
The Rehabilitation of ‘Alī in Sunnī Ḥadīth and Historiography



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Abstract

After the Prophet Muhammad, the most contested figure in Islamic history would be his son-in-law, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. ‘Alī’s political rivals staunchly denounced him, his family and his partisans as impious criminals in his own lifetime and after his death. Shortly after his assassination, the Umayyads succeeded in obtaining the reins of the caliphate and establishing a dynasty that lasted close to a century. Medieval sources indicate that rhetoric and propaganda hostile to ‘Alī permeated public discourse under the Umayyads. Nonetheless, through the efforts of his admirers, ‘Alī became a respected authority in both Sunnī and Shī‘ī Islam within a few centuries of his death. His nearly universal portrayal in Muslim literature as a pious authority rather obscures a centuries-long process of contestation and rehabilitation. This study considers the methods that ḥadīth transmitters and scholars employed to reconcile expectations regarding ‘Alī’s character and image in Sunnism with the vast and heterogeneous body of accounts about him. Sunnī scholars made use of their editorial privilege by transmitting selected versions of reports and omitting controversial material.

After the Prophet Muhammad, the most contested figure in Islamic history would be his son-in-law, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661). Umayyads, Khārijīs and early ‘Uthmāniyya (Muslims who revered the first three caliphs, but were hostile to ‘Alī) disavowed themselves of ‘Alī. According to these factions, ‘Alī wrongfully waged war against other Muslims in pursuit of power and betrayed the values of Islam. He and his partisans were no longer Muslims. For those who revered him, ‘Alī personified justice and righteousness. He was the ideal imam. Through the efforts of his admirers, ‘Alī became a respected authority in both Sunnī and Shī‘ī Islam within a few centuries of his death. His near-universal portrayal in Muslim literature as a pious authority, however, rather obscures a centuries-long process of contestation and rehabilitation.¹ The Umayyad state apparatus (40–132 AH/661–750CE) had

¹For key studies on historiography regarding ‘Alī, see *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, s.v. “‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib” (F. Manouchehri, M. Melvin-Koushki, R. Shah-Kazemi, et al.); Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: a study of the early caliphate* (New York, 1996); E.I. Petersen, *‘Alī and Mu‘āwiya in Early Arabic Tradition: studies on the genesis and growth of Islamic historical writing until the end of the ninth century* (Copenhagen, 1964).

facilitated the proliferation of ‘Uthmānī and Umayyad portrayals of ‘Alī for close to a century. With the fall of the Umayyads, ‘Alī’s subsequent transformation from heretic to saint was neither immediate nor complete.

Beginning in the third/ninth century, the compilers of Sunni *ḥadīth* literature faced a great challenge in sifting through conflicting narratives regarding the legacy of ‘Alī. On one hand, transmitters, some described as Shī‘ī and some not, narrated *ḥadīth* about his merits (*faḍā’il*, *manāqib*) and the aid he provided to the Prophet and many others as a pious member of the Muslim community. On the other hand, ‘Uthmānī and pro-Umayyad scholars transmitted accounts that usually portrayed him as irreligious and immoral.² This study considers the methods that *ḥadīth* transmitters and scholars employed to reconcile expectations regarding ‘Alī’s character and image in Sunnism with the vast and heterogeneous body of accounts about him. As a sect, Sunnism encompasses Muslims who differ from one another considerably on the subject of ‘Alī and the Prophet’s Household (*ahl al-bayt*). Key studies have already documented the role that the ‘Uthmāniyya played in shaping early hostile views on ‘Alī.³ Others have noted the popularity of the cult of ‘Alī and his admiration among poets, mystics and soldiers in later periods.⁴ Elsewhere, I have considered the stark contrast between Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and his pro-‘Alid interlocutors who denounced his views.⁵ Although Salafism in the late twentieth century has greatly enhanced Ibn Taymiyya’s reputation and prestige, the antagonism that existed between him and his interlocutors seem at times to mark the boundaries of Sunnī Islam. Ibn Taymiyya’s antipathy to Shī‘ism led him to reject reports about ‘Alī and Fāṭima (d. 11/632) that previous Sunnīs had accepted as authentic.⁶ Over the centuries, various non-Shī‘ī scholars have expressed support for the

²For ‘Uthmānī and Umayyad narratives about ‘Alī, see Badr ‘Awwād, *al-Naṣb wa’l-nawāṣib: dirāsa ta’rīkhiyya ‘aqadiyya* (Riyadh, 2012). See also Nebil Husayn, “The Memory of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in Early Sunnī Thought” (unpublished PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2016), pp. 188–212.

³*E.I.*², s.v. “Imāma” (W. Madelung); “‘Uthmāniyya” (P. Crone); Asma Afsaruddin, *Excellence and Precedence: medieval Islamic discourse on legitimate leadership* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 14–23; Patricia Crone, *God’s Rule: Government and Islam* (New York, 2004), pp. 20–32; Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, trans. Stern (Chicago, 1973), ii, pp. 95–120; Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago, 1977), i, pp. 247–67; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Religion and Politics Under the Early ‘Abbāsids: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunnī Elite* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 49–63, 167ff.

⁴Farhad Daftary, *Ismaʿilis in Medieval Muslim Societies* (London, 2005), pp. 183–203; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Shī‘ism and Sufism: Their Relationship in Essence and in History”, *Religious Studies* VI, 3 (1970), pp. 229–42; Habibeh Rahim, “Perfection Manifested: ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib’s image in classical Persian and modern Indian Muslim poetry” (unpublished PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1989); Riza Yildirim, “Shī‘itisation of the *Futuwwa* Tradition in the Fifteenth Century”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* XL, 1 (2013), pp. 53–70.

⁵Husayn, “The Memory of ‘Alī”, pp. 180–187, 218–224.

⁶For example, Ibn Taymiyya argues that “no one has ever narrated from the Prophet” or claimed in “any known work of *ḥadīth*” that God’s anger accompanies the anger of Fāṭima. However, *ḥadīth* to this effect appear in a couple sources, see Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya*, (ed.) Muḥammad Sālim ([Riyadh], 1986), iv, pp. 248–249; cf. al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-ṣaḥīḥayn wa bi-dhayliḥ al-Talkhīṣ* (Beirut, 1986), iii, p. 154; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu‘jam al-kabīr*, (ed.) Ḥamdī ‘Abd al-Majīd Salāfi (Beirut, 2002), i, p. 108, xxii, p. 401. Ibn Taymiyya rejects the authenticity of reports about Fāṭima’s anger with Abū Bakr and her final request for an evening burial, although these reports can be found in the *ḥadīth* collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, see Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna*, iv, pp. 243, 247, 248, 256, 257, 264; cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut, 1981), iv, p. 42, v, pp. 82–83; Muslim, *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut, 1974), v, pp. 153–154. Elsewhere, on the basis of an alleged consensus of scholars, he rejects the authenticity of reports that claim Q5:55 was revealed about ‘Alī. The transmission of these reports in well-known sources appears to contradict his claim, see Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna*, ii, p. 30; cf. ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān* (Riyadh, 1989), iv, p. 1162; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, (ed.) Muḥammad Bāqir al-Maḥmūdī (Beirut, 1974), ii, p. 150; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq* (Beirut, 1995), xlii, p. 357; Ibn Mardawayh, *Manāqib ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib wa-mā nazala min al-Qur‘ān fi ‘Alī* (Qum, 2001), pp. 233–238; Maṅṣūr ibn Muḥammad al-Sam‘ānī, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān* (Riyadh, 1997), ii, pp. 47–48; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu‘jam al-awsat*

doctrine of *tafḍīl* 'Alī (the superiority of 'Alī to his contemporaries) and for granting the *ahl al-bayt* a unique status in the community.⁷ But the most influential scholars of *ḥadīth* in Sunnī Islam tended to maintain a position somewhere in the middle. They were fonder of the *ahl al-bayt* than Ibn Taymiyya, but their love for 'Alī did not mean support for *tafḍīl* 'Alī. Sunnīs with competing theological commitments, whether to pro-'Alid sentiment or anti-Shī'ī polemics, clearly dealt with the early source material differently.

Pro-'Alids consistently accepted and transmitted *ḥadīth* that exalted 'Alī, whereas early 'Uthmāniyya and pro-Umayyads viewed him and his followers as a scourge of the community and as the source of sedition. These anti-'Alids transmitted *ḥadīth* that extolled the merits of 'Alī's rivals. The narratives of the Kūfan storyteller Sayf b. 'Umar (d. c. 180/796) reflect a slightly more moderate 'Uthmānī sentiment compared to that which was popular under the Umayyads. In Sayf's stories, 'Alī is surrounded by criminals, and it is these criminal associates, not 'Alī himself, who cause civil unrest and misguidance in the community. Sayf does not seem to recognise 'Alī as a rightly guided caliph, instead portraying him as only one contender among many in a time of social turmoil.⁸ The literary contributions of Sayf and other more temperate 'Uthmānīs nonetheless represent an important shift in the legacy of 'Uthmānī sentiment. In their reports 'Alī no longer appears as an arch-heretic; rather he is a Companion who found himself in the company of heretics who venerated him, and fell victim to their machinations on numerous occasions. Both early Shī'ī and 'Uthmānī accounts portray 'Alī as someone who disagreed with his predecessors and rivals on a number of issues.⁹ The more moderate 'Uthmānīs, by contrast, circulated counter reports in which 'Alī appeared as a loyal partisan of the first three caliphs.¹⁰ The 'Uthmānīs of the third/ninth

(Cairo, 1995), vi, p. 218; Muḥammad ibn Ja'fir al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī = Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qu'rān* (Beirut, 1995), vi, pp. 389–390; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa'l-bayān = Tafsīr al-Tha'labī* (Beirut, 2002), iv, pp. 80–81; al-Wāhidī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl* (Cairo, 1968), 133–134. See also Walid Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qur'ān Commentary of al-Tha'labī* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 218–221.

⁷Aḥmad b. al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī, *'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib imām al-'arīfīn = al-Burhān al-jalī fī taḥqīq intisāb al-ṣūfiyya ilā 'Alī wa-yalīhi Kitāb Fatḥ al-Malik al-'Alī* (Cairo, 1969), p. 56; al-Ḥākim al-Ḥaskānī, *Shawāhid al-tanzīl li-qawā'id al-tafḍīl fī al-āyāt al-nāzila fī Ahl al-Bayt*, (ed.) M. Bāqir Maḥmūdī (Tehran, 1990), ii, pp. 470–473; Ibn Abī 'l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha* (Qum, 1983), i, p. 7; Abū Ja'far al-Iskāfī, *al-Mi'yār wa'l-muwāzana fī faḍā'il al-Imām Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, wa-bayān afdaliyyatihi 'ala jamī' al-'ālamīn ba'da al-anbiyā'* (Beirut, 1981), pp. 20–21, 63–78, 187, 206–254; Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Kanjī, *Kifāyat al-ṭālib fī manāqib 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib wa-yalīhi al-Bayān fī akhbār Ṣāhib al-Zamān* (Tehran, 1984), pp. 245, 246; al-Muwaffāq ibn Aḥmad al-Khuwārizmī, *al-Manāqib* (Qum, 1993), p. 106; 'Alā' al-Dawla al-Simmānī, *Manāzīr al-mahādīr li 'l-munāzīr al-ḥādīr* (al-Zāhir [Cairo], 1989), pp. 14–19.

⁸Sean W. Anthony, *The Caliph and The Heretic: Ibn Saba and The Origins of Shi'ism* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 82–135; Patricia Crone, "Review. *Kitāb al-ridda wa'l-futūḥ and Kitāb al-jamal wa masīr 'Ā'isha wa 'Alī*. A Facsimile Edition of the Fragments Preserved in the University Library of Imam Muhammad Ibn Sa'ud Islamic University in Riyadh", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* VI, 2 (1996), pp. 237–240.

⁹On the matter of the caliphate, for example, 'Alī voiced his dissatisfaction regarding the election of his predecessors according to a number of sources, see Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Ḥammū'ī, *Farā'id al-Simṭayn: fī faḍā'il al-Murtaḍā wa-'l-Batūl wa-'l-Sibṭayn wa-'l-'imma min dhurriyyatihim*, (ed.) M. Maḥmūdī (Beirut, 1978), ii, pp. 319–320; al-Kanjī, *Kifāyat al-ṭālib*, p. 386; al-Khuwārizmī, *al-Manāqib*, p. 313; al-Simmānī, *Manāzīr al-mahādīr*, pp. 14–19. For reports in canonical collections that state that 'Alī withheld his oath of fealty to Abū Bakr for six months, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, v, p. 82; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, v, p. 153.

¹⁰For reports in which 'Alī eagerly supports the candidacy of his predecessors and states his belief in their superiority to him, see al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, 10 vols. (Beirut, 1999), viii, p. 143; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, p. 195; al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, iii, p. 76; Ibn Abī 'Āṣim, *Kitāb al-sunna*, (ed.) M. Nāṣir al-Albānī (Beirut, 1993), pp. 555–561; Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-muḥriqa fī al-radd 'alā ahl al-bid'a wa'l-zandaqa*, (ed.) 'Abd al-Wahhāb 'Abd al-Laṭīf (Cairo, 1965), pp. 60–65; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' fatāwā shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya*, (ed.) 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim (Medina, 1995), vii, pp. 511–512; Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī al-Samhūdī, *Jawāhir*

century may have appropriated this image of ‘Alī from quietists, centrists and ‘Alī’s partisans who revered him and the first two caliphs together. Some, such as Abū al-Qāsim al-Saqāfī (d. 406/1015), went further by claiming that ‘Alī and his family members in fact loved Mu‘āwiya (d. 60/680). In one report transmitted by al-Saqāfī, al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (d. 61/680) ascribes to Mu‘āwiya the honorifics “scribe of the Qur‘ān” and “uncle of the believers” (*khāl al-mu‘minīn*) and asserts that the angel Gabriel had declared Mu‘āwiya to be so pious that no true devotee of the Prophet’s family could ever speak ill of him.¹¹

E.I. Petersen previously examined historiography regarding ‘Alī by comparing the interests and methods of ‘Abbāsīd-era storytellers, like Sayf b. ‘Umar, who composed historical chronicles.¹² This study considers the work of influential scholars in the genre of *ḥadīth* to complement Petersen’s work. In terms of prestige, the most venerated work of *ḥadīth* in Sunnī Islam would be the *The Authentic Collection (Jāmi‘ al-musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ)* of Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/869).¹³ Al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* not only provides readers with the doctrines of its compiler, but also the views championed by an emerging group of *ḥadīth* scholars actively engaged in the formation and maintenance of orthodoxy. While al-Bukhārī is more circumspect in transmitting controversial material regarding ‘Alī, I occasionally contrast him with one of the most celebrated *ḥadīth* scholars of Baghdad, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal consistently transmits material that provides the audience with greater context and additional commentary from transmitters. Although these two scholars and their students dedicated their lives to the collection and transmission of prophetic *ḥadīth*, the agency and predilections of each author becomes apparent in a comparative study.

Unlike their Mu‘ tazilī, Shī‘ī and Khārījī interlocutors, these proto-Sunnī scholars of *ḥadīth* optimistically hoped that all of the Prophet’s Companions could be recognised as righteous figures in the literature that they produced.¹⁴ To achieve this objective, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal transmitted many reports about the merits of the Companions embroiled in the early conflicts from their partisans.¹⁵ ‘Uthmānī, pro-Umayyad, and pro-‘Alid *ḥadīth* all appear in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s *Musnad*. Although each of these factions contribute *ḥadīth* to al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, the latter generally refrains from transmitting *ḥadīth* about ‘Alī’s merits and the history of his caliphate. To explain his position, al-Bukhārī cites the opinion of Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/729) who considered most reports about ‘Alī to be fabricated.¹⁶ Al-Bukhārī limits himself to reporting only three unique merits of ‘Alī.¹⁷ By contrast, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal preserves and transmits hundreds of *ḥadīth* in praise of ‘Alī.¹⁸

al-‘aqdayn fi faḍl al-sharāfayn: sharaf al-‘ilm al-jalī wa-‘l-nasab al-Nabawī (Beirut, 2003), pp. 248–250, 451–460; Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī = Ta‘rīkh al-umam wa-‘l-mulūk* (Beirut, 1983), ii, p. 447.

¹¹Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta‘rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, xiv, pp. 113–114.

¹²Petersen, *Alī and Mu‘āwiya in Early Arabic Tradition*.

¹³On the canonisation of the work, see Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden, 2007).

¹⁴For a comparative study of Muslim doctrines on the righteousness of Companions, see Scott Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam: the legacy of the generation of Ibn Sa‘d, Ibn Ma‘īn, and Ibn Ḥanbal* (Leiden and Boston, 2004), pp. 221–285.

¹⁵Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, p. 285.

¹⁶Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, p. 209.

¹⁷Al-Bukhārī’s section on ‘Alī’s merits consists of six reports, but these reports collectively confirm the authenticity of only three merits unique to ‘Alī, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, pp. 207–209.

¹⁸Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍā‘il Amīr al-Mu‘minīn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* (Qum, 2012); *Kitāb Faḍā‘il al-ṣaḥāba*, (ed.) Waṣī Allāh M. ‘Abbās (Beirut, 1983), i, pp. 528–551, ii, pp. 555–725.

Despite their differences in terms of methodology and receptiveness to pro-'Alid reports, the two scholars shared a concern for articulating orthodoxy through *ḥadīth* and their assessments of *ḥadīth* transmitters. Consequently, they sought to (1) condemn and suppress the legacy of anti-'Alid sentiment (*naṣb*), (2) discredit *ḥadīth* that undermined the superiority of Abū Bakr and 'Umar (or explicitly upheld *tafḍīl 'Alī*), and (3) appropriate 'Alī as an innocuous member of the early community. The third objective resulted in these authors' acceptance of *ḥadīth* that depicted 'Alī making mistakes and upsetting the Prophet or other Companions. In one case, 'Alī refuses the Prophet's invitation to join him in worship,¹⁹ and, in another, he leads a congregation in prayer while intoxicated.²⁰

The compilers of Sunnī *ḥadīth* literature faced great challenges in sifting through the plethora of conflicting narratives about 'Alī and reconciling them with their own vision of early Islamic history and what constituted orthodoxy. Although the scholars sought to portray this process of selection as an objective one by relying solely on narrators who were trustworthy and avoiding those who were not, the reality was much more complex. *Ḥadīth* scholars clearly judged reports by their contents even when they cited problems in the chain of transmission as the principal reason for any negative assessment.²¹ When confronting anti-'Alid *ḥadīth*, they responded in one of at least seven different ways.

Rejection

In a number of cases, *ḥadīth* scholars rejected an anti-'Alid report outright, declaring it a fabrication. For example, claims that 'Alī tried to physically injure or kill the Prophet or that the Prophet referred to him as the Korah (*Qārūn*) rather than the Aaron (*Hārūn*) of the community were systematically excluded from well-known *ḥadīth* collections.²² The transmitter of these claims, Ḥarīz b. 'Uthmān (d. 163/779), was nevertheless considered trustworthy, so other reports that he transmitted appear in the collections of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Bukhārī and many others.²³ The prevalence of anti-'Alids like Ḥarīz in the chains of transmission in Sunnī *ḥadīth* literature is unknown, since biographers usually do not specify a transmitter's exact views on 'Alī when the transmitter was pro-Umayyad or 'Uthmānī. Geographically, contempt for 'Alī seems to have been common among *ḥadīth* transmitters active in the pro-Umayyad Levant and 'Uthmānī Baṣra.²⁴ Scholars from these regions generally believed

¹⁹Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, i, pp. 77, 91, 112; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ii, p. 43, viii, p. 155, 190; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ii, p. 187.

²⁰Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, (ed.) Sa'īd M. al-Laḥḥām (Beirut, 1990), ii, p. 182; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, i, p. 389.

²¹Jonathan Brown, "How We Know Early Ḥadīth Critics Did Matn Criticism and Why It's So Hard to Find", *Islamic Law and Society* XV, 2 (2008), pp. 143–184; "The Rules of Matn Criticism: There Are No Rules", *Islamic Law and Society* XIX, 4 (2012), pp. 356–396.

²²Al-Dhahabī, *Ta'riḫ al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhūr wa-'l-a'lām* (Beirut, 1998), x, p. 122; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫ madīnat Dimashq*, xii, p. 349.

²³For example, see Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad wa-bi-hāmishihī muntakhab Kanz al-'ummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-'l-a'māl* (Beirut, 1969), iv, p. 99, 105, 106; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, p. 164; Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan*, ii, p. 392; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, (ed.) Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī (Beirut, 1954), i, p. 151; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī = al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut, 1983), iv, p. 10.

²⁴Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'* (Beirut, 1993), iii, p. 128; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' fatāwā*, iii, p. 408; al-Iskāfī, *al-Mi'yār*, p. 32; al-Nashwān b. Sa'īd al-Ḥimyarī, *al-Ḥūr al-'ayn* (Cairo, 1948), pp. 229–230.

there was no caliph during the tumultuous years in which ‘Alī ruled. It was Mu‘āwiya who eventually followed ‘Uthmān as the fourth caliph of the community.²⁵

Deflection

Scholars deflected accusations that ‘Alī committed serious crimes by acknowledging his culpability for minor sins, including that of keeping bad company. For example, the Marwānids accused ‘Alī of leading the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) in the slander of ‘Ā’isha in the *Ifk* incident. In narratives circulated on the authority of al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) and found in the canonical collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, ‘Alī appears as an antagonist who does not assume ‘Ā’isha’s innocence and encourages the Prophet to divorce her. However, he is not depicted as one of her slanderers.²⁶ When a Marwānid asked al-Zuhrī whether ‘Alī was a slanderer, he reportedly answered, “No ... but ‘Ā’isha said, ‘He behaved badly in my affair [*kāna musī‘am fī amrī*]’”²⁷

While the Umayyads claimed that ‘Alī bore direct blame for the assassination of ‘Uthmān,²⁸ Sunnī scholars tended to shift responsibility to ‘Alī’s close associates.²⁹ Some Sunnīs portrayed ‘Alī as unwilling to surrender ‘Uthmān’s murderers because he was in need of their military and political support.³⁰

Likewise, the heretical belief in ‘Alī’s superiority to his predecessors was deflected away from ‘Alī to Ibn Saba’, the legendary heretic in his army. According to this narrative, Ibn Saba’ was the real source of *tafḍīl* ‘Alī. ‘Alī himself strongly condemned this doctrine and punished Ibn Saba’ for holding it.³¹ Ibn Saba’ came to serve as a figure to whom Sunnīs could attribute all crimes and heresies related to the memory of ‘Alī and the first civil war.³² Ibn Saba’ was responsible not only for the death of ‘Uthmān but also for the Battle of the Camel and the birth of Shī‘ism. Abbas Barzegar explains the significance of such historiography: “Through reliance on stories such as the infiltration of the community by the subversive Jew ‘Abd Allāh b. Saba’, the responsibility for the events of the *fitna* in Sunni historical traditions are externalised, placed outside the space of the ‘community’ ...”³³

²⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna*, iv, pp. 400–401.

²⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iii, p. 155, v, p. 58, vi, p. 7, viii, p. 163; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, viii, p. 115.

²⁷ ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, iii, p. 52; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, ii, p. 160; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa wa-ma’rifat aḥwāl ṣāḥib al-sharī‘a* (Beirut, 1985), iv, p. 73; Ibn Shabba, *Ta’rīkh al-Madīna al-munawwara*, (ed.) Fahīm Muḥammad Shaltūt (Qum, 1989), i, p. 337; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr bi-al-ma’thūr* (Cairo, 1897), v, p. 32.

²⁸ Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, viii, p. 189; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd* (Beirut, 1983), v, p. 81; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* (Beirut, 1984), viii, p. 411; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa’l-nihāya* (Beirut, 1988), vii, p. 288; Sibṭ Ibn Jawzī, *Tadhkirat al-khawāṣṣ* (Qum, 1998), p. 82; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, iv, p. 4, 30. See also Madelung, *Succession*, pp. 156 (for Marwān b. al-Ḥakīm’s accusations), 189–190, 198–199 (for al-Walīd b. ‘Uqba’s poetry), 200–201, 205, 211 (for Mu‘āwiya making such a claim).

²⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut, 1986), i, p. 104, 121; al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-ṭiwāl* (Cairo, 1960), p. 149; Ibn Shabba, *Ta’rīkh al-Madīna*, iv, p. 1250. See also Madelung, *Succession*, p. 156; Maya Yazigi, “Defense and Validation in Shi‘i and Sunni Tradition: The Case of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr”, *Studia Islamica* XCVIII/XCIX (2004), pp. 62–64.

³⁰ Al-‘Aynī, *Umdat al-qārī*, xv, p. 51; al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, pp. 162, 170–171; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, v, p. 83; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī*, vi, p. 454, xii, p. 448; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa’l-nihāya*, vii, p. 288.

³¹ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Lisān al-Mizān* (Beirut, 1971), iii, p. 290.

³² For a comprehensive study, see Anthony, *The Caliph and The Heretic*.

³³ Abbas Barzegar, “Remembering Community: Historical Narrative in the Formation of Sunni Islam” (unpublished PhD dissertation, Emory University, 2010), p. 148.

Instead of accepting narratives in which Companions were responsible for discord and bloodshed, Sunnī heresiography and historiography mostly opted for a conspiracy theory that identified an outsider, a legendary black, Jewish scapegoat as the cause for everything that went wrong in the community.

Recasting: The Curious Case of “Abū Turāb”

In at least one case, *ḥadīth* transmitters attempted to recast a derisive epithet frequently used by the Umayyads to refer to 'Alī into an honorific nickname and a sign of distinction. 'Alī possessed the unique distinction of having fathered the Prophet's descendants and was thus entitled to use the agnomen Abū al-Ḥasan in honour of al-Ḥasan, his eldest son, whose mother was Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet. However, it was not in the interests of the Umayyads to remind their audiences of 'Alī's close relationship to the Prophet every time that they publicly disparaged or ritually cursed him. Consequently, according to abundant literary evidence in the Sunnī tradition, the Umayyads opted to refer to him as Abū Turāb, 'the father of dust'.³⁴ In letters between 'Umar II (d. 101/720) and the Byzantine Emperor Leo III (r. 717–741), preserved in Arabic as well as (non-Muslim) Armenian, Aljamiado and Latin sources, Leo only knows 'Alī by this epithet.³⁵ The Byzantine assumption that Abū Turāb was the name of 'Alī was the result of a practice among leading Umayyads like Mu'āwīya,³⁶ Marwān b. al-Ḥakam (d. 65/685),³⁷ and al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714)³⁸ to only mention 'Alī by this nickname in public lectures. Although anti-'Alids intended to disparage 'Alī with this name, by the third/ninth century, Sunnī *ḥadīth* literature had firmly established a pious narrative in which the Prophet gave 'Alī the nickname Abū Turāb. Some believed that 'Alī received the name in the course of a battle,³⁹ whereas others said that he obtained it after a disagreement with his wife.⁴⁰ According to the reports that mention the marital dispute, 'Alī himself considered Abū Turāb to be his most cherished nickname. Shī'īs followed their Sunnī coreligionists in circulating many *ḥadīth* that recast Abū Turāb in positive terms.⁴¹ The apparent agreement between the Sunnī and Shī'ī traditions leaves little room for challenging the shared narrative regarding the origins of the

³⁴Etan Kohlberg, “Abū Turāb”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* XLI (1978), pp. 347–352.

³⁵Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: a survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), pp. 500–501; Arthur Jeffery, “Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III”, *The Harvard Theological Review* XXXVII (1944), pp. 292, 298.

³⁶Al-Dhahabī, *Ta'riḫ al-islām*, iii, p. 627; Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, iii, p. 108; Ibn Abī 'l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ*, iv, pp. 56–57; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫ madīnat Dimashq*, xlii, p. 111; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vii, p. 120; al-Nasā'ī, *Khaṣā'is Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, p. 81.

³⁷Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, ii, p. 446; al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *Ma'rīfat 'ulūm al-ḥadīth* (Beirut, 1988), p. 211; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫ madīnat Dimashq*, xlii, p. 17; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vii, pp. 123–124.

³⁸For al-Ḥajjāj, see al-Ḥākim al-Ḥaskānī, *Shawāḥid al-tanzīl*, i, pp. 121–122; Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm* (Beirut, 2003), i, p. 251; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, (ed.) Muḥammad Bāqir al-Maḥmūdī (Beirut, 1977), vii, p. 295, xiii, p. 365; al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa'l-tabyīn* (Beirut, 1926), p. 200.

³⁹For example, see Ibn al-Maghāzīlī, *Manāqib 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* (Qum, 2005), p. 27; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, iv, p. 263; al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, iii, p. 141; al-Nasā'ī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, (ed.) 'Abd al-Ghaffār S. Bindārī and S. Kasrawī Ḥasan (Beirut, 1991), v, p. 153.

⁴⁰Ibn al-Maghāzīlī, *Manāqib 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib*, pp. 28–29; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, i, p. 114, iv, p. 208, vii, pp. 119, 140; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vii, p. 124.

⁴¹Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* (Qum, 1959), ii, pp. 305–306; al-Ṣadūq, *'Ilal al-sharā'i'* (Najaf, 1966), i, pp. 155–157.

epithet. However, there is reason to believe that the epithet was neither honorific nor commonly used by those who knew or venerated ‘Alī.

Linguistic evidence

According to some lexicographers, variations of an invocation based on the verb *ta-ri-ba* were used in classical Arabic to damn someone. Examples include *taribat yadāk* (‘may your hands be soiled’), *taribat yamūnik* (‘may your right hand be soiled’), and *taribat jabīnik* (‘may your forehead be soiled’).⁴² The invocation *taribat yadāh* was understood to mean *lā aṣāba khayr^{an}*, ‘may he not find any bounty!’.⁴³ Scholars also argued that like other curses, these invocations were used to express condemnation of someone, usually in response to words or deeds that the invoker considered objectionable, but they did not entail a wish for a literal outcome.⁴⁴ The phrases’ literal meaning—‘your hands have become soiled’ or ‘your forehead has become soiled’—conveys the figurative message ‘you have become impoverished’, ‘your mind has become impoverished (and in need of knowledge)’, or ‘you have lost everything (and become impoverished)’.⁴⁵

Evidence from ḥadīth

As some lexicographers noted, *taribat yadāk* and its variants were commonly used in classical Arabic and even appear in *ḥadīth*. Sometimes the Prophet is depicted chiding a Companion for saying something wrong or rude.⁴⁶ On another occasion, he gives advice and concludes with a cautionary *taribat yadāk*.⁴⁷ The commentators understood the Prophet’s use of the phrase to mean that ignoring his advice would lead to disastrous consequences.⁴⁸ Finally, when the Prophet reportedly said to someone, “Your forehead has become soiled”, the phrase was interpreted to convey his desire that the addressee repent for his error with abundant prayers and prostration on the ground.⁴⁹

Evidence from the Qur’ān and its exegesis

The Qur’ān refers to *turāb* (earth, soil, dust) as the fundamental origin of humankind in a number of verses.⁵⁰ The most relevant verse to this discussion is Q90:16, *aw miskīn^{an} dhā*

⁴²Badr Dīn al-‘Aynī, *‘Umdat al-qārī: sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo, 1929), ii, pp. 211–212; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Tanwīr al-ḥawālik: sharḥ ‘alá Muwaṭṭa’ Mālik* (Cairo, 1934), p. 72; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Qum, 1984), i, p. 229; al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-‘arūs min jawāhir al-Qāmūs* (Beirut, 1994), i, p. 322.

⁴³Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, i, p. 228; Muḥammad ibn Ya’qūb al-Firūzābādī, *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* (Cairo, 1980), i, p. 39; al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-‘arūs*, i, pp. 231–232.

⁴⁴Al-Nawawī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim bi-sharḥ al-Nawawī* (Beirut, 1987), iii, p. 221; al-Suyūfī, *Tanwīr al-ḥawālik*, pp. 71–72.

⁴⁵Al-Firūzābādī, *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, i, p. 39; al-‘Aynī, *‘Umdat al-qārī*, iii, p. 237.

⁴⁶Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan*, i, p. 60; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vi, p. 27, vii, p. 110; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vi, pp. 33, 92, 201, 306, 309, 377; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, i, p. 197; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, i, pp. 171–173, iv, pp. 163–164, viii, p. 189.

⁴⁷Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan*, i, p. 454; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vi, p. 123; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, ii, p. 275; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, ii, p. 428, iii, pp. 158, 302; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, i, p. 597; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, p. 175.

⁴⁸Al-Nawawī, *al-Majmū’ sharḥ al-Muḥadhdhab* (Cairo, 1925), xvi, p. 136.

⁴⁹Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, i, p. 229; al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-‘arūs*, i, p. 322; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, iii, p. 144.

⁵⁰For example, see Q18:37, 22:5, 30:20, 35:11, 40:67.

matraba, or 'a poor person in dire need' (lit. covered in dust). Exegetes understood *dhū matraba* literally as being covered in dust but also figuratively as being in abject poverty and in dire need of assistance.⁵¹ Al-Ṭabarī provides a long discussion about the various possible interpretations of the phrase.⁵² This verse of the Qur'ān may have referred to a person who had too many children and lived in poverty with them.⁵³ Others said the phrase referred to a homeless person who slept outside subjected to the elements and "possessed nothing but the dust that adhered to him."⁵⁴

The reception of the epithet among 'Alī's disciples

A few reports indicate that those who personally knew 'Alī or lived in Iraq and respected his legacy refrained from using the name Abū Turāb to refer to 'Alī. In a number of cases, the Umayyads are depicted as calling 'Alī by this name to the confusion of 'Alī's associates. In these cases, when the non-Umayyad interlocutor realises that the Umayyads are referring to 'Alī, he frequently interprets the epithet as demeaning to 'Alī. For example, in reports about the execution of 'Alī's companion Ṣayfī b. Faṣl (d. 51/671) one finds the following exchange involving Ṣayfī and the Umayyad governor of Kūfa, Ziyād b. Abīh:

Ziyād b. Abīh said, "O enemy of God! What is your opinion of Abū Turāb?"

"I do not know an Abū Turāb."

"Are you [really] unacquainted with him?"

"I do not know him."

"Do you not know 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib?"

"Of course I do."

"That man was Abū Turāb."

"No, that man was Abū 'l-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn."

Ziyād's police chief interjected, "The governor tells you that he is Abū Turāb and you [have the audacity to] say no?"

"When the governor says a lie, do you wish for me to lie and testify to falsehood as he has done?"

Ziyād answered, "This [insolence] shall be added to your original offence ..."⁵⁵

Another report links the epithet to the Umayyad practice of cursing 'Alī. In it, a man comes to Sahl b. Sa'd and says, "So-and-so, the governor of Medina, *yad'u 'Alīyan* from the pulpit". Sahl asks, "What does he say?" The man replies, "He says Abū Turāb ..."⁵⁶ And in a third report, a Kūfān is brought before the Umayyad prince Muḥammad b. Hishām, who asks him whether or not he is a follower of Abū Turāb. The man responds, "Who is Abū Turāb?" The prince says, "'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib". The man responds, "Do you

⁵¹Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (ed.) Sa'īd al-Mandūb (Beirut, 1996), i, p. 373; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, xxx, p. 258.

⁵²Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, xxx, pp. 256–259.

⁵³*Ibid.*, xxx, pp. 258–259.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, xxx, pp. 257–258.

⁵⁵Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, v, pp. 251–252; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, xxiv, pp. 259–260; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-ta'rīkh* (Beirut, 1965), iii, p. 477; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, iv, p. 198.

⁵⁶Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, pp. 207–208.

mean the cousin of God's messenger and the husband of his daughter Fāṭima? The father of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn?"⁵⁷ Likewise, when al-Ḥajjāj requested that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī share his opinion of Abū Turāb, al-Ḥasan asked for clarification: "Do you mean 'Alī?"⁵⁸ All of these anecdotes suggest that Abū Turāb was an Umayyad epithet that Muslims who venerated 'Alī never used. It is true, according to both Sunnī and Shī'ī *ḥadīth*, that the Prophet gave 'Alī the nickname Abū Turāb. In Sunnī *ḥadīth*, the Prophet called him by this name jokingly upon finding him sleeping on the ground and covered in dust.

However, the Umayyads applied the epithet disparagingly throughout their reign. It is unclear why they chose this particular nickname. Perhaps they were aware of the version of the name's origin story that describes 'Alī and Fāṭima experiencing marital strife, as a result of which 'Alī leaves their home and sleeps in the mosque. It is there that the Prophet finds him covered in dust and calls him Abū Turāb.⁵⁹ The Umayyads may thus have used the name to highlight alleged unhappiness in 'Alī's and Fāṭima's marriage. The story could also be read to show the Prophet as giving 'Alī the name Abū Turāb in dismay. In this case, the story would fall under a genre of anti-'Alid *ḥadīth* that were used to portray 'Alī as a bad husband to Fāṭima. Another example of this genre is the famous report, narrated by al-Bukhārī and others, in which the Prophet allegedly censures 'Alī for upsetting him and Fāṭima by considering the daughter of Abū Jahl as a second wife.⁶⁰ According to some accounts, the Prophet goes on to praise the fidelity of another son-in-law, Abū 'l-Āṣ b. al-Rabī', who shared close kinship ties with the Umayyads.⁶¹ In contrast to 'Alī, this cousin of the Umayyads is described as a devoted husband. Thus, the topos of 'Alī as a bad son-in-law that appears elsewhere in the *ḥadīth* literature may have something to do with the Umayyad use of Abū Turāb.

If Abū Turāb is tied to the phrases *taribat yadāh* or *dhā matraba*, then the Umayyads used the epithet to deride 'Alī's appearance and to imply that he looked dirty and homeless. Whereas the Umayyads possessed great wealth and distributed it to their partisans, the figure of Abū Turāb was one of a pretender to the caliphate who commanded no such wealth. Pro-'Alid texts interpreted 'Alī's modest means as a consequence of his principled refusal to use public funds to enrich himself or the aristocracy of his society,⁶² but the Umayyads may have cast his poverty as a sign of failure or weakness. The epithet may also have referred to the fact that 'Alī had many children but remained extremely poor, or it may have alluded to the wrathful invocation *taribat yadāh* as appropriate for someone who, in the Umayyads' view, had caused great misfortune with his many errors. Therefore, it is possible that the epithet Abū Turāb began as an anti-'Alid aspersion on 'Alī but was subsequently recast and accepted as a merit.

⁵⁷ Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-Iqd al-farīd* (Beirut, 1983), v, p. 348.

⁵⁸ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, ii, p. 147; al-Ḥākim al-Ḥaskānī, *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*, i, p. 122.

⁵⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, i, p. 114, iv, p. 208, vii, p. 140; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vii, p. 124.

⁶⁰ Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, vii, pp. 300–302; Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan*, i, p. 460; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, iv, pp. 326, 328; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, p. 212, vi, p. 158; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaḥ Ibn Abī Shayba fī al-aḥādīth wa-'l-āthār*, (ed.) Sa'īd al-Laḥḥām (Beirut, 1989), vii, p. 527; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, i, pp. 643–644; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vii, pp. 141–142; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, v, pp. 359–360.

⁶¹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, iv, p. 326; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, p. 212; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, i, p. 644; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vii, p. 142.

⁶² Ibn Abī 'l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ*, vii, pp. 37–40; Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa al-Naṣībī, *Maṭālib al-sa'ūl fī manāqib Āl al-Rasūl*, (ed.) Mājid ibn Aḥmad 'Aṭiyya (Beirut, 2000), pp. 178–188.

Erasure

Scholars of *ḥadīth* occasionally felt compelled to delete components of a report that were offensive to their sensibilities. In particular, *ḥadīth* explicitly denigrating 'Alī could not continue to circulate intact after the Umayyad period, since the 'Uthmāniyya gradually came to accept him as the fourth caliph. This development rendered problematic *ḥadīth* such as that transmitted by Abū Bakr b. al-'Arabī (d. 543/1148) and Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (d. 656/1258) on the authority of al-Bukhārī, in which the Prophet declares, "The family of Abū Ṭālib are no allies [*awliyā*] of mine".⁶³ By the Mamluk period, extant copies of al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* no longer identified the family of Abū Ṭālib as the rejected clan mentioned in the report,⁶⁴ but Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), in his assessment of the report, conceded that the report had indeed originally named Abū Ṭālib's family: he had found a variant of the report in Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī's (d. 430/1038) *Mustakhraj* of al-Bukhārī's text that did not omit the family's name.⁶⁵ The following reports reflect the transmission of this report in the canonical *ḥadīth* collections and their commentaries:

Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Bukhārī, and Muslim all narrate from Muḥammad b. Ja'far Ghundar [active in Baṣra, d. 193/809], who narrates from Shu'ba [Kūfa and Baṣra, d. 160/777], who narrates from Ismā'īl b. Abī Khālid [Kūfa, d. 146/763], who narrates from Qays b. Abī Ḥāzim al-Aḥmaṣī [Kūfa, d. ca. 98/717], who narrates from 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ [d. ca. 43/663] that the Prophet announced openly, not privately, "The family of Abū *so-and-so* are no allies of mine. Rather, God and the righteous among the faithful are my allies ...".⁶⁶

Al-Bukhārī's direct informant 'Amr b. 'Abbās (active in Baṣra, d. 235/849) notes that "there is a blank space [*bayāḍ*] in the book of Muḥammad b. Ja'far [Ghundar]".⁶⁷

Al-Bukhārī adds, on the authority of the Umayyad 'Anbasa b. 'Abd al-Wāḥid [active in Kūfa, fl. early third/ninth century], who narrates from Bayān b. Bishr al-Aḥmaṣī [Kūfa, fl. second/eighth century], who narrates from Qays b. Abī Ḥāzim al-Aḥmaṣī, who narrates from 'Amr that the Prophet continued, "but they have kinship ties that I will honour".⁶⁸

Ibn Ḥajar transmits a report from al-Bukhārī as "The descendants of Abū _____ are no allies of mine ...".⁶⁹

Al-Bukhārī's first report of this statement, transmitted by 'Amr b. 'Abbās, seems to have circulated in anti-'Alid Baṣra from at least the middle of the second/eighth century. Al-Bukhārī's second report comes from an Umayyad informant who narrates the *ḥadīth* on the authority of two transmitters belonging to the Aḥmaṣī clan in Kūfa. The chain of

⁶³Ibn Abī 'l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ*, iv, p. 64; al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr ibn al-'Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, (ed.) 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭṭā (Beirut, 1988), iii, p. 461.

⁶⁴Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-bār bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut, [1980]), x, pp. 350–354; al-'Aynī, *Umdat al-qānīn*, xxii, p. 94.

⁶⁵Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-bār*, x, p. 352. Al-Iṣbahānī's work is no longer extant.

⁶⁶Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vii, p. 73; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, iv, p. 203; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, i, p. 136.

⁶⁷Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vii, p. 73.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Taghliq al-ta'liq 'alā Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (ed.) Sa'īd 'A. Mūsā al-Qazaqī (Beirut and Amman, 1985), v, p. 87.

transmission seems incomplete since only one person in it, Bayān, was active in the second/eighth century. Ibn Ḥajar and Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī (d. 855/1451) note in their respective commentaries on the Baṣran text that some copyists mistook a note about the deletion or blank space (*bayād*) in the manuscript to stand for the name of a tribe, incorrectly reading the text to refer to the family of an “Abū Bayāḍ”.⁷⁰

Al-Bukhārī’s *ḥadīth* appeared in three different forms, reflecting the varying sensibilities of its narrators. First, the earliest narrators transmitted the report in its complete form, explicitly naming the family of Abū Ṭālib (Text A). Sunnī *ḥadīth* scholars pointed to Qays b. Abī Ḥāzim and the Umayyad ʿAnbasa b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid, both part of the report’s chain of transmission, as anti-ʿAlids who might have fabricated the report.⁷¹ Pro-ʿAlids, meanwhile, identified ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ, a close confidant of Muʿāwiya, as the culprit.⁷² ʿAmr is depicted as instrumental to Muʿāwiya’s political victories first as a rebel against ʿAlī and al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī and finally as an Umayyad governor. ʿAlī reportedly denounced ʿAmr as sinful on repeated occasions and prayed for his punishment in supplications (*qunūt*) that he made in daily worship.⁷³ Most Sunnīs did not follow suit in censuring ʿAmr, since he was a Companion of the Prophet. However, some prominent Sunnīs, such as al-Nasāʾī (d. 303/915) and Abū al-Fidāʾ (d. 732/1331), refrained from venerating him because of his opposition to ʿAlī.⁷⁴ At least in the Umayyad period, transmitters generally identified Abū Ṭālib’s family as the subject of the *ḥadīth*. However, scholars who read al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* report that they frequently found Abū Ṭālib’s name deleted from the report. Since al-Bukhārī himself states that his informant found the clan’s name omitted in his source, it is clear that deletions began to occur at least one generation before al-Bukhārī, though the precise point in time when copies of al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* gained or lost the name cannot be pinned down. Extant copies of the work no longer contain Abū Ṭālib’s name in full.

The testimony⁷⁵ of al-Bukhārī’s informant suggests that Ghundar’s book of *ḥadīth* once carried Abū Ṭālib’s name in full, but either Ghundar or a copyist of his book deleted the second part of the name, leaving the ʿAbū intact (Text B). The person responsible for the deletion probably considered the report anti-ʿAlid in tone and offensive to the Ṭālibids (the descendants of ʿAlī, ʿAqīl and Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib). As the Prophet’s kinsfolk, the Ṭālibids possessed great social capital in early Islamic history, to the point that they threatened ʿAbbāsīd claims to power.⁷⁶ Transmitters who sought to convey the report’s lesson that allegiance to the faith should trump family ties, but had qualms about its anti-Ṭālibid tone, transmitted the text with either a lacuna or the anonymous ʿAbū so-and-so (*fulān*). Neither Abū Bakr

⁷⁰Al-ʿAynī, *ʿUmdat al-qārī*, xxii, p. 94; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-bārī*, x, p. 351.

⁷¹Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-bārī*, x, p. 352.

⁷²Ibn Abī ʿl-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ*, iv, pp. 64, xii, p. 88.

⁷³Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, ii, pp. 127, 352; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iv, pp. 34, 37, 52, 81; Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* (Beirut, 1991), iv, pp. 201–202.

⁷⁴Abū ʿl-Fidāʾ, *al-Mukhtaṣar fī akhbār al-bashar = Tārīkh Abī al-Fidāʾ* (Beirut, 1919), i, p. 186 (for a report from al-Shāfiʿī that identifies ʿAmr and three others as Companions whose testimonies are rejected); al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, xiv, p. 133.

⁷⁵Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vii, p. 73.

⁷⁶Crone, *God’s Rule*, pp. 87–93; Amikam Elad, *The Rebellion of Muhammad al-Naqṣ al-Zakiyya in 145/762: Ṭālibīs and Early ʿAbbāsīds in Conflict* (Leiden, 2016); Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, pp. 33–48.

b. al-‘Arabī nor Ibn Ḥajar had problems in accepting the authenticity of the report. The latter reasoned that the *ḥadīth* cut ties only between the Prophet and non-Muslim Ṭālibids.⁷⁷ As previously mentioned, pro-‘Alids such as Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd considered the report an Umayyad fabrication.

Finally, in its third form (Text C), the report refers to the family of Abū Bayāḍ (‘Father of blank space’). This version arose, as described earlier, from copyists’ misreading of notes left in the text to indicate a lacuna (*bayāḍ*) after the word ‘Abū’ and their conclusion that the Prophet spoke of a clan named Abū Bayāḍ. The three forms of the *ḥadīth* appeared can be summarised thus:

Text A: the complete *ḥadīth*:

“The family of Abū Ṭālib are no allies of mine.”
 “The descendants of Abū Ṭālib are no allies of mine.”⁷⁸

Text B: a censored version:

“The family of Abū _____ are no allies of mine.”
 “The descendants of Abū _____ are no allies of mine.”
 “The family of Abū *so-and-so* are no allies of mine.”

Text C: misreading of *bayāḍ* as a name:

“The family of Abū Bayāḍ are no allies of mine.”

Emendation

Copyists and scholars emended *ḥadīth* that they considered objectionable in at least three ways: by obscuring the identity of a Companion, by omitting reported speech or by emending key words. As for the first method, if a *ḥadīth* seemed to depict a Companion in a negative light, his identity might be obscured. For example, in the *ḥadīth* discussed in the previous section, the clan of Abū Ṭālib became “Abū so-and-so”. In another case, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644) curses Samura b. Jundab (d. 60/680) for selling intoxicants.⁷⁹ In the recension of al-Bukhārī, Samura’s name is omitted and the report consistently refers to him as “so-and-so” (*fulān*), giving no indication that the person selling intoxicants had been a Companion.⁸⁰ In a few anti-Umayyad *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet allegedly condemns Mu‘āwiya as evil, Mu‘āwiya’s name is also replaced with “so-and-so”.⁸¹

In another case, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1176) note that when Marwān b. al-Ḥakam became the governor of Medina, he would censure and ritually curse ‘Alī every

⁷⁷ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī*, x, pp. 352–354.

⁷⁸ Ibn Ḥajar claims to have found a variant in Abū Nu‘aym’s *Mustakhraj* that had *banī Abī Ṭālib*, see Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī*, x, p. 352.

⁷⁹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, i, p. 25.

⁸⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iii, p. 40.

⁸¹ For the uncensored reports, see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, (ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut, 1979), v, pp. 126–127; Ibn Abī ‘l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ*, xv, p. 176; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Majrūlūm min al-muḥaddithūn wa’l-ḍu‘afā’ wa’l-matrūkīn* (Mecca, 1970), i, pp. 157, 250. For reports in which Mu‘āwiya’s name is replaced with *fulān*, see Ibn ‘Adī, *al-Kāmil fī ḍu‘afā’ al-rijāl* (Beirut, 1988), iii, p. 419; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, lix, p. 155; Abū Nu‘aym Iṣbahānī, *Dhikr akhbār Iṣbahān* (Leiden, 1934), ii, p. 114.

Friday.⁸² The name of this Umayyad governor (and future caliph) was omitted in other recensions where he commands others to join him in cursing 'Alī.⁸³ Al-Bukhārī included a heavily redacted version of the report in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.⁸⁴ In al-Bukhārī's report, the name of the governor and his demand that others curse 'Alī are omitted. However, when a witness complains of the incident to a revered Companion, Sahl b. Sa'd al-Anṣārī (d. c. 91/710), Sahl consoles the person by explaining why one should not be offended by the governor's custom of referring to 'Alī as Abū Turāb. Al-Bukhārī's redacted report is indicative of how denigrating statements in one version may be omitted elsewhere. Unlike the reports of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Ibn 'Asākir, which quoted the words of the governor directly, the governor's speech is fully excised in al-Bukhārī's account. Instead, a witness mentions only that the governor referred to 'Alī as Abū Turāb. The report is sanitised of its anti-'Alid historical context.

There are reports in which Mu'āwiya and Marwān censure and curse 'Alī from the pulpits and in the presence of 'Alī's own sons.⁸⁵ This led 'Alids to avoid attending certain worship services at the mosque. Al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī, for example, would wait until Marwān was finished with his Friday sermon before entering the mosque to join the community in congregational worship.⁸⁶ Marwān also alienated the family of Abū Bakr when he publicly censured 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr (d. 53/673) for refusing to recognise Yazīd as Mu'āwiya's heir apparent. As Marwān delivered his speech on the merits of Mu'āwiya's son, 'Abd al-Raḥmān angrily replied that the caliphate was not an institution governed by dynastic succession like the kingdoms of Rome and Persia.⁸⁷ Marwān responded by claiming that Q46:17 was revealed as a critique of 'Abd al-Raḥmān's insolence and unruliness as a young man. When 'Abd al-Raḥmān angrily responded that such a claim was slander, 'Ā'isha comes to the aid of her brother and corroborates him, arguing that the verse had nothing to do with him. When 'Abd al-Raḥmān reminds the congregation that the Prophet once cursed (and exiled) Marwān's father, Marwān orders his arrest and 'Abd al-Raḥmān flees from the mosque to avoid capture.⁸⁸ Al-Bukhārī omits all of 'Abd al-Raḥmān's fiery words to Marwān. In al-Bukhārī's version of the *ḥadīth*, his likening the Umayyads to Roman and Persian rulers and reference to the Prophet's curse is replaced with a vague note that 'Abd al-Raḥmān "said some things to him".⁸⁹

Al-Bukhārī's proclivity for transmitting reports in which objectionable material is omitted can also be seen in cases where 'Alī appears too Shī'ī for a Sunnī audience. Multiple sources,

⁸² Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-'Ilal*, iii, p. 176; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, lvii, p. 243; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa'l-nihāya*, viii, p. 284.

⁸³ Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, ii, p. 446; al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *Ma'rīfat 'ulūm al-ḥadīth*, p. 211; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, xlii, p. 17; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vii, pp. 123–124.

⁸⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, pp. 207–208.

⁸⁵ Abū 'l-Faraj al-Isbahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭalībīyyīn*, (ed.) Kāzīm Muẓaffar (Najaf, 1965), p. 46; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, v, p. 113; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, iii, p. 184; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-kabīr*, iii, p. 85; Nūr al-Dīn al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id wa-manba' al-fawā'id* (Beirut, 1988), v, p. 240.

⁸⁶ Al-Būṣayrī, *Mukhtaṣar itihāf al-sāda* (Beirut, 1996), v, p. 503; Ibn Ḥajar 'Asqalānī, *Maṭālib al-'Āliya* (Riyadh, 1998), xviii, p. 267; Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *Taḥlīl al-janān wa-'l-lisān 'an thalab Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān*, (Ṭantā, 1992), p. 210.

⁸⁷ Al-'Aynī, *'Umdat al-qārī*, XIX, p. 169; Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* (Beirut, 1991), IV, pp. 335–336; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, iii, pp. 506–507; al-Nasā'ī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, vi, p. 459.

⁸⁸ Al-'Aynī, *'Umdat al-qārī*, XIX, p. 169; al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, 5:241; Ibn Abī Ḥatīm al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, p. 3295; al-Suyūṭī *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vi, p. 41.

⁸⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vi, p. 42. In some recensions, it is also 'Ā'isha who testifies that the Prophet cursed Marwān's father, see al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, iv, p. 481.

including Muslim's (d. 261/875) *Ṣaḥīḥ* and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī's (d. 211/827) *Muṣannaf*, narrate 'Umar's dismay that 'Alī and 'Abbās considered Abū Bakr and himself unjust (*ẓālim*) or sinful (*āthim*) in their decision to disinherit Hāshimids from the Prophet and convert the latter's estates into public endowments.⁹⁰ These two prominent Hāshimids are portrayed as holding opinions of the first two caliphs that would be considered quite offensive, Shī'ī and incendiary to a Sunnī audience. Al-Bukhārī transmits versions of the report in which the views of 'Alī and 'Abbās are not explicitly stated; rather, it is vaguely noted that they used to claim "this and that" (*kadhā wa-kadhā*) about Abū Bakr.⁹¹ In another recension of al-Bukhārī, neither 'Alī nor 'Abbās voice any objection to the ruling of Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Their offensive views regarding the caliphs are completely omitted.⁹²

In some cases, *ḥadīth* may have been emended so that negative words about a Companion were transformed into positive ones. 'Alī benefited from this third type of emendation when early transmitters reported that 'Ā'isha criticised 'Alī's conduct in the *Ifk* incident. She reportedly said, "He behaved badly in my affair".⁹³ Some transmitters changed *kāna musī'an* to *kāna musallam*, with the effect that 'Ā'isha now praised 'Alī as free (*musallam*) of any wrongdoing in the matter.⁹⁴ Consequently, depending on the version they received and their own sensibilities, scholars taught al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* with either version of the text. Published editions of al-Bukhārī's work contain the positive *musallam*, but many scholars in the Mamlūk period still possessed copies in which 'Alī was censured as *musī'*. The rehabilitation of 'Alī played an important role in the gradual shift in the interpretation of this report. In the Umayyad period, an 'Uthmānī such as al-Zuhūrī had no qualms in saying that 'Alī had treated 'Ā'isha unfairly in the *Ifk* incident, but centuries later, after 'Alī's retroactive acceptance as an 'Uthmānī, it was unthinkable to acknowledge that he had ever been portrayed as an antagonist of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, or 'Ā'isha. Thus, later Sunnīs took for granted that 'Ā'isha described 'Alī as *musallam*, not *musī'*, in the *Ifk* incident.

Circulation of Counter reports

Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections included contributions from 'Alī's partisans and detractors alike in their construction of an image of 'Alī that was neither entirely evil nor fully pure. Rather, 'Alī appeared as a normal human being, subject to the same challenges and temptations as everyone else. This balancing effect may not have been coincidental: the content of certain reports suggests that when 'Alī's detractors encountered a *ḥadīth* about his merits, they would narrate a counter report to contradict it.

As noted earlier, some anti-'Alids (*nawāṣīb*), such as Ḥarīz b. 'Uthmān, cited Marwānids as their authorities for emending a famous *ḥadīth* that described 'Alī as the *Hārūn* (Aaron) of the community; in the emended version, he became its *Qārūn* (Korah, who rebelled against Moses). In this case, it is clear that anti-'Alids were engaged in circulating a report that contradicted a well-known merit of 'Alī. Other examples of counter reports are slightly more

⁹⁰ Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, v, pp. 470–471; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, v, pp. 152–153.

⁹¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vi, p. 191, viii, p. 147.

⁹² Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, p. 44; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, iii, p. 82.

⁹³ Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, iii, p. 52; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, ii, p. 160; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, iv, p. 73; Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madīna*, i, p. 337; al-Suyūfī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, v, p. 32.

⁹⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, v, p. 60; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī*, vii, p. 336.

subtle.⁹⁵ ‘Alī’s partisans often portrayed him as a saint who worshipped God abundantly and greatly resembled the Prophet in his habits of worship.⁹⁶ But according to other reports, ‘Alī led prayers while intoxicated in the lifetime of the Prophet and in a state of major ritual impurity as caliph.⁹⁷ Al-Bukhārī and others narrate a report in which ‘Alī annoys the Prophet by declining his invitation to join him in prayer.⁹⁸ These reports appear to contradict the image of ‘Alī as a devout worshipper and support the Umayyad image of ‘Alī as someone who did not engage in daily worship.⁹⁹

When ‘Alī married Fāṭima, the Prophet reportedly congratulated him for having been selected by God to marry the Prophet’s daughter.¹⁰⁰ Marriage to the Prophet’s daughter was undoubtedly a great honour and an indication of ‘Alī’s stature in the Prophet’s eyes. Since Fāṭima was considered a woman of great piety, uniquely honoured by God and her father, she required a spouse of equal calibre. Thus, some pro-‘Alid *ḥadīth* assert that had it not been for ‘Alī, Fāṭima would never have found a suitable partner.¹⁰¹ However, as the examples discussed earlier in this article indicate, there were counter reports that depicted ‘Alī as a bad husband to Fāṭima.

According to some *ḥadīth*, the Prophet commanded everyone in his community to close their private entrances to his mosque.¹⁰² The only exception was granted to ‘Alī, Fāṭima and their two sons, who could enter the mosque through their private entrance at any time, even in a state of major ritual impurity (*janāba*).¹⁰³ Pro-‘Alids and Shī‘īs understood these reports as further confirmation of the exceptional purity of the Prophet’s household. The dispensation also offered a practical benefit: it allowed the family easy access to the Prophet’s home. They could pass through the mosque even in a state of major ritual impurity without angering God or His Prophet.

As Hossein Modarressi has pointed out, the same merits that were ascribed to ‘Alī in pro-‘Alid circles were also ascribed to the first three caliphs in ‘Uthmānī circles.¹⁰⁴ Thus, in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the permission given to ‘Alī and Fāṭima to keep their entrance to the Prophet’s mosque open was given to Abū Bakr instead.¹⁰⁵ The *ḥadīth* granting Abū Bakr the same privilege may thus be viewed as a counter

⁹⁵ Hypothetically, texts could have circulated independently of one another or the less flattering reports about ‘Alī could be more ancient than the ones in his praise.

⁹⁶ Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, ii, p. 180; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, i, pp. 338–390; Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa al-Naṣībī, *Maqālib al-su’ul*, p. 129 (where ‘Alī is compared to Christ in his worship).

⁹⁷ Ḥabīb ibn Abī Thābit (d. 119/737) narrates reports in which ‘Alī accidentally prays in a state of major impurity and another in which he leads prayer intoxicated, see al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, iv, p. 305; ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Ṣan‘ānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, (ed.) Ḥabīb al-Rahmān al-A‘zamī (Beirut, 1970), ii, p. 350.

⁹⁸ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, i, pp. 77, 91, 112; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ii, pp. 43, viii, pp. 155, 190; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ii, p. 187.

⁹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, iv, p. 30 (where Syrians state that they had heard that ‘Alī did not pray).

¹⁰⁰ Al-Haythamī, *Majma’ al-zawā’id*, ix, p. 204; Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī, *al-Riyāḍ al-naḍira fī manāqib al-‘ashara* (Beirut, 1984), iii, pp. 145–146; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-kabīr*, x, p. 156.

¹⁰¹ Abū Shujā‘ Shīrīya al-Daylamī, *al-Firdaws bi-ma’thūr al-khiṭāb*, (ed.) M. Zaghlūl (Beirut, 1986), iii, p. 373 (read *li-Fāṭima for li-nāṣiḥ*); Sulaymān Qundūzī, *Yanābī’ al-mawadda* (Qum, 1995), ii, pp. 67, 80, 286.

¹⁰² Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, v, p. 305; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vii, p. 500; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, iv, p. 369; al-Nasā’ī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, v, pp. 118–119; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-kabīr*, xii, p. 78.

¹⁰³ Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, vii, p. 65.

¹⁰⁴ Hossein Modarressi, “Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur’ān: A Brief Survey,” *Studia Islamica* LXXXVII (1993), pp. 16–22.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Nasā’ī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, v, p. 35; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, iv, p. 254; Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, v, p. 270; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vii, p. 108.

report to the *ḥadīth* about 'Alī. In addition, 'Uthmānīs further narrated *ḥadīth* that portrayed 'Alī as afflicted with frequent seminal discharge (*madhy*).¹⁰⁶ Reports about this malady may be understood as 'Uthmānī explanations for the dispensation that he received to enter the Prophet's mosque even in a state of ritual impurity.

The Principle of Charity

An ideological commitment to belief in the righteousness of all Companions led many scholars either to reject or to charitably interpret texts that seemed to present Companions in a negative light. Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), for example, argues that the man who killed the Prophet's revered Companion 'Ammār b. Yāsir should receive a reward from God for his deed.¹⁰⁷ Ibn Ḥazm explains that the killer Abū 'l-Ghādiya had also been a Companion and, thus, his deed should be charitably understood as the error of an expert (*mujtahid*) engaged in religious hermeneutics. Elsewhere, I have discussed the reception of canonical reports that depict 'Alī as delaying his pledge of allegiance to Abū Bakr.¹⁰⁸ These texts were reinterpreted to deny that 'Alī ever questioned the first caliph's preeminence or challenged his candidacy. Accounts in which 'Alī explicitly complains about the succession of his predecessors never entered the canon and were largely rejected as forged.¹⁰⁹

Both Mu'āwiya and 'Alī benefitted from the principle of charity and the tendency to defend all Companions as righteous. Influential scholars such as al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) proposed charitable reinterpretations for canonical *ḥadīth* that appear to show Mu'āwiya cursing 'Alī or encouraging others to do so, while other scholars rejected such texts altogether.¹¹⁰ The *ḥadīth* discussed above, "The family of Abū Ṭālib are no allies of mine", is another example: the text was read to refer hypothetically to non-Muslims in 'Alī's family.¹¹¹ Such generous interpretations were irrelevant to early 'Uthmānīs and pro-Umayyads who never recognised 'Alī and his descendants as Muslims but rather condemned them as apostates and evil criminals. Consequently, charitable interpretations of the *ḥadīth* came to play a key role in safeguarding the honour of 'Alī and his sons after their rehabilitation in Sunnism.

From Three Caliphs to Four

The early 'Uthmāniyya supported not only the caliphate of the first three caliphs but also the insurrection of 'Ā'isha, Ṭalḥa and Zubayr against 'Alī. 'Uthmānīs such as Wurayza b. Muḥammad al-Ḥimṣī (d. 281/894) reportedly refused to recognise 'Alī as a legitimate caliph because they believed that such recognition would necessarily entail opposition to

¹⁰⁶ Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, i, pp. 155–157; Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan*, i, p. 53; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, i, pp. 42, 52; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, i, p. 115; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, i, pp. 80, 87, 108; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, i, p. 169.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-Fiṣal fī 'l-milal wa 'l-ahwā' wa 'l-niḥal* (Cairo, 1904), iv, p. 125.

¹⁰⁸ Husayn, "The Memory of 'Alī", pp. 103–109.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 122–133.

¹¹⁰ See al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, xv, pp. 175–176; cf. Suhayla Ḥammād, "Mu'āwiya raḍiya Allāh 'anhu al-muftarā 'alayhi," *al-Madīna*, 10 April 2012, <https://www.al-madina.com/article/148014/> (accessed 13 May 2019).

¹¹¹ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī*, x, pp. 352–354.

and censure of the leaders who fought ‘Alī at the Battle of the Camel.¹¹² The ‘Uthmānī shift to accepting ‘Alī as a legitimate caliph probably began in Kūfa and Baghdad. Scott Lucas has argued for the possibility that early theologians who were Zaydīs or Baghdādī Mu‘tazilīs “contributed to the profound respect for ‘Alī and his family found in the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal, *Muṣannaḥ* of Ibn Abī Shayba, and *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim that seems stronger than the fourth-place status accorded him by [later] Sunnī doctrine”.¹¹³ It should be added that al-Ma‘mūn (r. 198–218/813–33) played a key role in initiating public debates about the place of ‘Alī in Islamic history by proclaiming *tafḍīl ‘Alī* to be orthodoxy in 211/826 and once more the following year.¹¹⁴ The caliph invited *ḥadīth* scholars and Mu‘tazilīs who opposed *tafḍīl ‘Alī* to debate the issue with him in his court.¹¹⁵ Al-Ma‘mūn undoubtedly encouraged al-Jāhīz (d. 255/869), Abū Ja‘far al-Iskāfī (d. 240/854) and other theologians to discuss the issue of *tafḍīl ‘Alī* in their literary work. During the reign of al-Ma‘mūn and in the years that followed, these scholars carefully considered evidence indicating ‘Alī’s distinguished status. The same can be said about Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal who made the conscious decision to locate and preserve hundreds of Kūfan *ḥadīth* about the merits of ‘Alī. All of these figures also resided in Baghdad, where they encountered each other’s opinions. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal may have accepted *ḥadīth* about ‘Alī’s merits from pro-‘Alid transmitters in Baghdad after conceding to the arguments of pro-‘Alid theologians in the city. For example, probably to the dismay of the city’s ‘Uthmānīs, he reportedly agreed with proponents of *tafḍīl ‘Alī* that no Companion possessed more merits than ‘Alī.¹¹⁶ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s decision to transmit hundreds of anecdotes in which the Prophet singles out ‘Alī for praise bears witness to his assessment.¹¹⁷ He also reportedly began arguing for the need to accept ‘Alī as a legitimate fourth caliph among his ‘Uthmānī peers.¹¹⁸ Such advocacy would have involved some acceptance of the historical narratives of ‘Alī’s partisans. Although Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal was not an outright proponent of *tafḍīl ‘Alī*, his acceptance of pro-‘Alid *ḥadīth* led him to transmit reports associated with this doctrine.¹¹⁹

Sunnī scholars transmitted reports that explicitly articulated the merits of Companions both generally and specifically, but Lucas suggests that the most enduring achievement of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal was an implicit polemic: the vindication of all Companions who participated in the civil wars that engulfed the community after the Prophet’s death. By including them as important sources of *ḥadīth* in his *Musnad*, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal acquitted these personalities of charges of impiety.¹²⁰ The inclusion of Companions who fought against ‘Alī in the *Musnad* indicated that despite reports that cast their political careers in a negative light and

¹¹²Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* (Beirut, 1970), i, p. 393. See also ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Uqaylī, *Mu‘jam nauwāsib al-muḥaddithīn* (Karbalā’, 2014), pp. 46–47.

¹¹³Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, p. 284.

¹¹⁴Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta‘rīkh*, 7:188. See also *E.I.*, s.v. “al-Ma‘mūn” (M. Rekaya).

¹¹⁵Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, v, pp. 349–359.

¹¹⁶Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Isṭī‘āb fī ma‘rifat al-aṣḥāb* (Beirut, 1992), iii, p. 1115; Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī, *al-Riyāḍ al-nadīra*, iii, p. 188.

¹¹⁷For example, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍā’il Amīr al-Mu‘minīn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib*.

¹¹⁸Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī*, vii, p. 47; Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, i, p. 393. See also Wilferd Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 223–228.

¹¹⁹Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍā’il Amīr al-Mu‘minīn*, 147; *Kitāb Faḍā’il al-ṣaḥāba*, (ed.) W. ‘Abbās (Beirut, 1983), ii, pp. 564, 671.

¹²⁰Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, p. 285.

despite the criticisms levied against them by pro-'Alid theologians, these Companions were nonetheless trustworthy sources of information about the life of the Prophet and his teachings. By the middle of the third/ninth century, 'Alī had also come to benefit from an emerging Sunnī orthodoxy that used the hermeneutical tools described in this article to delegitimise hostile depictions of him and appropriate him as the fourth caliph, extending the three-caliph model of the early 'Uthmāniyya. As others have noted, this acceptance of 'Alī's fourth place (*tarbī'* 'Alī) was an innovation for the 'Uthmāniyya of the third/ninth century.¹²¹

Conclusions

The image of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib that appeared in Sunnī ḥadīth collections produced after the beginning of the third/ninth century was as complex and composite as the compilers' sources. Anti-'Alids viewed 'Alī and his family with contempt, whereas to many pro-'Alids he was the most meritorious Muslim after the Prophet. A third group consisted of those who were ambivalent about 'Alī's personality and considered him a Companion no different from his peers. For example, Ibn Taymiyya argued that 'Alī possessed merits but also many shortcomings.¹²² He forcefully argued that 'Alī upset the Prophet and later waged war unnecessarily against his rivals.¹²³ Thus, 'Alī was responsible for civil strife in the community, though he was not evil.

Whereas pro-'Alids remembered 'Alī as someone who exercised independent judgment after the Prophet, later orthodoxy frequently portrayed him as agreeing with the positions of other authorities. 'Alī's variant opinions on political and religious questions were gradually replaced in reports about him with answers that affirmed Sunnī orthodoxy.

Various caliphs, from Mu'āwiya to al-Ma'mūn, were clearly invested in shaping public perceptions about 'Alī. While the Umayyads supported the circulation of tales that maligned him, al-Ma'mūn appears to have spurred 'Alī's rehabilitation in the community. The case studies in this article indicate the ways in which Sunnī scholars made use of their editorial privilege to reshape 'Alī's image: they transmitted selected versions of reports that omitted what they saw as controversial material and obfuscated certain sensitive elements of the narratives that they transmitted. In some cases, individuals resorted to outright deletion of particularly inflammatory words or passages when they were obliged to transmit such material. It is unclear to what extent copyists contributed to this revisionary process.

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¹²¹Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, i, p. 393. See also Afsaruddin, *Excellence*, pp. 16–18; Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, pp. 49–59, 169ff.; *E.I.*², s.v. "Imāma" (W. Madelung); "'Uthmāniyya" (P. Crone).

¹²²Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna*, v, p. 7.

¹²³*Ibid.*, iv, pp. 255, 384, 389, 392.