does not by itself cause concern, but the mention of the murder of child-bearing women sounds suspiciously like the story of Ibn Khabbāb, whose pregnant wife or concubine also had her belly ripped open. If this detail was added later, then it well may represent a case of increased distinction to either tie it to the story of Ibn Khabbāb, or simply increase sympathy for the victims and antipathy for the Khawārij. Bunānah and the unnamed female slave appear to fall into this latter category. The narrator described the former as someone who “had read the Qur’an and was exceedingly beautiful,” traits which multiply the tragedy of her death.⁵²⁰ In the case of the slave woman, the khabar implied that she had a child to care for, again increasing the pathos. One may draw the same conclusion for Simāk ibn Yazīd and his daughter:

⁵¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *The Victory of the Marwānids*, vol. 21 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by Michael Fishbein (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 125. Sābāt is southeast of Madā’in in the region of Wasit.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 120 and 120n433. Mus’ab was the brother of Ibn al-Zubayr.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

both should have been the recipients of compassion. In regard to Simāk, Qur'an 4:5 mandates that Muslims care for the mentally ill.⁵²¹ And the sources paint his daughter in the colors of Late Antique martyrdom. She begged the Khawārij, "People of Islam, my father is afflicted [with mental illness], do not kill him. As for me, I am only a girl. I swear to God I have never committed indecency, harmed any neighbor of mine, or been proud and conceited"; in other words, she was without sin.⁵²² Immune to her pleas, the sectarians killed her and chopped up the body.

The report of the Azraqī raid on Sābāt described it as a vicious event in which the sectarians attacked the people without mercy, but a closer reading suggests otherwise. Not only were Bunānah and the slave woman the only fatalities, but these Khawārij do not appear to have been particularly good at the job of isti'rāḍ. One struck Rayṭah bint Yazīd on the head so hard that the point of the attacker's sword simultaneously struck al-Ruwā' bint Iyās, felling both women in a single blow. But both survived and, after the Azāriqa left, they got up, dressed their wounds and set off for Kufa, along with the rest of the victims but for the unnamed slave woman and Bunānah.

What can explain the miraculous survival of the people of Sābāt at the hands of the murderous Khawārij? The sectarian swordsman may have lacked skill and accidentally struck Rayṭah and al-Ruwā' with the flat of his blade rather than the edge. Or maybe the two women really did survive the grievous wounds insinuated in the khabar; such improbabilities fill the annals of warfare. Or perhaps the details were fabricated, maybe even the entire event. The nature of the sources makes it impossible to ascertain with any certainty, but it is telling that a separate khabar attributed to one of the victims

⁵²¹ "Do not give the foolish [mentally ill] your property which God has assigned to you to maintain, but provide for them by means of it and clothe them, and speak to them rightful words."

⁵²² Al-Ṭabarī, *Victory of the Marwānids*, 129.

of the attack on Sābāt, al-Ruwā' bint Iyās, made no mention of her own grievous injury nor did she identify the attackers. Instead, she used her brief moment in the spotlight to accuse one man of cowardice for not protecting his young daughter, and to note the bravery of another for fighting the attackers even though he did not belong to the community.⁵²³ In a culture where personal accomplishment was something to crow about, the fact that al-Ruwā' failed to mention her own participation in the event seems quite odd indeed.⁵²⁴

Overall, the akhbārī narrative as it pertains to the Azāriqa ascribed only a handful of atrocities to that sect. Even if all are taken as factual the number of cases seems insufficient to judge the entire movement as inherently bloodthirsty. If one discounts those of a vague nature, such as Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ's casual comment about the revolt of Nāfi', then the number of incidents becomes very small indeed. Interestingly, one khabar ascribed the motivation for another murder attributed to this sub-sect to tribal honor rather than any homicidal tendency endemic to the Azāriqa.⁵²⁵ Considering the concerns noted above, it may be that the reputation ascribed to this sub-sect finds its basis in a singular event, perhaps a handful. But it seems more likely that it reflects the back-reading of later doctrine associated with the Azāriqa into earlier events. The works of the heresiographers suggests just such a conclusion. Al-Baghdādī, who related many details of a historical nature, added nothing in regard to reports of actual

⁵²³ Ibid., 126.

⁵²⁴ It is possible, of course, that she did mention it but that al-Ṭabarī or another akhbārī opted not to include it in the report. Again, as with so much of the early tradition, it is impossible to ascertain which exactly is the case.

⁵²⁵ A leader of the Azāriqa named Abū al-Hadīd al-Shannī murdered the wife of one of al-Muhallab's commanders. The sectarians captured the woman during a battle, after which they offered her for sale to the highest bidder as a slave—a normal and expected outcome in the Late Antique world. But she happened to belong to the same tribe as Abū al-Hadīd, and he felt that her sale into slavery would besmirch his honor and that of Banū Shann (a sept of Banū 'Abd al-Qays), so he beheaded her himself (Al-Ṭabarī, *Victory of the Marwānids*, 200).

violence perpetrated by this sect outside the so-called “trial of the soldier,” a ridiculous right of passage on the surface, and one that does not hold up under examination. He claimed that Nāfi’ adopted this odd process from one of three men; which one is not clear, although al-Baghdādī seems to favor ‘Abdallah ibn al-Waḍīn. According to the heresiographer, Ibn al-Waḍīn came up with the idea for having new recruits execute a captive as a sign of their devotion to the cause. Nāfi’ opposed the idea at first, but changed his mind after Ibn al-Waḍīn died, or at least al-Baghdādī claimed as much. That a sect which purportedly grew to the size of “more than twenty thousand” fighting men dogmatically maintained such a policy stretches credulity well past the breaking point.⁵²⁶ This is not the sort of practice that can be kept secret for long, and it is hard to imagine it providing an incentive to join the sect for so many people. As such, this policy would prove a detriment to group identity for a group the size of the Azāriqa, making it unappealing and not likely to attract the large following attested in the sources.⁵²⁷

Rather, the trial of the soldier sounds like polemic of the type common in the Ancient and Late Antique world, whereby those hostile to a tradition ascribed bizarre and inhuman behaviors to its practitioners. In *Contra Celsum*, Origin of Alexandria (d. ca. 254 CE) described the accusations that the Greek philosopher Celsus leveled against Christians and Christianity, among them sorcery, infanticide, cannibalism, wife swapping, and appealing deliberately to the “uninstructed, and servile, and ignorant.”⁵²⁸ Christian heresiographers proved themselves just as capable of launching such attacks. John of Damascus called Muḥammad “a false prophet” who forged the Qur’an under the

⁵²⁶ Al-Baghdādī, 85. Of course, the 20,000+ figure is probably an exaggeration, but the Azāriqa must have possessed considerable numbers regardless, based on the record of their military success and longevity, both of which are presented with consistency in the sources.

⁵²⁷ Not to mention the improbability of finding the thousands of captives needed to practice this policy.

⁵²⁸ Origin, *Contra Celsum*, 6.12, 6.14, 6.27, and 6.33.

influence of Arianism and the Jewish and Christian scriptures to construct "his own heresy."⁵²⁹ John also accused Muslims of paganism with his claim that the black stone of the Ka'ba was actually "a head of that Aphrodite whom they used to worship and whom they called Khabar."⁵³⁰ Islamic theologians likewise involved themselves in these cross-cultural contests. For example, in the eleventh century Ibn Ḥazm argued for the unreliability of the four gospels, and concluded that all the ahl al-kitāb were "engrossed in error."⁵³¹ Late that century, 'Alī ibn Ṭāhir al-Sulamī suggested that Christians could expect to spend eternity burning in hell for refusing to accept Islam.⁵³² But Islamic heresiographers saved their harshest condemnations for fellow Muslims who did not conform to the authors' interpretation of orthodoxy. Ibn Ḥazm called 'Abdallah ibn Mu'āwiya ibn 'Abdallah ibn Ja'far ibn Abī Tālib a "nihilist" who held "detestable opinions" for his attempt to lead a Shi'ī revolt in the east in 127/743-44, even though that rebellion may have been more an opportunistic power-grab typical of the people and period than a theologically-based uprising.⁵³³ And al-Baghdādī did not limit his arrow slinging to the Khawārij. He accused the founder of one Mu'tazila sub-sect, Abū Ishāq ibn Saiyār al-Nazzām, of associating with "dualists, with the innovators... and with the quasi-heathen," and claimed that the latter's nisba actually did not refer to the excellence

⁵²⁹ John of Damascus, *Saint John of Damascus Writings*, trans. by Frederic H. Chase, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 153

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 156-57.

⁵³¹ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 65-67; and Abū Muḥammad 'Alī ibn Aḥmed ibn Sa'īd Ibn Ḥazm, *The Heterodoxies of the Shiites According to Ibn Hazm: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, trans. by Israel Friedlaender (New Haven, CT: N.P. [Jewish Theological Seminary?], 1901), 40.

⁵³² 'Alī ibn Ṭāhir al-Sulamī, *The Book of the Jihad of 'Alī ibn Ṭāhir al-Sulamī (d. 1106)*, trans. by Niall Christie (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 372n27.

⁵³³ Ibn Ḥazm, 45. For an account of 'Abdallah ibn Mu'āwiya's revolt, see: al-Ṭabarī, *The Waning of the Umayyad Caliphate*, trans. by Carole Hillenbrand, vol. 26 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by Ismail K. Poonawala (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 254-63.

of his poetry, but to the fact that he spent his days making beads in the market of Basra.⁵³⁴

That the Khawārij introduced factionalism into Islam was one thing the Muslim heresiologists agreed upon, but beyond that they reached no consensus, even when it came to describing a single sub-sect like the Azāriqa. The list of doctrine al-Ṭabarī ascribed to Nāfi', discussed above, contained only two precepts.⁵³⁵ A century later al-Baghdādī added the trial of a soldier, the permissibility of killing unbelieving women and children, a very-strict application of ḥudūd based on the Qur'an alone, and allowance for the confiscation of a waqf made by a non-member.⁵³⁶ To this list Ibn Ḥazm added that Azāriqa women had to participate in fasting and prayers even while menstruating, the proscription of killing dhimmī, and an elaboration to the punishment for theft to mandate amputation of the whole arm.⁵³⁷ In the sixth/twelfth century, al-Shahrastānī provided a list of his own that included several of the points mentioned by his predecessors, plus 'Alī's divinely-ordained status as an unbeliever, Ibn Muljam's right action in killing the fourth caliph, and the potential for God's prophets to fall into unbelief either before or after their prophetic missions.⁵³⁸ These different lists, which exhibit added distinction over time, beg the question: from where did these new elements derive? If the forces of al-Ḥajjāj defeated the last of the Azāriqa ca. 78/697, who was left to create new doctrine

⁵³⁴ Al-Baghdādī, 136.

⁵³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Collapse of Sufyānid Authority*, 103. Nāfi', in his hermeneutic for Qur'an 2:154, 2:220, and 9:1, instructed his followers to separate completely from polytheists and that God would curse all those who do not agree with the Azāriqa.

⁵³⁶ Al-Baghdādī, 83-84. This heresiographer appears to have borrowed at least some of his material from Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī's (260-324/874-936) *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*; see: Keith Lewinstein, "The Azāriqa in Islamic Heresiography," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 54, no. 2 (1991): 258.

⁵³⁷ *ET*², s.v. "Azāriqa'." Some interpretations of shari'a have determined that women should not pray during menses, but is not a Qur'anic injunction, hence the difference in Khārijī doctrine.

⁵³⁸ Al-Shahrastānī, 103.

for the sect five-hundred years later?⁵³⁹ In a movement that forbade quietism, the only possible answer is "no one."⁵⁴⁰ Keith Lewinstein's observation in regard to the heresiographical tradition and its ever-expanding list of Khārijī doctrine appears correct: Muslim heresiographers felt compelled by "the polemical potential" of the Azāriqa to continue to reinvent that sect's identity over time.⁵⁴¹ In this regard the followers of Nāfi' provided an excellent out-group against which more-mainstream Muslims might make useful comparisons in order to enhance their own self-image at the expense of this extinct sect.

Two more problems inherent to the sources' presentation of the Azāriqa deserve brief mention. First, several reports on the activities of the group ascribed behavior to them that contradicted the overall presentation of that sect in the master narrative. In particular, some of the Azāriqa accepted a pardon (*amān*) when offered prior to their last battle, a decision that suggests a sudden change of heart both on their part and on those who did not take the offer, as it would have been beholden on the latter to confront the former.⁵⁴² The behavior of those who accepted is consistent with the precepts of group identity formation; to not accept clemency meant probable death at the hands of a superior enemy that had the Azāriqa surrounded. At that moment, strict adherence to sectarian identity lost much of its value for some members. But it also

⁵³⁹ The akhbārī differ in regard to the year in which the last of the Azāriqa were wiped out. Al-Ṭabarī locates the event in 77/696, Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt in 78/697, and Ya'qūbī in 79/698 (al-Ṭabarī, *Marwānīd Restoration*, 164 and 165n596; Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 138; and 'Abd Dixon, 182).

⁵⁴⁰ Cf. the *Sirat Sālim ibn Dhakwān*, if from a later date, implies that quietist Azāriqa did exist; however its translators, Crone and Zimmerman, doubted that to be the case. Madelung mentioned a Khārijī community in Gardīz in eastern Iran that claimed to descend from the Azāriqa as late as the fourth/tenth century. According to him, they were no longer warriors and had submitted to the government (Madelung, *Religious Trends*, 70). Regardless, this oddly-passive manifestation of the Azāriqa is not mentioned by any of the heresiographers considered herein, and therefore has no bearing on the present study.

⁵⁴¹ Lewinstein, "Azāriqa," 260.

⁵⁴² 'Abd Dixon, 182 and 182n63.

implies that the dogma ascribed to this sect had to be cast out or ignored by those who chose to hold on to their group identity to the bitter end. This contradicts the popular image of a group that supposedly persecuted non-conformists with murderous fury.

Second, the sources do not present the sectarians' overall behavior as substantially different from that of their more-orthodox opponents. Undoubtedly, part of the reason behind this lies with the fact that their nemesis was al-Ḥajjāj, the effective but tyrannical ruler in the east. His harsh policies and treatment of dissent provided incentive to rebel whenever the opportunity presented itself, and not just by those who called themselves Khawārij. Several versions of his inaugural speech as governor of Kufa survive between which, like those of Pope Urban II in preaching the First Crusade, the details vary considerably but the theme is consistent. "By God," he told the assembled Kufans, "I take full accounting of wickedness, match it in return, and pay it back in kind! I see heads ripe and ready for harvest, and blood ready to flow between turbans and beards.... By God, you will stay on the straight paths of the right, or else I will leave every man of you preoccupied with the state of his body."⁵⁴³ Never slow with the executioner's blade, the governor proved a man of his word. Other individuals exhibited the same level of cruelty ascribed to the Azāriqa. During the battle in which Qaṭarī was killed, one of his opponents saw a group of Khārijī women clustered together. Since all of them were "as comely and pleasing to the eye as your Lord willed except for a single old woman among them," he did what came naturally and herded them towards one of his comrades so that they might capture and take them as war booty.⁵⁴⁴ When the old woman tried to defend her younger charges, the man cleaved her skull in two with his sword, an

⁵⁴³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Marwānid Restoration*, 13-14. For more versions, see: Ibid., 15-18.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 162.

outcome which earned him some good-natured ribbing from his friend. This khabar, narrated by the killer, contains parallels to the Azāriqa attack on Sābāt, but is treated entirely different, almost as comedy rather than tragedy.

Among the Khārijī sects of the Second Fitna, Nāfi's received much of the akhbārīs' and heresiographers' attention, second only to the early Khawārij who rebelled against 'Alī. This preferential treatment makes sense: the Azāriqa proved themselves among the most active of all the sub-sects during the Second Civil War and, although they had ceased to exist by the end, they also enjoyed the greatest success over the longest span of time of the activist Khārijī groups. Not only did his sect take over the collection of taxes, after Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujā'a retook parts of Ahwaz and secured his hold over Fārs and Kirmān in the year 69/688-89, he minted coins in the Arab-Sasanian style predominant in the east. Text on these silver *dirhams* included the *lā ḥukm* and a legend that read, "Servant of God, Qaṭarī, Commander of the Faithful."⁵⁴⁵ In this way he participated in a method of legitimation practiced by the caliphs and their governors who issued coins similar in design and purpose, different titles and the absence of the Khārijī slogan the only significant differences. Adam Gaiser proposes that the sectarians required specie in order to pay and supply their troops, and that the design of the Qaṭarī coinage may reflect a desire to interact with those outside the Azāriqa, including dhimmī, mawālī, and non-Khārijī Muslims.⁵⁴⁶ If Gaiser is correct on this last point, then it likewise casts doubt on the accuracy of the master narrative's presentation of the Azāriqa, who allegedly had no association with Muslims outside their sect.

⁵⁴⁵ Adam Gaiser, "What Do We Learn About the Early Khārijites and Ibāḍiyya from Their Coins?", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130, no. 2 (April-June 2010): 174-75.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

Those who followed Najda ibn Āmir had similar successes during the Second Fitna. However, the Najdāt failed to capture the attention of the akhbārī to the same extent as the Azāriqa, in spite of having much in common. Ibn Kathīr summarized Najda's career with a terse khabar set in 71/690: "Najda al-Haruri was killed. He had conquered Yamama."⁵⁴⁷ While the sources do not agree on all the events or their sequence, for some reason Najda decided to blaze his own trail in terms of where and how to rebel against the Umayyads. According to al-Balādhurī, Najda took over a rebellion in Yamama led by Abū Ṭalūt after the former successfully raided a caravan, the spoils of which he distributed among his fellow Khawārij. Over the next several years, Najda and his followers secured parts of Bahrain, the Yamama, and Oman, the last through the efforts of one of his deputies, 'Aṭīyya ibn al-Aswad. By 68/687 Najda held political and military power in the Arabian Peninsula that overshadowed that of Ibn al-Zubayr and the Umayyad caliph, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān. After a falling out with his chief, 'Aṭīyya tried to take Oman for himself and failed, but succeeded across the Persian Gulf in Kirmān.⁵⁴⁸ There he, like Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujā'a, minted his own silver dirhams, surviving examples of which span a six-year period, 71-77/690-97.⁵⁴⁹

Najda's followers deposed and then murdered him in 72/691-92. The reasons provided in the sources are, as usual, multiple, and one sounds suspiciously similar to the disagreement over arbitration:

When Najda wrote to 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān expressing his satisfaction with him, his followers disapproved of what he had done and called upon him to repent. This he openly did, and they accordingly gave up their resentment and hostility. One section of them, however, was ashamed of this demand made on him, saying, "We have made a mistake; we had no right to ask an imām to repent, nor had he any

⁵⁴⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *Beginning to the End*, 2.928. This author reports Najda's death once again in 72/691.

⁵⁴⁸ 'Abd Dixon, 172-73.

⁵⁴⁹ Gaiser, "Early Kharajite Coins," 178.

right to repent on our demanding that he do so." They then repented, confessed to their error, and said to him, "You must now repent of your repentance, otherwise we shall forsake you." Accordingly he repented of his repentance.⁵⁵⁰

This passage has much in common with the post-Ṣiffīn narrative in which the early Khawārij pressured ‘Alī to accept arbitration but then changed their minds and asked him to repent of his acceptance of their initial request. In the fourth caliph's case, he stood by his first promise in spite of the obvious consequences. In the story cited above, Najda revealed himself to lack that same degree of moral fiber, flip-flopping whenever asked. Considering these striking similarities and their use in making what appears to be an object lesson, this particular rationale for dissatisfaction among the sectarians is probably the product of someone's imagination. Fortunately, the sources also mention dissent over Najda's distribution of spoils, a more probable explanation of events all things considered. Regardless, the Najdāt elected his murderer, Abū Fudayk, to replace him, but the latter lasted only a year before a combined army of Kufans and Basrans sent by ‘Abd al-Malik defeated him and put an end to the Najdāt in Arabia.⁵⁵¹ Based on the numismatic evidence, the branch in Kirmān under 'Aṭīyya thrived for few years more, but was eventually crushed by an army led by al-Muhallab, the most-effective of al-Ḥajjāj's anti-Khārijī generals.⁵⁵²

Numerous minor rebellions by Khawārij and their sympathizers erupted during this period, all of which were put down in short order with one exception. In the spring of 76/695 the pious Qur'an reciter, Ṣāliḥ ibn Mussariḥ al-Tamīmī, came out in

⁵⁵⁰ Al-Shahrastānī, 105. The heresiographer did not mention his sources, which is a shame because tracing the isnād might reveal a pro-'Alid source.

⁵⁵¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Victory of the Marwānids*, 206, and 232-33.

⁵⁵² ‘Abd Dixon, 171.

revolt in the vicinity of his village of Dārā.⁵⁵³ It began with approximately 120 men and the movement stayed relatively small throughout its short life, never numbering more than around six hundred.⁵⁵⁴ Ṣāliḥ and his band identified with a moderate Khārijī movement, the Ṣufriyya, proponents of which did not believe it mandatory to fight those who subscribed to other forms of Islam.⁵⁵⁵ As such, Ṣāliḥ's revolt possessed a very different tenor from those of the Azāriqa and Najdāt in that the Ṣufriyya proved completely disinterested in taking and holding territory or forming their own separatist states. Instead, they lived a nomadic existence and sustained themselves by raiding, but, if the sources are correct, they let their beliefs guide and limit their actions. This is attested in the sectarians' first encounter with caliphal forces led by 'Adī ibn 'Adī ibn 'Umayra. Although the latter outnumbered Ṣāliḥ by more than eight-to-one, he did not really want to fight. In an exchange of messages, he informed the Khārijī, "By God, I am not of your opinion, but I am reluctant to fight you or anyone else, so fight someone other than me."⁵⁵⁶ So Ṣāliḥ ordered his men to mount up and move on, hardly the sort of behavior expected in the master narrative.

The Ṣufriyya leader died later that year in a battle against an army sent by al-Ḥajjāj three-times the size of the one led by 'Adī. One of Ṣāliḥ's followers, Shabīb ibn Yazīd, rallied the survivors and defeated the enemy in a surprise attack the next day.⁵⁵⁷ This proved just the first of many successes for that rebel, whom the sources present

⁵⁵³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Marwānid Restoration*, 37. Dārā was in northern Mesopotamia, near the present-day border of Iraq and Turkey.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 38; and *EP*, s.v. "Shabīb ibn Yazīd."

⁵⁵⁵ Madelung and Lewinstein have independently suggested that Ṣufri identity is largely a construct of the heresiographers, and that those identified with the sect would not see themselves as anything other than Khawārij. See: EI2, s.v. "Ṣufriyya"; and Keith Lewinstein, "Making and Unmaking a Sect: The Heresiographers and the Ṣufriyya," *Studia Islamica* 76 (1992): 76-77. For problems in associating Ṣāliḥ with the Ṣufriyya, see: Lewinstein, "Making and Unmaking," 80-81.

⁵⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Marwānid Restoration*, 39-40.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

more as a brave and dashing bandit than a murderous sectarian. One of his first decisions as leader was to fetch his mother so that "she will never be parted from me until one of us dies."⁵⁵⁸ He recited amusing poetry while battling his foes, and his reputation became such that al-Ḥajjāj's forces cowered at the mere suggestion of his presence.⁵⁵⁹ Indeed, Shabīb reserved his wrath for the governor's men intent on hunting him down, and he went out of his way to minimize the discomfort of the people. When near Baghdad, he sent word to the market there to let the merchants and buyers know they could proceed without fear as he had no intention of disrupting what was theirs by right.⁵⁶⁰ Shabīb continued to enjoy success, consistently outsmarting and outfighting his enemies until near the end of 77/697 when the tide turned against him. The present author has already related the account of Shabīb's battlefield interrogation at the hands of some of his own soldiers.⁵⁶¹ Shortly after that unlikely event, the sources tell us that the phenomenal Khārijī leader drowned after the bridge he was crossing was cut by someone, perhaps those same disgruntled men.⁵⁶²

Highly entertaining all around, the saga of the Ṣāliḥ-Shabīb revolt presented by al-Ṭabarī reads like wild-west fiction. The rebels moved swiftly from one adventure to the next, almost always outsmarted and outfought their opponents, and Shabīb won every duel he entered. The Ṣufriyya also possessed the moral high ground in their contests against al-Ḥajjāj. But, other than a few mentions of the *lā ḥukm*, signs of discernable Khārijī doctrine are rare in this narrative. The reports often sound apocryphal in this regard, such as the very-odd interrogation khabar. The story of Shabīb's death also fits

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 52-53.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁶¹ Chapter 3.

⁵⁶² Al-Ṭabarī, *Marwānid Restoration*, 116-18, and 122-27.

neatly into this latter category. As he slipped off the bridge into the river where he would drown, he managed to recite part of the eighth sūra of the Qur'an, "that God might decide the affair," and when he came up for one last breath, sūra 41:12: "That is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing."⁵⁶³ Perhaps the author or redactor of this khabar intended it to reveal Shabīb's piety, but it sounds a lot like comedy on the surface, a big end to suit a big life.

As seen in the copious examples provided above, the sources' presentation of the various Khārijī sects during the Second Fitna is problematic for a variety of reasons. In the case of the Ṣufriyya revolt under Shabīb, many of the reports that involve him in battle against the forces of al-Ḥajjāj contain copious commonalities that insinuate the presence of assimilation. For example, he is always in the thick of the fight, and often credited with personally defeating the commanders or other notables arrayed against him.⁵⁶⁴ In fact, if one strips away all the elements suspected of being additions to heighten the entertainment value of the story, then what remains looks a lot like a tale about a nomadic Bedouin tribe living off the land via raiding. That is exactly the impression left by Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt. His version, a mere shadow of al-Ṭabarī's, jumps from one battle to the next with almost no other detail, the rebels moving from place to place, fighting off their opponents as needed.⁵⁶⁵ In this regard, the Ṣufriyya look quite different from the Azāriqa and the Najdāt. The latter groups seemed more interested in establishing a caliphate with physical boundaries, as evidenced in their setting up house long enough to determine it prudent to mint coins. The sectarians under Shabīb never sat

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 124. The first verse is found in 8:42.

⁵⁶⁴ E.g.: Ibid., 46, 60, 63, 66, 78, and 87.

⁵⁶⁵ Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 135-38.

still for so long. Even when successful in driving off their foes they soon moved on themselves.⁵⁶⁶

This small Şufriyya revolt highlights an additional point: the hazards of ascribing gross similarities to everyone who identified as Khārijī. The heresiographers took pains to describe the alleged nuances in doctrine between the sects but, as witnessed in the case of the Azāriqa, it appears at least some of that doctrine derived from outsiders who wanted to fashion the Khawārij into a more-useful theological tool. To paraphrase Cook, it is not that the dogma associated with the sectarians "*might conceivably*" represent later interpolations by outsiders, "but that they are *not unlikely*" just that.⁵⁶⁷ A close reading of the akhbār preserved by the historiographers combined with contextual and other evidence suggests rather that doctrinal issues were of secondary importance, useful primarily for justifying rebellion against a centralized government which attracted hostility from many directions, not just the Khawārij. The years of the Second Fitna made the first look tame by comparison. Besides those already described, the following staged significant revolts against the caliphate or its agents: al-Mukhtār ibn 'Abī 'Ubayd al-Thaqafī took control of Kufa in 66-67/685-87 in protest of Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī's death at Karbala; al-Ḥajjaj's governor of Madā'in, Mutarrif ibn al-Mughīra ibn Shu'ba al-Thaqafī, revolted against his master in 77/696 while the latter concentrated on Shabīb; 'Abdallah ibn al-Jarud took Kufa for a brief period in 75/695-96; Dāwūd ibn al-Nu'mān revolted near Basra that same year; and 'Amr ibn Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ attempted to claim the caliphate

⁵⁶⁶ At one point, Shabīb did build a mosque in a Kufan suburb, which 'Abd Dixon interpreted as a sign that the Khārijī intended to stay for awhile. Possible, but unknowable as al-Ḥajjāj drove him away a few days later ('Abd Dixon, 187-88).

⁵⁶⁷ Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 51. Cook made his comment in regard to the early epistolary tradition in Islam, but it applies equally here.

for himself in 69-70/689.⁵⁶⁸ Add to this list ten more uprisings by Khawārij in the Arabian Peninsula and Jazira, and unrest and rebellion emerge as not the exception but the status quo. That a majority of the uprisings adopted Khārijī identity implies that some perceived it to have value in justifying dissent, whether proactive or quietist. This becomes abundantly clear in the North African rebellions that erupted during the waning years of the Umayyad dynasty.

Last Years of the Umayyads, 122-50/739-67

North Africa⁵⁶⁹ came under Muslim rule as part of the Arab Conquests, a process completed by the Umayyads. As with the other regions overrun by the early Muslim empire, the invaders were less concerned about converting the indigenous peoples than acquiring the spoils of war and eliminating any presence from the region of its major competitor, the Byzantines. How Berbers came to accept Islam in the early years remains a mystery, but it probably occurred as a consequence of their recruitment into the military forces of the conquerors. In this regard they appear to have differed little from the Arab tribespeople of the Peninsula who adopted the new faith in part for the tangible benefits it offered, and the Berbers appear to have taken on the mantle of Islam with as much enthusiasm as any. However, in spite of conversion to the preferred religion, they were dissatisfied with the treatment they received under their Arab masters and looked for opportunities to rebel with some regularity.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁸ *EF*², s.v. "al-Mukhtār ibn 'Abī 'Ubayd"; Khalifa ibn Khayyāt, 132—33; and 'Abd Dixon, 124-26, and 191-94.

⁵⁶⁹ The term "North Africa" in the present designation refers to the Mediterranean regions west of Egypt.

⁵⁷⁰ Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 26-32.

Religious justification for proactive anti-Umayyad dissent arrived by no later than 117/735 in the form of missionaries sent by the Ibāḍiyya and Ṣufriyya sects in Iraq. The details of these efforts are murky and likely apocryphal; one version has the missionaries from both parties arriving on the back of the same camel. These details need not concern us, but the salient point remains that several important Berber tribes converted to one or the other of these moderate Khārījī groups in the first part of the second century AH, and they rebelled against the caliphate as members of those sects, predominantly the Ṣufriyya at first.⁵⁷¹ Unlike many of the earlier rebellions by Khārījī groups, these events received scant attention from the early akhbārīs. The first Berber uprising under Ṣufriyya ideology occurred no earlier than 122/740. In his record for that year, al-Ṭabarī focused on the rebellion of Zayd ibn ‘Alī. The akhbārī did mention the Berber revolt, but only as context for the death of the caliphal representative sent to halt it, Kulthūm ibn ‘Iyāḍ al-Qushayrī.⁵⁷² Al-Ṭabarī did provide a rationale for the uprising, which he included in his narrative for the year 27/647, nearly a full century before the revolt.⁵⁷³ According to this khabar, peace reigned among the Berbers of Ifrīqiya until "the Iraqis infiltrated them," spreading anti-Umayyad propaganda in the form of Khārījī thought.⁵⁷⁴ While the author of the narrative did his best to deflect blame from the North African natives, painting them as true and pure Muslims corrupted by evil sectarians, the list of complaints ascribed to the Berbers tells a different story. Their delegate, Maysara al-Maṭgharī, claimed that the caliph's governor in Ifrīqiya used Berber soldiers for the

⁵⁷¹ *EI*², s.v. “Ṣufriyya,” and “al-Ibāḍiyya”; and T. Lewicki, “The Ibādites in Arabia and Africa,” *Cahiers d’Histoire Mondiale* 13 (1971): 75-77.

⁵⁷² Al-Ṭabarī, *Waning of the Umayyad*, 54. Ibn Kathīr, who tended to rely on al-Ṭabarī for much of his historical material, does not mention this revolt at all. For his part, al-Balādhurī had even less to say in his *Futūḥ*. He mentioned the death of Kulthūm and located it in the province of Ifrīqiya, but did not mention those responsible or any cause (al-Balādhurī, 367).

⁵⁷³ This is not so surprising when one realizes that al-Ṭabarī took this khabar from Sayf ibn ‘Umar.

⁵⁷⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Crisis of the Early Caliphate*, 20-21.

most dangerous duties so as to spare his Arab troops; he slaughtered the natives' pregnant sheep to acquire the softest skin from the unborn lambs as a gift for the caliph; he took the prettiest of the Berbers' young daughters as brides for his Arab soldiers; and, most egregious of all, he denied Maysara's people any share in the spoils of war, even though they had done more than their fair share in the jihad. The spokesman posed a question to the caliph, Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 105-25/724-43): "We do not find this in the Book of God nor in the practice of His Messenger, and we, too, are Muslims. We would like to know, then, whether the Commander of the Faithful approves of all this or not."⁵⁷⁵ Hishām ignored them, and this precipitated the first Berber revolt justified by Khārijī ideology.

Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ did not offer any cause, but he did share details not found in al-Ṭabarī. According to him, the rebellion began under the Ṣufrī, ‘Abd al-A‘la ibn Hudayj, who defeated the gubernatorial forces sent against him. Part of a coordinated effort among the tribes, Maysara revolted at the same time and defeated another army sent by the governor, killing the latter's son in the process. Ibn Khayyāṭ placed the arrival of Kulthūm in the following year, 123/741, and his death the year after that in a battle at the Wādī Sabū, alongside a river in Tangier. Prior to that Maysara had lost the confidence of his men, and they replaced him with two leaders, Khālid ibn Humayd and Abū Yūsuf Sālīm al-Azdī, who reunited long enough to defeat Kulthūm. The Ṣufriyya were later stopped by Balj ibn Bishr, Kulthūm's paternal cousin and his replacement in command of the caliph's army in the region. This did not put an end to this Ṣufrī rebellion in Ifrīqiya, which continued into 125/743.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁷⁶ Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ, 240-44.

Writing in the early eighth/fourteenth century, Ibn Idhārī al-Marrākushī provided greater detail than Ibn Khayyāṭ. He claimed that Kulthūm arrived originally with twelve-thousand Syrian troops, but his army grew to thirty-thousand by the addition of non-specific Arabs, who Khalid Yahya Blankinship assumes came to North Africa as colonists and joined the caliph's army out of a need to protect themselves from the Berber rebels.⁵⁷⁷ Kulthūm committed a cardinal sin in splitting up his forces, sending Balj ahead with a vanguard. But Balj's Arab cavalry did not have all their armor with them—just some leather shields for protection. They fared well in the initial skirmish against the Berbers, but the latter won through in the end. They pushed past Balj and attacked Kulthūm, who had in the meantime erected a tower from which he could oversee his forces. The tribesmen broke the ranks of the Syrians and killed the governor and a number of Arab chiefs.⁵⁷⁸

Ibn Idhārī's description provided a lot of minutiae, but his narrative contained obvious biases friendly to the forces in power as evidenced by the excuses he offered to explain Kulthūm's defeat at the hands of a mob of fractious tribesmen. While the elements found in his version might be accurate, it appears another case of increased distinction, the additions intended to breath more life into the minimalist narratives of the early akhbārīs. But in regard to the cause of the rebellion, Ibn Idhārī agrees with al-Ṭabarī in theme if not detail. According to the former, the Arab governors made one-fifth of the Berbers slaves as *khums* for the caliph.⁵⁷⁹ That those taken were Muslim, and that the

⁵⁷⁷ Khalid Yahya Blankinship, *The End of the Jihād State: The Reign of Hishām 'Abd al-Malik and the Collapse of the Umayyads* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 210-11.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibn Idhārī al-Marrākushī, *Al-Bayan al-Maghrib*, trans. by E. Fagnan (Alger: Orientale Press, 1901), 54-55. Translated from the French by the present author.

⁵⁷⁹ In this case, *khums* was the one-fifth share entitled to the caliph of all spoils of war. If true, the timing of this demand could not have been worse.

acquisition occurred long after the conquests only increased unrest among the North African natives to the breaking point.⁵⁸⁰ The akhbār provided by both historians point to underlying secular concerns supported by tribal tradition and a basic understanding of justice in Islam. The criterion of difficulty suggests that these issues shine through in both narratives in spite of attempts to deflect blame to a Khārijī fifth column (in al-Ṭabarī) or fate (Ibn Idhārī) because they represent the actual grievances of the Berbers.

Adam Gaiser offers further support for this argument. He identifies a connection with tribal identity in the Khārijī rebels' use of the title *ra'īs* for their leaders, which implies that they bore the same responsibilities as a shaykh to their people and therefore locates the revolts in the tribal milieu.⁵⁸¹ The actions of the Berbers in response to their complaints find parallels in many of the other uprisings discussed herein and in the sources, only some of which bear any association to the Khawārij. It is also interesting that the Berbers appear to have preferred Ṣufīrī over Ibādī ideology in the early decades of proactive unrest against the caliphate. According to Wilferd Madelung, the Ṣufriyya did not incline towards debating doctrine or establishing legal theories, and instead held up the early-Khawārij as exemplars to follow.⁵⁸² The latter's focus on the rejection of a centralized government they judged impious lacked nuance and therefore could be easily digested by Berber peoples relatively new to both Islam and caliphal governance. Therefore, Ṣufīrī "doctrine," which consisted of little that did not involve the justification of rebellion against the caliphate, proved just what the Berbers needed to

⁵⁸⁰ Ibn Idhārī, 51-52, cited in Blankinship, 204.

⁵⁸¹ Adam R. Gaiser, *Muslims, Scholars, Soldiers: The Origin and Elaboration of the Ibādī Imāmate Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 71.

⁵⁸² *EF*², s.v. "Ṣufriyya."

grant their uprisings religious legitimacy.⁵⁸³ The eventual dominance of Ibādī thought in the region came after the North Africans successfully established their own state only nominally beholden to the Abbasids, by which point the juristic and theological discourse of the Ibādīyya came into its own, particularly its concept of the imāmate.

The early historiographers do not appear to have had much interest in events on the far-side of Egypt,⁵⁸⁴ and instead focused their attentions to the east where rebels adopted diverse identities in opposing the Umayyads and Abbasids. Unsurprisingly, rebellions against both dynasties occurred with greater frequency and consequence during times of general hardship or unrest. It shall suffice to discuss a few representative examples, starting with the revolt of the Ṣufrī, al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays al-Shaybānī, who al-Ṭabarī called "al-Ḥarūrī" or "al-Muḥakkim."⁵⁸⁵ The precipitating event according to that akhbārī was the assassination of the caliph, Walid ibn Yazīd in 127/745, an event that Ibn Kathīr claimed "caused a tremendous unrest among the people."⁵⁸⁶ That proved something of an understatement, as it actually precipitated the Third Fitna among the Muslims.

⁵⁸³ Blankinship's claim that the Berbers' identification with the Khawārij has been overstated in the sources supports this contention, in that the minimalist Ṣufrī ideology required very little of the adherent other than a willingness to express dissent against the caliphate (Blankinship, 208).

⁵⁸⁴ For example, in his report for the year 133/750-51, al-Ṭabarī once again glossed over a Berber rebellion in Ifrīqiya with a single sentence. He did little better with the revolt of 153/770, when allied Ibādī and Ṣufrī tribes killed the governor of Abbasid caliph, al-Manṣūr and declared their own caliphate. See: Al-Ṭabarī, *The Abbasid Revolution*, vol. 27 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by John Alden Williams (New York: State University of New York Press, 1985), 197; and Al-Ṭabarī, *Al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī*, vol. 29 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by Hugh Kennedy (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 65. Hugh Kennedy notes that this more-minimalist reporting style reflects changes to the historiographical tradition over time. The coming of the Abbasids reduced the reliance on *isnād* to vet each khabar. From that point the akhbārīs often regurgitated facts in list-like format without consideration of the source (Al-Ṭabarī, *Al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī*, xiv).

⁵⁸⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Abbasid Revolution*, 9. Al-Ṭabarī's use of the labels applied to the earliest sectarians lends further credence to claims that Ṣufrī identity is largely an external construct of the heresiographers applied *ex eventu* to some Khawārij, particularly those who did not profess identifiable dogma.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Beginning to the End*, 3.188.

It is in this context of general unrest among the umma that the revolt of al-Ḍaḥḥāk must be understood. Like Shabīb ibn Yazīd, al-Ḍaḥḥāk took over a rebellion in progress when its previous leader, Sa‘īd ibn Bahdal al-Shaybānī, died of the plague on the way to Iraq. Prior to that, Sa‘īd expended more energy contesting other small uprisings than the caliphate, often absorbing those groups into his own.⁵⁸⁷ By the time al-Ḍaḥḥāk took over, he had approximately one-thousand men under his command, and he continued to absorb more dissenting groups that spoiled for a fight, preferably against the Umayyads. This included many Syrian soldiers stationed in Iraq who had formerly served in the caliphal armies there to provide security and stability in the region. According to some reports, by the time al-Ḍaḥḥāk arrived outside Kufa, his army had swollen to some thirty-thousand fighting men, and he took the city after a battle that lasted one or two days. Afterwards, he set up enough administration to oversee the collection of taxes and defense in Kufa, and moved against Wāsīt where the governor, a Qurashī, submitted to the rebel.⁵⁸⁸ Not content with that, he moved directly against the new caliph, Marwān II (r. 127-32/744-50). In spite of his identity as a Khārijī, al-Ḍaḥḥāk proved popular with many. The population of the city of Mosul voluntarily submitted their city to him, and some reports claim that as many as 120,000 men eventually flocked to his banner. But the rebel met his match in Marwān II, who defeated his army and killed al-Ḍaḥḥāk in 128/745.⁵⁸⁹

The revolt of al-Ḍaḥḥāk reveals a number of points important to the present study. First, while the numbers may be exaggerated, the size of the rebel army and its almost constant growth reveals the popularity of this particular anti-caliphal movement.

⁵⁸⁷ Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 265-66.

⁵⁸⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Abbasid Revolution*, 10-16.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10-19, and 49-51; al-Balādhurī, 328; and Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 274-76.

Sa'īd ibn Bahdal started with approximately two-hundred men, a number that exploded to six-hundred times that by al-Ḍaḥḥāk's final battle. Certainly there were not 120,000 people committed to the Khārijī cause in Iraq; in fact the sources suggest that al-Ḍaḥḥāk's army consisted of diverse social and political groups, not just religious sectarians. Much of the initial upsurge in enlistment came from two tribal confederations who set aside a bloody struggle between them for control of the land between Kufa and Ḥīrah to join the uprising against Marwān II.⁵⁹⁰ The Syrian troops who joined had spent much of their careers in the region fighting against Khawārij and other rebels, not alongside them. While the defense forces in Kufa had put up some resistance, the people appear to have accepted al-Ḍaḥḥāk's rule because he felt compelled to leave only two-hundred of his own followers behind to oversee the city, a much smaller garrison than that utilized by the previous ruler.⁵⁹¹ The sources offer several explanations for the popularity of this particular rebellion: al-Ḍaḥḥāk spared those who surrendered to him, and he did not pursue those who fled; he also paid very-generous monthly stipends to his men, based on their role, not their social status.⁵⁹² While the number of participants involved is probably exaggerated, the revolt of al-Ḍaḥḥāk appears to have been a very popular movement—in spite of its leader's identification as a member of a sect remembered with little fondness by those who did not belong. The most-likely explanation is that many outsiders saw Khārijī identity as one conducive to the expression of dissent against the government and its agents. The sectarians' stance against the legitimacy of a caliphate, an exemplar for which could not be found in the Qur'an, was the one constant across the sub-sects, whether real or imagined. In an age of wide-spread dissatisfaction against Umayyad

⁵⁹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Abbasid Revolution*, 10-11.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 50; and Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 275; and *EF*², s.v. "al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Ḳays al-Shaybānī."

leadership, the Khawārij provided a ready-made identity for those who felt compelled to express their unrest.

This conclusion is further supported by events in Mecca the following year when another Khārijī, Abū Ḥamza,⁵⁹³ managed to take control of Mecca with a small army of between 700 and 1000 men.⁵⁹⁴ That he accomplished it during the *Hajj*, a time when the faithful flocked to the area intent on fulfilling one of the five obligations incumbent on all Muslims, makes his accomplishment all the more remarkable.⁵⁹⁵ In fact, one khabar explicitly blamed ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Sulayman, the Umayyad governor of the two holy cities at the time, for not mobilizing the pilgrims against the sectarians.⁵⁹⁶ Similar to al-Ḍaḥḥāk's revolt the year before, Abū Ḥamza appears to have enjoyed more support from the general populace than did the caliphate. The governor felt compelled to leave Mecca at the first opportunity, and the Khārijī took control of Islam's most-sacred city without a fight. He then gave a famous sermon to the Meccans which, although likely apocryphal in its specifics, contained the same types of complaints witnessed in the Berber rebellions to the west.⁵⁹⁷

Once again, the akhbār give the impression that contemporaries understood Khārijī identity to have value in opposing an unsatisfactory caliphate. Not only did the sect justify dissent, it justified *change*; if the current caliph did not live up to the

⁵⁹³ His full name was al-Mukhtār ibn 'Awf al-Azdī al-Salīmī. He hailed from Basra, a locus of Khārijī unrest at the time (al-Ṭabarī, *Abbasid Revolution*, 53).

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 90. Cf. Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 281. Ibn Khayyāt claims that Abū Ḥamza came with 10,000 men from a larger army that had just taken Yemen. This number that does not damage the present author's argument because it still reveals considerable support for the Khawārij in their opposition to the caliphate.

⁵⁹⁵ The pilgrimage to Mecca is one of the five "pillars of Islam," the other four being the confession of faith (*shahāda*), prayer (*salāt*), fasting (*ṣawm*), and charity (*zakāt*).

⁵⁹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Abbasid Revolution*, 91.

⁵⁹⁷ Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 282-84. Cf., al-Ṭabarī, who places the sermon in Medina after the sectarians took that city (al-Ṭabarī, *Abbasid Revolution*, 113-17). In both cases multiple versions of the sermons are attested that differ in detail but not in tenor.

community's standards, he could be replaced by anyone with the appropriate qualifications. This represents a tribal understanding of leadership, one that predated Islam and continued to exist in the MENA of the twentieth century. The sectarians did institute one innovation: above and beyond wisdom, the Khawārij demanded piety of their leaders. This presented a problem for some akhbārīs who seem to have struggled to make the objects of their reports appear more like the sectarians than mere facts suggested. For example, al-Ḍaḥḥāk said few words in the akhbār that relate his efforts, an absence that makes it difficult to see what made him a Khārijī outside his rebellion against the Marwānids. Someone thought better of it and, in the khabar of al-Ḍaḥḥāk's last battle, put the following words into his mouth after some of his subcommanders advised him not to expose himself unnecessarily to harm: "I have no need of anything in this world of yours. I only want this tyrant [Marwān II]. I have made it my duty before God that when I see him, I shall attack him (and battle with him) until God decides for me or for them."⁵⁹⁸ In case that did not make clear the intensity of al-Ḍaḥḥāk's fundamentalist piety, he ended his farewell speech with, "I have a debt of 7 dirhams, of which I have 3 dirhams in my sleeve," essentially asking his fellows to make sure his debts were paid in case of his death.⁵⁹⁹ These final words, reminiscent of the extremely pious behavior ascribed to the Khawārij who allegedly murdered Ibn Khabbāb, may have emanated from al-Ḍaḥḥāk's mouth, but more likely came from the pen of an imaginative reporter in search of added distinction.

A document contemporary with al-Ḍaḥḥāk's revolt suggests that his Umayyad contemporaries did not see the rebel in the same light as did later writers. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd,

⁵⁹⁸ Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 275.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

the secretary (*kātib*) of Marwān II, wrote an epistle to the crown prince, ‘Abdullāh, in the year 127/745. The latter had been charged by his father with suppressing al-Ḍaḥḥāk's uprising, and ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd wrote to convey advice as to how ‘Abdullāh should conduct himself as heir apparent. More important for the present study, the author opened his letter with some choice words about the recipient's opponent. He called al-Ḍaḥḥāk "the enemy of God, that uncouth and brutish Arab of the desert who obdurately acts at random in the perplexity of ignorance and the outrage of sedition."⁶⁰⁰ As for the rebel's followers, they were "riffraff who have wrought great mischief in the land... and have battered God's bounties for unbelief."⁶⁰¹ While unsurprising rhetoric from a member of the Umayyad court, it reveals that any claims to pietistic superiority on the part of al-Ḍaḥḥāk remained either unknown or unacknowledged by his political opponents.

After the culmination of the Abbasid Revolution, the strife of the Third Fitna settled down to a dull roar that seemed like peace by comparison. The Khawārij no longer enjoyed the popularity the movement had during the last decades of the Umayyads, but they continued to be identified with dissent against the caliph—whomever it might be at the moment. Khārijī uprisings appeared from time to time but seldom enjoyed much success in the heartland of the empire. They fared a little better in the east, where many people who identified as Khārijī lived. Ḥamza ibn Atrack began his revolt in Quhistān (southern Khurāsān) in 179/796.⁶⁰² Neither al-Ṭabarī or Gardīzī offered any motivations for Ḥamza's actions. The latter akhbārī's narrative implies that the rebel's first action

⁶⁰⁰ *Risāla ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib*, partially translated and cited in J. D. Latham, "The Beginnings of Arabic Prose Literature: The Epistolary Genre," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. by A. F. L. Beeston, T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant, and G. R. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 168.

⁶⁰¹ Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, 275.

⁶⁰² Al-Ṭabarī, *The Abbasid Caliphate in Equilibrium*, vol. 30 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by C. E. Bosworth (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 152; and Gardīzī, 38. The latter akhbārī refers to the rebel as Ḥamza ibn Ādharak.

involved collecting the tax for himself, which explains why the governor ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā made the first military move. Regardless, Ḥamza's revolt looked for all intents and purposes like another case of tribal raiding for the purposes of self-aggrandizement that ended with the rebel's death in 213/828.⁶⁰³ The last great revolt by the Khawārij mentioned in al-Ṭabarī, that of Musāwir ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, is likewise presented as Khārijī-in-name-only. The reports offer nothing to identify Musāwir with the sectarians other than the label itself.⁶⁰⁴ The last event mentioned in the *Tārīkh* to involve any Khawārij located them in Azerbaijan, where they helped the new Abbasid governor replace his predecessor when the latter refused to vacate the post.⁶⁰⁵

The trailing off of Khārijī-related akhbār reflects a parallel decrease in visible activity on the part of those who identified with the sect during the third century AH. Should the last uprisings' relationship with the Khawārij actually be spurious or in-name only, then activism by the sect outside the rhetorical may have died out even earlier. Regardless, it appears certain that Islam's first sectarians were on the way out as a viable identity for the expression of proactive political dissent. This outcome likely resulted from the Abbasid's influence on the discourse of legitimacy, a conversation that had relocated to the new city of Baghdad along with the caliphate during the reign of Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr (r. 136-58/754-75). As those 'ulamā' friendly to the dynasty worked to improve its reputation at the expense of others, those in opposition found themselves increasingly disenfranchised, the Shi‘i and Khawārij among them. But whereas the

⁶⁰³ Gardīzī, 43.

⁶⁰⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *The Crisis of the Abbasid Caliphate*, vol. 36 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by George Saliba (New York: State University of New York Press, 1985), 147-49, and 161; and Al-Ṭabarī, *The Revolt of the Zanj*, vol. 36 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by David Waines (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 24, 90-91, 112, 116, 158, 164, and 187.

⁶⁰⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Revolt of the Zanj*, 161-62.

former continued to have relevance thanks to their identification with the fourth caliph, the latter quickly lost theirs because the objects of their dissent, the Umayyads, no longer existed in any significant form.

This transition opened the door for muḥaddithūn and heresiographers who required a villain for their work. Traditionists could safely insert the Khawārij into stories of the Prophet and Companions to explain how the umma divided and place blame on a functionally-extinct group no longer in a position to defend itself. Working in the wake of the muḥaddithūn, the heresiographers redefined the sects to suite their own purposes. Some divided the Khawārij into subsects so as to ensure that the total of all Islamic sects added up to 73, a number found in the ḥadīth.⁶⁰⁶ Others seemed more concerned to explain the dangers of factionalism or tie up loose ends left by others. Combined, these processes resulted in the creation of a master narrative in which the Khawārij have been presented as single-minded, inherently homicidal fundamentalists who placed their own perverse piety over the well-being of the community and even their own safety. It is no wonder that Ibn Kathīr, writing long after the heresiographers had done their work, used their narrative to judge the Khawārij the most odd of all people.⁶⁰⁷

As witnessed in the examples presented in the present chapter, there is much more to these dissenters than that, and they actually shared a great deal in common with their contemporaries who, during the Third Fitna, saw in the sect a compelling and viable means for opposing an unsatisfactory government. In the penultimate chapter, we shall step inside to explore how the Khawārij created and interpreted their own identities.

⁶⁰⁶ Al-Baghdādī, 4; and al-Shahrastānī, 10.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *Beginning to the End*, 2.690.

Chapter VII

Khārijī Identity from the Inside

Sources for the reconstruction of Khārijī identity from the perspective of that sect's members are sparse. As discussed in the preceding chapter, those akhbār from which one can sift the polemical chaff suggest that the earliest Khawārij expressed their dissatisfaction with the caliphate by behaving exactly like their ancestors would have when they left (*kharajū*) the community to return to a nomadic-like way of life. Overall, the narratives give the impression that tribal identity continued to have a great deal of influence on the sectarians. Some of the reports preserved by the early historiographers allegedly originated with members of the Khārijī community; the story of al-Mustawrid provides one of the few such examples. While the authorship attributed in their isnād may be fabricated, in some cases the akhbār offer no obvious reasons to doubt their contents. Finally, two other sources exist to aid in the reconstruction of Khārijī identity: poetry written by members of the various sub-sects, and documents left by the early Ibāḍiyya. Considered in combination, these elements shed a little light on the evolution of self-identity among the Khawārij.

Akhbār Ascribed to Khawārij

In the *Tārīkh* of al-Ṭabarī, the first instance of an alleged Khārijī providing a report occurred in the aftermath of the First Fitna, in the accounts of the revolt of al-Mustawrid ibn 'Ullifa al-Taymī (43/663-64). The narrator, 'Abdallah ibn 'Uqbah al-Ghanawī, made his association with the sectarians clear in no uncertain terms: "I was

among those who went out with al-Mustawrid ibn 'Ulifah, and I was the youngest man among them."⁶⁰⁸ Seldom in the akhbār did narrators announce their credentials in such a brazen manner, and that a second such rare instance occurred in the case of Shabīb's uprising naturally triggers skepticism. Indeed, al-Ghanawī's akhbār contain much of a questionable nature. He recalled a great deal of dialogue and the contents of a lengthy letter verbatim, and he claimed to have heard of the enemy's own detailed communications from four anonymous "louts" who happened to pass by at a convenient moment in the story. On the other hand, he did not present his fellow sectarians in suspiciously-laudatory terms other than his uncle, al-Mustawrid, who al-Ghanawī described as a willing martyr at times impatient to meet his maker.⁶⁰⁹ The fact that the narrator focused on himself likewise poses no difficulty; if Arabic poetry teaches anything, it is that self-aggrandizement in speech was culturally-acceptable behavior. Overall, al-Ghanawī's narrative contains nothing overtly hagiographic in nature, no one commits any supra-human actions or appears to be in any hurry to become a martyr with the exception of al-Mustawrid. That the whole event looks and sounds like a tribe on a raid lends further credence to al-Ghanawī's story. Therefore, the present author proposes it represents al-Mustawrid's uprising in general if not in all the specifics.

As mentioned above, the isnād for some of the akhbār of the Ṣāliḥ-Shabīb revolt claim to originate with one of two Khārijī participants.⁶¹⁰ The first, Qabīṣa ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Quḥafī, also happened to provide the khabar that described the

⁶⁰⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Between Civil Wars*, 45-46.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 45-50, 55, 56-57, and 61-65.

⁶¹⁰ One khabar attributed to a third, anonymous Khārijī tells the story of Shabīb's panache in the face al-Ḥajjāj's pursuing cavalry. The rebel, fully aware of the threat, kept dozing off, apparently unconcerned. The governor called off his men before they made contact. The apparent purpose of this report is to highlight Shabīb's bravery and perhaps contribute to the entertainment value of the narrative (al-Ṭabarī, *Marwānīd Restoration*, 112).

fracturing of the Basran Khawārij into various sub-sects during the Second Fitna.⁶¹¹ As discussed in the preceding chapter, that story comes across as too tidy an explanation that conveniently explains the genesis of all the major Khārijī groups. Qabīṣa appeared once again in al-Ṭabarī to explain the rationale behind Ṣāliḥ's decision to revolt. According to Abū Mikhnaf's source, the Companion 'Abdallah ibn 'Alqamah (aka Abū Nabīqah),⁶¹² Qabīṣa, "who was one of those who subscribed to these people's [the Khawārij's] opinions... had possession of the sermon of Ṣāliḥ ibn Mussariḥ," and he willingly provided a copy of the text. Over two-pages long in translation, Ṣāliḥ's khutba included all the stock Khārijī talking points later associated with the sect. After commending the Prophet, the speaker advised his audience, "I commend you to the fear of God, austerity in this world, desire for the afterlife, frequent recollection of death, avoidance of the sinners, and love for the believers."⁶¹³ These points, repeated throughout the speech, conveyed everything a non-member might expect one of the sectarians to say.

Unfortunately for those desirous of understanding the Khawārij as they saw themselves, evaluation of the isnād proves it a forgery, a discovery which does not reflect well on the khabar itself. According to al-Ṭabarī, Abū Nabīqah died in the year 80/699.⁶¹⁴ In her monogram on Abū Mikhnaf, Sezgin placed that Companion's death in 87/706, based on other sources not available to the present author.⁶¹⁵ Abū Mikhnaf died in 157/774.⁶¹⁶ Regardless of which date for Abū Nabīqah's death one prefers, the possibility of the two meeting in any meaningful way can be dismissed out of hand. Furthermore, al-

⁶¹¹ Discussed in the previous chapter.

⁶¹² Al-Ṭabarī, *Biographies*, 77.

⁶¹³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Marwānid Restoration*, 34.

⁶¹⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Biographies*, 77.

⁶¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Marwānid Restoration*, 33n135.

⁶¹⁶ *EF*², s.v. "Abū Mikhnaf."

Nadīm made no mention of the Companion in the *Fihrist*, an absence which raises questions about the possibility of Abū Nabīqah having left behind a written account. All things considered, it appears that the narrative ascribed to Qabīṣa said more about the external understanding of Khārijī identity than what the sectarians thought of themselves.

The akhbār traced to the second Khārijī source, Farwah ibn Laqīṭ, have more in common with those of al-Ghanawī than Qabīṣa, in that some seem plausible in their representation of the Khawārij from an internal perspective. Of course, Farwah's narratives do contain difficulties of their own. His introduction is functionally identical to al-Ghanawī's, he provided a copious amount of very-questionable detail, and the khabar that related Shabīb's drowning words also originated with this source.⁶¹⁷ But such questionable akhbār aside, Farwah often portrayed Shabīb as entirely human. One of the Khawārij under Shabīb killed Zuhrah ibn Ḥawiyya in battle. Prior, Zuhrah had proven himself loyal and formidable during the conquest of Iraq and at the Battle of al-Qādisiyya, and so Shabīb mourned his death. When one of the younger Khārijī accused his leader of grieving for an unbeliever, Shabīb retorted, "You know their [the non-Khārijī Muslims] error no better than I, but I also know of their past what you do not know; if they had held to it, they would have been [our] brethren."⁶¹⁸ These are not the Khawārij of the heresiographers.

Farwah related two more akhbār of relevance to the present study, not because they are unquestionably historical, but because they are obvious fabrications. The first, a narrative of Shabīb's birth, al-Ṭabarī placed after the stories that related the death of the

⁶¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Marwānid Restoration*, 37, and 123-24.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 95n378, and 104-5.

Khārijī leader. The story opens after the Muslims returned with captives from a successful raid into Byzantine territory:

When the Muslims returned from the campaign, the captives were put up for sale, and Shabīb's father, Yazīd ibn Nu'aym, saw a tall, pretty, eye-catching girl, fair-skinned, but without a trace of gray or blue in her black eyes; and he bought her. Then he took her—this was at the beginning of the year 25 (645)—and brought her to al-Kufa. There he asked her to convert to Islam, but she refused, and when he beat her, she only became more stubborn. Seeing this, he ordered her made ready, and then called for her, and she was brought in to him. When he had intercourse with her, she conceived Shabīb, who was born on Saturday, the Day of Sacrifice, in Dhū al-Ḥijjah of the year 25 (September 27, 646). She loved her master dearly, and while she was in labor she said, "If you wish, I will convert to Islam as you asked me to." He said, "I do wish." She then converted and was a Muslim when she bore Shabīb. She said, "I saw, in a dream, that a flash came forth from my vagina, which blazed forth to heaven and to the horizon on all sides, and then suddenly fell into a flood of running water, and went out. I gave birth to him on this day on which you shed blood, and that I interpreted this vision of mine as meaning that I would see this son of mine, as he grew up, becoming a man of bloodshed, and that I would see him rise and quickly become great."⁶¹⁹

This khabar contains elements common to hagiography in the Late Antique world. It presented Shabīb's father as a successful warrior, back from jihad. His nameless mother was perfect, possessing the best traits of the Byzantines yet with the pure-black eyes ascribed to the *ḥūr* (houris), those physically-idealized heavenly companions mentioned in the Qur'an.⁶²⁰ Her refusal to convert when beaten revealed her strength of body and will, and her eventual conversion only after receipt of a prophetic vision marked her as someone with charisma. The day of birth was auspicious; the Day of Sacrifice (*yawm al-naḥr*) is that on which those on ḥajj symbolically reject evil, perform sacrifices in memory of the binding of Ismail, and shave their heads as a sign of piety⁶²¹—an act some later Khawārij allegedly adopted as a continuous sign of their devotion. The dream itself foresaw her son's career in its entirety, from his meteoric rise to his death by drowning.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 126.

⁶²⁰ *EF*², s.v. "Ḥūr."

⁶²¹ *EF*², s.v. "Ḥadjdj."

All of this reflected highly on Shabīb himself. Thanks to his mother's eleventh-hour conversion, he birthed the offspring of devout Muslim parents. That his life and death were fore-ordained placed him alongside the Prophet, ‘Alī, and a tradition of saints with roots in all the religious traditions of the Near East. What makes this khabar stand out, however, is that it had nothing negative or sarcastic to say about Shabīb or the Khawārij. That al-Ṭabarī included it in his history implies that he was not so dead-set against this sect as some have proposed.⁶²² It also suggests that this report actually did originate with a Khārijī source; it seems beyond the realm of probability that anyone outside the sect would invent this hagiographic narrative.

Later developments to the legend of Shabīb ibn Yazīd support this contention. Over time it experienced increased distinction intended to tidy-up loose ends and magnify the already-considerable reputations of the protagonists. In the seventh/thirteenth century, Ibn Khallikān provided a number of details not found in the version preserved by al-Ṭabarī. Shabīb's mother received a name—Jahīzah—and a boost in physical prowess: she fought beside her son in all his battles and died combating the forces of the tyrannical governor, al-Ḥajjāj. His wife, Ghazālah, who already had a reputation for pious devotion to Islam, likewise found her place in the front line alongside her husband. So formidable were her skills that al-Ḥajjāj refused to duel her. Someone, not content with the account of Shabīb's death attributed to Farwah, provided an interlocutor who asked the drowning man questions appropriate to the verses he allegedly spouted so that the narrative might appear less absurd. Finally, Ibn Khallikān's version had al-Ḥajjāj order an autopsy of the sectarian commander which revealed that he had a heart like stone that bounced when dropped. Within that hard outer heart the examiners found a second, smaller one, inside

⁶²² Hagemann, 141.

which they noticed a single drop of congealed blood—a reference to Qur'an 22:5.⁶²³ While we can discount the historical veracity of all these added elements, as hagiographic material they could only have been authored by someone friendly to the Khawārij, and therefore most-likely reflect an internal understanding of the sect.

The isnād for the last khabar to consider also originated with Farwah, and the setting involved Shabīb's final major-engagement with al-Ḥajjāj in which the rebel's forces were routed and his wife killed. Farwah began his report thus:

On that day Shabīb said to us, "O people of Islam! We have sold ourselves to God, and he who has sold himself to God cares little for any harm or pain that may come to him for God's sake. Hold fast, and charge as you charged in your other noble battles!"⁶²⁴

As with Ṣāliḥ's khutbah, this speech utilized stock Khārijī language. But, unlike the former, Shabīb's exhortation contained no doctrinal allusions other than the concept of the "seller." This notion, derived from such passages as Qur'an 2:207 and discussed in more detail below, reflects the most-common label that the sectarians applied to themselves. While this connection does not prove that this khabar originated with an actual Khārijī or that the suspiciously-detailed series of events occurred as noted, the author at least knew of this aspect of the sectarians' self-identity.

The above akhbār, at least some of which appear to have originated with members of the sect, shed light on the formation of identity among the Khawārij, but not much. For a clearer picture, one must turn to the most-common means of literary self-expression left by Khārijī authors, their poetry.

⁶²³ Ibn Khallikān, 1.616-19. Surā 22:5 reads, "People! If you are in doubt about the raising up [i.e. resurrection]—surely We created you from dust, then from a drop, then from a clot, (and) then from a lump, formed and unformed, so that We may make (it) clear to you."

⁶²⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Marwānid Restoration*, 110-11.

Khārijī Poetry and Self-Identity

Poetry provided the principle form of literary expression of the Arabs before Islam and for some time after. It had its own themes, rules of structure and style, and it possessed great cultural value. Odes (*qaṣā'id*, s. *qaṣīda*) had seven principle themes: praise or panegyric of others (*madīḥ/madh*), glorification of self (*fakhr*), amatory (*ghazal*), lampoon (*hijā'*), descriptive (*waṣf*), lamentation (*rithā'*), and wisdom (*ḥikmah*).⁶²⁵ Tribes treasured their own poets as spokespeople who both proclaimed and defended their kin-group's honor. Poetry at its heart provided a means of promulgating the identity of the poet and his or her tribe.

Khārijī poets created verse for the same reasons, and they continued to use several of the themes of their creative forbearers, albeit with some modification.⁶²⁶ Not inappropriately, studies to date have focused on those surviving examples which reflect notions of personal or group piety. These could take the form of panegyric for fellow Khawārij who gave their lives for the cause. The following example eulogizes Abū Bilāl, the quietist who led his non-aggressive rebellion circa 60/680. It comes from the pen of 'Imrān ibn Ḥiṭṭān (d. 84/703), an early-Khārijī poet who rose to great general acclaim in spite of his sectarian identity.⁶²⁷

Weep for Mirdās and his death in battle, O eyes.
Lord of Mirdās, pray make me like Mirdās!
You left me wandering, weeping for my calamity.
In a desolate but formerly genial house.
After your death, I disavow all that I knew.
For your people, after you are gone, are no more people.
You drank from a cup that had first circulated
Among peers in battle who had tasted sips of it,

⁶²⁵ Tayib, "Pre-Islamic Poetry," 39.

⁶²⁶ Adam R. Gaiser, *Shurāt Legends, Ibādī Identities: Martyrdom, Asceticism, and the Making of an Early Islamic Community* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2016), 45-47; and Badawi, 6-7.

⁶²⁷ *EP*², s.v. "'Imrān ibn Ḥiṭṭān."

But everyone who has not tasted it will soon drink
Gulp after gulp of it.⁶²⁸

'Imrān had the following to say in regard to the death of the Azāriqa founder, Nāfi':

He died without guile, in his faith, he who used to swoon away when he merely
heard [eternal] fire mentioned.
Death is an impending doom, inescapable; the man to whom it does not come at
morn will find it knocking at his door at eve.⁶²⁹

Ibn Muljam's fellow tribesman, Ibn Abī Mayyās, praised the assassin of the fourth caliph
in two separate works. First:

You upon whom be blessings, we have struck Ḥaydar Abū Ḥasan with a blow to the
head and he was split apart.
We have removed kingship from his concerns, with the blow of a sword, since he
waxed high and mighty.
We are noble and powerful in the dawn, when death puts on and wraps itself in
death.⁶³⁰

And second:

I never saw a dowry provided by any generous man, whether Arab or other, like
that of Qaṭamī:
Three thousand dirhams, a slave, and a singing girl, and the stabbing of 'Alī with
the piercing blade.
There is no dowry, however costly, more costly than 'Alī, and no killing above that
performed by Ibn Muljam.⁶³¹

But the above examples of early-Khārijī verse do not sound thematically different
from poetry composed during the Jāhilīyya or during the years of Muḥammad's prophetic
mission. Consider the following by the pre-Islamic author, Aws ibn Ḥajar, composed to
mourn the passing of a patron:

O my soul, mourn you well, for that which you dreaded has befallen.
He in whom were united forbearance, courage, prudence, vigor, is departed.⁶³²

⁶²⁸ Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *The Unique Necklace: Al-'Iqd al Farīd*, trans. by Issa J. Boullata, (Reading: Garnet, 2007), 1.147-48.

⁶²⁹ Trans. and cited by Francesco Gabrieli, "Religious Poetry in Early Islam," in G. E. von Grunebaum, ed., *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973), 11.

⁶³⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *First Civil War*, 225. Ḥaydar (the lion) was a nickname for the fourth caliph (Ibid., 225n905).

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² Trans. and cited by Tayib, 89.

Or this, by Mutammim ibn Nuwayrah, to eulogize his brother, Mālik, killed during the ridda:

Among boon companions he was not one found ill-mannered over the wine, selfish or proud.

Among the gambling party, he was not the one standing over the tripe, preventing the meat from being distributed.⁶³³

Finally, a poem by Āmir ibn al-Ṭufail on the death of his father:

Alas, that all things on which the wind blows must pass away, and every warrior, after a life-time unscathed, must come to his end!⁶³⁴

The Khārijī poets adopted these themes of mourning and panegyric whole cloth, and to them added a few elements borrowed from the Qur'an. One in particular came to play a seminal part in the formation of the sectarians' identity: the idea of the seller (*shurā*, p. *shurāt*) or exchanger (*shārī*, p. *shārūna*). This connection, expounded thoroughly by Higgins in her Ph.D. dissertation and more recently by Gaiser, originated with a number of sūrat in which sellers/exchangers engaged in a "positive exchange resulting in the great reward of heaven."⁶³⁵ Qur'an 4:74 presents the idea most clearly for the present discussion: "So let those who sell this present life for (the price of) the Hereafter fight in the way of God. Whoever fights in the way of God—whether he is killed or conquers—We shall give him a great reward." Higgins' argument that the Khawārij identified themselves most frequently as *shurāt* is strong and does not need to be rehashed here in great length; a few examples of sectarian poetry will suffice to get the point

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ 'Abīd ibn al-Abrāṣ, and Āmir ibn al-Ṭufail, *The Diwāns of 'Abīd ibn al-Abrāṣ of Asad, and Āmir ibn al-Ṭufail, of Āmir ibn Ṣa'Ṣa'ah*, trans. by Sir Charles Lyall (Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial, 1980), 117.

⁶³⁵ Higgins, 15.

across.⁶³⁶ First, a verse from a piece commemorating the rebels who fought with Ṣālih against the governor, al-Ḥajjāj:

Youths who obeyed God to the point that he loved them
While each of them was an exchanger, fearing and desiring Him.⁶³⁷

The second century AH poet, Mulayka al-Shaybāniyya ascribed the shurāt identity to Khārijī men and women alike in one of her eulogies for the rebel leader, al-Ḍaḥḥak:

So let the women of the shurāt shed tears
At the wars where every mature man is an exchanger.⁶³⁸

Mulayka's contemporary, al-Khaybarī al-Shaybānī, brought up the concept in a poem in which he described the honor that his fellow Khawārij associated with membership in their community:

For an exchanger, being killed is no shame;
Rather they are killed while they are dignified.⁶³⁹

Even those poets who did not use the term explicitly still managed to convey the concept of exchanging. Consider these lines from 'Amr ibn Ḥusayn al-'Anbarī (d. mid-second century AH), in which he remembered his fellow sectarians, all of whom died in battle:

They were heroes in the uproar (of battle), forbearing, and the best who have
walked the earth,
Until they fulfilled their covenants with God, without lying or deceit, wherever they
met (in battle).
And they pilfered their very own souls and their enemies' with fine swords.⁶⁴⁰

In this excerpt, the Khawārij have stolen the souls of their foes in combat, and their own by dying while in pursuit of jihad.

⁶³⁶ Gaiser confirms this association in his *Shurāt Legends, Ibāqī Identities*, chaps. 2 and 3.

⁶³⁷ Trans. and cited by Higgins, 79.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 82.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 86.

⁶⁴⁰ Trans. and cited in Wadād al-Qādī, "The Limitations of Qur'ānic Usage in Early Arabic Poetry: The Example of a Khārijite Poem," in Wolfhart Heinrichs, Gregor Schoeler, and Ewald Wagner, eds., *Festschrift Ewald Wagner Zum 65. Band 2: Studien Zur Arabischen Dichtung* (Beirut [?]: In Kommission Bei Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994), 170.

The understanding of the seller/exchanger displayed in these and many other works sounds similar to the New Testament parable of the pearl of great price: in both cases the eternal reward of heaven is worth any cost here on earth.⁶⁴¹ While the Christian parable involved a merchant selling everything he owned to acquire the object of his desire, for the Khawārij portrayed in their poetry the only fair price is the life of the believer devoted wholeheartedly to jihad. This is clearly reflected in another eulogy to the memory of Abū Bilāl, ascribed to a man who wanted to join the early sectarians at al-Nahrawān but was denied by his brother:

Ibn Ḥudayr exchanged his mortal self for God, and gained
Gardens of paradise with luxuriant graces.⁶⁴²

The concept of exchanging and the connection of extreme piety and sacrifice with eternal reward are attested time and again in the corpus of Khārijī poetry. This has led a number of scholars to conclude that religious considerations proved the principal motivating factors for the sectarians. Donner applied this understanding to the whole of the nascent umma in his *Muḥammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam*, and specifically to the Khawārij in his contribution to the festschrift to Iḥsān 'Abbās wherein he suggested that "the continuities that we have observed between the tone and concerns of the Qur'an and those of the early Khārijite poetry suggest that we should view the Khārijites not as a divergent 'sect', but rather as authentic representatives of the earliest community of Believers around Muḥammad himself."⁶⁴³ Higgins, focused as she was on the Qur'anic notion of exchange, also interpreted the Khawārij from a purely religious perspective,

⁶⁴¹ Matt. 13:45-46.

⁶⁴² Trans. and cited by Higgins, 90.

⁶⁴³ Fred M. Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010), 66-67; and Fred M. Donner, "Piety and Eschatology in Early Kharijite Poetry," in Ibrāhīm as-Sa'āfīn, ed., *Fī Miḥrāb al-Ma'rīfah: Festschrift for Iḥsān 'Abbās* (Beirut: Dar Sader, 1997), 16.

although she did admit that they, "like all people, were mingling various interpretations of Islamic ideas with ideas from previous religious practices."⁶⁴⁴ While correct in this regard, she did not stretch her perspective to discuss secular influences to any depth. In a similar vein, Francesco Gabrieli claimed that Khārijī poetry "mirrored directly the passions, enthusiasm, doubts, and remorse of those austere and fanatical 'puritans of Islam'."⁶⁴⁵

One of the problems with this piety-first interpretation is that it fails to adequately take into account the affinity that the sectarians' poetry had with that of contemporary Arabs in general, a few examples of which are provided above. Similarities abound, and some non-Khārijī poems even made use of the idea of exchange, as in the following verse attributed to the Companion Umayr ibn al-Ḥumām at the Battle of Badr (2/623-24). After the Prophet promised heaven's rewards to every Muslim killed in battle without showing fear or hesitation, Umayr leaped up and exclaimed, "Excellent! All that stands between me and entering Paradise is being killed by these people!", and he rushed to the fray while extemporizing his own elegy:

I hasten to God without provision except fear of God and working for the Hereafter,
And patience in God in the struggle, for every other provision is liable to be
exhausted
Except for fear of God, piety and right guidance.⁶⁴⁶

This is as clear an example of the concept of exchanging one's life for eternal salvation possible without actually using the terms *shurā* or *shārī*. Regardless of the historicity of the tale, it suggests that those concepts were not the exclusive property of the Khawārij.

⁶⁴⁴ Higgins, 164.

⁶⁴⁵ Gabrieli, 9.

⁶⁴⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *The Foundation of the Community*, vol. 7 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. by M. V. McDonald (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 55.

While a later author probably put those words into the Companion's mouth, similar thoughts are well-attested in pre- and early-Islamic verse by authors with no connection to the Khawārij. The author of the next example, al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḥumam, lived in the years preceding Muḥammad's revelations, and composed in regard to a blood feud between his tribe, the Banū Sahn, and Banū Sirmah, in which he revealed his desire for a noble death in battle:

What withholds the son of Salma [from baseness] is that he cannot live forever, and
must one day face his doom whithersoever he turns his way:
Therefore am I not one to buy life at the price of disgrace, or to look for a ladder to
climb for fear of death.
No! Take me whatsoever day ye can lay hands on me, and cut off my head to stop
my speech.⁶⁴⁷

In his reflections on the same event, one of Ibn al-Ḥumam's fellow tribesmen, Basmamah ibn 'Amr ibn Mu'āwiya, pondered whether to battle those formerly considered friends or abstain and thereby fail in his duty to kin. He composed the following, addressed to the rest of his sept:

Your people have been offered the choice of two things, and in both they have set
before you a manifest wrong—
A life of shame, or war with friends—either course I count a poisonous food;
And in it must be that ye choose one of the twain, then march ye to death with a
noble tread!
Sit not still while strength is in you: Time will come soon enough to devour your
strength.⁶⁴⁸

More than three centuries later, Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī incorporated this mode of thought into one of his early odes. He advised the hearer

Live strong or die if you are noble amid thrusting lances as flags flutter
Spearheads are best to melt wrath, best cure for a boiling rage in a breast.
Not as you live without any praise and you die, die without being missed!
Seek glory in fire, leave humiliation—even though it be in immortal paradise.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁷ Charles James Lyall, trans., *The Mufaḍḍalīyat: An Anthology of Ancient Arabian Odes...* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918), 2.37.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

All three of these examples display some of the same sentiments found in Khārijī verse: the inevitability of death, and the preference for dying in battle rather than seeking safety. The two from the Jāhilīyya also prioritize fighting for the honor of one's social group. In the cases just cited, those groups were the authors' tribe. For Umayr ibn al-Ḥumām it was the new umma under Muḥammad. In the case of the Khawārij, it was their sectarian brothers and sisters.

For the Arabs, poetry was a universal means of expression of all the joys, hopes, and concerns that make up the human experience, and the Khawārij proved no exception. Unfortunately, while they composed satire as well as panegyric and wisdom poetry, they do not seem to have said much about the more-mundane aspects of life. If they did, then little if any survives. In his *Meadows of Gold*, al-Mas'ūdī ascribed a brief encomium on love to Abū Malik al-Hadramī, a Khārijī theologian invited to discuss the topic by Yahyā ibn Khālīd, a vizier of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170-93/786-809).⁶⁵⁰ And the great rebel leader, Shabīb ibn Yazīd, was allegedly fond of citing proverbial wisdom. Both cases well may be apocryphal: al-Hadramī gave his speech in a suspiciously pro-Abbasid setting that looked a lot like a Greek *symposion*, and the bucolic wisdom ascribed to Shabīb sounds too-colorful to be true: when informing his enemies that they had met their match in him, he declared "He who fucks a donkey fucks an expert fucker!"⁶⁵¹ But even if both stories contain no truth, they imply that their

⁶⁴⁹ Abū al-Ṭayyib Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Mutanabbī, *The Diwan of Abū al-Ṭayyib Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Mutanabbī*, trans. by Arthur Wormhoudt (Chicago: KAZI Publications, 2002), 27.

⁶⁵⁰ al-Mas'ūdī, *The Meadows of Gold: The Abbāsids*, trans. by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Kegan Paul International, 1989), 109.

⁶⁵¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Marwānid Restoration*, 52.

authors believed the Khawārij capable of a greater range of feeling than just piety and a thirst for death in battle.

As evidenced here and in the preceding chapter, while the words that emanated from the sectarians' mouths and the minutiae preserved in the sources might be figments of someone's imagination, how the sectarians pursued their rebellions fits well into both the tribal and Late Antique milieus. The sources overwhelmingly support Watt's contention that the early Khawārij conducted their uprisings exactly like clan raids, favoring hit-and-run operations in the hopes of fighting to their greatest advantage. Likewise the larger revolts of the Second and Third Fitnas. The campaign of al-Ḍaḥḥak looked from all angles like other major military operations of his time and place. These and other examples make lie of the notion that the sectarians proactively sought martyrdom as a group. While some may have pursued death, the majority appear to have adopted Khārijī identity as a means of changing a status quo which did not work for them. The argument between al-Mustawrid and his followers over whether to rush headlong into death like 'Umayr ibn al-Ḥumām or seek more advantageous circumstances in the hopes of achieving some kind of success provides an early example, but the behavior of later Khawārij during the Second and Third Fitnas makes this conclusion unavoidable. People with martyrdom as their *telos* do not conquer cities and provinces, appoint governors, establish administrations, or mint their own coinage to prove their own political legitimacy. These are the actions of activists in pursuit of radical social change, or conquerors competing in the ongoing struggle for control of resources that characterized the region since long before the arrival of Islam.

The most positivist statement one can make regarding Khārijī poetry is that it reflected an ideal, not reality, what Gaiser calls "romanticized visions of history."⁶⁵² This conclusion should surprise no one. After all, just because Marty Robbins penned lots of ballads about the wild west in which cowboys lost their lives does not mean that all cowboys proactively sought death in a gunfight. Robbins' songs romanticized and idealized an image with which many twentieth-century Americans identified as representative of their own heritage. More useful to the present work, the same observation applies to the extant Christian martyrology texts contemporary with early Islam. Although he admits that no material connection exists and therefore must argue *a silentio*, Gaiser convincingly establishes criteria that suggest the early Muslims "possessed a sophisticated knowledge of Late Antique religions," thanks to the constant contact they had with the Arab clients of Rome and Persia, and the various religious communities that lived within and around those empires.⁶⁵³ Thanks to the efforts of Peter Brown and those who followed him, the role of martyrs in the Christian traditions is well understood. No expectation existed that everyone who belonged to a particular expression of Christianity should take on the martyr's mantle. Instead, stories of Brown's "very special dead" served to inspire and remind believers that death for the pious was not to be over-mourned but celebrated as a sign of an eternal promise fulfilled.⁶⁵⁴

This appears to be the intended function of Khārijī verse. That the behavior of many of the sectarians did not rise to the standards of the poets suggests that the seller/exchanger identity had more cachet with some and less with others. But it served a

⁶⁵² Gaiser, *Shurāt Legends, Ibādī Identities*, 46.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁵⁴ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 70-71.

vital function in the formation of identity for all Khawārij for a number of reasons. First, it made the sectarians distinct from other groups that called themselves Muslim, and it did so in a way that lent an air of superiority to the Khawārij. Borrowing their identity from scripture allowed them to claim the moral high ground—they lived the life called for by the Qur'an, the word of God. This sense of superiority is further witnessed in their name for non-Khārijī Muslims, *ahl al-qibla*, which implied that those outside the sect possessed only superficial faith.⁶⁵⁵ Second, adopting the identity of the seller/exchanger both explained and justified the failure that proved the fate of the majority of Khārijī uprisings. It also helped process the grief associated with loss, because every sectarian who died in jihad became a martyr destined for heaven. In fact, the concept of jihad, understand as striving in the path of God, came to be inextricably linked with shurā identity in sectarian poetry. This connection also points to the fact that, while initial motivations for Khārijī dissent appear to have had more to do with social and political grievances, as a general movement the seceders did turn to a few Qur'anic concepts to justify their actions and forge their own group identity. This allowed them to claim legitimation via the highest authority available, the received word of God.

Overall, the seller/exchanger concept fulfilled for the Khawārij what the Christian martyrs did for their own tradition. Both originated as minority movements within larger communities that perceived them as inferior and subjected them to occasional and at times violent persecution. Both elevated members who paid the ultimate price for belonging and turned them into objects of veneration and inspiration. Both valued bravery and tenacity when faced by the tyranny of those groups that

⁶⁵⁵ The phrase means "people of the direction," implying that those outside the Khārijī sect were willing to face the proper direction for prayer, but little else.

dominated their respective societies. And both continued to idealize self-sacrifice long after regular opportunities for martyrdom had vanished. But, while Christians enjoyed a reversal of fortunes in the early fourth century CE and themselves became the dominant group identity in their culture, the Khawārij did not, at least not in the heart of the Muslim world. Instead, those that remained adapted their identity to accommodate life alongside those they saw as outsiders.

Other than the seller/exchanger concept, early Khārijī poetry appears to lack any references to recognizable doctrine. Gaiser mentions a verse attributed to Ma‘dan ibn Mālik al-Iyādī in which that early sectarian leader expressed his displeasure at those Khawārij who did not join their brothers at al-Nahrawān, but it appears apocryphal based on some anachronistic language.⁶⁵⁶ Outside this and similarly-questionable examples, Khārijī poetry suggests that the doctrine associated with the sect by the heresiographers and in those akhbār obviously laced with polemic actually represents later developments.⁶⁵⁷ If correct, this leads the present author to conclude that, at its early stages, the identity of the Khawārij had at its core an idea of the seller/exchanger, and this was used to justify dissent—proactive and quietist—against the "oppressors," which for the sectarian poets meant the caliphate and its representatives. Other dogma associated with the early sect are later developments or even full-fledged inventions. Crone demonstrated that the relatively-egalitarian requirements for an imām associated with the Khawārij fall into this later category.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁶ Gaiser, *Shurāt Legends, Ibādī Identities*, 49.

⁶⁵⁷ The present author suggests a *terminus post quem* near the conclusion of the Second Fitna, based on verse associated with the Azāriqa leader Qaṭarī in which he scolds his quietist fellows.

⁶⁵⁸ Patricia Crone, "'Even an Ethiopian Slave': The Transformation of a Sunnī Tradition," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57, no. 1 (1994): 59-67.

Some examples of Azraqī poetry likewise suggest that those allegedly-murderous sectarians did not possess the extremist views associated with them. Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujā'a composed the following to accuse another Khārijī, Sumayra ibn Ja'd, of quietism (*qu'ūd*), and encourage him to join the jihad against al-Ḥajjāj:

Make amends, Abū Ja'd, do not shut
Your eyes in a darkness that blinds every eye.
Repent a repentance that will guide you to martyrdom,
For surely you are a sinner, not an infidel [*kāfir*].⁶⁵⁹

The last line in particular runs counter to the presentation of Azraqī belief presented by the Sunni heresiographers, who came to the consensus that the Azāriqa judged all those who did not join them in proactive participation in jihad as *kāfirūn* (infidels or unbelievers) which made both their property and their blood licit for the faithful.⁶⁶⁰ Furthermore, al-Shahrastānī claimed that the Azāriqa believed that anyone guilty of a grave sin was "an unbeliever and outside the fold of Islam" and faced eternal damnation with no chance for forgiveness.⁶⁶¹ But Qaṭarī's verse implies that a quietist was a sinner, not an unbeliever, and could be forgiven and readmitted to the fold—even in the case of someone who sought sanctuary with the enemy as had Ibn Ja'd. This counters the external understanding of the Azāriqa and suggests that, during Qaṭarī's tenure as their leader at least (ca. 69-79/688-98), the sectarians either held multiple opinions or had not yet adopted the doctrines later ascribed to them.⁶⁶² A third possibility, that these doctrines never existed but are instead added distinction, cannot be discounted. Such practice lies within the scope of the heresiographers' art, and their desire to attribute dogmatic

⁶⁵⁹ Trans. and cited in Gaiser, *Shurāt Legends, Ibāḍī Identities*, 110. Arabic terms translated by present author.

⁶⁶⁰ Al-Shahrastānī, 103; and al-Baghdādī, 83.

⁶⁶¹ Al-Shahrastānī, 103.

⁶⁶² Gaiser, *Shurāt Legends, Ibāḍī Identities*, 111.

differences to each of the Khārijī sub-sects in order to explain their existence would provide sufficient motivation.

Identity must evolve and adapt to accommodate changing circumstances. As noted, later Khawārij who, after witnessing the repeated failures of activist uprisings, developed doctrine that allowed them to live in a world not of their own creation, and at the same time maintain their distinct identities as pious sectarians. Fortunately, the Ibāḍiyya preserved some of their early literature which grants valuable insight into how that group saw itself and other Khārijī sects.

Ibāḍī Identity

The most-important of the early Ibāḍī documents for the present study is the *Sīrat Sālim ibn Dhakwān*, the so-called epistle of a scholar of that sect who lent the document his name. In reality, that attribution is an educated guess, and the *Sīrat* is really more a sermon than a letter, similar to the Letter to the Hebrews of the Christian cannon. Precise dating has also proven elusive, with modern scholars locating it in the range 72-185/691-800.⁶⁶³ The present author prefers a date at the later end of the range which the translators of the *Sīrat* have convincingly argued. But regardless of where its authorship falls within that timeframe, the *Sīrat* serves the present study well as it offers an inside look into Ibāḍī self-identity while the sub-sect was still relatively young and the battle for orthodoxy still unresolved.

⁶⁶³ Patricia Crone, and Fritz Zimmermann, *The Epistle of Sālim ibn Dhakwān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11-14. The later dating comes from the translators, who also proposed that the actual author was one Ḍirār ibn 'Amr who, according to al-Nadīm, published a work on the same sects found in the *Sīrat* (Crone and Zimmermann, 299-300).

While not his primary intent, Sālim did provide a history of the umma from the perspective of the Ibāḍiyya as it pertained to them and the early Khawārij. In the *Sīrat* the early sectarians approved of the Prophet and the first two caliphs. Sālim noted that 'Uthmān was selected with the approval of the community, but then the author quickly segued to a lengthy list of that caliph's "arbitrary innovations."⁶⁶⁴ The complaints provided included those ascribed to the proto-Khawārij and the qurrā' in the historiographic works, and Sālim legitimates their claims with Qur'anic verse. They accused 'Uthmān of mishandling state funds, appropriating them for himself and his family, and that he deprived many Muslims of the honor they felt their due.⁶⁶⁵ Unlike al-Ṭabarī, Sālim had nothing positive whatsoever to say about this caliph. Also unlike that historiographer, the author of the *Sīrat* called 'Uthmān's killers "the Muslims," and alleged they had acted righteously.⁶⁶⁶ In regard to 'Alī's tenure as Commander of the Faithful, Sālim jumped almost immediately to Ṣiffīn and the arbitration issue. No prophecy or wisdom spouts from that caliph's mouth in this version. Instead, he comes off as completely wrong-headed:

He claimed that those who clung to obedience to their Lord and who refused to let anyone but God be their judge of anything already settled by God were infidels who had forfeited their covenant or protection, and that it was misguided to follow the path of the believers who had been slain and died before the appointment of the two judges, though he was still declaring for them and hoping that they would find eternal life and sustenance with God. He also branded as misguided those who upheld the principles on which he himself had acted on the day Uthman was killed and on the Day of the Camel.⁶⁶⁷

To Sālim, 'Alī was hypocritical in word and deed. That made him no better than the extremist Khārijī sects with which the author also took exception.

⁶⁶⁴ *Sīrat*, 79.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 79-87.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

Conversely, the author only offered words of praise for those Muslims who decided to separate from 'Alī:

Then the Khārijite Muslims followed one another, adhering to that way [i.e. the Qur'an]. They would make God their sole judge and accept the path of the Muslims who had gone before them. They would not kill the offspring of their *qawm* [non-Khārijī Muslims] or hold sexual intercourse with their women to be lawful. They would not expose their *qawm* to indiscriminate slaughter, treat their property as booty, or sever relations of inheritance with them. They would discharge their trusts to them and others, and honor their contracts [with them and?] others. Those members of their *qawm* who restrained (their hands and tongue) and withdrew from them would be safe with them, even though (the Muslims) would neither doubt their error [nor grant them?] a position between right and wrong, for there is nothing after truth but error. They would maintain blood ties and respect the rights of neighbors, companions, orphans, travelers, and slaves. Those who went out (to fight) would affiliate to those who stayed home, <and those staying at home would acknowledge> the superiority which God has granted to those who go out. They would love one another for the love of God and affiliate to one another out of desire for God's approval. The rich among them would share with the poor out of desire for God's face and the last abode. When a party of them went [out] they would leave to the friends they left behind the 'firm argument' against their enemies (that counted) with people of understanding who knew God's command. Large numbers of believers proceeded in this way.⁶⁶⁸

This part of Sālim's "history" is actually a back-reading of contemporary Ibādī doctrine into the story of the early-Khārijī community. The author followed this with a refutation of the doctrines of the Azāriqa and Najdāt, three of their sub-sects, and the Murji'a and Fatana.⁶⁶⁹

Combined, these passages reveal a great deal as to how the Ibādiyya identified themselves. First and foremost, Sālim presented his fellow sectarians as the descendants of the earliest believers. Prior to 'Uthmān, everyone in the umma was Muslim, but his caliphate opened the door to division and factionalism. Şiffīn represented the major breaking point, revealed in the author's decision to reserve the designators "Muslim" and

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 97-99.

⁶⁶⁹ The sub-sects are the Dāwūd, 'Aṭīyya, and Abū Fudayk. According to Sālim and others, the Fatana believed that the caliphs were evil, but that proactive resistance against them was forbidden by God: Ibid., 127.

"believer" for his fellow sectarians; those who called themselves Muslim but not Khārijī he referred to as *qawm*, a term without religious connotation. He also used "Khawārij" to refer to the early seceders, and he attributed to them that lengthy list of doctrine and praxis cited above. By doing so, Sālim staked a claim on behalf of the Ibāḍiyya as the only true inheritors of the Khārijī tradition.

The author tried to accomplish several things in the *Sīrat*. First, because the Ibāḍiyya identified as Khawārij, Sālim had to acknowledge that connection, and he had to do so in a manner that supported the identity of his own group. This meant he had to uphold the earliest sectarians as exemplars of Islamic piety, and explain precisely what made the Ibāḍiyya distinct from other groups that also called themselves Khārijī. As seen, Sālim anachronistically ascribed Ibāḍī doctrine to the first-generation Khawārij, and then explained where the beliefs of the activist sub-sects erred. He also differentiated the Ibāḍiyya from mainstream Muslims by referring to the latter as *qawm*, a label that implies the same pejorative sense as *ahl al-qibla*. In this manner, Sālim laid bare the process of Ibāḍī identity formation. The *Sīrat* contains all the key elements: the use of distinction to create a positive group identity; bias towards the in-group; discrimination toward relevant out-groups; and the co-opting of historical people and events.

While Sālim treated the Azāriqa and Najdāt no differently than the heresiographers, some of the doctrinal details he provided differed from those later authors. He did not associate "secret killing" to the Azāriqa, contrary to al-Balādhurī who did so in his *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*.⁶⁷⁰ Nor did Sālim mention the concept of *hijra* to the Azraqī

⁶⁷⁰ Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, vol. 4.a, ed. by M. J. Kister (Jerusalem: n.p., 1971), 149.11, and 154.14, cited and trans. in Crone and Zimmermann, 178 and 205. "Secret killing" is the practice of proactive jihad while remaining hidden, assassination without revealing the killer's identity.

camp, a mandatory practice according to the heresiographers.⁶⁷¹ He did assert that the followers of Nāfi' subjected those who came to join them to a test, but, contrary to al-Baghdādī, it did not involve executing a prisoner but instead appears to have been an oral examination in which the subject had to correctly explain Azraqī belief.⁶⁷² Overall, Sālim does not get us much closer to an understanding of how the non-Ibādī Khawārij saw themselves, but he adds to the body of evidence that suggests that the reputation of the activist sub-sects is largely a later fabrication.

The above represents some of the small body of surviving literature left by those who identified as Khārijī. Perhaps its greatest value is in the opposing viewpoints the documents offer to outsider sources. In particular, they provide a counterpoint to the impression left by the heresiographers who have, for better or worse, dominated the understanding of the sectarians ever since.

⁶⁷¹ Crone and Zimmermann, 204-5.

⁶⁷² *Sīrat*, 101-3.

Chapter VIII

Conclusion

The sources discussed in the present work suggest that the presentation of the Khawārij in the master narrative does not accurately reflect those sectarians. The issues with it are legion. Foremost, it relies on the perspective of people who belonged to out-groups, and who therefore judged the sectarians with a discriminating eye. Second, many of the doctrinal peculiarities and anti-social behaviors attributed to the sect in all likelihood originated in a period when the Khawārij had ceased to be an effective socio-political force in most of the Muslim world; those that did remain had adopted quietist identities that allowed them to live alongside the majority non-Khārijī population, or in their own communities at the extremities of the empire. For them doctrine fueled discourse but not action. Third, while the ḥadīth are generally of an accord with the later sources, they are too-biased and unreliable from which to extract anything positivist about the sect. On the other hand, many of the akhbār that mention the sectarians reveal different priorities both in belief and action from those preserved in the more polemical sources. What little remains of Khārijī literature likewise presents them in a manner contrary to that in the master narrative.

At this point, the old conclusions that the Khawārij found motivation in either purely secular or purely religious concerns may be relegated to the historical dust bin. Rather, the sources create the impression that an unequal share of communal resources moved them to voice their dissent and, after considerable conflict and bloodshed within the umma, to disassociate through an act of physical separation from the community of

believers and a caliphate that had failed to live up to its obligations. Later generations adopted this sectarian identity when similar patterns of unrest and conflict emerged in the Muslim world, as witnessed in the Second and Third Fitnas. Khārijī identity came to be seen as a ready-made means of expressing dissent with caliphal governance, one with more appeal to those who found Qurayshite-related dominance of political and religious authority objectionable and therefore chose not to identify with the ‘Alids thanks to their association with that tribe. Over time, as the various expressions of Islam entered into dialogue with one another, Khārijī groups found further justification for their dissent through the creation of doctrine. The sectarians’ identity did not remain static in this process, but evolved with time as evidenced in the writings of the Ibāḍiyya.

Unfortunately, this analysis leaves us with a void and very little to take its place. This author suggests that, by ignoring the late and polemical conclusions of the Muslim heresiographers and relying instead on the writings of those who identified with Islam's first sectarian division along with those reports that cannot be dismissed as probable fiction, it is possible to create a more realistic narrative of Khārijī identity formation than that presented by the present master narrative. Make no mistake: this is a conjectural exercise that must travel on the *via negativa*, but one at least grounded in close analysis of the sources.

Towards a New Narrative

The master narrative makes it clear who was right and wrong, and in a colorful and entertaining manner. The narrative proposed herein accomplishes none of those things. It assumes that Arabian tribal culture maintained throughout the period

under discussion, and the influence of Islam on those older traditions developed only slowly, assumptions consistent with patterns of social and cultural change in general. While the new religion mandated new beliefs, when it came to behavior its greatest immediate influence was on *cultus*, but less so on the living of daily life before the promulgation of ḥadīth. Competition for the control of resources remained a priority, and raiding and retributive justice permissible. People then as now placed great stock in their social identity. They took pride in the groups with which they claimed membership, and took pains to maintain and improve in-group prestige at the expense of others. And when adversity threatened to overwhelm, they either adapted their identities or adopted new ones to accommodate changed circumstances. All of these are in evidence through a close reading of the sources, and they inform this new narrative.

Those who came to be called Khawārij appeared during the First Fitna in opposition to a centralized government that had failed to adequately fulfill its role as patron and protector. The prosperity enjoyed by the young umma under the first two caliphs turned into disappointment under 'Uthmān thanks to a halt in the conquests and consequent reduction in wealth flowing to government coffers. Combined with new emigration to the garrison cities in Iraq, the pie was cut into ever shrinking pieces. The policy of *sābiqa* helped to create greater socio-economic disparity by preferring early converts over later ones, and 'Uthmān did not help matters any by favoring his kin both with material gifts and positions of importance within his administration. This behavior gave those who felt dissatisfaction a target for their anger, and 'Uthmān became the first caliph to die at the hands of fellow believers. 'Alī inherited his predecessors unfortunate situation, and a civil war on top of it because 'Uthmān's relatives set out to do exactly

what any of their contemporaries would do had one of their own family members been murdered: seek satisfaction from the killers. Some of those later identified as Khārijī sought protection under the fourth caliph, Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr among them, and there they remained until the Battle of Ṣiffīn.

By all accounts a long and arduous affair, at some point the parties involved in that affair decided to arbitrate their dispute. The story related in the master narrative is almost too-bizarre to believe, and probably originated as pro-‘Alid polemic. The present author suggests that, after the notoriously bloody "night of the howling," men on both sides had reached the point of war weariness and their commanders, who realized that they would probably lose their armies if they pushed them much more, saw at least a temporary benefit in calling a truce. ‘Alī's response to the arbitrators' decision makes it clear he never intended to relinquish the caliphate, regardless.

The decision to arbitrate put those in danger of the Umayyad's wrath back in the hot seat. This at least would explain why Ḥurqūṣ ended up associated with the early Khawārij, although it does not explain why he remained with them. By the time of the arbitration agreement, dissatisfaction with the caliphate could derive from a number of issues, but the majority who joined the seceders appear to have continued to harbor dissatisfaction in regard to the distribution of state largesse; all the complaints attributed to them mention the misappropriation of the fay' by the caliphate. As grumbling grew louder in Kufa and, to a lesser extent, Basra, the anti-caliphal forces split into two camps based not on differences in doctrine, but in inertia. It appears that the majority remained in place as "quietists," an odd-sounding term to apply to some of the very-vocal people

remembered in the sources. The rest of the dissenters did exactly what their ancestors had done and their descendents would continue to do in the face of adversity: relocate.

While the master narrative presents ‘Alī as the voice of moderation and forbearance, in the sources caliphal forces fire the first shot when the 500 Basrans attempted to leave their city. On the way to join their fellow seceders at their camp at al-Nahrawān, they attacked those of ‘Alī's supporters they encountered, probably as an act of revenge. But they appear to have been the only ones to have perpetrated any attacks of this nature, whatever the cause. In what probably represented the best option available to him from a strategic perspective, ‘Alī decided to deal with the sectarians before facing Mu‘āwiya again, and this led to the massacre at the canal, where the caliph's army outnumbered the putative rebels by a wide margin. ‘Alī's attack accomplished its intended purpose in that for the time being it eliminated any significant military threat on the part of the Khawārij. But it also created a cult of martyrs of the slain.

The Battle of al-Nahrawān did not put an end to the seceders' movement, but it did instill a desire for vengeance among the survivors and their associates. Small in size, the early Khārijī uprisings looked and behaved in a manner indistinguishable from tribal raids. They conducted hit-and-run attacks in preference to set-piece battles because the former favored success more than the latter. Even when blood vengeance provided motivation for an uprising, the Khawārij did what they could to maximize the chances of success. While they saw their fallen brothers and sisters as martyrs for the cause, and their poets eulogized the glories of a noble death in battle, their behavior indicates that the lust for death was an ideal meant to inspire rather than a practice to emulate for most.

While the earliest Khawārij possessed almost no tangible doctrine, this changed with time as quietist groups engaged in the debates taking place in the cities, principally Basra, which became the center of Khārijī activity after the First Fitna. During the chaos of the Second Fitna, Basran Khawārij joined in the rebellion of Ibn al-Zubayr but eventually split with him, perhaps over some disagreement, perhaps to seek their own fortunes elsewhere. A number of sectarian groups that traced roots to Basra emerged during the larger conflict. While these gained eponymous identifiers and the heresiographers later ascribed to each a distinct ideology based on theological minutiae, the akhbār make them appear more similar than different. Both the Azāriqa and the Najdāt successfully took and held territory, and some of the former even had opportunity and motivation to mint their own specie. But in an age when rebellion was the norm, these Khārijī uprisings do not appear significantly different from the many others that took place contemporaneously.

Between the Second and Third Fitnas the sectarians returned to small-scale uprisings of the tribal-raid mould, but when the Umayyads entered their death throes, the large rebellions returned. Once again, the behavior of the sectarians reveals them more concerned with the mundane than attempting to maximize their personal piety. The Berbers may have justified their uprising with Ṣufrī doctrine, but they acted just like other conquerors when they took over and established their own de facto state. And it appears al-Ḍaḥḥāk intended to take over the caliphate for himself. Again, this is not the behavior of those proactively seeking martyrdom, but of rebels, revolutionaries, and conquerors.

While the size and shape of Khārijī uprisings ebbed and flowed with the times, quietist members debated and invented doctrine. At what pace is impossible to determine, although a close reading of the sources suggests that none of the various sub-sects possessed all the dogma with which they came to be associated. Rather, these understandings represent later, external developments back-read into groups which had effectively ceased to exist, with the exception of the Ibādīyya, who had relocated to the fringes of the Muslim world. The absence of anyone to act as a Khārijī apologist in the centers of discourse in the Abbasid empire made them an easy tool for polemicists of all persuasions to manipulate as needed. Like Sālim ibn Dhakwān, fourth/tenth-century Ismaili author Abū Tammām used the Khawārij to create distinction for his own religious group. He categorized Islam's first sectarians as part of the "satans among humans" who focused on superficial materialities at the expense of understanding transcendent realities.⁶⁷³ In so doing, he warned against his fellow Ismailis acting similarly. And some Sunni heresiographers used the Khawārij to fulfill a prophetic claim regarding the number of factions in Islam, while others used the sect to illustrate the dangers of heterodoxy.

As with many sects that have passed into history, Khārijī identity eventually reified under the influence of outsiders who had no interest in preserving the sectarians' self-identity. This new narrative does not rectify that situation, but it does provide a basis for clearing away some of the apocryphal beliefs and behaviors attributed to Islam's first sectarians. It also proves ISIS apologists correct in one regard: that particular brand of Jihadi-Salafism, outside its ideological opposition to the political status quo, has nothing

⁶⁷³ Abū Tammām, *An Ismaili Heresiography: The "Bāb al-Shayṭān" from Abū Tammām's Kitāb al-Shajara*, trans. by Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 20 and 28.

in common with the Khawārij. But it does look a lot like the seceders of the master narrative, those that a process of external identity formation have preserved as renegades and assassins, anathema to the very notion of the community of believers.

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