The Caliph and the Heretic
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Ibn Sabaʾ and the Origins of Shīʿism

By

Sean W. Anthony
For Susu Sweets, Little Red Ray Ruka, Jay Jay the Jetplane, and most of all for Catherine the Great
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book represents a revised version of my 2009 University of Chicago dissertation. I must, of course, acknowledge those foundations and institutions that provided considerable financial support during the writing of this work: the Martin Marty Center at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago and also the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation. However, it is the faces of the scholars and colleagues who aided and encouraged me along the way that are dearest to me. Indeed, it was my great fortune to have labored on this project from the very outset under an amazing group of scholars who dedicated a truly humbling amount of their time and energies to the project’s refinement. Firstly, Professor Wadād al-Qādī’s indefatigable dedication to the project accompanied and inspired me throughout, from its inception until its current form. In my mind and heart, she will always be without a peer as my advisor, editor, and (most of all) mentor. A great deal of thanks is also due to Professor Fred Donner, who contributed a great deal to the project as one its principal readers and, in particular, as a fellow compatriot in fighting the good fight to decipher the less-than-ideal Arabic prose of Sayf ibn ʿUmar. I was also quite honored to benefit from the guidance, critiques, and formidable erudition of Professor Wilferd Madelung, who kindly offered his considerable insights as a reader on my dissertation committee while serving as a visiting professor at the University of Chicago.

Many others deserve many thanks as well, such as Professor Taheera Qutbuddin, who aided me in the project as it got off the ground, and Professor Patricia Crone, who was always generous with both her insights and work during our conversations and correspondences. Matthew Pierce aided me immensely to improve the final version of the book. A special note of thanks and appreciation must be offered to the 2007–2008 fellows at the Marty Martin Center, with whom I shared my work and who shared their work with me in fruitful and stimulating discussions. In this regard, I must express special appreciation for and gratitude to the seminar’s irreplaceable and brilliant master of ceremonies, Professor William Schweiker. A note of thanks must be directed to Professor Margaret Mitchell, who encouraged me for her seminar on early Christian history to write a study on Sayf
ibn ‘Umar’s curious account of the Paul the Apostle, an account that would inexorably lead me to down the path towards ‘Abdallāh ibn Saba’.

My wife Catherine has been a constant source of support throughout the creation of this book and sacrificed much to see that my labors came to fruition. Her love and the orneriness of our children—Sawim, Suraya, and Julius—kept me sane throughout the times of leanness and hardship and kept me focused throughout times of plenty.
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TABARI, JAMI' 1 Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, JAMI' al-

TABARI, JAMI' 2 Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, JAMI' al-


WI Die Welt des Islams


WO Die Welt des Orients

WUNT Wissenschaftlichen Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

ZA Zeitschrift für Assyriologie

ZDMG Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft
INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the sect known as the Sabaʾīya, a sect traditionally classified by early and medieval Muslim heresiographers, regardless of sectarian loyalties, as the original manifestation of so-called extremist Shiʿism (al-shīʿa al-ghāliya) and even the very fount of Shiʿite belief itself. This study is equally concerned with the legends surrounding the sect’s infamous, founding personality, most widely known as ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ, or simply “Ibn Sabaʾ”. At first glance, this sect and its eponymous founder may seem to belong to only the most obscure and arcane corners of Islamic history and, therefore, to be of purely antiquarian interest. As fate would have it, however, the Sabaʾīya and Ibn Sabaʾ stand at the heart of a host of the most salient and intractable problems of early Islamic historiography. This is in part because Ibn Sabaʾ is a fixture of Islam’s earliest years—the era that is, not without some irony, referred to simultaneously as the era of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (al-khulafāʾ al-rāshidūn) and the era the First Civil War (al-fitna al-kubrā). Inextricably linked to this formative period, Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya remain deeply entangled within the web of the historiographical enigmas associated with writing the history of Islamic origins. Yet, the historical importance of the sect and its founder also arises from the fact that recurrent interest in Ibn Sabaʾ and his sect among Muslim religious scholars—whether in works of theology, heresiography, or history—thrived for centuries. This ensured the sect’s continued relevance for a wide spectrum of religious concerns and anxieties salient not only to the earliest articulations of Muslim identity but also the more mature developments thereof. As a result, Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya have remained permanent fixtures within the Muslim debates over sectarianism and dogmatic purity, particularly as they unfolded and evolved amidst the religio-political upheavals and socio-historical transformations of the first four centuries after the hijra.

As with most historical persons and phenomena dating from the earliest years of the Islamic religion, there exists no indisputably contemporary witness to Ibn Sabaʾ and his activities. By contrast, from the 2nd/8th century onwards the quantity of portrayals depicting the life and events of Ibn Sabaʾ multiply to quite a considerable number. More
anecdotal than biographical, these accounts also contradict each other a great deal and, as a result, pose manifold historical puzzles that are not easily resolved. Hence, to hazard an early, preparatory summary of who Ibn Sabaʾ was and what the Sabaʾīya believed risks arbitrarily prejudicing one account over a myriad, rival accounts. Indeed, a premature, prejudicial favoritism for one source or tradition over others continues to blight modern treatments of Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya today. In order to avoid repeating past errors, we shall begin, therefore, with a broader question: Why are there so many accounts of Ibn Sabaʾ, and why is he so important to early Islamic historiography and heresiography?

In the view of many early and medieval Muslim scholars, Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya stand at the nexus of the earliest incarnations of Islamic sectarianism. As such, Ibn Sabaʾ almost invariably appears as the nemesis of either one or two of the early community’s caliphs and as instigating some form of reprehensible or refractory innovation against them. (This caliph is usually the fourth of those whom the Sunnīs revere as ‘rightly-guided’ caliphs—i.e. the Prophet’s son-in-law, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib—but his predecessor, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, features grandly in one of the more well-known accounts, too. Lesser known accounts even place in conflicts with the Umayyad dynast Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam or the Shīʿī imāms ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn and Muḥammad al-Bāqir.) For those medieval scholars of a non-Shīʿī disposition (often Sunnīs or Muʿtazila, but not necessarily so), Ibn Sabaʾ represents the very fount of ʿAlid and Shīʿī sectarianism and, thus, the leader of the party responsible for first despoiling the original, pristine unity (Ar., al-jamāʿa) of the primitive Muslim community. In anti-Shīʿite polemic, he is reviled as the first to regard ʿAlī as the sole successor to and inheritor of Muḥammad’s prophetic legacy (i.e., his waṣiʿ); the first to curse ʿAlī’s three caliphal predecessors, Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān as usurpers; and the first to claim that ʿAlī possessed a unique, even esoteric, knowledge of the Qurʾān. For Imāmi-Shīʿī scholars, however, he is not a founding figure but rather the quintessential ‘extremist’ heretic (ghālī; pl. ghulāt). Summarily denouncing Ibn Sabaʾ as a depraved

1 Lit., “one who exceed the bounds,” here with the sense of exceeding the bounds of proper belief (cf. Q. 5:77). It has become a convention to translate the term into English as ‘extremists’, which has the unfortunate, and unintended, connation of terrorism given the contemporary climate. The other conventional, much less felicitous, translation in English is ‘exaggerators’. Unfortunately, this translation loses the sense
corrupter of the early Shi‘i creed, Shi‘i theologians thus vitiate him as a veritable icon of ghulūw (a term in the Shi‘ite context that usually denotes Ibn Saba’’s excessive veneration for ‘Alī as immortal or divine) and as the progenitor of all the ghulāt-sects.

Ibn Saba’ is, for this reason, nearly universally reviled as a noxious religiopath. He subsequently becomes a historiographical obsession because he stands at the pathological locus of Islam’s earliest sectarian moment. He is not merely Islam’s first heretic, but also (in a more literary sense) its most nefarious—its arch-heretic.

This work is necessarily, therefore, also a study about the origins of Shi‘ism and the historiography thereof. While the present study makes no claims to having achieved a comprehensive account of early Shi‘ism—of delineating and distilling the early Shi‘i Gestalt as it were—many of the fundamental issues at stake for early Shi‘ism are necessarily on the table when discussing Ibn Saba’ and the Saba‘iya. Although formidable, this aspect of our study is also unavoidable inasmuch as Ibn Saba’ and the Saba‘iya pertain so vividly in both modern and medieval literature to the origins of the religious reverence for Muhammad’s household (ahl al-bayt), his clan (the Banū Hāshim), and the person and descendents of his son-in-law ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

Still, the persona of Ibn Saba’ is a perplexing phenomenon for the historiography of early Shi‘ism, for he embodies many of the contradictions and tensions characterizing Shi‘ism during the first three centuries of its development. One could also say that he serves as a type of synecdoche for the enigmas posed by early Shi‘ism to any modern historian. Ibn Saba’, most accounts claim, was a Jewish convert to Islam; his reverence for Muhammad’s son-in-law ‘Alī was allegedly derived from his attempt to conceptualize ‘Alī’s role vis-à-vis Muhammad within a framework adopted from biblical and Judaic paradigms concerning the succession of Joshua to Moses. This innovation of Ibn Saba’—if it indeed was his innovation—was and still is conventionally regarded by Muslims hostile to Shi‘ism as a Judaizing contagion threatening to undermine autochthonous, Islamic conceptions of legitimate leadership. Many traditions assert as well that Ibn Saba’ denied ‘Alī’s death and professed that he would return to usher in a chiliastic utopia. Such traditions raise profound questions concerning the apocalyptic roots of

of malice implied in ghālī and extremist, since a ghālī, is culpable of ghulūw—i.e. going to harmful excesses in belief—and not exaggeration per se.
early Shi‘i reverence for the Prophet’s clan (the Banū Hāshim) as well as ‘Alī and his descendants—not to mention the palpable Jewish influences on Shi‘i eschatology. Other medieval Muslim scholars further claim that Ibn Saba’ regarded ‘Alī not only as imām but also as God-incarnate, raising profound questions as to the place of esotericism and the belief in the supra-human powers and identity of the imāms in early Shi‘i thought. Hence, although Ibn Saba’ is a figure often pushed to the margins, the controversies surrounding him stand at the center of the most important developments of early Shi‘i beliefs.

Numerous Orientalists and Islamicists have already undertaken several studies of considerable consequence for any investigation into Ibn Saba’ and the Saba‘iya. All of these studies serve as a reminder of the salience of the topic in the study of Islamic origins. Among these scholars, one can mention such pioneers and luminaries of the field as Julius Wellhausen, Israel Friedländer, Leone Caetani, Heinz Halm, and Josef van Ess. Obviously, one may wonder whether there remains any more to be said on the issue given the pedigree of previous studies, but in fact much more does remain to be said, as I hope to demonstrate. This is mostly due to the fact that the above scholars rarely treated the sect and its founder as a topic of study on its own terms, being contented to discuss the aspects or features of the sect’s beliefs and founder (and/or the historical traditions about them) only insofar as they relate to other interests. Not surprisingly, then, one would search in vain to locate an occidental monograph on Ibn Saba’ and the Saba‘iya. Although a concentrated, focused effort to analyze all the materials relevant to Ibn Saba’ has indeed been attempted in Western scholarship, this was done only once—by Israel Friedländer—and that

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2 Marshall G. S. Hodgson emphasizes the embarrassment for early Shi‘a created by Ibn Saba’ and his ilk (see “How did the Early Shi‘a Become Sectarian?” JAOS 75 [1955], 2 ff.), but the story he presents as evidence of an attitude contemporary with ‘Ali, in fact, dates to centuries after the imām’s death.

3 Prolegomena zur ältesten Geschichte des Islams, in: Skizzen und Vorarbeiten (Berlin, 1889), vi, 1–160.


5 Annali dell’Islam (Milan, 1918), viii, 42 ff. et passim.

6 Das islamische Gnosis: Die extreme Schia und ʿAlawiten (Zürich, 1982), 33–42.

was over a century ago. The considerable time that has passed since Friedländer’s admirable attempt has brought with it the discovery, publication, and wider accessibility of numerous sources unavailable to him. These sources (not to mention the studies they inspired) have since transformed the study of early Islam profoundly and, moreover, bear within them the possibility of shedding considerable new light upon the origins, development, and spread of the accounts of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Saba’, the Sabaʾiya, and their religious beliefs and practices in ways hitherto unrealized or unappreciated.

This study has been structured with the express purpose of elucidating the portrayals of Ibn Sabaʾ and, subsequently, the Sabaʾiya that remain enshrined within medieval Islamic literary sources. These sources are diverse, encompassing historical annals, prosopographical compendia, compilations of belle-lettres, and treatises of theological and heresiological dispositions. The considerable demands that these diverse genres exact from the historian require flexibility in both approach and methodology. As a result, the reader of this study will find that, although essentially united in its topical aim, the various chapters of the present work often assume considerably different approaches depending on the materials given the most preeminent place in any given chapter.

My approach to the body of materials I shall hereafter refer to as ‘the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition’ divides into three main parts. Part I of this study marks our first foray into the tradition and begins with the most well-known and most influential (in modern times at least) portrayal of Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾiya: that of the 2nd/9th century Kūfan historian/akhbārī Sayf ibn ʿUmar al-Tamīmī. Chapter 1 sets the groundwork by reviewing the place of Sayf b. ʿUmar in scholarly debates over early Muslim historiography, and chapters 1 and 2 explores Sayf’s utilization of Ibn Sabaʾ and his Sabaʾiya in his narrative of the caliphate of ʿUthmān and the events leading up to and culminating in the Battle of the Camel.

Sayf’s version of Ibn Sabaʾ enjoys an exceedingly prominent, and even notorious, place in the modern iterations of the Ibn Sabaʾ tale—a prominence and notoriety matched perhaps only by Sayf’s own place in the debates over the modern historiography of Islamic origins, more generally speaking. For this reason, I have accorded to his account the honor of first place in my study. This is despite the fact that the ‘Sayfian’ account of Ibn Sabaʾ, though extensive, is in reality quite idiosyncratic and often uncannily at odds with the broader Ibn Sabaʾ tradition.
as it came to coalesce over the centuries. Yet, the importance of Ibn Sabaʾ and Sabaʾiyya for comprehending Sayf’s historical corpus is paramount. Not only did Sayf’s obsession with Ibn Sabaʾ as the heretical provocateur of the early Islamic caliphate produce a substantial body of narratives about the heresiarch and his acolytes, their story within his narrative is, in fact, conterminous with the religious and ideological outlook characteristic of the broad strokes of his narratives of the first Muslim civil war, or fitna. His work is also exceptionally early, and given the recent discovery of an incomplete manuscript of his historical writings, it is also of revitalized importance insofar as his work was previously known only through the redactions of later authors. Thus, despite the tendentiousness of the Sayfian materials on Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾiyya, they provide an indispensable testimony to the earliest strata of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition as a whole.

Even though the Sayfian depiction of Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾiyya is fundamental to understanding the evolutionary trajectory of the overall tradition, a Sayfian baptism into the Ibn Sabaʾ lore by no means comes close to exhausting the ocean of extant Ibn Sabaʾ materials. Sayf’s materials, rather, represent one exceptional moment in this tradition’s evolution. To fully appreciate the significance of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition and the light it sheds on Shiʿism, particularly as it evolved from the 2nd/7th through 3rd/8th centuries, one requires a more comprehensive view that does not merely concentrate on a single author’s corpus. Hence, after addressing the unique problems posed by Sayf’s corpus, Part II of this study sets aside the Sayfian corpus in order to examine the origins and evolution of the medieval Muslim heresiographers’ and theologians’ diverse portrayals of Ibn Sabaʾ.

With this in mind, Chapters 4 through 6 broaden the focus considerably and examine the persona of Ibn Sabaʾ through the panoramic perspective of the evolution of a corpus of legends and tropes that form the structural features of the ‘Ibn Sabaʾ tradition’. In so doing, however, this section of the study focuses nearly exclusively on the persona of the heresiarch himself and the archetypal, narrative tropes that eventually gave rise to the portrayal of Ibn Sabaʾ as the founder of Shiʿism or, alternatively, of the Shiʿi ghulāt. These chapters have at their heart a twofold aim: 1) to map out the principal features of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition and 2) to establish a chronology of the tradition’s evolution as well as the origins of its earliest components. Our approach in these chapters, therefore, is both source- and tradition-critical. Chapter 6 in particular concludes with an attempt to evaluate
the historicity of the earliest extant materials on Ibn Sabaʾ and their significance for illuminating our understanding of early Shiʿism in light of the conclusions our analysis of the Ibn Sabaʾ lore.

Part III marks our final shift in methodological focus, turning away from source- and tradition-critical analyses towards a focused reconstruction of the history of the Sabaʾīya in the Umayyad period. Thus, chapter 7 takes up the issue of the Sabaʾīya as a sectarian movement removed from the considerable shadow cast by its eponymous founder. Gathering together a diverse corpus of materials attesting to the existence of groups and/or individuals known collectively as the Sabaʾīya, this chapter attempts to evaluate the historicity of the Sabaʾīya as they appear in the pages of early Muslim annals at various moments throughout the history of the Sufyānid era of the Umayyad caliphate and, subsequently, the Second Civil War (ca. 40–72/661–691). Our final aim, therefore, is to determine the identity of the Sabaʾīya, what ultimately comprised their earliest beliefs, and (inasmuch as it is possible) to surmise the ultimate fate of the sect and its influence on Shiʿism in the wake of the resurgence of Umayyad caliphate under the Marwānid dynasty after the Second Civil War.
CHAPTER ONE

IBN SABA’ AND THE SAYFIAN CORPUS

Of all the accounts of Ibn Saba’ and the Saba’īya discussed in the present study, an examination of the corpus of traditions redacted and compiled by the Kūfan akhbārī Abū ‘Abd Allâh Sayf ibn ‘Umar al-Usayyidī al-Tamīmī (d. ca. 180/796) occupies an unusually large space. Such extravagant treatment of this 2nd/8th-century historian’s corpus requires a modicum of justification, especially since, as I will eventually argue, the Sayfian corpus offers the historian little of value if one’s aim is to gain knowledge about the historical Saba’īya. Apart from the extant sections of his historical corpus, which cover the period beginning the ridda-wars during the caliphate of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (r. 11–13/632–4) and the events culminating in the cessation of hostilities after the Battle of the Camel in 36/656, Sayf ibn ‘Umar remains, and will likely always remain, somewhat of an unknown quantity in terms of his personal biography.1 The ḥadīth-critics preserve next to nothing with regard to biographical details and, as a general rule, tend to castigate Sayf as unreliable in his transmissions of prophetic ḥadīths, albeit while also lauding his importance for history.2 The Sayfian corpus stands as one of those uncanny examples wherein the text far outstrips the historical significance of its author. From the historian’s perspective, Sayf and the Sayfian corpus are virtually identical entities.

1 Even his death date, perhaps first surmised by Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) to have occurred during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–193/786–809), seems to be based on his location in the isnāds rather than any direct report about his life, as suggested by Fred M. Donner in “Sayf ibn ‘Umar,” EP, ix, 102a. It is curious to find mention of a certain Sayf al-Tamīmī as the subject of a legal dispute over divorce in Raqqā during the reign of the Umayyad caliph Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malīk while his son Sulaymān governed there in 121 a.h. See Abū Zakarīyā Yazīd ibn Muḥammad ibn Iyās al-Azdī, Taʾrikh al-Mawsīl, ed. ‘Ali Ḥabība (Cairo, 1968), 40.

2 Dhahabī regards him as a peer of al-Wāqidī in terms of historical writing, see Mizān al-iʿtīdāl fi naqd ʿilm al-rijāl, ed. ‘A. M. al-Bijāwī (Cairo, 1963), n, 255. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī states things most clearly, declaring Sayf to be “weak in ḥadīth but a pillar in history [daʿī fī ʾl-ḥadīth ʿumdatun fī l-taʾrīkh],” see Taḥrīr Taqrib al-tahdhib, eds. Sh. al-Arnaʿūt and B. ʿA. Maʿrūf (Beirut, 1997), 100 f.
Yet, our nescience with regard to Sayf’s biography does little in the way of recommending his corpus for thorough study, let alone of illuminating that corpus’ rather fanatical preoccupation with ‘Abd Allāh ibn Saba’ and the Sabaʾiya. The real justification comes from the nature and legacy of this akhbāriʾs work when viewed on its own terms. Along these lines, one may cite three principal reasons as to why the portrait of the Sabaʾiya and Ibn Sabaʾ constructed by Sayf merits such unique consideration. Firstly, the Sayfian accounts of the activities and beliefs of the sect and its eponymous founder abound with an exceedingly rich and uncannily vivid pallet of detail when compared with the sparser, more laconic accounts of the heresiographical tradition. Moreover, the Sayfian corpus yields a narrative unique in its presentation and content that, although virtually without parallel, conspicuously employs numerous leitmotifs and tropes present in the heresiographical tradition nonetheless, albeit while discarding others. Secondly, Sayf’s account has captured both the imagination and derision of modern historians (whether critical, nationalist, or confessional) to an extent that far exceeds what any rival accounts of Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾiya may boast. Sayf’s writings on Ibn Sabaʾ have, thus, spawned a vast literature and debate, particularly in the Arab world.3 While I have refrained from rehashing the more modern debates contained in many such works, their existence has at least informed the layout of this present study. Lastly, and most significantly, the relatively recent discovery and publication by Qasim al-Samarrai of a manuscript containing the fragmentary remains of Sayf’s writings in their original form provides us with the opportunity to engage his work, especially the materials on the Sabaʾiya, with a hitherto unparalleled level of access to his oeuvre. Until recent times, it has been impossible to read Sayf unmediated, for example, by the annalistic redaction of the historian Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) or other, later scholars who have for so long served modern scholarship as the primary bases of modern, source-critical research into the Sayfian corpus.

The earliest occidental studies of Sayf’s materials—especially those dating from the turn of the 19th century and undertaken by such pioneers of the field as Wellhausen, de Goeje, Caetani, and Brockelmann—emerged from an attempt to discern the sources used by the Sunnî historian Ṭabarî, the doyen of classical Islamic historical writing. The prognoses of these scholars concerning the remains of the Sayfian corpus redacted by Ṭabarî were surprisingly unanimous in their devaluation of Sayf’s materials as devoid of historical value. Generally speaking, they regarded the Sayfian corpus as a body of materials characterized by fantastic scenarios and implausible events that strained credulity and lacked any basis in historical reality. Dismissing Sayf as undeserving of any role in the repertoire of the modern historian and as an unreliable source for historical information, they regarded much of his material as merely tendentious, invented fictions laced with heavily ideological overtones.

Of these early scholars, Wellhausen proved to be the most articulate and sophisticated critic of Sayf’s writings in so far as his critique served also as a grounding for a broader methodological approach to the earliest narrative sources of the Islamic tradition, particularly the panorama of earlier historians’ materials that Ṭabarî redacted into his own history. 4 Comparing Sayf’s corpus of historical writings, which

4 Despite Wellhausen’s trenchant criticism of Sayf as a historian, he nonetheless accords to the Sabaʿiya a measure of historicity as well as the Jewish influences on their doctrines, which he equates with those influencing proto-Shi‘ism more generally speaking. See J. Wellhausen, Die religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien im alten Islam, Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologische-Historische Klasse, V/2 (Berlin, 1901), 89 ff. He finds warrant for doing so, despite the factitious legends attached to the sect and its founder, in the poetry of Āshā Hamdān, al-Sayyid al-Himyarī and Kuthayyir ʿAzza. In the end, Wellhausen regarded the Sabaʿiya as essentially identical with, although perhaps the earliest group of, those sects variously known as al-Kaysāniya and al-Mukhtāriya. He writes: “Was in den späteren Dogmengeschichten steht, deckt sich wesentlich damit; nur werden da zwischen Sabaiten, Kaisaniten, Muchtariten, etc. unberechtigte Unterschiede gemacht, denn nur die Name differiren” (ibid., 91 n. 6). Louis Massignon expressed a similar view (although in a manner couched in a dubious and idiosyncratic adaptation of later Ismāʿīlī terminology) in classifying the Sabaʿiya and the Kaysāniya both as ʿAyniya sects (i.e., those giving primacy to ʿAlī as imām over Muhammad as prophet); see his Salmān Pâk et les prémices spirituelles de l’Islam iranien (Tours, 1934), 37. In contrast to both Wellhausen and Massignon, W. Montgomery Watt rejects altogether the idea of any historical role being played in the formation of early Shi‘ism by the Sabaʿiya—stating, inaccurately, that “it is suspicious that no one is named as belonging to the sect [i.e., the Sabaʿiya] except ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʿ...and an obscure companion Rushayd al-Hajari. Because of this, too, no continuity can be shown between the Sabaʿiya and other proto-Shi‘ite and later Shi‘ite phenomenon.” See W. M. Watt, The
Wellhausen hypothesized represented an ʿIrāqī school of historiography, with that of other historians approximately of his generation—e.g., Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767) and, later, al-Wāqīdī (d. 207/823), who represented the Medinan school in his scheme—Wellhausen devalued Sayf’s writings vis-à-vis those of his peers, labeling them as largely implausible, pious forgeries. Most distinctive of the tendencies highlighted by Wellhausen was what one may deem as Sayf’s overweening, irenic temperament toward the more scandalous events of early Islamic history, which led Sayf to create highly tendentious accounts that exonerated the Prophet’s Companions of their alleged misdeeds and glossed over their profound conflicts and disagreements. He further argued that Sayf achieved this effect by simultaneously inventing personalities whom he scapegoated and upon whom he hoisted responsibility for the internal dissent and strife within the early Muslim community, or umma, particularly from the onset of the conflicts during the reign of the third caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (r. 23–35/644–56). Wellhausen’s quintessential example of this tendency was, of course, the unparalleled role played by Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya in Sayf’s narratives of the first Islamic schism (al-fitna al-kubrā).\(^5\)

Despite the dubious aura that came to surround the Sayfian corpus in the eyes of many occidental scholars due to Wellhausen’s considerable influence, a number of scholars of the following generations recognized a certain prescience of insight and historical description occasionally conveyed by Sayf’s writings. In particular, scholars took notice of the important data Sayf preserved on the dynamics of intertribal politics in the garrison cities (Ar. amṣār; sg. miṣr), the composition of the Muslim armies, and the urban topography of Kūfa.\(^6\) Not


\(^6\) E.g., Martin Hinds, “Kūfan Political Alignments and Their Background in the Mid-Seventh Century A.D.,” *IJMES* 2 (1989), 346–67; Albrecht Noth, “Eine Standortbestimmung der Expansion (*Futūh*) unter der ersten Kalifen (Analyse von ʿṬabarī i, 2854–2856),” *Asiatische Studien* 43 (1989), 120–36. See also other sources cited below by Djait, Donner, et al. None of these scholars deny that Sayf transmits clearly tendentious material, but rather they refuse to dismiss his entire corpus as bereft of value. Although given to positive evaluations of much of the interpretive aspects Sayfian corpus, Hinds, in some cases, argued against Sayf’s material as incredulous: e.g., see M. Hinds, “The First Arab Conquests in Fārs,” *Iran JBIPS* 22 (1984), 48 f. In his translated volume of ʿṬabarī’s history, Gautier H. A. Juynboll criticized Sayf as being particularly guilty of inventing exaggerated and embellished numbers in his descriptions of battles and the like; see his *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. XIII: *The Conquest of Iraq*. Formative Period of Islamic Thought (Edinburgh, 1973), 60. Watt’s statement, as will be shown throughout this study, is highly misleading and factually misinformed.
surprisingly, then, these same scholars were often the first to muster an attempt to counter and erode the overwhelming influence of Wellhausen’s theories while buttressing Sayf’s reputation as an historian vis-à-vis his peers.⁷

Among the first and most influential of such studies was that of Albrecht Noth, who virulently attacked the hermeneutic heart of Wellhausen’s methodological approach to the early Islamic sources—his *Schulentheorie*, or “school theory”.⁸ Noth argued cogently that Sayf and his *akhbārī* peers ought not to be regarded as imparting to their corpora of historical *akhbār* any marked, singular view of history as argued by Wellhausen. Rather, Noth contended that not only is the contradictory nature of their historical material void of any geographically determinable ideology (e.g., one finds an abundance of instances in which Ibn Ishāq includes clearly ‘pro-‘Irāqi’ accounts and Sayf includes ‘anti-‘Irāqi’ accounts), but the contents of the so-called rival ‘schools’ also tend to agree and overlap in important sections of their transmissions. Thus, when reading accounts gathered from the diverse reports, or *akhbār* (sg. *khabar*), of early historians within the context of a synthesized collection, such as the *Taʾrikh* of Ṭabarī, historians must recognize the heterogeneity of the individual accounts therein and, therefore, regard them not as the product of the regional perspective or creation of earlier collector, such as Sayf, who imparted onto their materials a homogenous and/or ideological view of history. Hence, these *akhbār* must not be read, argued Noth, according to their ‘vertical’ relationship to one another (i.e., conforming to external

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⁸ ‘Schulentheorie’, to my knowledge, is actually a term coined not by Wellhausen but rather by Noth himself—apt as it may be. See A. Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsüberlieferung* (Bonn, 1973), 12.
factors such as the views of previous redactors/authors: Sayf, Abû Mikhnaf, Ibn Ishâq, Wâqidi, Madâ’ini, etc.), but rather should be viewed as existing in a ‘horizontal’ relationship with one another (i.e., parallel accounts ought to be compared on the basis of internal features particular to those accounts, not their transmitters/redactors). Thus understood, Noth placed the Sayfian corpus on a more or less even playing field with those of other akhbâris. No longer deemed a forger of fantastic accounts, Noth transformed Sayf’s image from that of a myth-making forger into one of a passive collector and transmitter of materials, the basic contents of which Sayf left unadulterated and for which he cannot be viewed as directly responsible.

Although Noth’s criticisms of Wellhausen’s Schulentheorie remains definitive, his re-evaluation of the Sayfian corpus, however, has neither been universally accepted nor instilled a more credulous attitude in modern historians towards the Sabaʾiya material of the Sayfian corpus. Thus, Hichem Djait, in his monograph on the First Civil War, confirmed many of Wellhausen’s evaluations of Sayf—even if not his defunct Schulentheorie of early Muslim historiography—andcolorfully denounced Sayf’s depiction of the Sabaʾiya as “une invention phantasmagorique.” Likewise, Wilferd Madelung dismissed and disregarded nearly all the Sayfian materials in his seminal study of the early caliphate, disdaining the Sayfian corpus as “a late Kūfan ʿUthmānid and anti-Shiʿite concoction without any source value for the events [it narrates].” Although working largely independently of orientalist scholarship, Murtadâ al-ʿAskari, an ʿIrāqi-Shiʿite scholar, published a series of works that eventually made an indelible imprint upon occidental scholarship as well. Fueled by a nearly obsessive determination to debunk and delegitimize the historical corpus of Sayf ibn ʿUmar,

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9 Noth, “Charakter,” 198. While Noth allowed for the possibility that Sayf and others introduced changes into their accounts (e.g., by combining them, abridging or expanding their contents), he iterates that “while these compilers did add their own changes to the material which they assembled, they are nonetheless collectors of historical reports first and foremost.” See A. Noth and L. I. Conrad, The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study, 2nd ed., trans. M. Bonner, SLAEI 3 (Princeton, 1994), 7.


al-ʿAskari’s works represented perhaps the most extended treatment of the Sayfian corpus, especially those materials bearing directly on the legend of Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾiya. Although al-ʿAskari wrote largely isolated from the Western academy, his critique of the Sayfian corpus exerted its most direct influence on occidental scholarship by its resurrection of the Sabaʾiya narratives as a central problematic feature of the Sayfian corpus—a feature almost entirely neglected and ignored in prior attempts to redeem his corpus, such as those by Noth, Hinds, and Laundau-Tasseron (all of which focused on the period encompassing the ridda wars and early conquests). Although the scholarly perspective of al-ʿAskari, shaped profoundly, as it were, by his identity as a confessional, Shiʿite scholar, was certainly unrepentantly ex parte, the evidentiary bases of many of his indictments of the Sayfian corpus proved too profound and insurmountable to ignore altogether.12 Khalid Blankenship, for example, composed for the introduction to his translated volume of Ṭabarī’s history a staunch critique of the Sayfian materials featured in Ṭabarī’s text citing al-ʿAskari’s strident critique extensively.13

Yet, the bulk of modern scholarship has been undertaken in the absence of any of Sayf’s texts, save those transmissions preserved by Ṭabarī, the historian most famously, or infamously, dependent on his material.14 As noted above, the manuscript edited by Qasim al-Samarrai changed irrevocably the nature of all subsequent work on

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12 The most definitive iteration of al-ʿAskari’s study of Ibn Sabaʾ is to be found in his ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ wa-asāṭīr ukhrā, 2 vols. (Beirut, 1991). See Ende, Arabische Nation, 203 ff. on the controversy surrounding his work. That al-ʿAskari neglects a large swath of Shiʿi reports on ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ is a baffling aspect of his work, and his neglect of these materials makes the vast majority of his assertions about the origins of our information on the sect untenable. Throughout the present work, I have opted for treating the sources directly rather than dealing extensively with the analysis of any individual scholar and, thus, only cite the view of al-ʿAskari sporadically. For a concisely stated critique and treatment of al-ʿAskari’s work, see Muḥammad ‘Alī Muʿallim, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ: al-haqqāq al-majhūlā (Beirut, 1999).


14 An important exception to this is Madelung’s insightful essay, “Sayf ibn ʿUmar: Akhbārī and Ideological Fiction Writer,” in: M. A. Amir-Moezzi, M. M. Bar-Asher, S. Hopkins, eds., Le shīʿisme imāmite quarante ans après: Hommage à Etan Kohlberg (Turnhout, 2009), 325–38 which updates the views he expressed in his Succession. The essay remained unpublished since 1997 and also during the time when this study was being written. I would like to thank Prof. Madelung for graciously providing me early on with a copy of this essay, which considerably enriched the content of the present study, prior to its publication.
Sayf’s materials. Samarrai uncovered the manuscript while cataloguing manuscripts in the University Library of the Imam Muhammad ibn Sa’ūd Islamic University in Riyadh in 1991. This manuscript contains the only two works of Sayf known to either modern or medieval scholars: the *Kitāb al-ridda wa-l-futūḥ* (i.e., The Book of the Wars of Apostasy and Conquests) and the *Kitāb al-jamal wa-maṣir ‘Ā’isha wa-‘Alī* (i.e., The Book of the Battle of the Camel and the Marching of ‘Ā’isha and ‘Alī). Given that the manuscript was found in imperfect condition, large enough sections remain lost that one must still consider significant portions of the Sayfian corpus non-extant. Of the manuscript of the *K. al-ridda*, only the section on the final days of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb’s caliphate and the reign of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān survives, and the final folios completing the *K. al-jamal* are missing as well. Still, its importance for the study of the Sayfian corpus, especially due to the bevy of new materials it brings to light, nonetheless remains undiminished. This proves to be case in particular for the present study insofar as those sections in which Ibn Saba’ and the Saba’īya feature most prominently have survived almost entirely intact.

Until the discovery of this manuscript, Ṭabarī’s heavy dependence upon Sayf for the period spanning from the Ridda Wars of the caliphate of Abū Bakr to the Battle of the Camel during the tumultuous caliphate of ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib earned Ṭabarī’s redaction of his materials a central place in the analysis of the Sayfian corpus. After all, the first attempts to understand the Sayfian corpus ultimately derived from the larger ambition to more fully comprehend Ṭabarī as an historian. In so far as the manuscript of Sayf’s *K. al-Ridda* is incomplete, Ṭabarī’s importance for the examination of this corpus shall remain into the foreseeable future, although we may benefit from a considerable number of other supplementary texts that heavily redacted Sayf’s materials, such as the *Ṭā’rīkh madiḥat Dimashq* of Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1176) and *al-Tamhīd wa-l-bayān fī maqtal al-shahīd*...
'Uthmān of Ibn Abī Bakr (d. 740/1340). The new manuscript, moreover, presents us with merely one transmission of Sayf’s K. al-ridda—that of al-Sarī ibn Yahyā from Sayf’s student Shu‘ayb ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tamīmī al-Rifā‘i9—whereas Ṭabarī utilized multiple transmissions of Sayf’s corpus. Although Ṭabarī, among others, utilized the transmission of al-Sarī for the majority of reports, he also relied on a transmission of Sayf’s akhbār related on the authority of a certain ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Sa’d al-Zuhri from his uncle (and student of Sayf) Ya‘qūb ibn Ibrāhīm. Of the latter transmission, however, all of the sections preserved by Ṭabarī fall within the timeframe of the ridda wars, and none fall under the period covered by the manuscript edited by al-Sammarai, nor bear directly on the narratives of the Ibn Saba’ and the Saba’īya. However, Ṭabarī also includes selections from an alternative redaction of Sayf’s K. al-jamal (or, at least, materials that thematically pertain to the same event) not included in the manuscript that are transmitted from Sayf by his younger Kūfan and Shi‘ī contemporary Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqārī (d. 212/827).20

The initial reception of and reaction to the publication of al-Sammarai’s edition were mixed and did not inspire much optimism that the current scholarly impasse over the Sayfian corpus would soon be resolved. Crone and Madelung have fervently argued that Sammarai’s edition reveals once and for all the extent of Sayf’s ideological

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19 Neither of these individuals is identifiable in the rijāl-works. The al-Sarī ibn Yahyā who transmits the Sayfian corpus from Shu‘ayb ibn Ibrāhīm to Ṭabarī is not to be confused with the Baṣrān traditionist al-Sarī ibn Yahyā al-Shaybānī (d. 167/783–4), as does Kh. Athamina, “The Historical Work of al-Ṭabarī and al-Baladhuri,” in: Kennedy, ed., Ṭabarī, 145. See Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī, Tahdīb al-Kamāl fi asmāʾ al-rijāl, ed. B. Ma‘rūf (Beirut, 1992), xi, 232 ff.; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, Tahdīb al-Tahdīb (Hyderabad, 1907–9), iii, 460 f.

20 Ṭabarī records two traditions transmitted by Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim. In the first, a mixed report, ‘Ā’isha is reproached for her prior opposition to ‘Uthmān (Ṭabarī, i, 3111 f.); in the second, which is not a mixed report, ‘Ā’isha is again condemned but this time for her public appearance on the battlefield and thus contravening Q. 33:33 (Ṭabarī, i, 3120 f.). Four additional reports from Sayf are to be found in Naṣr’s Waqʿat Siffin, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muhammad Hārūn (Cairo, 1962), 5 f., 9 f. Naṣr apparently also composed a history of the Battle of the Camel aptly titled Kitāb al-jamal, which appears to be no longer extant; see Yaqūt al-Ḥamawī, Muṣjam al-udabāʾ (=Irshād al-arīb li ma‘rifat al-adīb), 7 vols., ed. ʿĪsān ʿAbbās (Beirut, 1993), vi, 2750. One wonders if this work depended on Sayf’s materials at all and, if so, how Naṣr’s Shi‘ī riwāya might have substantially differed from those materials that are presently extant.
Crone in particular commented that, “In light of al-Samarrai’s publication, [Noth’s] view must be abandoned, salutary though it was at the time.” On the other hand, al-Samarrai himself and Michael Lecker have espoused just the opposite view—the latter proclaiming that this new edition “demonstrates the meticulousness of Sayf’s transmission” and “shows him to be a reliable transmitter of his predecessors’ (written) accounts.” Clearly the current state of affairs calls for a fresh, sustained analysis of the Sayfian corpus in light of this manuscript and the new materials that it brings to light. No longer fettered by the redactionary selectivity of his successors, Sayf’s standing as an historian calls for re-evaluation. His narratives on Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya, I contend, serve as an ideal arena in which to do so.

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22 JRAS 3rd ser., 6 (1996), 239.
24 See Lecker’s review in JAOS 119 (1999), 533.
25 One of the delights of the manuscript is the number of reports found therein absent from Tabari’s redaction of Sayf’s text. As for the magnitude of this material, al-Samarrai has done the counting for us, “as far as the narratives of Kitāb al-Ridda wa al-Futūḥ and Kitāb al-Jamāl are concerned, Tabari omitted 89 out of 196 narratives of the first fragment. From the 107 narratives that he recorded, he more than 28 substantial portions. From the second fragment, which contains 108 narratives, he partially included 8 narratives and completely omitted 33.” See al-Samarrai, “A Reappraisal,” 539. Many of these suppressed materials, especially concerning the events of the caliphate of ʿUthmān, appear in the Taʾrīkh madinat Dimashq of Ibn ʿAsākir and al-Tamhid wa-l-bayān of Ibn Abī Bakr (d. 740/1340), but, here again, the rearrangement of Sayf’s materials within these historians’ oeuvres precluded the reconstruction of the original work’s scope, structure, and design.
CHAPTER TWO

SAYF IBN ‘UMAR AND THE SABA’IYA (I):
THE CALIPHATE OF ‘UTHMĀN IBN ‘AFFĀN

The caliphate of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (r. 23–35/644–56) in many ways seemed poised to prosper. ‘Uthmān profited from the astounding success of the Muslim conquests still underway upon his assumption of the caliphate; his election by the shūrā-council of Qurashi Companions accorded him, in theory at least, an unparalleled degree of legitimacy among his peers; and early on, the caliph could boast of an accomplishment unrealized by any of his predecessors, even the Prophet himself: the codification of the qurʾānic text. Yet, as the course of events would unfold, the caliph’s tenure, despite its initial successes, was scarred by unrest and sedition and was ultimately stained with the blood of the assassinated caliph himself—and at the hands of fellow Muslims no less—ushering in a period of civil war. The caliph’s ignominious and murderous end created an indelible fracture within the Muslims’ understanding of themselves as an umma, or community, chosen by God above all others. The community had faced other tragedies to be sure—the decimation wrought by the Emmaus (Ar. ‘Amwās) plague in Syria¹ and the unforeseeable death of ‘Uthmān’s predecessor, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–44), by the treacherous blade of a mere non-Arab plebe, a mawlā.² However, although not the first tragedy to befall the nascent community, ‘Uthmān’s murder certainly marked the first existential trauma with which history afflicted the Muslims. The theological and historical interpretations of the events leading up to and proceeding from this traumatizing event formed one of the earliest, and perhaps most compelling, mandates for the subsequent generations of Muslim scholars who bore the responsibility of composing the first histories of the Muslim community. In this chapter, we embark on the first part of our study of the Saba’iya as they

feature in the corpus of one such scholar: the 2nd/8th century historian Sayf ibn ʿUmar al-Tamīmī. Sayf, although living nearly a century and a half after the events he purports to describe, wrote to a large extent in response to this mandate in order to interpret the calamities of ʿUthmān’s caliphate. In particular, we shall examine the role Sayf assigns to the Sabaʾīya, which he posits as being the key to deciphering the origins of the troubles in the reign of ʿUthmān.

As a constant feature of Sayf’s narrative of the caliph’s troubled reign, the Sabaʾīya have long remained a Gordian Knot of Islamic historiography—even more so the sect’s namesake and heresiarch. His names are legion: ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ, Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥarb, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabbāb, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Hamdānī al-Sabaʾī, etc. Indeed, some medieval authors conceived of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ as two different figures altogether who aided one another in their devious devices to sow schism in the Muslim umma. But for Sayf, the head of the Sabaʾīya is one man, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ, whom he prefers to call by his nomen odiosum, Ibn al-Sawdāʾ. As the appearance of the latter name predominates throughout Sayf’s materials, the name Ibn al-Sawdāʾ will be employed in this chapter as shorthand for Sayf’s peculiar incarnation of the heresiarch.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ in Sayf’s narrative. In this narrative, Ibn al-Sawdāʾ is ever lurking in the underworld of early Muslim politics and scheming perfidy; he is the consummate instigator of every major conflagration of schism and sedition threatening to rend Muslim solidarity, or jamāʿa, asunder. Roaming Muslim lands, he achieves his gambit ultimately through manipulating his most loyal acolytes, the Sabaʾīya, who are as equally hell-bent on havoc as he. As imagined by Sayf, the heresiarch and his followers are the very personification of the communal strife, or fitna, which

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3 Probably confused with ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥarb al-Kindī, eponymous founder of the ghālīt sect known as the Harbiya. Amr ibn Bahr al-Jāhiz is the only writer to refer to him by this name; see al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn, 4 vols., ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Kuwait, 1968), ii, 81.
5 This final name appears to be the earliest; see Ch. 6 below.
imperils the integral well-being and, therefore, the very existence of the Muslim umma.

Oddly enough, the Sabaʾiya reports (Ar. akhbār, sg. khabar), which impart to us this narrative, and which have also served as the cornerstone of the earliest modern critiques of Sayf’s materials as ahistorical,7 have long been neglected in the more recent debate over Sayf’s trustworthiness as a transmitter of historically valuable reports. This neglect is problematic in that the Sabaʾiya-narratives are one of the most distinguishing and recognizable features of the Sayfian corpus. In his narrations of the Sabaʾiya, Sayf is entirely unique—none of the other early-medieval historians and purveyors in akhbār of his generation seems either to know or to be aware of the central role accorded to the Sabaʾiya by Sayf. Modern historians have, therefore, frequently viewed the Sayfian corpus, which finds itself so much at odds with commensurate materials, through the lens of a profound and critical suspicion, if not outright derision. Placing the Sayfian corpus in the context of the accounts of Sayf’s peers, whose accounts he so often contradicts, the modern historian is vexed by the frequent recurrence of Wellhausen’s classic conundrum: “Für oder wider Sayf?”—viz., should one side with Sayf’s account against all others or not? Wellhausen’s vexation with the frequent idiosyncratic and tenuous features of Sayf’s corpus, which places it so sharply at odds with the corpora of Sayf’s akhbāri contemporaries, reflects a problem whose salience persists even after al-Samarrai’s discovery of the manuscript of his work, which, though fragmentary, preserves crucial sections of the Sayfian corpus intact. This problem, therefore, deserves to be considerably reframed and reevaluated with renewed rigor in the light of the manuscript’s discovery.

A number of questions concerning the Sayfian corpus immediately come to mind, some older and more familiar and others more recent: Did Sayf invent the Sabaʾiya materials in order to create a narrative of his own ideological devising, thus rendering his corpus bereft of any historical insight into the time period concerned? If Sayf’s mendacity can indeed be ascertained, what exactly was the message he intended to convey? If Sayf may be regarded as innocent of such mendacity, and thus as a ‘mere compiler of disparate materials’ (as Noth argued), does

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7 E.g., Wellhausen, Prolegoumena, 121–34 and Caetani, Annali, viii, 42 ff. et passim.
8 Wellhausen, Prolegoumena, 5.
the possibility of uncovering the source(s) he employed present itself to us? Can one reconstruct those sources utilizing the newly available materials revealed by the manuscript? If Sayf did, indeed, depend on earlier sources, to what extent can one detect whether his redacting hand reshaped these works and imparted to them their current form? Questions such as these shall be the guiding current of inquiry as we examine the Sayfian corpus closely below.

Although attempts have been made to reconstruct earlier sources for other accounts of Sayf,⁹ all such enterprises have inevitably run against the perennial problem of identifying Sayf’s alleged sources named in his isnāds, for to most scholars—both modern and medieval—the vast majority of the figures named therein remain entirely unknown figures.¹⁰ One notices other odd features in his isnāds as well; his methodology strikes one acquainted with Islamic sources as simultaneously both familiar and oddly atypical. Although Sayf, much like other akhbarīs, often presents the reader with ‘combined reports’—i.e., putative syntheses of two independent accounts edited into a harmonized narrative—he usually does not mix and match the sources he combines; rather, they come frozen in formulaic pairs. Thus, in some of his accounts, he cites the combined authority of Ṭalḥa ibn A’lam al-Ḥanafi and Muḥammad ibn ’Abd Allāh ibn Sawād ibn Nuwayra,¹¹ and in others he narrates citing the combined authority of Abū Ḥarīthah Muḥrīz al-ʿAbshāmi and Abū ʿUṣmān Yazīd ibn Asīd al-Ghassānī—but he never breaks up these pairings to narrate accounts in a combined form from Ṭalḥa and Abū Ḥarīthah, and so forth. This cannot be attributed to the particular specializations of the individuals in these pairings, for often these paired sources discuss the same events and topics. Furthermore, Sayf often produces a simple and seemingly linear isnād that does not reflect the actual content of the text of the report, which one can adduce on the basis of internal evidence to be, in actuality, a multi-layered, combined report. Cases

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¹⁰ See Hinds, “Sources on Arabia,” 3 ff.; Blankenship, *Challenge*, xxiii–xxv (see n. 21 for an extensive list of these individuals). Scholars like al-ʿAskarī and Blankenship revile Sayf severely for this fact, but somewhat unfairly. After all, should one be surprised to find such scant information on Sayf’s sources when virtually no single item of biographical detail can be found for even Sayf himself?

¹¹ Both are unknown, as are also the names of numerous rāwīs to follow; see Mizzi, *Tahdhib al-kamāl*, xi, 325; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhib*, iv, 295; Hinds, “Sources on Arabia,” 8 f.
such as these will be encountered in a number of the traditions we shall examine below.

Since most traditions proffered by Sayf take the form of a combined report, one can assume that, for the most part, he records his own harmonized account drawn from the potentially divergent accounts of his alleged sources. Perhaps this perspective sheds light on Sayf’s obscure and awkward style (his narrative jumps, anachronisms, chronological inconsistencies, pronouns and proleptic suffixes without clear antecedents, and so on), which results in the vexingly difficult and elliptical prose for which he is notorious. Yet, a great number of the accounts for which he cites multiple authorities exhibit no evidence of being synthesized accounts. Quite often, in fact, these ‘combined accounts’ are rather short and straightforward. Consider, for example, the following *khabar*:

Al-Sarī—Shu’ayb—Sayf—Muḥammad and Ṭalḥa:

Not a year had passed from the rule [*imāra*] of ʿUthmān when men from the Quraysh appropriated properties in the garrison cities, and the people attached themselves to them. They were steadfast in doing this for seven years, while each group [*qawm*] desired that their leader should rule. Then Ibn al-Sawdāʾ converted to Islam and began to speculate in religious matters [*aslama wa-takallama*]. The world passed into chaos, and by his hands harmful innovations [*ahdāth*] arose. People then felt that ʿUthmān’s years were too long [*fa-istatālūʿumraʿuthmān*].

That this report is an historian’s manifesto is immediately clear. Events are only obsequiously noted, whereas the vast majority of effort has been mustered only to put forward a declarative statement about who should be held responsible for the woes of ʿUthmān’s caliphate. The question that naturally arises is: whose words are these? Muḥammad and Ṭalḥa’s both (which would be uncanny), or, as the inevitable conclusion seems to be, are they Sayf’s? And, if one concedes that they are Sayf’s, what role, if any, does there remain for Muḥammad and Ṭalḥa as the alleged sources of the report? The answer would seem to be: little role, if any.

As the matter would have it, however, most reports do not lend themselves to such straightforward analysis. The above report may be

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13 Sayf, *K al-ridda*, i, 122; Tābari, i, 3027.
an anomaly, but one can use it, at the very least, as an indication of the liberties in which Sayf indulges with his sources at least occasionally. Yet, even if one can ascertain the fingerprints of Sayf’s redacting hand at work in the reports he transmits and/or to which he gives shape, it remains quite implausible that he invented his narrative whole-cloth for a number of rather solid reasons, not least of which is that a significant body of his reports agree with the reports of the other akhbāris of his generation. The Saba’iya, moreover, were certainly not his invention; mention of the sect appears at least three, if not more, generations before his writing activity. At the same time, the Saba’iya clearly function as such an integral centerpiece in his narrative of the caliphate of ʿUthmān and, subsequently, the Battle of the Camel, that the sect must somehow be a decisive clue for uncovering the underlying narrative arch imparted by Sayf onto his corpus. Can one, perhaps, find a layer ‘underneath’ or ‘behind’ Sayf’s text pointing to an earlier Saba’iya narrative? With Sayf’s work in hand, in particular with the body of his writings on the Saba’iya more or less complete, one can now observe these narrative freed from the sieve of ʿTabarī’s restructuring and reorganization of the Sayfian corpus. Many insights emerge from reading Sayf on his own terms. Examining the structure of Sayf’s narrative on the reign of ʿUthmān, one can discern on the macro-level of his narrative at least one striking feature of his Saba’iya narrative.

Sayf’s material on the events of ʿUthmān’s caliphate does not unfold annalistically, as in ʿTabarī’s history, but rather in what may be described as a roughly regional pattern. This provides the superstructure in which individual akhbār are organized, thereby producing a plot pattern falling along the following rubrics:

1. the investiture (imāra) of ʿUthmān,
2. the arrival of Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ at Kūfā,
3. the tale (ḥadīth) of Baṣrā,
4. the tale of Egypt,
5. the tale of Medina

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14 Such as in the poetry of Aʿshā Hamdān (d. 65/685); see ch. 7 below.
15 This assumes that Sayf composed no other historical works detailing the events that followed the Battle of the Camel. No evidence survives attesting to the possibility of his having composed other works. This, however, leads one to the most enigmatic feature of Sayf’s Saba’iya—namely, that his account of the sect stops at the conclusion of the Battle of the Camel, the point at which the other Saba’iya narratives begin.
6. the plot to assassinate ‘Uthmān,
7. the final will and testament (waşīya) stipulated by ‘Uthmān, and finally
8. ‘Uthmān’s funeral.\textsuperscript{16}

The Saba‘īya narrative, however, unfolds along slightly different plotlines than that of ‘Uthmān’s caliphate—one that, instead, follows the travels of Ibn al-Sawdā‘ after his conversion. This alternative plot also progresses regionally but according to a different order than encountered above, running as follows: Ḥijāz → Baṣra → Kūfa → Shām/Syria → Miṣr/Egypt. The geographic arrangement of the Saba‘īya subplot, thus, significantly departs from the larger plot of ‘Uthmān’s caliphate. A regional order characterizes both, but insofar as Sayf’s narrative of the caliphate of ‘Uthmān predominates, his Saba‘īya material as placed in his corpus seems to be out of order—even incomplete at times. Does this fact, therefore, indicate that the Saba‘īya material predates Sayf’s composition? Indeed, is it simply a coincidence that this material appears out of order and transmitted only piecemeal? Or does the Saba‘īya narrative reflect a subplot of Sayf’s own devising that merely parallels the spread of discontent with ‘Uthmān and that, in actuality, bears no evidence of having been derived from an earlier source, whether written or oral?

It is to such questions that I hope the following chapter will find the beginnings of an answer. Perhaps, we will better understand then why Ibn al-Sawdā‘ consistently appears as the \textit{deus ex machina} in Sayf’s narrative of the trouble-ridden reign of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān. Below, I have reproduced the order of the reports in accordance with the compilation of Sayf rather than following the familiar annalistic rearrangement of Ṭabarī (i.e., following a regional rather than annalistic scheme). It is hoped that this will facilitate the analysis of these reports and, eventually, the conclusions derived from them.

\textit{The Saba‘īya and the Opposition to ‘Uthmān in al-‘Irāq}

The first notice of the pernicious presence of Ibn al-Sawdā‘ in Sayf’s work appears at the climax of ‘Uthmān’s caliphate, following a string

\textsuperscript{16} Al-Samarrai, “A Reappraisal,” 536.
of events that transpire largely in Kūfa and Egypt and that span the final six years of ʿUthmān’s leadership. In Kūfa, which will draw our attention first, the central narrative thrust hinges upon ʿUthmān’s appointment of Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ, an Umayyad Qurashi, to the governorship of this garrison city in the year 29/649–50 and Saʿīd’s subsequent conflict with ten prominent Kūfan leaders, collectively known after their exile as the musayyarūn. These narrations conclude, or at least come to a relative abeyance and shift in regional focus, with the repulse of Saʿīd by the Kūfans and his substitution by Abū Mūsā l-Ashʿarī, in compliance with the demands of the Kūfans. 17 By the time these events transpire, Ibn al-Sawdāʾ and his minions have long been active throughout the Muslim garrison-towns. However, as the material unfurls itself in Sayf’s work, the reader remains largely unaware of this until later on when the grander moments of the narrative reveal the plottings of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ. The milieu in which this pernicious figure first appears and the associations Sayf attributes to him are of the utmost importance for establishing his role in the Sayfian narrative of the crises of ʿUthmān’s reign. Indeed, it would be accurate to say that nearly all of the musayyarūn hailing from Kūfa, upon whom Sayf lavishes a great deal of attention, are either implicated as associates or as partisans in the ranks of the Sabaʾiya, and they themselves act, albeit at times unknowingly, in accordance with the schemes and directions of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ. Taking this into consideration, it would be fortuitous, before moving directly to an analysis of the individual akhbār in which Ibn al-Sawdāʾ and the Sabaʾiya play an explicit role, to proceed with a summary of the events preceding the appearance of the opposition of the Kūfan musayyarūn in order to provide a context for later interpretations.

According to Sayf, the problems of Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ’s governorship over Kūfa, though firmly rooted in and precipitated by troubles afflicting the garrison-city prior to his arrival in the year 29/649–50, really came to the fore with an incidental, yet ill-advised, remark made in his presence by a guest at his residence in the company of “the early settlers of Kūfa, the veterans of the early battles and al-Qādisiyya, the

17 On these events in Kūfa and ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿĀmir’s appointment over Baṣra in the same year, see Martin Hinds, “Kūfan Political Alignments and Their Background in the Mid-Seventh Century A.D.,” IJMES 2 (1971), 356 ff.
qurrā\textsuperscript{18} of the garrison-city and the piety-minded [nāzilat ahl al-kūfa wa-wujūh ahl al-ayyām wa-ahl al-qādisiya wa-qurrāʾ ahl al-miṣr\textsuperscript{19} wa-l-mutasammitūn].\textsuperscript{20} We read in the account that:\textsuperscript{21}

Hūbaysh ibn so-and-so al-Asadī\textsuperscript{22} said: “How generous Tālḥa ibn ’Ubayd Allāh is!” Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀs replied, “It’s fitting for a person possessing the like of al-Nashāstaj to be generous. By God, if I possessed its equivalent, God would grant you with it a life of ease.” Then ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Hūbaysh—who was a youth [ḥadathun]—said: “By God, I wish that this al-Milṭāt were yours!”—i.e., that which belonged to the family of Khusraw on the side of the Euphrates bordering Kūfa.

The remarks of ʿAbd al-Rahmān aroused the immediate ire of its hearers, particularly the qurrāʾ, among whom Mālik al-Ashtar acts as the most staunchly outspoken critic, for these remarks seemed to welcome the usurpation of properties held to belong to the attendees at Saʿīd’s court. Hūbaysh, his father, attempted to defuse the situation by appealing to the youthfulness of his son, pleading, “Hūbaysh is just a boy [ghulām], don’t punish him!”\textsuperscript{23} The qurrāʾ, however, accused Saʿīd

\textsuperscript{18} Traditionally translated as ‘quʿān-reciter’, the qurrāʾ emerge repeatedly in the early period as a distinctive political faction. As such, a number of historians have attempted to suggest alternative renderings of the term—most famously M. A. Shaban, and, with a good deal more evidence, G. H. A. Juynboll. Both scholars suggested that qurrāʾ be rendered as ‘villager’ (as in ahl al-qurā). This view has not been met with wide acceptance; for a summary of this discussion, see T. Nagel, “Qurra’,” \textit{EI}, v, 499 f. An updated bibliography and a much fuller discussion of the literary evidence on the qurrāʾ can now be found in A. Asfaruddin and Ch. Melchert, “Reciters of the Qurʾān,” \textit{EQ}, v, 386–93.


\textsuperscript{20} Sayf, \textit{K al-ridda}, i, 63 f.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22} Following the ms (ibid., ii, fol. 30a), Ibn Athīr, iii, 108.3 and Aghānī, xi, 141.6, 16 (Abū Mikhnaf and al-Shaʿbī). See Tābarī, i, 2909.3 (Sayf) where his name is Khunays; likewise, Balādhurī gives his name as Khunays in Balādhurī, \textit{Ansāb}, iv, 529.8 (Abū Mikhnaf).

\textsuperscript{23} Sayf’s account here differs starkly from other akhbaraṣ such as al-Zuhri, al-Shaʿbī, Abū Mikhnaf, and al-Wāqīḍi who also relate this account. For one, only Sayf records the presence of ʿAbd al-Rahmān’s father, Hūbaysh; secondly, Sayf’s account depicts him as a mere boy whereas the other akhbaraṣ state that he was the head of the Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ’s elite troop (Ar. sāhib al-shurta). See ʿUmar ibn Shabba al-Numayrī, \textit{Tāʾrīkh al-madīna al-munawwara}, ed. Fuhaym Muhammad Shaltūt (Jidda, 1979), iii, 1141.2 (Abū Mikhnaf); Balādhurī, \textit{Ansāb}, iv, 529.9 (Abū Mikhnaf); Tābarī, i, 2917.6
and his entourage of staging the remark, claiming Ḥubaysh uttered his remarks at the governor’s prompting. Having launched his allegation, al-Ashtar and the congregants sympathetic with his denunciation seized both Ḥubaysh and his son, beating them until they lost consciousness. Word of the conflagration quickly spread and soon thereafter the Banū Asad surrounded the governor’s dwelling. With some calming words and diplomatic assurances directed towards the Banū Asad, accompanied by a stern censuring of the assailants of Ḥubaysh and his son, Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ deftly prevented further escalation of the situation. The incident itself, however, led to further actions undertaken independently of the governor, the long-lasting repercussions of which Sayf subsequently details.

Sayf’s account of these events is an irenic one, and when viewed against the backdrop of the accounts of other akhbāris, it clearly offers the mildest possible literary reconstruction of the controversy. The gripes of the qurrāʾ were obviously much deeper than a collective displeasure directed against the glib comments of ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Ḥubaysh. Al-Shaʿbī (d. 103/721), Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/774) and al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823) unanimously depict Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ as much bolder and more presumptuous—in their accounts, controversy ensues following the governor’s impetuous boast that “the Sawād (of ʿIrāq) is the garden of the Quraysh.” Sayf also records the controversial claim as being attributed to Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ; however, when he does mention the governor’s alleged boast, it appears only as a piece of propaganda concocted by Mālik al-Ashtar.

In reality, the origins of the dissension arose from the policies of ʿUthmān towards the sawāfī, i.e., the former Sasanid crown lands and dominal estates, which, constituting an extensive portion of the conquered territories, served also as the shared, communal spoils (fayʾ) of the Muslim soldiers.

At the outset, the applicable policy towards this land putatively derived from previously established prophetic practice and was based

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(al-Wāqidī); Ibn Aṯ’am, ii, 171.7; Aghānī3, xii, 141 ff. (Abū Mikhnaf, al-Shaʿbī, and al-Zuhrī).

24 Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 529.12; Ṭabarī, 1, 2915; Ibn Aṯ’am, ii, 171; Aghānī3, xii, 141 ff. Cf. Donner, Early Islamic Conquests, 240 f.

25 Mālik al-Ashtar alleges before the Kūfans that Saʿīd not only “claims that your wealth [fayʾ] is the garden for the Quraysh,” but that he also intends to lower the pension of their women and of the veterans (Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 72).
on Qur’ānic injunction (Q. 8:41): as spoils (fāy’) the land would be divided among the Muslim warriors excluding the fifth portion, or khums, which the imām distributed at his own discretion for the sake of the benefit of the community. In the case of al-‘Irāq, ‘Umar modified this policy choosing, instead, to leave the land undivided to act as sort of perennial source of communal fāy’, administered under collective ownership, to equitably provide for the needs and maintenance of the adjacent Muslim populations established in the Sawād.

‘Uthmān’s policy was, however, an entirely different affair. Rather than regarding the sawāfī as domains owned by the Muslims collectively, he viewed the former crown lands as subject to the prerogatives of his office as both amīr al-muʾminīn and khalīfa. Apparently functioning under the assumption that his caliphal prerogatives took precedence over the local, communal interests attached to these lands, ‘Uthmān showed scant hesitation in granting swaths of these lands to members of the Quraysh and to Medinans as he deemed fit.26 Whereas ‘Umar’s policy succeeded with little opposition,27 ‘Uthmān’s engendered fierce resistance. This, of course, emerges from the faultlines underlying the administrative shifts occurring in ‘Irāq. The subsequent conflicts thus undermine and undo the stability of the caliph’s suzerainty over the conquered territories. Since our purpose mainly resides in highlighting Sayf’s view of these events, it would be helpful to review the origins of ‘Uthmān’s policy and its repercussions within that context.

According to Sayf, in the seventh year of ‘Uthmān’s caliphate, Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀs composed a rather distressing letter to the caliph upon assuming his predecessor’s office as governor of Kūfa, in which he wrote:28

The state of the Kūfans is divided. The notables among them, the distinguished households, and those with precedence and experience have been overrun [qad ghuliba ahl al-ashrāf fīhim wa-l-buyūṭāt wa-l-sābiqa wa-l-qudma]. Those who have overrun these lands are the newcomers who have recently arrived and the Bedouins who followed behind

26 For a list of these individuals, see Madelung, Succession, 83.
28 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 44; Ṭabarī, i, 2852.
[rawādif radafat wa-a’rāb lahiqat], and they have denied (lit., twisted) our right to demand obedience.29 Until now we have not set eyes upon an individual possessing either nobility or experience among (Kūfa’s) settlers and its young men [min nāzilatihā wa-nābitatihā].

Sa’īd’s letter describes a crisis and a predicament ironically arising from the overwhelming success of the initial conquests and the subsequent largesse enjoyed by the earliest participants. The early-comers’ renowned fortune created the irresistible attraction of ʿIrāq for the later-comers, or rawādif, but the reality was that previous successes were unlikely to be repeated, thus frustrating the expectations of the latter. The late-comers, seeking commensurate fame, fortune, and prestige through either martial or pious exertions, came in such an unforeseeable and unexpectedly large influx that they quickly rendered the prior organizational structure of the veteran pioneers of the community defunct. These newcomers came carrying far too many expectations and far too much ambition to be easily placated by the oldguard into conforming to the status quo; and, with the sheer force of numbers in their favor, they inevitably came to dominate the scene and exert their will upon the ‘Irāqi garrisons.30

ʿUthmān’s antidote for the divisions plaguing Kūfa proved in the end not to ameliorate the state of affairs; rather, his policy acted as a catalyst that exacerbated the original causes of dissent among the late-comers. His first move was to entrench and buttress the authority of the veterans of the community over the newcomers through actions, rooted firmly in his conception of his prerogatives as caliph, that aimed at transferring portions of the undivided fay’ lands from the sawāfī into grants handed over as land concessions to be managed and possessed by the Qurashī notables and the early-comers who could lay claim to the rank of precedence (Ar. sābiqa). According to Sayf’s depiction, these land concessions in ʿIrāq took the form of remunerations for lands handed over to the caliph in the ḥijāz, or elsewhere in Arabian Peninsula. Hence, Ṭalḥa, as mentioned above, acquired al-Nashāstaj near Kūfa but only in exchange for his properties in Khaybar and elsewhere, such as in Ḥaḍramawt.31 The profit gained by such exchanges must have been by all estimates considerable.

29 “fa-lawaw ḥaqqa ṭā’atina”; this phrase is omitted by Ṭabarī.
30 The best treatment of these developments can be found in Hinds, “Kūfan Political Alignments,” 348–56 and Donner, Early Islamic Conquests, 231–9.
31 For this and other examples, see Madelung, Succession, 83 ff. and n. 20 thereto.
According to some accounts, Ṭaḥṣa’s income from al-Nashtāstaj reached between approximately 400,000 and 500,000 dirhams per annum. As R. Stephen Humphreys observes, this policy also included the added benefit of placing the control of some of the wealthiest estates of the Ḥijāz, along with their revenues, under the direct supervision of ʿUthmān.

The problem with this was, of course, that ʿUthmān was exchanging private estates in the Arabian Peninsula for lands regarded in ʿIrāq as communal and, therefore, intended for the benefit of the entirety of its Muslim inhabitants. The policies of land exchange openly excluded the newcomers who had recently settled in ʿIrāq and, in their view, could only be implemented very much to their detriment; most of the newcomers, with the exception of a handful of tribal leaders, lacked land-holdings for which they could exchange land and balked at the notion of their dependence on the munificence of a Qurashī notable such as Ṭaḥṣa ibn ῤiyā ibn ʿUbayd Allāh. Sayf himself notes that only “those lacking precedence and experience [lā sābiqa lahum wa-lā qudma] or those who had neither attained the status of persons of precedence and experience in the councils, nor of those possessing high station and leadership [fi l-majālis wa-l-ḥuẓwa wa-l-riʿāsa]” objected to the policy, and only secretly did they reveal that they “considered it as an affront [yajʿalūnahu jafwatan].”

Given this context, the events at the court of Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ narrated above appear in a more vivid light. It should be recalled that Saʿīd himself was, as Sayf relates, “the best (of the family) of al-ʿĀṣ ibn...

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34 See Hinds, “Kūfan Political Alignments,” 359 f.
35 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 48. The policy as a whole is detailed in the passages in ibid., 46–8 and Ṭabarī, 1, 2854–6 (sub anno 30 a.h.). The latter passage has been subjected to a thorough analysis by Albrecht Noth, “Eine Standortbestimmung der Expansion (Futūḥ) unter der ersten Kalifen (Analyse von Ṭabarī 1, 2854–2856),” Asiatische Studien 43 (1989), 120–36. Noth was inclined to consider the account genuine; however, Madelung more recently has pointed to the rather glaring ʿUthmānid bias pervading the account (Succession, 83, n. 19). Such a bias does not, in my view, entirely hinder or nullify the veracity of the account’s depiction of ʿUthmān’s policy. Sayf clearly relates the tradition in a way most favorable to the caliph in accordance with his usual disposition; however, he can only cast the matter in an irenic mold and, hence, cannot obscure the source of the controversies rooted in the implementation of the policy, as well as its folly.
Umayya and came from a distinguished, long lineage \( \text{baqīyata l-} \text{āṣ ibn umayya wa-kāna ahluhu kathīr}^{\text{an}} \text{tatāba}^{\text{ā}}. \)\(^{36}\) He was thus a prime candidate for benefiting from the new administrative measures of the caliph. The scandal following the comments of Ḥubaysh’s son bear directly on the grievances of those Kūfans who regarded themselves as marginalized and slighted by the recent land appropriations. In that atmosphere, conflict appeared inevitable. As Sayf writes, “It was as though Kūfa was dry timber engulfed in flames \( \text{ka-annamā kānat al-} \text{kūfa yabis}^{\text{an}} \text{shamilathu al-nār}. \)\(^{37}\) The core individuals manifesting opposition to these policies were hardly unknown. Actions were swiftly taken against those persons who were most likely to pose a threat to the reorganization of the centralizing administration of the Sawād crafted under ‘Uthmān’s direction. “The most prominent and honorable Kūfans \( \text{ashrāf ahl al-} \text{kūfa wa-s}^{\text{ā}} \text{ulah ṣuhum}. \)” Sayf claims, appealed to ‘Uthmān to intervene on their behalf in order to stifle the dissension. The dissenters, however, petitioned to have their remonstrations directly addressed by Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Ās. ‘Uthmān responded by ordering the seditious individuals to be exiled, “and (the Kūfans) expelled them, and (the dissidents) were humiliated \( \text{fa-akhrajahum fa-udhillū}. \)\(^{38}\) Most of these exiles, or musayyarūn, were sent to Syria and placed under the surveillance of Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān who, according to Sayf, “welcomed them courteously and lodged them in a church named ‘Maryam’ \( \text{rah}^{\text{ā}} \text{haba bihim wa-anzalahum fī tasammā maryam}. \)” Sayf adduces the number of the musayyarūn to have been over ten persons, the most prominent among whom he names are: Mālik ibn al-Harith al-Ashtar, Ka‘b ibn Dhī l-Habaka al-Nahdi, Jundab (ibn Zuhayr al-Ghāmidī or ibn Ka‘b al-Azdī?), Sā‘a‘a ibn Sūhān al-‘Abdī, Ibn al-Kawwā,\(^{39}\) Kumayl ibn Ziyād al-Nakha‘ī and ‘Umayr

\(^{36}\) Sayf, \( \text{K al-ridda}, \) i, 42.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., i, 45.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., i, 65. Ibn A‘tham also narrates that the Kūfans were lodged in this church (\( \text{Futūh}, \) ii, 175). One wonders whether this is the same Damascene church mentioned as being located near Bāb Tūmā. See Dhahabī, \( \text{Tā rīkh al-islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-} \text{ʿAbdī, Ibn al-Kawwā,}" Kumayl ibn Ziyād al-Nakha‘ī and ‘Umayr

\(^{39}\) I.e., ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Kawwā ‘al-Yashkurī, of Bakr ibn Wā‘il. Son of “the cauterizer \( \text{al-kawwā} \)\),” his father’s name is variously given as Abū Awfā (see Tabari, ii, 68, quoting Maslama ibn Muhārib) or ‘Amr; see Abū ‘Uthmān al-Jāhiz, \( \text{al-Bursān wa-l-} \text{urjān wa-l-} \text{umyān wa-l-hūlān}, \) ed. Muḥammad Mursī al-Khūlī (Beirut, 1972), 54.-4; Ibn Durayd, \( \text{al-Ishtiqāq}, \) ed. ‘A.-S. M. Hārūn (Beirut, 1991), 340.9; Ibn Hajar,
ibn Ḍābiʿ ibn al-Ḥārith al-Burjumī. Many of these figures are later explicitly named as members of or sympathizers with the Sabaʾiya.40

‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Sawdāʾ Arrives in Kūfa

Adding to the troubled affairs of Kūfa while Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ sat as governor, Sayf relates, was the arrival of an individual named ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Sawdāʾ. Sayf’s first account of the heresiarch serves as a prelude of the sort of foreshadowing events to come. In the isnād one encounters two rather important (alleged) sources for the report: first, Sayf’s intermediary authority, Abū Rawq ʿAṭīya ibn al-Ḥārith al-Hamdānī al-Kūfī, and then the putative source of the account, Yazīd al-Faqʿāsī. For the former, ‘Aṭīya, a handful of scattered details have reached us about his identity. Ibn Saʿd, among others, relates that ‘Aṭīya was “sāhib tafsīr,” indicating that he had composed a work on Qurʾānic exegesis. His death date seems to have been forgotten by the traditionists, but one can garner from the scholars from whom he reputedly transmitted that he belongs firmly in the late Umayyad and early ‘Abbāsid periods.41 According to al-Ṭūsī (d. ca. 459–60/1066–7), the Imāmī exegete ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muḥammad al-Azdī al-Kūfī (fl. early 3rd/9th century)42 utilized ‘Aṭīya’s tafsīr alongside those of Abān ibn Ṭaghlīb al-Jarīrī (d. 141/758)43 and Muḥammad ibn al-Sāʿib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763)44 to compile an exegetical work of his own.45

‘Aṭīya also appears not infrequently as a purveyor of historical akhbār relating events that transpired in the environs Kūfa during the first

40 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 64; cf. the lists in Ibn Shabba, iii, 1141 (Abū Mīkhnaf); Balādhurī, Ansāb al-ashrāf, ii, ed. W. Madelung, Bibliotheca Islamica 28b (Beirut, 2003), 300 and Ṭabarī, i, 3349.
41 See Ibn Saʿd, vi, 256 who places him in the fifth tabaqa (ca. 140–150/757–767); cf. Mizzi, Tahdhīb, xx, 144.
42 See E. Kohlberg, A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Ṭawwūs and His Library (Leiden, 1992), 172 f.
43 A Shiʿite exegete to whom is attributed a tafsīr entitled al-Gharīb fi l-Qurʾān as well as numerous other works; see van Ess, TG, i, 334 and Modarressi, TS, i, 107–16.
44 On him, see ch. 4 below.


48 E.g., see Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, al-Jarh wa-l-taʿdīl, 4 vols. (Hyderabad, 1942), iii, 382; Mizzi, Tahdhib, xx, 144 f.; Ibn Ḥajar, Tahdhib, vii, 224.

49 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 55 f.
al-Ashtar, Abū Zaynab and Abū Muwarri and that ilk [tilka l-ṭabaqa] came to them. Saʿīd sent for (Ibn al-Sawdāʾ) and said, ‘What is this that has reached me?—that you are spreading traditions [ḥadīth] and reading, “We decreed to the Children of Israel in the Book, ‘Verily you shall spread corruption in the Earth two times [qaḍaynā ilā bāni ḵsrāʾīl fi l-kitāb la-tufsidunna fi l-ard marratayn]’ (Q. 17:4)—and it is they (i.e., the Jews?-my query) are the ones who have twice spread corruption on the Earth!” (Ibn al-Sawdāʾ) said, “We (Jews?-or Sabaʾīya?) are more knowledgeable of the ḥadīth of the Children of Israel than you all!” “He speaks the truth!” those (with him) said. Saʿīd said, “He lies and you lie! By God if I had not been ordered to hold back from you, you would have found me quite severe!” Saʿīd exiled (Ibn al-Sawdāʾ), and the people [al-nās] aided him in this. So (Ibn al-Sawdāʾ) left to Syria, but he was unable to accomplish what he wished there. He went to Egypt, and his companions became numerous there. He corresponded with his brethren from the garrison cities through letters and aided them in their aims, and thus he was the first to dispatch propagandists [awwalu man batṭḥa duʿāʾin] among the people, inviting them to rebel.

The above account marks the first occasion in which one encounters the subplot of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s roaming from Muslim populace to the next, beginning in the Hijāz and moving on successively to Başra, Kūfa, Syria and finally Egypt—a progression repeated in a subsequent report with the same isnād later on. Only the Hijāz and Syria prove immune to the conniving of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ. Furthermore, it is certainly not coincidental that Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s conversion corresponds to the turning point of ʿUthmān’s caliphate, which has been traditionally divided into ‘six good years’ followed by ‘six bad years’.

In addition to the skeletal plotline imbedded within the khabar, several additional facts merit highlighting: 1) the ‘Abd al-Qays act as Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s protectors and benefactors in ʿIrāq, whether in Kūfa or Başra; 2) al-Ashtar, Abū Zaynab and Abū Muwarri’ feature as the prominent individuals who fell under his influence 3) Saʿīd’s concerns focus on Ibn al-Sawdāʾ as a claimant to knowledge with regard to qurʾānic and ḥadīth materials leading him to exile Ibn al-Sawdāʾ; and 4) Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s daʾīs, or propagandists, act as the central means for exerting his control over his followers, allowing him to act as the epicenter of opposition even when absent (although in the above account his purposes remain to be fully enumerated).

50 Ibid., 1, 135 ff.
Not all of these details lend themselves to a straightforward interpretation. Sayf’s claim that the ʿAbd al-Qays sheltered Ibn al-Sawdā’ may reflect the prominence of ʿAbdī opponents to ʿUthmān and are, therefore, indicative of the heresiarch’s pervasive influence among the tribe (see below). The prominence of al-Ashtar as both an ʿAlid partisan and staunch opponent of ʿUthmān is well-known, and need not be dwelled upon here. Suffice it to say that Sayf acquaints us with al-Ashtar’s troublemaking first at the court of Saʿīd and subsequently expands upon this by attributing to him the inflammatory propaganda he spreads to calumnize the governor’s intentions and, thus, to sow dissension among the Kūfans. Sayf’s khabar clearly ensconces al-Ashtar within the ranks of the Sabaʿiya.

Much less known, however, are al-Ashtar’s comrades, Abū Zaynab and Abū Muwarriʿ. Early Muslim historical accounts remember both Abū Zaynab Zuhayr ibn ʿAwf al-Azdī and Abū Muwarriʿ al-Asadī\(^{51}\) as the two individuals who exposed the winebibbing of Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ’s predecessor, al-Walīd ibn ʿUqba, while still governor of Kūfa. According to most accounts, Abū Zaynab and Abū Muwarriʿ uncovered al-Walīd’s penchant for wine by bribing the doorman at his residence to let them inside after they noticed his absence from the communal prayers. Finding al-Walīd inebriated and unconscious in his home, they absconded with his signet ring to Medina, where they produced the ring before the caliph as proof of the governor’s neglect and wantonness. This leads eventually to al-Walīd’s dismissal from office.\(^{52}\) Sayf alone, however, seeks to exculpate al-Walīd ibn ʿUqba and, citing two reports on the combinded authority of Muḥammad and Talḥa, portrays the governor as the victim of the personal animosity and vicious calumny maliciously hatched by Abū Zaynab and Abū Muwarriʿ, whose sons, Sayf claims, al-Walīd had killed.\(^{53}\) The charges that he had been drinking wine were unfounded according to Sayf’s account: al-Walīd had merely been discovered having eating grapes

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\(^{51}\) The name of the latter also occurs without the kunya as merely Muwarriʿ; e.g., see Balадhuri,\(\textit{Ansāb},\)\textit{\textit{iv}}, 521.2.


\(^{53}\)\(\textit{K al-ridda},\) i, 29.8. This is a topos of which Sayf is fond; see, e.g., the notes on the story of Jundab and the sorcerer below.
when the *ashrāf* attempted to catch him.\(^{54}\) Moreover, the two men stole the signet from the governor not while he lay inebriated, but while he slept soundly.\(^{55}\) The problem, Sayf says, arose from the fact that al-Walīd maintained no partition (*hijāb*) separating him from the common people; thus, “they took advantage of his heedlessness [*fa-taghaffalū al-walīd*].”\(^{56}\)

The dispute arising between Saʿīd and Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, however, poses some difficulty—the language of the text is somewhat obscure. Perhaps the dispute can best be viewed as a conflict over hearing traditions from the Jews, a matter arising particularly from the prominence Ibn al-Sawdāʾ garnered for himself among the ‘Abd al-Qays. Sayf later depicts Ibn al-Sawdāʾ as boasting of considerable knowledge of the Torah. Early Muslims’ attitudes towards the scriptural and parascriptural traditions of the Jews and Christians, especially in the *hadith*, are well-known to be both ambivalent and contradictory.\(^{57}\) The key, perhaps, lies in the citation of Q. 17:4, in which the children of Israel are depicted as “twice spreading corruption on Earth.” This is a passage which properly belongs to the larger context of Q. 17:4–8, which traditionally has been read as referring to the destruction of the first and second Jewish temples in Jerusalem.\(^{58}\) Both destructions resulted from the Israelites “twice spreading corruption”—a phrase interpreted by most early exegetes as referencing the murder of two prophets: pairing together the martyrdom of John the Baptist with either that of his father Zechariah or with the that of Isaiah.\(^{59}\) Saʿīd’s censure

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\(^{54}\) Ibid., i, 29.10, stating that they merely found “a plate on which were the remains of grapes [*tabaq*], *alayhi tafārīq *inaab].”

\(^{55}\) Ibid., i, 33 ff.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., i, 32.


\(^{59}\) Tabari, *Jāmiʿ* ʿ, xv, 27; cf. A. Rippin, “Isaiah,” *EQ*, ii, 562b. John the Baptist’s father, Zechariah, is often conflated with two figures of the Hebrew Bible, the first-temple-period priest martyred in 2 Chr. 24 and the second-temple-period prophet after whom the biblical book is named. The conflation arises first from the erroneous confusion of the martyred priest Zechariah with the alleged author of the prophetic book in Matt. 23:35—an error absent from Luke 11:51. This confusion later served as an inspiration for the story of the martyrdom of John the Baptist’s father, as in
of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ for relating hadith while reading the above verse might, therefore, be directed at the recent convert’s pronouncements regarding the interpretation of the elliptical Qurʾānic pericope and the audacity of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, a Jew (i.e., one of those who spread corruption on Earth), to claim authority in interpreting it. The retort of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ for his part matches Saʿīd’s censure with equal defiance while touting his own superior knowledge over that of the governor. ⁶⁰

The defiance of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ avails him little against Saʿīd, and the governor swiftly expels him from Kūfa. This measure, however, comes too late, for Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, having already sufficiently entrenched his influence among the inhabitants, easily maintains his persuasive powers and remotely directs affairs via his agents, who spread far and wide across ‘Irāq. And the extent and depth of their influence is about to manifest.

The Sedition of Yazīd ibn Qays al-Arhābī and the Ousting of Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ⁶¹

In the eleventh year of ʿUthmān’s caliphate, viz., five years after the appointment of Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ to the governorship over Kūfa, Saʿīd left the garrison-city heeding a caliphal summons to meet for a consultative council in Medina alongside the other provincial governors gathered there. Saʿīd would never again return to occupy his seat of governorship. Sayf later relates the nature of this meeting with ʿUthmān:

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⁶⁰ From another perspective, there is certainly aspects of this exchange between Saʿīd and Ibn al-Sawdāʾ which are reminiscent of the exchange between ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and a certain Ṣābīgh ibn Ṣulṭ, who often appears in accounts as, in the words of Leemhuis, “a rebellious agitator…posing dubious questions”—usually about the Qurʾān and, more specifically ambiguous Qurʾānic verses (Ar. mutashābihāt); see Fred Leemhuis, “Origins and Early Development of the tafsīr Tradition,” in: A. Rippen, ed., Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān (Oxford, 1988), 17. The point here, as Leemhuis notes, seems not to be an objection to tafsīr as such, but rather that in “the precise nature of (Ṣābīgh’s) inciting questions, Ṣābīgh was not explaining the Qurʾān, but casting doubt on its meaning and authority” (op cit., 18); cf. Cl. Gilliot, “Les débuts de l’exégèse coranique,” REMMM 58 (1990), 84 f. Such an undercurrent might be behind the above account of Ibn al-Sawdāʾs dubious exegetical activities as well. It is worth noting that a transmitter of the story of Ṣābīgh ibn Ṣulṭ is al-Qāsim ibn Muhṣīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, a traditionist whose views exerted considerable influence upon Sayf (see below and Gilliot, “Les débuts de l’exégèse,” 85).

⁶¹ Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 70–74; Ṭabarī, 1, 2927–31 (sub anno 34 A.H.).
the caliph marshaled the combined prescience of all his governors to advise him with regard to the rash of problems plaguing the umma. At this juncture, though, Sayf defers discussing the caliph’s meeting with the provincial governors in detail. The meeting’s importance arises from the fact that it essentially serves Sayf as a linchpin event of his narrative, a turning point in the caliphate of ʿUthmân that later functions a delta into which the tributary narratives of each province converge and, thus, culminate in the extensive, unified account caliph’s martyrdom. Before arriving to this point in his narrative, however, Sayf’s focus remains regional.

Beginning with Kūfa, one encounters first the outcome of the events leading to the repulse of Saʿīd—a feat, according to Sayf, largely accomplished due to the efforts of Yazīd ibn Qays al-Ārḥābī.62 Sayf narrates Yazīd’s activities in two separate akhbar, which roughly agree in terms of content. The first narrative provides the most extensive treatment and is related on the authority of al-Mustanīr ibn Yazīd from his brother, Qays ibn Yazīd al-Nakhaʾi; the second khabar, a combined report, comes much later in the narrative of ʿUthmân’s reign and rehashes briefly the events transpiring between Yazīd ibn Qays and al-Qaʿqāʾ ibn ʿAmr. Sayf relates this latter report on the combined authority of Abū Ḥāritha and Abū ʿUthmân as well as numerous others.63 For what follows below, the former account has been followed most closely, while making note of significant features found in the latter.

As one may recall, Yazīd ibn Qays was counted among the trouble-makers at Saʿīd’s court who assaulted ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Ḥubaysh.64 Yazīd successfully seizes Kūfa, and Sayf attributes this to the fact that ʿUthmān and Saʿīd had deputized and commissioned Kūfa’s most prominent leaders to the various satellite provinces under the governor’s authority. Hinds saw in this deputation an attempt to displace,

62 Al-Hamdānī (d. 334/945) gives him a short notice in which he states that he “was a greatly esteemed leader [kāna raʾīs ‘azīm al-ḥaṣā],” providing a poem of his composition. He also note that ʿAli later made him part of his élite troop (Ar., shurtā); see al-Iklīl min akhbār al-Yaman, x, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khatīb (Cario, 1949), 172 f. and Hichem Djait, “Les Yemenites à Kūfa au 1er siècle de l’hégire,” JESHO 19 (1976), 159. Hinds is perhaps too conjectural when he suggests that the brevity of al-Hamdānī’s treatment of Yazīd ibn Qays suggest that his leadership was based primarily on his reputation of piety rather than his tribal connections; see his “Kūfan Political Alignments,” 357.
63 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 150; Ṭabarī, i, 2944 f.
64 Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv., 529.5.
to outlying provinces remote from the administrative center, those leaders from the early-comers to ʿIrāq whose prestige rested on factors “more Islamic than tribal.” By removing them from Kūfa, the governor and the caliph hoped to thereby diminish their growing influence within the garrison city itself.\(^{65}\) Such may have been the case, as Hinds has suggested, especially insofar as Yazīd ibn Qays had been among those displaced leaders, having himself been dispatched to Hamadhān, although subsequently discharged and replaced by al-Nusayr al-ʿIjī.\(^{66}\) Sayf’s primary intention is to emphasize the vulnerability of Kūfa during the absence of Saʿīd and the peril in which the garrison-city found itself once deprived of his leadership; he wrote: “Kūfa was emptied of the leaders (of the people) save those who were discharged or seditious [khalat al-kūfa min al-ruʾasā ʿillā manzūʿ ʿun aw maftūn].”\(^{67}\)

Realizing a timely opportunity, Yazīd ibn Qays initiates an uprising in Kūfa. His intentions, Sayf informs us, were to depose ʿUthmān, “kharaja wa-huwa yurīdu khal ʿaʿuthmān.” And, it is at this moment, in an exceedingly subtle passage, that Sayf introduces into the narrative his archvillian, Ibn al-Sawdāʾ. Yazīd ibn Qays enters Kūfa’s mosque surrounded by an entourage of men whom Sayf identifies as “those with whom Ibn al-Sawdāʾ had been corresponding.”\(^{68}\) Sayf offers no further comments, but the reader of his account, cognizant of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, sees the ‘hidden hand’ at work. In Sayf’s narrative, Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, having long since established his spheres of influence in ʿIrāq, has been writing to the Kūfans from his base in Egypt, where he and his inner circle had hoped to coordinate a simultaneous rebellion spanning across all the provinces.\(^{69}\) Apparently equipped with a keen faculty for detecting trouble, Saʿīd’s deputy over Kūfa during his absence, al-Qaʿqāʾ ibn ʿAmr al-Tamīmī al-Makhzūmī, directly confronts and assails Yazīd and his co-conspirators, whereupon Yazīd

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65 Hinds, “Kūfan Political Alignments,” 357.
66 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 70. Tabārī, 1, 2927.ult. erroneously reads “kāna saʿīd ibn qays ʿalā hamadhān fa-ʿuzila…” instead of Yazīd ibn Qays. A number of sources assert that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, once caliph, later reinstalled Yazīd as ʿāmil over Hamadhān, as well as Isfahān and Rayy; see Abū Nuʿaym al-Isfahānī, Taʿrikh Isfahān, 2 vols., ed. S. Dedering (Leiden, 1934), ii, 343. Others assert, however, that he placed Yazīd ibn Qays over al-Madāʾin; see Naṣr ibn Muzāhīm, Waq at Sīffīn, 11.
67 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 71.
68 Ibid., “alladhīna kāna ibn al-sawdāʾ yuḥātibuhum.”
69 Only the Kūfans were able to execute the plot successfully; see Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 149; Ṭabarī, 1, 2949.
attempts to muster a defense for their cause.\textsuperscript{70} This he does this, however, deceitfully and with guile by disguising his real intentions in his actual reply: he merely voices his grievances with Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀs. As Yazīd avers in the combined account, “We only seek Saʿīd’s resignation [innamā nastaʿfī min saʿīdin].”\textsuperscript{71} By God, I hear and obey and so do they! Verily, I am dedicated to my community and so are they [fa-walāhi innī la-sāmiʾ wa-hum wa-innī li-jamāʾati wā-hum].”\textsuperscript{72} Al-Qaʿqāʾ denies the possibility of Yazīd achieving his stated goal of removing Saʿīd from office. Later he proclaims to Yazīd in the same account, “The élite [al-khāṣa] seek to do away with an affair with which the masses [al-ʿāmma] are content!”—thus, reinforcing the

\textsuperscript{70} Balādhurī records a similar scuffle. In his account, however, the argument arises between Mālik al-Ashtar and Qabīsa ibn Jābir ibn Wahb al-Asadī (see Ansāb, iv, 534). Sayf places Yazīd’s argument with al-Qaʿqāʾ prior to al-Ashtar’s return from exile and, therefore, views events differentially, although a reading of both accounts clearly reveals either their interdependence or their usage of a common topos. al-Qaʿqāʾ ibn ʿAmr is a continually recurring figure in Sayf’s narratives, and he repeatedly dons similarly prominent roles on the side of the good, as in the instance above, throughout the Sayfian corpus: whether fighting as a lieutenant of Khālid ibn al-Walīd, distinguishing himself in battle at al-Qādisīya and Nihāvand, as the war commander entrusted with the welfare of Kūfa in Saʿīd absence, or as ‘Alī’s ally in the Battle of the Camel. Outside the Sayfian corpus, however, he is a virtual non-entity. For this reason, a number of historians (Wellhausen, Caetani, al-ʿAskarī, and Blankenship) have argued that al-Qaʿqāʾ, who belongs to the same clan as Sayf (i.e., Usayyid), ought to be viewed as a heroic invention intended to glorify the place of Sayf’s clan. Thus understood, the heroic al-Qaʿqāʾ is equally regarded as yet another figment of the historian’s imagination alongside the villainous Ibn al-Sawdāʾ (albeit on the opposite end of the moral spectrum). Landau-Tasseron has shown the contrary to be the case (see her essay, “Sayf ibn ‘Umar,” 16, 19 ff.), although her views ought to be revised in light of Madelung’s essay (see his, “Sayf ibn ‘Umar”). To the sources cited in the above articles, one may add the appearance of al-Qaʿqāʾ ibn ‘Amr in Ibn Abī l-Hādīd, Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha, 20 vols., ed. Muhāmmad Abū Faḍl ʿIbrāhīm (Beirut, 2001), ii, 112 (citing Wāqīdī). Hitherto neglected in the discussion of al-Qaʿqāʾ, however, is the somewhat substantial body of poetry attributed to him. Much of this material appears in the Sayfian corpus, but only in those sections preceding the caliphate of ʿUthmān and, therefore, beyond the contents of the extant manuscript of the K al-ridda. No doubt these verses have long been neglected due to the fact that Tābarī excised them from the text of his history. Ibn ʿAsākir, however, preserves numerous lines of this poetry, cited from Sayf, in his entry on al-Qaʿqāʾ; see Taʾrikh madinat Dimashq, ix, ed. Sukayna al-Shīḥābī (Damascus, 1951), 56 ff. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawi (d. 626/1229) collects an even more substantial corpus of poetry attributed to him. Much of this material appears in the Sayfian corpus, but only in those sections preceding the caliphate of ʿUthmān and, therefore, beyond the contents of the extant manuscript of the K al-ridda. To the sources cited in the above articles, one may add the appearance of al-Qaʿqāʾ ibn ‘Amr in Ibn Abī l-Hādīd, Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha, 20 vols., ed. Muhāmmad Abū Faḍl ʿIbrāhīm (Beirut, 2001), ii, 112 (citing Wāqīdī). Hitherto neglected in the discussion of al-Qaʿqāʾ, however, is the somewhat substantial body of poetry attributed to him. Much of this material appears in the Sayfian corpus, but only in those sections preceding the caliphate of ʿUthmān and, therefore, beyond the contents of the extant manuscript of the K al-ridda. No doubt these verses have long been neglected due to the fact that Tābarī excised them from the text of his history. Ibn ʿAsākir, however, preserves numerous lines of this poetry, cited from Sayf, in his entry on al-Qaʿqāʾ; see Taʾrikh madinat Dimashq, ix, ed. Sukayna al-Shīḥābī (Damascus, 1951), 56 ff. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawi (d. 626/1229) collects an even more substantial corpus of his poetry, albeit in a considerably more scattered form, in his Muḥjam al-buldān; see Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, ed., Jacut’s geographisches Wörterbuch, 6 vols. (Leipzig, 1924), i, 321, 620 et passim (for further references see al-Qaʿqāʾ ibn ‘Amr see the index in ibid., vi, 617)

\textsuperscript{71} Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 71.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., i, 150.
notion that the discontents arise from a volatile few without broad support for their cause.

The account of al-Mustanir ibn Yazīd and his brother Qays, whom Sayf cites as his second authority for these events, explicitly mention Ibn al-Sawdāʾ and his communiqués only once, but then all mention of this external influence over the events in Kūfa disappears entirely from the *khabar*. Instead, the focus shifts to detailing Yazīd’s efforts to summon Mālik al-Ashtar and the *musayyarūn* back to Kūfa and enlist their support. Although most of the exiled leaders prove reluctant to join Yazīd’s cause, al-Ashtar proves enthusiastic, rousing the Kūfans alongside Yazīd to camp outside the garrison-city at al-Jaraʿa. Despite the protestations of al-Qaʿqāʾ, Yazīd and al-Ashtar, once the latter returns to Kūfa, together successfully repulse Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ. Saʿīd then returns to Medina to be replaced, at the Kūfans’ request, by Abū Mūsā l-Ashʿarī.73

As seen in the above account, a large portion of Sayf’s narratives concerning the Sabaʾīya and their founder are oblique, with only a few exceptions. Hence, many of the Sayfian materials work on the level of the insinuation of influence by and associations with the Sabaʾīya rather explicitly stating such connections as established fact. One never encounters an exhaustive, definitive litany of the ostensible members of the Sabaʾīya. For instance, the *musayyarūn* of Kūfa are never unequivocally identified as adherents of the Sabaʾīya, although Sayf takes pains to emphasize the manipulative influence the Sabaʾīya held over several of them. While the core Sabaʾīya are named, often the broader membership of their ranks remains tenuously grasped and ambiguous. Thus, the Sabaʾīya appear not as a self-identified group of dissidents rearing their heads during the most visible stirrings of dissent during the caliphate of ʿUthmān, but rather lurk as a virtually imperceptible presence underneath the more visible roots of the sedition and turmoil undermining the caliph’s leadership. The Sabaʾīya appear as a cryptic, virtually invisible cabal working in the shadows—they are not merely the *musayyarūn* or the *qurrāʾ*. Often, therefore, one must interpret their mere presence or mention by Sayf as an indictment of either a movement, historical persona, or even region—a paradigm one first encounters in the narrative of the Kūfan uprising against Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ.

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73 Ibid., i, 73 f.
The Parables of Ka‘b ibn Dhī l-Ḥabaka, ‘Umayr ibn Ḫābi‘, and Kumayl ibn Ziyād

A hallmark feature of Sayf’s narrative is his inclusion of a number of didactic reports focusing on the fate of those numberd either among the opponents of ʿUthmān and/or among the partisans of the Saba‘īya. These appear in the form of parables wherein tangential narratives are introduced. Such sidelights tend to exhibit God’s providential economy of retribution, which he exacts against the opponents of ʿUthmān for the evil deeds they committed against the caliph. Here, Sayf’s depiction of the menace of the Saba‘īya is inseparable from his efforts to defame, and generally discredit, the chief opponents of ʿUthmān. Although this observation may be applied to Sayf’s treatments of the dissidents more broadly, this especially applies his narrative of the turmoils in his native Kūfa. We have already encountered Sayf’s disdain for the leading opponents to ʿUthmān in Ḥiraq in the above accounts; however, only al-Ashtar and Yazīd have hitherto been singled out for unequivocal scorn. Sayf, as one may recall, not only portrays al-Ashtar as a Saba‘ī but also as one possessed by a profoundly malicious temperament. This is revealed first in his attack against ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Ḥubaysh in the court Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀs but also later when he mercilessly decapitates a mawlā of Saʿīd upon hearing the man remark that Saʿīd ought to have remained governor in Kūfa.

Positing association or membership with the Saba‘īya functions as just one of the many means available to and utilized by Sayf in his repertoire of historical reportage and narrative. Thus, in our first khabar transmitted on the combined authority of Muḥammad and Ṭālḥa, we encounter two sidelights on Ka‘b ibn Dhī l-Ḥabaka and ‘Umayr ibn Ḫābi‘, both of whom were prominent among the musayyarūn and the associates of al-Ashtar. Sayf’s reports for each follow the format of a common topos of his narratives wherein he chooses a prominent opponent of ʿUthmān and proceeds to explain and delegitimate the motives for his opposition to the caliph.

The roots of the opposition of Ibn Dhī l-Ḥabaka, Sayf informs us, lay in the fact that he had once been censured by the former governor of Kūfa, al-Walid ibn ʿUqba (gov. 29/649–50), at the behest of ʿUthmān, after word had spread that he was “practicing white magic

74 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 81–7; Ṭabarī, 1, 3032–7 (sub anno 35 A.H.).
75 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 73.
When summoned before al-Walīd, he excused himself saying, “This is merely finesse (to earn a living), and something to wonder at [innamā ḥuwa ḫiqīn wa-amrīn yu’jabu minhu].” Despite his appeals, al-Walīd ordered that he be flogged for his religious indiscretions. Much later, when Ibn Dhī l-Ḥabak entered exile along with the rest of the musayyarūn, Saʿīd sent him along with Mālik al-Ashtar—“whose religion [dīn] was like his religion,” Sayf tells us—not to Muʿāwiya in Syria but to Danbāwand in Iran, “because it was a land of sorcerers.” The exile of Ibn Dhī l-Ḥabaka appears elsewhere other than in the Sayfian corpus, but his delight in the magical arts does not.

Beyond the mere matter of Ibn Dhī l-Ḥabaka’s exile to Danbāwand, the scenario Sayf presents is highly suspect on a number of accounts. On the one hand, al-Walīd ibn ‘Uqba incurred his own notoriety among the Kūfans during his governorship for entertaining his guests with the feats of a sorcerer (Ar. sāhir). Establishing this reputation of the Kūfan governor is the well-known tale of Jundab ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Azdī, himself often counted among the qurrāʾ and musayyarūn opposed to ʿUthmān; he was imprisoned by al-Walīd after for his

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76 Nīranj, a calque of the Persian nīrang, connotes white magic and sleight of hand; cf. Toufic Fahd, “Nirandj,” EM, viii, 51b.
77 “Li-annahā ard saḥara,” in Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 81 f.; Ṭabarī, 1, 3033 f. An ancient town as well as an immense volcanic mountain north-east of modern Tehran, Danbāwand (or, Damāvand) plays numerous, prominent roles in Iranian folk and religious myths; see Ahmad al-Tafażżoli, “Damāwand,” Elr, vi, 630 f.
78 See Ibn Shabba, iii, 1143; Balādhuri, Ansāb, iv, 531. The mention by Ibn Shabba and Balādhuri of his exile to “the mountain of smoke [jabal al-dukhān]” in their accounts of Ibn Dhī l-Ḥabaka is a reference to the mountain being volcanic. Most famously, the Mt. Damāvand was reputed to imprison the diabolical al-Dāḥāk (Av., Aži Dahāk; Ar.-Pr., al-Żahāk), an arch-demon, tyrant, and sorcerer of the Persianate pantheon most famously depicted in Ferdowsi’s Shāhnāmah. Legends claim that he ruled after having slain the righteous king Jamshēd, whose death was finally avenged by Jamshēd’s descendent Ferēdūn. Ferēdūn vanquished al-Dāḥāk by chaining him to the mountain and, thus, put an end to his millennium-long tyranny. The volcanic rumbling of the mountain was associated in popular belief with the imprisoned al-Dāḥāk, awaiting his return at the apocalypse. Cf. P. O. Skjærvø, “Aždahā,” Elr, iii, 194 ff. In yet another Persian Islamic adaptation, it was not al-Dāḥāk, but the fallen angels Hārūt and Mārūt. The two angels are supernatural interlocutors of the qur’ānic Solomon cryptically credited in the Qur’ān with teaching humankind dual evils of sorcery and sowing discord between spouses (see Q. 2:102) who reputedly had been imprisoned in that mountain. See A. Shapur Shahbazi, “Hārut and Mārut,” Elr, xii, 21b. Much of the imagery associated with these legends also appear to have entered Muslim apocalyptic as well; e.g., see David Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, SLAEI 21 (Princeton, 2002), 117 ff. and Tafażżoli, op. cit., 631a.
impromptu execution of the aforementioned sorcerer in the midst of his performance in the governor’s court. On the other hand, non-Sayfian accounts portray Ibn Dhī l-Hābaka not as a practitioner of magical arts, but as religiously devout: “kāna nāsikān.” In Balādhurī’s combined account, ‘Uthmān orders for Ibn Dhī l-Ḥabī to be flogged and exiled, not for sorcery, but rather as the only named signatory of the otherwise anonymous letter of scathing rebuke sent by Kūfa’s qurrā’ to ‘Uthmān. Sayf, however, likely wishes for his readers to consider Ibn Dhī l-Ḥabī among the Sabaʿīya, or at least in the circles operating under the sway of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, and working in pursuit of goals shared in common with them. No explicit mention of Ibn Dhī l-Ḥabī among the ranks of the Sabaʿīya appears here, but, as noted above, innuendo and implied associations are key in Sayf’s narrative. Casting Ibn Dhī l-Ḥabī as a practitioner of ‘nīranj’, Sayf employs a common leitmotif of charges leveled against the ghulāt. Nīranj also reappears among the suspect practices of al-Mughīra ibn Saʿīd (d. 119/737)—the mawlā of the governor of ‘Irāq, Khālid al-Qasrī (gov. 105–20/724–38)—who was also reviled as a Sabaʾī. It is tempting to wonder whether or not such events inspired Sayf to spin his tale about Ibn Dhī l-Ḥabī.

The second half of the same khabar relates the story of Dābi—father of ʿUmayr ibn Dābi al-Burjumī. Sayf relates that, in the time of al-Walīd ibn ʿUqba, Dābi had borrowed a dog named Qurhān owned by a group of Ansār in order to hunt gazelle. Later, Dābi refused to

79 The story appears in a myriad of sources and entertaining iterations. See, for example, al-Yaʾqūbī, Taʾrikh, 2 vols. (Beirut, n.d.), ii, 165; Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 519; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, al-Iṣṭiʿāb fī maʿrifat al-ashāb, 4 vols., ed. ‘A. M. al-Bijāwī (Cairo, 1960), ii, 258–60; Ibn ʿAsākir, Taʾrikh madīnat Dimashq, 80 vols., ed. ‘U. Gh. al-ʿAmrawī (Beirut, 1995), xi, 309, 311, 313. Only Sayf, however, presents the episode as a conspiracy in which Jundab, seeking revenge for a son killed by al-Walīd, himself brought the sorcerer to the court for punishment by al-Walīd. In Sayf’s story, the sorcerer’s performance had been conducted in al-Walīd’s residence only as a means to acquire the damning proof demanded by the sunna before dealing the man his death sentence. Al-Walīd, moreover, merely followed the recommendations he received in the matter. He only undertook these actions after soliciting the advice of the venerable Ibn Masʿūd. Exculpating al-Walīd, Sayf would have one believe that the other accounts ultimately derive from a canard maliciously spread by Jundab who opportunistically murdered the sorcerer in order to upstage al-Walīd. See Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 31 f.

80 Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 528.

81 Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 530 f.; cf. the same in Ibn Shabba, iii, 1132 ff.

return the dog despite the protestations of the Anṣār to whom the dog originally belonged. Eventually these Anṣār enlisted against Dābiʾ the aid of his fellow tribesmen, who were able to secretly snatch the dog away. In retaliation, Dābiʾ composed a few lines of invective against the culprits in which he claimed that the dog was their mother, “fa-kalbukum lā tatrukūhā wa-ummukum//fa-inna ʿuqūqa l-ummahāti kabīrūt”83 This insulting verse earned him the chastisement of ‘Uthmān, after which he was imprisoned. Dābiʾ was later released, but his hatred for ‘Uthmān over the dog affair led him to seek the caliph’s assassination. His ire now directed towards the caliph, Dābiʾ composed the following verse expressing his wish to bereave ‘Uthmān’s wives, “hamamtu wa-lam af’al wa-kidtu wa-laytani//fa’altu fa-wallaytu l-bukāʾa ḥalāʾīlūh!”84 This thinly veiled threat against the life of ‘Uthmān inevitably earned him a second imprisonment.85 According to Sayf’s account, “that was too much to bear, and he remained in prison until he died there [fa-istathqala dhālika fa-mā zāla fī l-sijn ḥattā māta fihī].”86

This historical vignette, as reproduced by Sayf, closely resembles the numerous other parallel accounts of the event dispersed throughout the Arabic sources and contains hardly any significant departures from them. However, tacked on to the end of the narrative, we read one further detail that Sayf alone includes. Moved by his father’s sufferings and subsequent death, “ʿUmayr ibn Dābiʾ,” Sayf informs us, “became a Sabaʾī.” While the notice is brief, much like the previous mention of the minions of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ among the supporters of Yazīd ibn Qays al-Arhābī, it is clear that in Sayf’s narrative the Sabaʾīya’s influence pervaded the Kūfan revolt and exacerbated with purposeful plotting the temperaments of the disgruntled qurrāʾ. Sayf is keen to demonstrate, moreover, that not only were ‘Uthmān’s opponents deviant in their religion, but that they also opposed him on the basis of personal

83 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 83.
84 Ibid. Ibn Shabba (iii, 1024) gives a much bolder rendering of the verse: “hamamtu wa-lam af’al wa-kidtu wa-laytani//taraktu ʿalā ‘uthmāna tabkī ḥalāʾīlūh.”
85 Although absent from Sayf’s account, his version appears to be a truncated version of the original story which included two imprisonments and seems to assume it. Cf. Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 576 f. and idem, Ansāb al-ashraf: Sāʾ ir furūʿ qabāʾil al-ʿarab, vii, ed. Ramzi al-Baḥbakī, Bibliotheca Islamica 28i (Beirut, 1997), 5 ff.; Ibn Shabba, iii, 1024 ff.
86 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 82.
grudges in which the caliph was in the right, not on the basis of legitimate religious and political grievances.

Sayf continues to tell us more about ʿUmayr ibn Ḍābi’ in a report related on the authority of al-Mustanir ibn Yazīd al-Nakhaʿī from his brother Qays. Qays ibn Yazīd, who ostensibly relates the account, begins by declaring, “By God, I have never heard of, nor do I know of, anyone who assaulted ʿUthmān or rode against him who was not killed.”87 His account continues to discuss a gathering of a group of the usual suspects: Malik al-Ashtar, Zayd and his brother Šaʿaʾa ibn Šūhān al-ʿAbdī, Kaʾb ibn Dhī l-Habaka, Abū Zaynab, Abū Muwarriʿ, Kumayl ibn Ziyād, and ʿUmayr ibn Ḍābiʾ. After unanimously assenting that not a single member of their ranks could rightly hold his head high as long as ʿUthmān remains caliph,88 ʿUmayr ibn Ḍābiʾ and Kumayl ibn Ziyād vow to murder ʿUthmān and swiftly ride off from Kūfa towards Medina in order to accomplish their task. ʿUmayr, however, loses his nerve and like a coward shrinks from his original resolve mid-voyage.89 Kumayl’s resolve, by contrast, does not waver, and he risks the venture alone and readies himself for the attack. Once he arrives in Medina, however, he encounters a brawny caliph, who upon seeing Kumayl slaps him in the face with such force that he knocks him to floor. After taunting him to accomplish the assassination, which Kumayl naturally refuses to do, the caliph demands his submission. Kumayl acquiesces to ʿUthmān, stupefied with fear before the majestic caliph, and disavows his intention to seek the caliph’s death. Afterwards, the munificent caliph bids him leave, despite his foresight of Kumayl’s future and seditious machinations. Warning Kumayl, ʿUthmān declares: “If you speak the truth, then God shall reward you; if you are a liar, then God shall recompense you!”90

Not surprisingly, Sayf narrates that ʿUthmān’s pronouncement proved to be true. The narrative continues, “(Kumayl and ʿUmayr)

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87 Ibid., i, 84.
88 Wa-llāhi lā yurfa ʿu binā raʾsun mā dāma ʿuthmān ʿalā al-nās!
89 ʿUmayr ibn Ḍābiʾ, however, inflicted upon ʿUthmān’s corpse the indignity of being trampled under his own feet according to most sources—an indignity which Sayf’s narrative spares the caliph by neglecting to mention. See Balādhurī, Ansāb, vii, 7 (cf. the editor’s notes for additional references).
90 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 84. Ibn Shabba compiles a number accounts to the same effect; however, in his versions, the would-be assassin of ʿUthmān remains anonymous referred to only as an “ʿIrāqi man [rajul ʿirāqi]” (op. cit., iii, 1026 f.). Perhaps this account served as a template for Sayf’s report?
lived on until people quarreled a great deal about the impunity they enjoyed [fa-baqiyā ḥattā akthara l-nāṣ fi nijā’ihim].”91 ’Umayr’s demise, however, inevitably came, albeit some four decades after ’Uthmān’s murder. Sayf’s first account concludes with ’Umayr’s death, in which the Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī beheads the hoary dissident upon learning of his involvement with the murderers of ’Uthmān. ’Umayr actually walks into his own death after he appears before the governor, appealing to his advanced age, in order to request that the governor accept his sons in his stead for an expedition led by the general al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra.92 Sayf then immediately introduces another khabar related on the authority on an anonymous “man from the Banū Asad” discussing the fate of both ’Umayr and Kumayl.93 The account here differs from the previous one. Rather than meeting his fate after petitioning al-Ḥajjāj to be excused from military service, al-Ḥajjāj pursues ’Umayr after Asmā’ bint Khārija informs the governor of ’Umayr’s long-lived impunity. Once the governor arrest ’Umayr, he interrogates the old man in order to discover how many of those who rebelled against ’Uthmān were still alive. ’Umayr betrays to him the name of his old companion Kumayl ibn Ziyād, who, despite the protection proffered by his tribe, must himself eventually submit to his fate of execution at the hands of the Umayyad governor.94

The Imprisonment of the “Thief” Hukaym ibn Jabala al-‘Abdī95

Sayf now changes venue, moving away from Kūfa and narrating events pertaining to Baṣra. He provides us with another account on the authority of ’Atīya ibn al-Ḥārith from Yazīd al-Faqāṣi, in which we encounter a piece of chronological datum. In a previously analyzed account transmitted on the same authorities, we encountered similar chronological hints from which we can begin to construct a more coherent picture of the activities of Ibn al-Sawdā during ’Uthmān’s

91 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 84. This is a difficult phrase. Caetani (Annali, viii, 68) paraphrases the passages as, “E restarono i due, finché la gente s’affollò meravigliata del colloquio.” Humphreys (Crisis, 233), however, objects to this rendering, translating the passage instead as “(Kumayl and ’Umayr) lived on until their longevity was much talked about among the people.”
92 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 84 f. This version of ’Umayr’s death is consonant with the other major accounts; see Baladhuri, Ansāb, vii, 8 and Ṣabarī, ii, 869 (sub anno 75 A.H.).
93 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 85 f.
94 Ibid.; cf. Ṣabarī, ii, 1097 f.
95 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 91 f.; Ṣabarī, 1, 2922 f.
caliphate. That above account claimed that Ibn al-Sawdāʿ converted to Islam in the seventh year of his caliphate (i.e., in 30 A.H.), which is a date also confirmed by another of Sayf’s favorite sources, Muḥammad and Ṭalḥa96—and continued to state that Ibn al-Sawdāʿ entered Kūfa in the eighth year (i.e., 31 A.H.). Sayf’s putative source again reconfirms this dating scheme, relating that three years into the governorship of Ibn ʿĀmir over Baṣra (31 A.H.)97 there appeared a man among the ‘Abd al-Qays who resided with Ḥukaym ibn Jabala al-ʿAbdī. This man, we are told later in the account, was none other than Ibn al-Sawdāʿ. Before revealing his identity, however, Sayf takes pains to inform us of the character of this Ḥukaym ibn Jabala with whom Ibn al-Sawdāʿ found lodging. Ḥukaym ibn Jabala, he tells us, gained notoriety as a thief: “kāna rajulan lisān.” Most of his thievery allegedly occurred after the Muslim armies had withdrawn from eastward territory. Following the Muslim armies’ withdrawal, “he quickly moved into the land of Fārs to raid the protected non-Muslims [al-dhimma],98 treating them reprehensibly, disturbing the peace, and seizing whatever he wished.”99 When both the dhimmīs and Muslims (“ahl al-qibla,” he says) began to appeal to ʿUthmān to intervene, he ordered Ibn ʿĀmir to arrest Ḥukaym and his ilk (tābaqa)100 in order to prevent them from leaving Baṣra until they mended their ways.

While Ḥukaym was incarcerated and prohibited from leaving the city, Ibn al-Sawdāʿ resided with him101 after which a handful of individuals began to congregate around him. It was in their company, Sayf writes, that “Ibn al-Sawdāʿ posed (questions) to them, but did not state things explicitly [taraḥa lahum ibnu l-sawdāʾ wa-lam yusarrīḥ], and they were receptive of him and found him acceptable [istaʿamūhu].”102

96 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 122.4.
97 The removal of Abū Mūsā a-Ashʿarī from his governorship over Baṣra and his replacement by ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿĀmir is usually dated to 29 A.H.; cf. Annali, vii, 237–40. These dates prove to be quite important later on, for it starkly contradicts Sayf’s subsequent assertion that Ibn al-Sawdāʿ had been stationed in Egypt, where he conspired to oust ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs from the governorship there (see the discussion below). Both accounts are transmitted from ʿAtiya ibn al-Hārith on the authority of Yazīd al-Faqāṣi.
98 The ms lacks ahl (see Sayf, K al-ridda, ii, fol. 43b), but this may be the result of textual corruption; cf. Ṭabarī, 2922.8, where the text reads ‘ahl al-dhimma’.
99 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 92.
100 The meaning of tābaqa here likely implies the Sabaʾiya (cf. ibid., 1, 56.3).
101 The text makes no mention of a prison and, thus, a type of house-arrest may be assumed here.
102 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 92. I have adopted the text of the ms (cf. ibid., ii, fol. 44a), which is admittedly awkward, in my translation above. Perhaps Ṭabarī’s recension
This provoked the interest of the governor Ibn ‘Āmir and gained Ibn al-Sawdāʾ an audience with him. While in the governor’s presence, Ibn al-Sawdāʾ strove to secure the governor’s favor by casting himself as a man from the people of the Book who desired to become Muslim and obtain Ibn ‘Āmir’s protection, “rajulun raghiba fī l-islām wa-raghiba fī jiwārika.” Ibn ‘Āmir’s reply was unwelcoming: “On the basis of what I have heard?! Depart from me!” Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, compelled by Ibn ‘Āmir, leaves Basra until he reaches Kūfa, where again he was compelled to leave. Sayf’s account here makes no mention of the details of the stay of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ in Kūfa, although presumably he established enough contacts to later aid his attempts to foment the sedition discussed above. Rather, the account ends by informing us that he settled in Egypt where he began to correspond with “them”—unnamed in the text, but presumably the Sabaʾiya of ʿIrāq—“and a number of men were acting as intermediaries between (the Sabaʾiya in the different garrison towns) [takhtalifu l-rijālu baynahum].”

Hukaym appears frequently in other accounts, mostly in his later role as the leader of the Basran dissidents who marched to Medina to confront ʿUthmān and, therefore, as one of the caliph’s most prominent opponents. His social standing was, thus, very much parallel to that of the much discussed musayyarūn of Kūfa. This does not mean, however, that Hukaym had always been on the outs with the caliph. A number of historians report that ʿUthmān commissioned him to scout al-Sind in order to investigate what potential boon or hazard the territory held for the Muslim armies. Hukaym found mostly hazard. Later in life, he became a strident partisan of ʿAlī.

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is superior, reading “they considered him to be a man of importance [istaʿzamūhu]” (op. cit., i, 2922.13).

103 “Bi-mā balaghanī ukhruj ’anni,” Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 92; Ṭabarī, i, 2922.15 reads, “mā balaghani dhālika.”

104 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 92. For this sense of the idiom ikhtalafa bayna in Sayf’s writing, see Donner, *Conquest of Arabia*, xviii and n. 12 thereto.


According to Balādhurī, citing the Kūfan authorities Abū Mikhnaf (d. 147/774) and al-Sha’bī (d. ca. 103–10/721–8), it was Ḥukaym who, after ‘Uthmān’s murder, personally seized al-Zubayr ibn ‘Awwām and brought him before ‘Alī compelling him to give his oath of allegiance, whereupon al-Zubayr protested: “I have been led by a thief of the thieves of ‘Abd al-Qays until I unwillingly gave my allegiance [sāqanī lisūn min luṣūsh ‘abd al-qays ḥattā bāyā’tu mukrah].”

Madelung views Sayf’s depiction of Ḥukaym as a thief and confederate of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ as originating with the above gibe of al-Zubayr, arguing rather that Ḥukaym was “in reality... a highly respected chief of the ‘Abd al-Qays in Baṣra.” Each of Balādhurī’s accounts is notably derived from the Kūfan historical tradition; therefore, the historical and chronological proximity of the recording and transmission of each strengthens the plausibility of Madelung’s assertion that Sayf’s tradition derives its inspiration from the above literary reconstructions of al-Zubayr’s oath of allegiance to ‘Alī. Sayf was himself a student of al-Sha’bī according to the rijāl-works—but, indeed, so was the putative authority of the tradition he transmits, ‘Aṭīya ibn al-Ḥārith.

It is interesting to note that Ibn Shabba provides us with a unique account of a conflict between Ibn ‘Āmir and Ḥukaym, whom, the account claims, met the challenge of an unnamed man who came to Baṣra “racing horses and provoking the notables [yuharrishu bayna l-ashrāf fa-ajrā al-khayl].” Ḥukaym raced the man and bested him. The account continues to state that Ibn ‘Āmir became angry at this and took the horse belonging to Ḥukaym to Fārs. It was on account of this horse, the account suggests, that Ḥukaym’s ire became inflamed against ‘Uthmān whom he thereafter began to reproach. This event may account for his eventual opposition to ‘Uthmān, but it is still a far cry from Sayf’s narrative.

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108 Balādhurī, Ansāb, ii, 189.17; cf. the version of events narrated by Sayf in K. al-jamāl, i, 237.


110 For Sayf, see Mizzā, Tahdhib al-kamāl, xii, 325; and for ‘Aṭīya, see ibid., xx, 143 f.

111 Ibn Shabba, iii, 1147.
The Discontents of Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī

Next the scene shifts from ʿIrāq to Syria, where Ibn al-Sawdāʾ works his pernicious influence on the famously irascible companion of the Prophet, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 32/651). Abū Dharr maintains a recurring presence in the Islamic tradition as a paragon of ardent, austere, and uncompromising piety; and the events surrounding his discontent with the administrative policies of ʿUthmān and his numerous governors appear in a myriad of sources. Sayf himself incorporates a total of eight consecutive akhbār about Abū Dharr—an exceptional quantity of material by Sayf’s standards. These eight akhbār roughly cover the period of Abū Dharr’s life during his first disputes with Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, then governor of Syria, and ending with his death. This series of akhbār comprises the bulk of Ṭabarī’s material on this figure as well, as he seems to have preferred Sayf’s more amicable accounts over others. Ṭabarī himself writes, “As for the other (narrators), they have narrated many things, … repugnant matters [umūr shanīʿa] that I am loathe mention.”

Not all of Sayf’s materials concerning Abū Dharr need detain us here. Of primary importance for our study—and, indeed, in many ways most revealing—is the khabar relating Abū Dharr’s encounter with Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, which Sayf alone narrates on the authority of Ḍāṭiyah from Yazīd al-Faqāṣi. Despite the array of narrators concerned with Abū Dharr’s conflict with Muʿāwiya and his disputes with ʿUthmān, all differ from Sayf’s most distinctive account in that they either neglected to mention or were nescient of Abū Dharr’s alleged interactions with Ibn al-Sawdāʾ. As Sayf’s account begins, Abū Dharr encounters Ibn al-Sawdāʾ in Syria where the latter instigates the former against Muʿāwiya:

Oh Abū Dharr, aren’t you amazed at Muʿāwiya?! He says, ‘The wealth is God’s wealth [al-māl mālu llāh]’—isn’t everything God’s?!—as if he wants to snatch it from the Muslims and erase the names of the Muslims (viz., from the diwān register).

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114 Ṭabarī, i, 2826.
115 See the sources reviewed in Caetani, Annali, vii, 365–79. To Caetani’s source, one may add Ibn Shabba, iii, 1033–41; Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv., 541 ff.; Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ, iii, 50 ff. and viii, 258–62.
116 Sayf, K al-ridda, 120; Ṭabarī, 2858 f.
Here again, we see the recurring theme of trepidations over the ’Uthmānic policies concerning the administration and equitable management of the *fay’* lands. Abū Dharr apparently finds the words of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ seductive enough to be convinced and begins to espouse them himself. In the scene immediately following in this *khabar*, Abū Dharr confronts Muʿāwiya:

“What led you to call the Muslims’ wealth God’s wealth [*mā yadʿūka ilā an tusammiya māla l-muslimīn māla llāh*]?” (Muʿāyiya) said, “Oh Abū Dharr, may God be merciful towards you! Are we not God’s servants? The wealth is his wealth, just as all creation is his creation and all authority is his authority.” (Abū Dharr) said, “Just don’t say it!” “I do not say that it is not God’s,” (Muʿāyiya) said, “but I will say ‘the wealth of the Muslims’ with that implied [*saʿaqūlu māl al-muslimīn wa-anwī*].”

Sayf’s account paints Muʿāwiya in affable hues but is keen to portray Abū Dharr as staunchly inflexible and, in essence, duped by Ibn al-Sawdāʾ. Abū Dharr’s tale, however, is somewhat unlike that of others who haplessly fall under the charms of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ in that Sayf spares him from bearing complete responsibility. ’Ubāda ibn al-Šāmit brings Ibn al-Sawdāʾ before Muʿāwiya in Sayf’s account declaring, “This is the one, by God, that sent Abū Dharr against you.” Muʿāwiya, it is worth noting, later emerges as perhaps the sole Companion to actually perceive that the plot against ’Uthmān is, in reality, “the attack of the Jews [*maʿrakat al-yahūd*].” Nonetheless, Abū Dharr stubbornly adheres to his position, and taking up residence in Syria, he takes to preaching fiery condemnation of the wealthy and their neglect of the poor.

The grievances of Abū Dharr voiced in his exchange with Muʿāwiya as crafted by Sayf appear not as well-founded discontents, but rather the result of his being inveigled by a Jew. This point becomes particularly vivid as the account shifts to a brief exchange between Ibn al-Sawdāʾ and Abū l-Dardāʾ (d. 32/652), who, unlike the impressionable Abū Dharr, discerns the ill-intentions of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ and declares, “Who are you?—I suppose, by God, that you are a Jew!”

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117 Sayf, *K al-ridda*, 102; Tabarî, 2859, but omitting the final phrase “wa-anwī.”
118 A reputed *ṣahābi* and later judge of Jerusalem for the Muslims; see Dhahabî, *Duwal al-islām*, 2 vols. (Hyderabad, 1918), i, 15.
120 Ibid., i, 102.3.
121 Ibid., i, 102.
Abū l-Dardāʾ serves as counter-example to the supposedly simple-minded Abū Dharr, for Abū l-Dardāʾ, too, was esteemed as a Companion of the Prophet. Not only that, but he also garnered widespread renown for both his asceticism and his reputation as a sagacious man of learning.122 He, therefore, stands in strark contraposition to Abū Dharr, who had been a mere unlearned Bedouin.

Sayf’s account, although replete with difficulties, has proven to exert a rather compelling influence on historians, both medieval and modern.123 Madelung in particular has connected the term ‘māl Allāh’, which Abū Dharr found so objectionable, with another allegedly ‘Uthmānic innovation, the caliphal title ‘khalīfat Allāh.’ The significance of this titular transformation, attested for nearly every caliph from ‘Uthmān onward,124 emerges against the backdrop of how ‘Uthmān exercised his own authority compared with his two predecessors, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. According to one tradition, the latter two allegedly preferred the titles khalīfat rasūl Allāh and amīr al-muʾminīn respectively, and ‘Uthmān’s assumption of the title khalīfat Allāh, thus, announced a seachange of sorts in terms of how he conceptualized his office.125 Here the matter can only be treated briefly; however, the prerogatives that the title implies should be teased out.

It has often been observed that, while the title khalīfat Allāh carries obvious religious implications for the ideology of the caliphate, one is hard-pressed to find a clear Qurʾānic import for the title. It is altogether remarkable that, in the Umayyad period at least, “the exegetes made no connection between the Qurʾānic term khalīfa and the politico-religious reality of the institution of the caliphate.”126 Hence,

125 Ibid., 20 f., 111 ff. The polemical context in which Abū Bakr, ‘Umar I and ‘Umar II often reject the title khalīfat Allāh should be noted (ibid., 22); however, Avraham Hakim provides several counter-examples leading him to argue that “only at a later stage did the title ‘Caliph of God’ become controversial, especially when conferred upon a leader of such stature as ‘Umar”; see his “‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and the Title Khalīfat Allāh: A Textual Analysis,” *JSAI* 30 (2005), 223.
126 W. al-Qādī, “Caliph,” *EQ*, i, 277b. Of course, one may point to al-Walīd II who, while composing his testament in 125/742, construes an exegetically derived parallel to Adam’s Qurʾānic title ‘khalīfa’ and the Umayyad title ‘khalīfat Allāh’. However, as al-Qādī notes, al-Walīd was not a ‘professional’ exegete; therefore, his efforts “had no effects on the exegesis of scholars… who wanted sincerely to understand the meanings
the title is bereft of any Qur’anic support, exegetical or otherwise. This being the case, the title almost certainly arises from the ideological and religious needs of the caliphal community—although often with an eye towards the domination of the former over the latter. In the Umayyad ideology of the Marwānid era, whence our best evidence survives, it seems altogether clear that the title announced that the caliph was God’s appointed authority on Earth and, hence, the direct conduit of his guidance to the community of Muslims.\textsuperscript{127} The prerogatives that the title would have arrogated to ‘Uthmān, especially vis-à-vis the past precedents of his predecessors as well as the Prophet himself, are clear: his authority represented God’s authority—hence, the arrival of “accusations that the caliph and his governor were misappropriating māl al-muslimīn, money belonging to the Muslims collectively, as māl Allāh, money at the discretionary disposal of the Viceregent of God.”\textsuperscript{128} Yet, as khalīfat Allāh, the dissidents, in fact, had no grounds to object to ‘Uthmān’s policies. A statement attributed to Mu‘āwiya demonstrates this succinctly, “The land belongs to God, and I am the of the revealed text and to arrive…to a clearer Islamic ‘sense of identity’—regardless of what the state thought or claimed” (idem, “The Term ‘Khalīfa’ in Early Exegetical Literature,” WI 27 (1988), 411; emphasis mine).

\textsuperscript{127} I. Goldziher was inclined to see the construe the title khalīfat Allāh as ‘successor’ (of the Prophet approved by God) in his essay, “Du sens propre des expressions, Ombre de Dieu, Khalife de Dieu pour designer les chefs dans l’Islam,” RHR 35 (1897), 337. Crone and Hinds contest this vigorously (God’s Caliph); however, a more recent study has attempted to revive, albeit with significant qualifications, Goldziher’s interpretation and construe the title as ‘replacement or successor’ by (the agency of God). See A. Shahin, Struggling for Communitas, 623 ff. It is worth noting the appearance of the caliphal title khalīfat rasūl Allāh applied to ‘Uthmān in an anonymous Syriac chronicle as tablīpā da-nbiyeh d-alāhā; see Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens, 2 vols., ed. J.-B. Chabot (CSCO 81–2/scri. syri 36–7; Louvain, 1916–20), i, 277.3–4 (cited in S. P. Brock, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam,” in Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society, ed. G. H. A. Juynboll [Carbondale, 1982], 14 and 201 n. 33). However, this attestation is rather late, and likely dependent on an equally late Muslim source. It is noteworthy that in the anonymous chronicle Muhammad ibn Abī Bakr is the person who so addresses ‘Uthmān, rather facetiously at that, in order to dupe him into ruling his own blood licit as an illegitimate ruler. Both the anonymous chronicle and the chronicle of Michael the Syrian are noted for their dependence on Dionysius of Tell Mahrê, but here, Michael’s passage diverges quite starkly from that of the anonymous chronicler. Michael depicts the masses as calling for ‘Uthmān’s repentance, but he replies defiantly, “I am king, and whatever I wish, I do [malkā ḫay kūl d-ṣābē-ñā abdā-ñā].” See Michael the Syrian, Chronique, 4 vols., ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot (Louvain, 1899–1910), ii, 449 (Fr.)/iv, 433 (Syr.).

\textsuperscript{128} Madelung, Succession, 84.
Caliph (appointed) by God. Whatever I take is mine. Whatever I leave is for the people.”

Madelung’s argument for pairing ‘māl Allāh’ and ‘khalīfat Allāh’ as ideological siblings paints quite a compelling picture, especially since it brings us back to Kūfa, which represents the very wellspring of ‘Uthmān’s protracted difficulties. However, the argument is also beset by a glaring difficulty: the articulation of the māl Allāh vs. māl al-muslimīn scenario attributed to Ibn al-Sawdāʾ appears also only in Sayf’s narrative of the Abū Dharr episode. In fact, Sayf’s location of the origins of Abū Dharr’s discontent in Syria runs contrary to a number of accounts which assert that he had traveled there only after a previous conflagration with ‘Uthmān in Medina. Moreover, there seems to be little indication that Abū Dharr articulated his rebukes in the manner claimed. The actual content of Abū Dharr’s preaching, as manifest in alternative narratives, denounces the newfound and freely enjoyed wealth spreading among the Muslims—not to mention the lifestyles engendered by such affluence. The most salient feature of his preaching takes its cues, not from Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, but from Q. 9:34–35: “Tell those who hoard gold and silver instead of giving in God’s cause that they will have a grievous punishment: on that Day, it is heated up with Hell’s Fire and used to brand their foreheads, sides and backs; they will be told, ‘This is what you hoarded up for yourselves! Now feel the pain of what you have hoarded!’” Hence, although the scenario

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130 One looks in vain for parallels; e.g., see Cameron, Abū Dharr, 62 ff. Two potential parallels can be located in Saʿīd’s declaration of the Sawād as ‘the garden of the Quraysh’ (which Sayf denies occurring) and ‘Uthmān’s terse reply to Ibn Maḥṣūd when he objects to Walīd ibn ‘Uqba’s appropriation of funds from the bayt al-māl and his dereliction in their repayment. ‘Uthmān declares to Ibn Maḥṣūd, “You are merely our (i.e., the Quraysh) treasurer [inammā anta khāzin un lanā].” To which Ibn Maḥṣūd retorts, “I thought I was a treasurer to the Muslims [kuntu azānnu annānī khāzin un li-l-muslimīn]” (Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 518). But in these two passages, the dispute occurs, by contrast, over the priority of the Quraysh, upon which ‘Uthmān bases his own claims of authority as their elected leader. Compare ibid., 548 f. and Ya’qūbī, Taʾrīkh, ii, 168 f. where the line is attributed to ‘Abd Allāh ibn Arqam and an unnamed appointee, respectively. The story has many iterations; see Noth/Conrad, op. cit., 21 f. Sayf’s version, which deems the event “as the first evil incited by Satan among the Kūfans,” places the conflict over the loan between Ibn Maḥṣūd and Saʿīd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ (‘Umar’s, not ‘Uthmān’s, appointee) who solicits the loan on his own accord.

131 See Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 542; Ya’qūbī, Taʾrīkh, ii, 171.
posits a compelling picture of the struggle between 'Uthmān and the provincial dissidents, it is nevertheless purely a literary one.

Once Muʿāwiya appeals for 'Uthmān’s permission to act against Abū Dharr, 'Uthmān replies, “Indeed, fitna has shown its snout and eyes and does not tarry save to pounce! Don’t scrape the scab, but send Abū Dharr to me.” Muʿāwiya complies and sends Abū Dharr along with an escort (dalīl) so as to hurry him on his way. Despite the harsh tone evinced by 'Uthmān’s letter to Muʿāwiya, 'Uthmān appears clement and conciliatory once Abū Dharr arrives, and in the face of his opposition, the caliph appears ready to meet Abū Dharr’s objections head-on. After Abū Dharr protests against speaking of māl allāh and the greed of the rich, 'Uthmān retorts gently:

Oh Abū Dharr! I only must do what I must and take what is required of my subjects. I cannot force upon them piety [al-zuhd] and must let them be earnest or moderate (on their own).132

Abū Dharr acquiesces to 'Uthmān and requests only that he be able to leave Medina. This, Sayf relates, he did willingly, settling in al-Rabadha where he marked off a mosque (fahāsa bihā masjidʾ). 'Uthmān provided him with a small herd of sheep and camels in addition to two slaves, stipulating, however, that he strictly adhere to the caliph’s charge “to return133 to Medina so that he would not revert to being a Bedouin [hattā lā yartadda aʿrābiyʾan].”134

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132 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 103; cf. Ṭabarî, 1, 2860 (with slightly different wording).
133 In Sayf’s text, “an yuʿāwida” (K al-ridda, 1, 104.4); Ṭabarî, 1, 2860 reads instead, “an yuʿāhida.”
134 'Uthmān’s stipulation that Abū Dharr return to Medina arises from the Prophet’s stipulation that Bedouin abandon their nomadic lifestyle (taʿarrub) and undertake a hijra to Medina. Such persons who reverted to Bedouinism afterwards were deemed apostates and cursed by Muḥammad, “May God curse those who become Bedouin after having emigrated [lā’ana llāh man badā ba da hijratihil]” (cited in Kister, “Land Property and Jihād,” 279 n. 40; cf. P. Crone, “The First Century Concept of Hiğra,” Arabica 41 [1994], 356 et passim). Abū Dharr’s prior life as a Bedouin raised the question as to whether or not 'Uthmān had forced Abū Dharr to break his oath to the Prophet, changing his status from that of a muḥājir to that of an aʿrābī. Sayf, however, emphasizes that this was not the case, citing his continued relationship with Medina; see Donner, Early Islamic Conquests, 265f. and Kh. Athamina, “Aʿrāb and Muḥājirūn in the Environment of the Amṣār,” SI 66 (1987), 12. Compare also the case of Salama ibn ‘Amr (or Wahb) ibn al-Akwa’, who was also exiled to al-Rabadha, discussed in C. E. Bosworth, “A Note on Taʿarrub in Early Islam,” JSS 34 (1989), 358 f.
Chapter Two

The Saba’iya and the Opposition to 'Uthmān in Egypt

The Perfidy of Muḥammad ibn Abī Hudhayfa

Following the brief episode in Syria with Abū Dharr, Sayf’s account changes venue yet again, moving further West to Egypt. Here the narrative resumes a character closely resembling the previous narrations of the series of crises arising in Kūfa, and in fact, all the events related in this section ostensibly transpire simultaneously and (from the perspective of the Saba’iya) in concert with those events previously related concerning Kūfa. Sayf’s narrative structure, as noted above, exhibits here its original tendency towards geographic focus throughout 'Uthmān’s caliphate, and as such, he takes great pains to recapitulate the narrative and bring it into alignment with the events in Egypt.

As Hinds has previously observed, Sayf casts the Egyptian scene along lines similar to that in Kūfa, and the same crucible of conflicting interests that had formed the opposition in Kūfa, reflecting as it were the disenfranchisement and complaints of the newcomers (rawādif) and qurrāʾ, appears in Egypt as well. However, it is in Egypt that the goals and ambitions of the Saba’iya and Ibn al-Sawdāʾ come into full bloom. When contrasting the Egyptian narrative with the narrative of events ostensibly transpiring within the environs of Kūfa and Baṣra, a distinguishing feature of Sayf’s narrative of the activities of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ in Egypt comes to the fore: whereas the depiction of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s activities in ‘Irāq tends to be subdued, in Egypt Sayf places the heresiarch at the forefront of events, albeit (as in Kūfa, too) operating underground. It is in Egypt, furthermore, that we begin to see the first detailed articulation of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s doctrine, which he produces only after some experimentation. Some of these narrative elements were foreshadowed and hinted at before; however, as long as Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s activities remained outside the Egyptian context, Sayf assigned no doctrinal belief to him but limited his activities to troublemaking and inciting sedition. It is in Egypt, therefore, that Ibn al-Sawdāʾ truly dons his role as Sayf’s heresiarch.

Below, we shall examine two accounts, neither of which is preserved in Ṭabarī’s Ta’rikh. As the analysis will show, these accounts demonstrate that Sayf himself either believed, or wanted his readers to believe,

that the doctrines and conspiracies of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ truly coalesced in the Egyptian milieu—with disastrous results for the umma.

The first khabar, transmitted by Sayf on the authority of ‘Atīya from Yazid al-Faqāsī, begins by narrating the first experiences of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ in Egypt, how he settled there and intermingled with the Muslims.136 The account relates how he moved from lodging to lodging, indulging in such details as the names of those persons who granted him the hospitality of their homes. Most prominent among these are Kināna ibn Bishr, Sūdān ibn Ḥumrān, and al-Ghāfiqī ibn Ḥarb al-ʿAkkī. In particular, al-Ghāfiqī, we are told, encouraged Ibn al-Sawdāʾ to disseminate his ideas. In addition to those who granted him shelter and lodging, figures such as Khālid ibn Muljam, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Zurayr, “and their likes” gathered around Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, and he would indoctrinate them with his teachings. The account reads:137

(Ibn al-Sawdāʾ) did not find them responsive to anything as much as they were responsive to (the idea of) the waṣīya. Thus, he said to them: “The most prominent and the cleverest of the Arabs (viz., ‘Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ) rules over you [ʿalaykum nābu l-ʿarab wa-ḥajaruhum], and we are not from among his men. So show him that that you are tilling the land but (in fact) do not till a thing all year so that Egypt collapses [wa-lā tazraʿūna al-ʿām shayʿan ḥattā tankasira miṣru]. As a result, you will raise complaints against him, and he will be dismissed from governing over you. We will (then) ask for one who is weaker than he, and we will have a free hand to do whatever we wish while claiming to implement what is right [wa-nakhlū bi-mā nurīdu wa-nuzhiru al-amr bi-l-maʾrūf].

Three observations are immediately apparent. Firstly, we find our first allusion to the Shiʿite doctrine of the waṣīya—a term which here refers to the belief in ‘Alī’s right as the heir designate of the religio-political authority of the Prophet over the community. Secondly, each of the individuals named play a central role, especially (and sometimes solely) in Sayf’s narrative, in the subsequent opposition movement against ‘Uthmān that emerges out of Egypt.138 Südān ibn Ḥumrān, Kināna ibn

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137 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 116; Ibn ʿAsākir adds, “wa-l-nahy ʿan al-munkar” (ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, 298).

138 Kināna ibn Bishr, Khālid ibn Muljam, and Südān ibn Ḥumrān are said to have been instrumental in winning ‘Ammār ibn Yasār to the side of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ. See Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 137; Ṭabarī, 1, 2943 f. Al-Ghāfiqī ibn Ḥarb al-ʿAkkī, according to Sayf, leads the entirety of the Egyptian troops to Dhū Khushub, forcibly replaces ‘Uthmān as imām of the prayer in Medina, and acts as interim governor of Medina immediately
Bishr and al-Ghāfiqī are those individuals whom Sayf names as those who murder ʿUthmān with their own hands. In typical Sayfian form, this khabar provides a veritable roll call of the Egyptian opposition—a pattern that we have encountered above in the case of Kūfa as well. Many of these names along with others mentioned by Sayf, as Hinds has noted, represent the “old-guard interests…belonging to ʿUmar’s type of Islamic élite, either on the grounds of ṣuḥba or because they were Egyptian early-comers.” Finally, all activities are undertaken with the perfidy and nefarious plotting Sayf has taught us to expect: the call to have ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ withdrawn, eventually in favor of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Saʿd Ibn Abī Sarḥ, acts merely as a subterfuge for the larger plan of gaining power.

This larger, final plan of the Sabaʾiya to gain power over Egypt attained its realization, in Sayf’s view, only somewhat later in the coup d’état of Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa, whom Sayf portrays as immersed in the machinations of the inner circle of confidants aiding Ibn al-Sawdāʾ. Sayf’s account calls him “the swiftest of them in (pursuing the plan) and the most industrious of them in (its realization) following ʿUthmān’s assassination, although Kināna ibn Bishr also acts in this capacity at a later time. See Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 158, 165, 172, 232. Al-Ghāfiqī is conspicuously absent from the accounts of many other historians (see the sources reviewed in Caetani, Annali, vii, 137 ff.; per usual, Caetani dismisses Sayf’s account, which he characterizes as ʿIrāqī mixed with Egyptian sources, entirely in favor of the Medinan tradition; see ibid., viii, 199 f.). Even the name, ‘al-Ghāfiqī ibn Ḥarb al-ʿAkkī’, in the words of Hinds, “epitomizes the original force of ‘Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ” (“Murder of ʿUthmān,” 456), for ‘Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ reputedly subdued and entered Egypt with a force of approximately 3,000–4,000 men from the Yamanī tribe of ʿAkk, a third of whom were from the subtribe of Ghāfiq. See Balādhurī, Futūḥ, 212 ff.; Muhammad ibn ʿUmar al-Kindī, Kitāb al-wulāt wa-kitāb al-qudāt, ed. Rh. Guest, GMS 19 (Leiden, 1912), 8; Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, Futūḥ Misr wa-akhbāruhā, ed. Ch. Torrey, Yale Oriental Series 3 (New Haven, 1920), 56. With this information in mind, al-Ghāfiqī strikes one as merely a contrived name without any basis in history, especially when one takes into account his absence in the accounts of most other historians in contrast to the central role he plays in Sayf’s account. Wellhausen, thus, seems justified to identify al-Ghāfiqī as yet another relative unknown used by Sayf in order to avoid assigning blameworthy actions to one of the Prophet’s Companions (See Wellhausen, “Prolegoumena,” 135). However, against this view, see the role of a certain Abū Ḥarb al-Ghāfiqī mentioned in both Abū Ḥanifa al-Dinawarī, al-Akhbār al-tiwāl (Beirut, 1988), 108.-10 and Ibn Abī l-Ḥadid, Sharh, ii, 112 (citing al-Wāqidi). Most accounts, most often ultimately derived from Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri, assert that it was ʿAlī who led the prayers as imām the day of ʿUthmān’s murder. See, e.g., Ibn Shabba, iv, 1215 ff.; Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 568; Ṭabarī, i, 3059 f.; Masʿūdī, Murūj, iii, 91.

139 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 190 f.; Ṭabarī, i, 3017 f.
140 “Murder of ʿUthmān,” 456.
[kāna asra’ahum ilā dhālika wa-a’malahum fīhi].”141 The opprobrium reserved for Ibn Abī Hudhayfa is unique insofar as he had been reared by ‘Uthmān from a young age after his father, Abū Ḥudhayfa ibn ‘Utba ibn Rabī’a ibn ‘Abd Shams, perished in Yamāma while fighting against the self-proclaimed prophet Musaylima at ‘Aqrabā’ in 12/633.142 Ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa’s opposition to ‘Uthmān scandalized his contemporaries as well as subsequent historians, resulting in numerous attempts to provide the rationale and/or motives for his renunciation of the man who had acted as his foster-father, benefactor, and caretaker.143 Regardless of the actual cause, it is clear that Sayf attributes his strident opposition to his frustrated political ambitions:

When (‘Uthmān) came to power, (Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa) sought his permission to emigrate to one of the garrison towns and then went out to Egypt. What led him to do that was that he requested an appointment (from ‘Uthmān) [al-ʿamal], but (‘Uthmān) said (to him), “You’re not up to that [lasta hunāka].”144

Regardless of their individual motives, the account makes clear that each of these individuals “did whatever Ibn al-Sawdāʾ commanded them to do,”145 and, thus acting in accord under his leadership, swiftly achieved their (or his) aims: first, by securing Ibn Abī Sarḥ’s control of the kharāj in Egypt by diminishing ʿAmr’s authority to the supervision of religious affairs [al-salāt] and military affairs [al-harb],146 and finally, after further entreaties and complaints, by achieving the total

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141 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 126; Ibn ’Asākir, ’Uthmān ibn ’Affān, 298.
142 “Kāna yatīm an fī hijri ʿuthmān”; see Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 116, 127 (Saʿid ibn al-Musayyab); cf. Balādhurī, Ansāb, ii, 343 (Abū Mikhnaf) and iv, 540.
143 See Ch. Pellat, “Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa,” EF, vii, 394b. According to an account of Abū Mikhnaf, Ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa, once a profligate, embraced piety and turned to worshipping God after ‘Uthmān chastised him for drinking alcohol [qad tanassaka wa-aqbalāʾa l-ibāda baḍ an ḥaddahu ʿuthmān fī l-sharāb]; see Balādhurī, Ansāb, ii, 277. Elsewhere, however, an account avers that after the punishment, “he harbored malice and resentment against (ʿUthmān) on account of that [fa-ihtamāla ḥalālika bi-dhīna wa-hanāqi]” (Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 540).
144 The khabar in this passage becomes atrociously elliptical, reading, “fa-lammā waliya, istā ḥanahu fī l-hijra lā baḍi l-amṣār, fa-khara jā ilā miṣra, wa-kāna alādhī daʾahū ilā dhālika annahu saʿala al-ʿamal, fa-qāla lasta hunāka” (Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 116). The passage becomes considerably clearer upon reading the khabar found in ibid., 1, 126 f.; cf. Ṭabarî, i, 3029 f. and Ibn ’Asākir, ’Uthmān ibn ’Affān, 298.
145 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 126; Ibn ’Asākir, ’Uthmān ibn ’Affān, 298.
146 An arrangement mentioned elsewhere as well, but said to have been adamantly rejected by ’Amr; see Balādhurī, Futūḥ, 223.
removal of ‘Amr from his seat of power in Egypt and forcing his return to Medina.147

Sayf relates a second khabar that closely resembles the first but that constitutes a combined report transmitted on the authority of both Abū Ḥāritha and Abū ’Uthmān.148 This second khabar yields scant new information not contained in the previous khabar and merely summarizes the contents of its predecessor in more laconic form (e.g., most of the persons featured therein remain unnamed except the most central players: Ibn al-Sawdā’, Ibn Abī Sarḥ, and ‘Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ). It has, however, one distinguishing feature, namely the exchange of the doctrine of the wasiyya of ‘Alī for that of discord (al-shiqāq). Ibn al-Sawdā’s activities are described in only slightly different terms. As the account relates,149

When Ibn al-Sawdā’ came to Egypt, he put them to the test. He was delighted with them, and they were delighted with him [fa-istahlawhu]. He presented them with disbelief [bi-l-kufr], and they distanced themselves from them [abʿadūhu]. He suggested discord

147 It is certainly strikingly incongruous here that Sayf has Muhammad ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa steadfastly plotting to realize what in other accounts formed the basis of his hostility to ’Uthmān—i.e., the appointment of Ibn Abī Sarḥ as governor over Egypt. All other accounts highlight Muhammad ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa’s objections to the impropriety of appointing Ibn Abī Sarḥ, a former scribe of the Prophet who had apostasized only to re-embrace Islam after the conquest of Mecca (see C. H. Becker, “‘Abd Allāh ibn Sa’d,” EF, i, 51b). Indeed, in these accounts, it was while Ibn Abī Sarḥ acted as the imām for the prayers that Ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa’s opposition first made itself manifest; e.g., see Ṭabarī, i, 2869 ff. (al-Wāqidī) and Balādhurī, Ansāb, ii, 277 ff. (Abū Mikhnaf). Ibn Shabba (iii, 1118) records several versions of an account, situated during the naval raids of Ibn Abī Sarḥ, in which Ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa repeatedly and mockingly inquires to Kaʿb al-Aḥbar as to whether or not their boat can be found in the Torah. Kaʿb harshly reproaches him for his persistent and irreverent jesting, warning him: “I find in God’s book [kitāb Allāh; viz., the Torah] that a man of the Quraysh whose name is your name, with evil aspirations, shall jump into schism [al-fitna] as an ass jumps into fetters. Take heed that you are not he.” In any case, it would be a calumny to hold ’Uthmān solely responsible for the appointment Ibn Abī Sarḥ, who, after being first appointed by ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb over the Šaʿīd, proved himself to possess sufficient administrative skill to compensate for what virtues he may have lacked with regard to religion (cf. Kindi, K. al-wulāt, 10f; Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakim, Futūḥ Miṣr, 173). Despite his tarnished past, Ibn Abī Sarḥ, as Hinds notes, seems to have been nevertheless a highly dependable and effective administrator, much more so at least than ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ (“Murder of ʿUthmān,” 453f.). Ps.-Severus ibn al-Muqaffa states that Ibn Abī Sarḥ had been the first to establish the Egyptian diwān and centralize tax-collection for Egypt in Fustāṭ, measures apparently neglected by ʿAmr; see History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria, ii, ed. and trans. B. Evetts in PO 1 (1907), 501 (also cited in Hinds, op. cit.).

148 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 117 f; Ibn ʿAsākir, Dimashq, xxix, 6.

149 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 117.
[shiqāq], and they gave him reason to be hopeful [at‘amāhu]. Then he began to slander ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, saying, “Why is his pension [ʿatā] and salary [rizq] the largest among yours? Will (ʿUthmān) not put forward a man from the Quraysh to settle the matter between us?” They were pleased with that from him and said, “How can we achieve this with ʿAmr when he is the Arabs’ man [rajul al-ʿarab]?” He said, “Seek his dismissal! Then we will play our role and begin to publicly command the good and defame (him) [wa-nuzhiru al-iʿtimār bi-l-maʾrūf wa-l-tāʾn]. At that point, no one will hold us back.”

According to this second account, the plan to remove ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ unfolds in a similar fashion to the previous khabar, and likewise meets with success.

Sayf’s two accounts, nearly identical in content if not in wording, are fraught by a rather glaring chronological difficulty. At this point, also, Sayf’s account of the opposition to ʿUthmān begins to exhibit its most tendentious and incredulous narrative details. This is a quality that remains somewhat obfuscated in Ṭabarī’s redaction of Sayf’s materials, since he intersperses them with Wāqidī’s considerably more credulous account and reorganizes them under a slightly more plausible annalistic rubric. As one may recall, Sayf had previously related a report about Hukaym ibn Jabala claiming that Ibn al-Sawdāʾ had appeared in Başra three years into the governorship of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿĀmir, i.e., 31 a.H. Also, Sayf consistently reiterates the chronological order of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s wanderings throughout Muslim lands during ʿUthmān’s caliphate, traversing them in the following order: al-Ḥijāz → Başra → Kūfa → Syria → Egypt. As noted above, Sayf’s report assigns the date 31 a.H. to Ibn ʿĀmir’s expulsion of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ from Başra and his subsequent arrival in Kūfa. However, if one is to give credence to Sayf’s assertion that Ibn al-Sawdāʾ had been residing in Egypt prior to and at the time of the removal of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, then he would have to have been residing there and recruiting his co-conspirators by 25 a.H., or 27 a.H. at the latest, for it was in this year that ʿUthmān handed control of Egypt entirely over to ʿAbd Allāh ibn Saʿd Ibn Abī Sarḥ. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, Futūḥ Misr, 174.20; Kindī, Wulāt, 11.-4; Baladhuri, Futūḥ, 222.ult. The date of 27 a.H. for ʿAmr’s dismissal is from Ṭabarī, i, 2813ff; cf. Caetani, Annali, vii, 127–37.
the date Sayf provides for Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s arrival in and departure from Başra prior to coming to Egypt, the state of affairs in Fustāṭ had long been transformed with responsibility of governance consolidated in the hands of Ibn Abī Sarḥ.

The Sayfian corpus is no stranger to problems of chronology; however, modern scholarship has too often attributed these problems to Sayf’s own haphazard forgery of his reports. Yet, the corpus, when examined in detail, does not lend itself to such an unequivocal conclusion. As Donner has noted, “since the chronological information is usually imbedded in lengthy reports in which Sayf combines information from several informants, it is not entirely clear whether the chronology is the work of Sayf himself, or of his informants.” In our case, however, one can rather reasonably ascertain the source of the dubious chronological scheme proffered for the spread of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ and his Sabaʿīya. This is so because the main Kūfan, Başran and Egyptian accounts that produce this chronological problem all ostensibly derive from Yazīd al-Faqʿasī via ʿAṭīya ibn al-Ḥārith. Indeed, Sayf cites this isnād for the bulk of his Sabaʿīya material in the reign of ʿUthmān—this isnād often accompanies, furthermore, those accounts relating the most specific and substantive items of information. A caveat here should be added though, namely that Sayf’s does supplement the traditions cited with the above isnād with additional materials transmitted on other authorities. The problematic dating of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s stay in ʿIrāq appears in one other report as well: a combined account attributed to his favorite pair of informants, Muḥammad and Ṭalḥa; it assigns the equally problematic date of 30 ʿA.H. to the conversion of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ.

So either Sayf or his source is confused. It is unlikely that the anachronism results from an inattentive coallation of disparate accounts if we take the claims of Sayf’s isnāds for granted. If we do not take this claim for granted, however, then one seems doomed to discard the significance of at least a large number of Sayf’s isnāds as

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151 Sayf cites not a single Egyptian source, and all of the Egyptian akhbāris disagree with him entirely; e.g., see the accounts gathered in Caetani, *Annali*, viii, 132–7. To Caetani’s sources, one ought to add Ibn Shabba’s account, which he culls extensively from Egyptian sources (iii, 1116 ff.).

152 Donner, *Narratives*, 244.


154 Ibid., i, 122.
methodologically useless for a source-critical analysis of his text. Yet, as the above analysis has attempted to demonstrate, such a false dichotomy inadvertently places myopic limits on the exegesis of the Sayfian corpus. Sayf’s isnāds do facilitate source-critical analysis at a certain level; but if they are taken too much at face value, they can also greatly hinder said analysis and occlude Sayf’s role in shaping and combining his materials as the redacting architect most responsible for the macro-structure of his narrative. The most fortuitous course seems to be one that integrates both an internal and comparative analysis of Sayfian akhbār—that is, combining Noth’s ‘horizontal’ analysis (i.e., across collections) and Wellhausen’s ‘vertical’ analysis (within collections) rather than favoring one over the other. The Sayfian corpus can be much more lucidly interpreted while gauging how his infamous, overweening irenic temperament interacts and interfaces with the rival narratives of his akhbārī contemporaries—whom Sayf clearly reads but rarely mentions—while also combing the corpus itself for the narrative themes Sayf employs and subsequently augments with additional materials. Emerging from such an analysis is a vision of the Sayf and his corpus that neither naïvely views him as a passive transmitter of materials with no role to play, nor regards him as a wholesale forger of materials but, instead, accounts for the role of Sayf as an akhbārī who synthesizes, incorporates, and alters a reservoir of materials which he shapes into his own grandiose scheme.

The Origins of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Saba’ and the Plot against the Caliph

Although an ubiquitous presence in Sayf’s narration from the outset of the events that transpired during the Kūfan governorship of Sa’id ibn al-ʿĀṣ, it is only at this point, during the sojourn of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ in Egypt, that Sayf presents to us an account of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ in which he is fully identified: he is ‘Abd Allāh ibn Saba’, a Yemenite Jew from Ṣanʿāʾ, born of a black mother (whence Sayf derives his favorite, derisive handle for him: Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, or ‘son of the Black woman’). Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, Sayf tells us, converted to Islam in the reign of ‘Uthmān, and trouble ensued ever since.156

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156 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 135–7; Ṭabarī, 1, 2942–4; Ibn ʿAsākir, Dimashq, xxix, 3–6 (ed. al-Ṭarābīshī).
As previously noted, Sayf’s accounts of the activities of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ and of his acolytes scattered throughout Muslim lands have hitherto been organized within regional chronologies in contrast to the annalistic format one encounters in the re-arranged redaction undertaken by Ṭabarī. At this point in the Sayfian corpus, however, one encounters a profound turning point for the narrative: Sayf departs from this regional division and unites the narrative streams of each region as the events in Egypt begin to catch up chronologically with those having transpired in Kūfā, Baṣra, and Syria. Only at this juncture, where the narrative streams merge, does Sayf’s narrative begin to march inexorably to its infamous denouement. One is left with the impression that, at long last, an account that has been anticipated since the very beginning of the narrative of ʿUthmān’s caliphate is finally coalescing. It is here that the presentation of the venture of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ and his beliefs emerges in its most comprehensive incarnation, bringing along with it the cohesion of the whole narrative of the Sabaʾīya in the reign of ʿUthmān.

Given the gravity of this account, Sayf apparently saw fit to construct a prelude of sorts, which we find among the additional materials brought to light by the newly discovered manuscript of Sayf’s text. It consists of a brief ‘history’ of Christianity detailing how another Jewish outsider—this time a Jewish king named Abū Shāʾūl, who later dons the name of Paul (Sayf here clearly intends the Apostle of the same name)—infiltrated the fledgling community left behind by Jesus after ascending to heaven and, after gaining the Christians’ trust, succeeded in leading all but a few into perdition by mendaciously spreading false beliefs that eventually corrupt the original faith of Jesus. Feigning conversion to Jesus’ faith and espousing a penitent asceticism, Sayf’s Paul constructs an elaborate gambit in which he recounts a series of mystic visions that he received while cloistered away in a sacred domicile (bayt) constructed by the Christians according to his specifications. Heralding these visions as revelations from God, he dissuades the Christians from observing the proper direction of prayer (qibla), from carrying out jihād, and from adhering to dietary prohibitions—viz., a litany of the touchstone departures of late antique Christianity from the early Islamic religion. Such he does all the while claiming to

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157 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 133–5.
instruct them in the Torah. These visions, however, merely lay the groundwork for the final coup de grâce: taking aside four disciples (Malik, Yaʿqūb, Naṣṭūr, and al-Muʿīn), Paul teaches each a different doctrine concerning the divinity of Jesus, which produces, as a result, the division of the Christians into three aberrant sects (the Melkites, Jacobites and Nestorians). Only al-Muʿīn rejects Paul’s final innovation. The remaining three proceed to persecute the tiny remnant of believers under the leadership of al-Muʿīn (lit., the believer) who, having rejected Paul’s devices, refuse to abandon the original teachings of Jesus. Thus, the remnant takes refuge in the distant countryside, living as monks and preserving the religion of Jesus until the advent of Muḥammad’s mission, whereupon they embrace the message of Islam.

Sayf’s Paul story is a pastiche compiled from an array of sources: qur’ānic and exegetical materials play an integral role and are fused with a pre-Islamic, anti-Pauline account ultimately derived from one of the many versions of an anti-Christian Jewish polemic known as Tōlēdōth Yēshūʿ. Particularly indicative of Sayf’s dependence, albeit likely

158 Cf. the previous account examined above, in which Ibn al-Sawdāʿ defies Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀs while touting his superior knowledge of the hadith of the Jews.
159 See Samuel Kraus, Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen (Berlin, 1902), 47 f. (Heb.), 60 f. (Ger. trans.) and Günter Schlichting, Ein jüdisches Leben Jesu: Die verschollene Toledot-Jeschu-Fassung Tam u mú ād, WUNT 24 (Tübingen, 1982), 172–7. Kraus boldly dated the the origins the Tōlēdōth to the 2nd century A.D.; however, subsequent scholars have tended to date the work, or rather works (for there exist numerous versions), centuries later, between the fifth and eighth centuries A.D. and often favoring the later date; e.g., see the discussion in Craig A. Evans, “Jesus in Non-Christian Sources,” in: B. Chilton and C. A. Evans, eds., Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research (Leiden, 1998), 449 ff. and the sources cited therein. Earlier sources for the tales contained in the Tōlēdōth accounts may be imbedded in the text but, as a recent study has noted, discovering such layers is complicated by the fact that “any earlier traditions must be carefully extracted from beneath several layers of earlier editing”; see S. E. Porter and B. W. R. Pearson, “Why the Split? Christians and Jews by the Fourth Century,” Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism 1 (2000), 86. The parallel Islamic accounts do, indeed, suggest the plausibility of the earlier dating of these materials, albeit not necessarily in the form one encounters in the current version of the Tōlēdōth. For an intelligent and well-informed discussion of this text from an Islamicist’s perspective, see G. S. Reynolds, A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: Abd al-Jabbar and the Critique of Christian Origins (Leiden, 2004), 233 ff. The means whereby the Jewish polemical account (from which the extants versions of the Tōlēdōth derive?) appears among the akhbāris and muḥāfāris of Kūfa, such as Sayf ibn ʿUmar, remains unclear. However, the additional attestation of an earlier anti-Pauline account of Muḥammad ibn al-Sāʿib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763), whom Sayf occasionally cites among his authorities, attests to the early date of the circulation of such accounts. See Giorgio Levi della Vida, “Appunti e quesiti di storia letteraria
through an unknown intermediary, is his reference to Paul’s name as having been Abū Shāʾūl rather than Saul of Tarsus, inasmuch as Abbā Shāʾūl appears to have been a common name for the apostle in Jewish anti-Christian polemical literature.\(^\text{160}\) I have elsewhere examined and discussed this account extensively, obviating the need to repeat our conclusions here in much detail.\(^\text{161}\) Here, let it suffice to reiterate the following. At the end of the anti-Pauline account, Sayf places a statement absolutely essential for our understanding of the importance of this account for Sayf’s portrait of Ibn Sabaʾ. The account ends with the following comment: “and the lesson (of Paul) in this community is the lesson of Ibn Sabaʾ [\textit{wa-mathaluhu fī ḥādhahi l-umma mathalu ibn sabaʾ}].”\(^\text{162}\)

The isnād for the account closely resembles one of Sayf’s stock isnāds for his Sabaʾiya account: ‘Atiyya from Yazīd al-Faqʾasī; it is also the isnād given for his extended account of Ibn Sabaʾ that follows. For the King Paul account, however, Sayf provides this isnād with a slight addition: ‘Atiyya—Yazīd al-Faqʾasī—Ibn ‘Abbās. Sayf’s attribution of the anti-Pauline account to Ibn ‘Abbās ought to be regarded with a great deal of skepticism;\(^\text{163}\) Ibn ‘Abbās’ appearance in the isnād most

\(^{160}\) Thus, Paul also appears as Abbā Shāʾūl in \textit{Tam ū-mūʾād} (ed. Schlichting, 173 ff.) and even as early as the \textit{K. al-dārāʾa} of the 3rd/9th-century Karaite scholar Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammīs as quoted in Yaʾqūb al-Qirīṣānī’s \textit{al-Anwār wa-l-marāqib}, ed. L. Nemy (New York, 1939–43), i, 44.17, 45.15. See also the reference to Paul as Abbā Shāʾūl by the 5th/11th-century Karaite scholar Ṭūwah ibn Moses as cited in M. Gil, \textit{Jews in Islamic Countries in the Middle Ages}, trans. D. Strassler (Leiden, 2004), 250 and n. 154 thereto.

\(^{161}\) See my “Sayf ibn ʿUmar’s Account of ‘King’ Paul and the Corruption of Ancient Christianity,” \textit{Der Islam} 85 (2008): 164–202. Sayf’s usage of non-Muslim narratives as templates for his own narratives is not at all atypical. See, for example, Lawrence Conrad’s observations on Sayf’s account of the Byzantine commander Georgius and his exchange with Khalīd ibn al-Walīd (see Ṭabarī, i, 2097 ff.) in his, “The Mawālī and Early Arabic Historiography,” in: M. Bernard and J. Nawas, eds., \textit{Patronate and Patronage in Early and Classical Islam} (Leiden, 2005), 379 f.

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\(^{163}\) Madelung also doubts the attribution to Ibn ‘Abbās of the story but assigns responsibility for it to Yazīd al-Faqʾasī (Salahuddin, 2000). This is an attribution that I, however, have contested (see the article cited in n. 161 above).
likely derives from Sayf’s integration of *tafsīr* materials in his account, many of which he may have indeed learned from ‘Aṭīya ibn al-Hārith. The account, however, almost certainly derives from Sayf’s own craftsmanship. Most importantly, the figures featured in the *isnād* attached to the anti-Pauline account further indicate the anti-Paul account’s proper place in Sayf’s view alongside the Ibn Saba’ lore. Sayf’s Paul is a prototype (*mathal*) for his depiction of Ibn al-Sawdā’.

Citing the authority of Yazīd al-Faq‘asī via ‘Aṭīya once again (this time, however, in the usual manner, without Ibn ‘Abbās), Sayf puts forward his most extensive account of Ibn al-Sawdā’. He recapitulates some previous details while adding a few more, informing us that “Ibn Saba’ was a Jew from the inhabitants of Ṣan‘ā’ with a black mother. He converted in the time [*zamān*] of ʿUthmān and subsequently roamed around the Muslim lands trying to lead them into perdition,”164 beginning in the Hijāz and moving consecutively to Baṣra, Kūfa, Syria and Egypt. The earlier narrative about him that had reached us through Sayf, of course, concentrated predominately on the influence he exerted over the Kūfans and Egyptians, although his activity in Baṣra—such as the incident involving Hukaym ibn Jabala—had also been mentioned. However, it is only in this account that one learns of his Yamanī origins. On the other hand, any mention of Ibn al-Sawdā’ while he was in the Ḥijāz remains conspicuously absent; therefore, one is left in the dark as to what he had been up to before he had cast his shadow on Kūfa and Baṣra. Sayf’s account, however, takes pains to assure the reader that, of all the inhabitants of the Muslim lands, the Syrians, like the Ḥijāzīs before them,165 staunchly rebuffed his devices and refused him harbor—apparently despite the incident involving Abū Dharr.166 But, it would be Egypt where Ibn al-Sawdā’ would not only encounter most of his success but would also remotely orchestrate events later to transpire in Kūfa and Baṣra.

Thus, as presented by Sayf’s account, the identity of Ibn al-Sawdā’ breaks down neatly into three components: he was 1) a Jew, 2) from

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165 Recall the aforementined account of Sayf which states that Ibn al-Sawdā’ could not effectuate his plans on “*ahl al-haramayn*,” i.e., the denizens of Mecca and Medina (ibid., 55.ult.).
166 Cf. Sayf’s description of Ifrīqiya as remaining “among the most heedful of countries and the most obedient and longsuffering up to the time of Hishām ibn Abd al-Malik… until the people of ‘Īraq (i.e., the Khārijites?—query mine) slipped in among them” (Sayf, *K al-ridda*, i, 112 f.; Ṭabarī, i, 2815).
Şan‘ā’, and 3) born of a black-skinned mother. The significance of each poses its own distinct problems of exegesis; therefore, each of these will be examined in detail and evaluated individually below.

Certainly the Jewishness of Ibn Saba’ looms largest in sources outside Sayf. The imputation of blame for the origins of heretical beliefs and sects to either Jewish or Christian converts recurs often enough as a leitmotif to lead numerous modern scholars to dismiss the Jewish identity of Ibn al-Sawdā’ as a mere heresiographical topos.\(^{167}\) Thus, one could plausibly cite the Jewishness of ‘King Paul’ as providing an archetypal figure around which Sayf constructed the persona of Ibn al-Sawdā’ and, hence, casted the heresiarch along similar lines as a conniving crypto-Jew. However, as Heinz Halm has noted, this traditional critique has likely been taken too far.\(^{168}\) The alleged Jewish identity of Ibn al-Sawdā’ could equally have been the impetus behind

\(^{167}\) Hence, Friedländer expressed doubts over the Jewish identity of Ibn Saba’ on the basis of his evaluation of the beliefs attributed to Ibn Saba’, which Friedländer regarded as too far afield from and incompatible with mainstream “official Judaism” to make his Jewish identity plausible (see “’Abdallāh ibn Sabā’ (II),” 26 f.). Friedländer’s solution, therefore, was to assign the origins of Ibn Saba’ to the Ethiopian Falasha community via his mother’s descent. This judgment suffers on numerous accounts. Beyond Friedländer’s reification of the heresiographers’ data on Ibn Saba’, one also should be reluctant to imbibe his dubiously ahistorical view of ‘official Judaism’ as a criterion for affirming the Jewishness of Ibn Saba’. No matter how bizarre his beliefs may appear in one’s judgment, this cannot in any sense preclude his (prior?) Jewish identity. G. Levi della Vida denied his Jewishness on other, albeit equally tenuous, grounds. He points to the fact that Balādhurī knows Ibn Saba’ by the nisba ‘al-Hamdānī’, thus indicating his membership in the Arab tribe of Hamdān. Levi della Vida’s implication, which is erroneous, is that Ibn Saba’, if possessing a tribal nisba, could not have been a Jew but rather must have been an Arab. See G. Levi della Vida, “Il califfato di Ali secondo il Kitāb Ansāb al-Ašrāf di Balādūrī,” RSO 6 (1914–15), 495 and n. 1 thereto. Levi della Vida’s argument found a receptive reader in M. G. S. Hodgson, who repeated his opinion in “Abd Allāh ibn Saba’,” EF, i, 51a. Levi della Vida’s assertion, however, contradicts the widely disseminated ethnographic picture of the Jews in the Arabian Peninsula, who were by no means a hermetically sealed ethnicity or unmixed with the local populations, particularly in the South. See Christian J. Robin, “Le judaïsme de Ḥimyar,” Arabia 1 (2003), 97–172. Even in the Hijāz the marriage of Qurashi tribesmen to Jewish women, for instance, is extensively documented by Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Baghdādī (d. 245/859) in al-Munammaq fī akhbār Quraṣḥ, ed. M. ’Abd al-Mu‘īd Khān (Hyderabad, 1964), 506 f. Cf. Michael Lecker’s erudite study of this passage in “A Note on Early Marriage Links between Qurashis and Jewish Women,” JSAI 10 (1987), 17–39. Medieval authors, moreover, saw no contradiction either. The account of Sa‘d al-Qummī reproduces the tribal nisba of Ibn Saba’ while simultaneously explicitly affirming his Jewish identity (see Maqālāt, 20 f.).

\(^{168}\) Halm, Gnosis, 42; cf. also more recently William F. Tucker, Mahdīs and Milieunarians: Shi‘īte Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq (Cambridge 2007), 11 f. (Tucker, here, is unfortunately misled by Friedländer on a number of key points).
Sayf’s attempt to draw a parallel between him and ‘King Paul’—for the traditions certainly existed independently of one another prior to being joined together in the Sayfian corpus. In favor of Ibn al-Sawdā’s Jewish identity, one may also cite some substantial, albeit circumstantial, body of evidence. The attribution of the tribal nisba ‘al-Hamdānī’ to Ibn Saba’ by numerous sources may account for his Jewish origins, insofar as Ibn al-Kalbi (d. 204/819) suggests in his K. al-Āṣnām that substantial numbers of the Banū Hamdān had converted to Judaism during the reign of Dhū Nuwāṣ (r. ca. 520–30 A.D.). Furthermore, although the presence of foreign influence—whether Christian, Jewish, or Persian—among sectarian Islamic beliefs is certainly a topos enlarged extensively by the heresiographical literature, the considerable influence on and prominence of mawālī in early Shi’ism is factually undeniable. Equally impressive, perhaps, is the sobriety with which Imāmī sources confirm the heresiarch’s Jewish identity, as well as how salient this datum persists through the heresiographical literature, and this despite Sunnī polemics against Shi’ism as being polluted by Judaic beliefs. Indeed, of all the components of Ibn al-Sawdā’s identity proffered by Sayf, that he was a Jew enjoys the broadest attestation elsewhere by far.

As for the second component of the heresiarch’s identity, a number of sources corroborate that Ibn al-Sawdā had come from either Yemen or Sānā’, a plausible birthplace for a recent Arab-Jewish convert to Islam, and, indeed, his Yemenite origins are implied his

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170 S. Moscati, “Per una storia dell’antica šī’a,” RSO 30 (1955), 264 f.

171 Al-Ḥasan ibn Mūsā al-Nawbakti, K. firaq al-shī’a, ed. Hellmut Ritter, Bibliotheca Islamica 4 (Istanbul, 1931), 20; Sa’d al-Qummi, Maqālāt, 20. If one accepts Madelung’s thesis regarding the above works of Nawbakti and Qummi (see his “Bemerkungen zur imamitischen Firaq-Literatur,” Der Islam 43 [1967], 37–52), then this material is not only early, but also contemporary with Sayf, being derived from the Ikhtilāf al-nās fi l-imāma of Hishām ibn al-Hakam (d. ca. 179/795). This will be further discussed in ch. 5 below. See also al-Kishshī, al-Rijāl (publ. as Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, Ikḥtiyār ma‘rifat al-rijāl), ed. Ḥ. Muṣṭafāvī (Mashhad, 1970), 108 f. and Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ, viii, 95.


cognomen “Ibn Sabaʾ,” i.e., son of the Land of Sabaʾ/Sheba. In this regard, none contradict Sayf save one much later source: the Ashʿarī heresiographer ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), who in any case avers Ibn Sabaʾ and Ibn al-Sawdāʾ to be two, entirely separate personalities. Thus, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī claims, citing the authority of al-Shaʿbī (d. 103/721), that Ibn al-Sawdāʾ established the beliefs of the Sabaʾiya, rather than founding the sect itself, and that it was he, not Ibn Sabaʾ, who was a Jew and from the Lakhmid capital al-Ḥira. ‘Abd al-Qāhir does not, however, state the homeland of Ibn Sabaʾ,174 and his text remains a rather isolated, not to mention late, aberration, and his attribution of this information to al-Shaʿbī finds no confirmation outside of his text.

There remains the final identifying mark of Sayf’s Ibn al-Sawdāʾ: his dark-skinned mother. Aside from the actual designation of the heresiarch as Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, one finds scant reference to his mother. Yet, this name of the heresiarch emerged quite early, despite the confusions and contradictions one frequently finds with regard to the identity of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ in a number of our earliest sources.175 In its simplest

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174 ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, 

175 Often these identifications of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ seem confused. Jāhiz, for example, identifies Ibn al-Sawdāʾ with a later heretic, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥarb, but curiously while attributing to him Ibn Sabaʾ’s famous dictum denying the death of ‘Alī (Bayān, ii, 81). Likewise, as noted above, ‘Abd al-Qāhir makes Ibn al-Sawdāʾ into an entirely different person from Ibn Sabaʾ, but while attributing to him basic doctrines and activities conventionally attributed to Ibn Sabaʾ (see 172, 225). The Imāmī heresiographer Sāʿid ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Qummī also mentions an Ibn al-Aswād (i.e., son of the black man) who aided Ibn Sabaʾ as well (see Maqālāt, 20), but his text may have been corrupted, exchanging Ibn al-Sawdāʾ with Ibn al-Aswād via a conflation of the former with the name of prominent ‘Alawī Companion al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswād. Such contradictions within the sources seem to have resulted from the misperception that the names Ibn al-Sawdāʾ and Ibn Sabaʾ actually referred to different people. Friedländer cites Yaʾqūbī’s Tāʾrikh as evidence that al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswād had also been known as Ibn al-Sawdāʾ (“Abdallāh ibn Sabāʾ (II),” 26 f.); however, the text he cites actually references ‘Ammār ibn Yāsar as Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, not al-Miqdād. See Yaʾqūbī, Historiae, ed. Th. Houtsma (Leiden, 1883), ii, 198.6. More interesting is Friedländer’s citation of a passage from Maṣʿūdī’s Murūj al-dhahab in which Abū Dharr reviles Kaʾb al-Aḥbār as “the son of a black woman [ibn al-sawdāʾ]”; see Maṣʿūdī, Murūj, iii, 83 and the textual variant in note 5 thereto. Kaʾb al-Aḥbār and Ibn Sabaʾ both share Jewish ancestry. The other aforementioned ‘Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’, ‘Ammār ibn Yāsar, may have indeed have been a Jewish convert to Islam as well (if Michael Lecker’s hypothesis to this effect is correct, though, in my view, his evidence for this is rather
form, the trope of the heresiarch’s dark skin (and, therefore, his lowly origins) apparently first manifested in a rather widespread *khabar* in which ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib denounces Ibn Saba’ declaring, “What do I have to do with the vile, black man [*mā lī wa-li-hādhā l-khabīth al-aswad*]?”  

Each of the three components of Ibn al-Sawdā’’s identity that Sayf enumerates, therefore, finds a parallel, albeit often with slight variations, in sources outside the Sayfian corpus. An examination of the diverse array of sources in which Ibn Saba’ features allows one to construct a sort of patchwork confirmation for Sayf’s depiction of Ibn al-Sawdā’ as essentially derivative in its basic features rather an effort *de novo*. Hence, although Sayf’s enterprise is certainly a creative one with much new material, it also bears the imprints of a corpus of Ibn Saba’ tradition that profoundly influenced Sayf’s text. In other words, there are strong indications that a tradition stands behind the Sayfian corpus serving as a reservoir of materials of which Sayf often avails himself in the construction of his take on Ibn Saba’/Ibn al-Sawdā’.

If one is to uncover any ‘historical kernel’ of fact behind the Sayfian persona of Ibn al-Sawdā’, it may be here in such random details concerning the heresiarch’s religious and ethnic background. Nevertheless, one must still be cautious in treating such details as necessarily factual. The piecemeal parallels one does find to the Sayfian account point not so much to the historicity of the information—for Sayf’s account still remains a factitious one with clear biases—but, rather, point to the fact that the origins of Sayf’s and others’ accounts are disparate. The accounts of Ibn Saba’ found in both the Sayfian corpus and the heresiographical literature are often a bricolage of accretions

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thin; see his study “Hudhayfa ibn al-Yamān and ’Ammār ibn Yāsar, Jewish Converts to Islam,” *QSA* 11 [1993], 149–52). This would suggest, perhaps, that *ibn al-sawdā’* was somewhat common pejorative moniker by which some Jews were called in the period. However, cf. the same *topos* associated with Abū Dharr, but directed against Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, in Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ḍīnasāḥ*, x, 464 (ed. al-ʿAmrawī) and Majlisī, *Biḥār*, lxxii, 147. Bilāl’s African descent is, of course, a common *topos* of the *sīra*-literature; see ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 2 vols., eds. Muṣṭafā al-Ṣaqqā et al. (Cairo, 1955), i, 232 where Bilāl’s Qurashi torturers mock him as “the black woman’s son [*ibn al-sawdā’*].”


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stemming from a common repertoire of *topoi* predating the later literary accounts which are grafted, often tacitly and seamlessly, into the variegated accounts known to modern historians.

Hence, one can say that Friedländer justifiably concluded, despite his acceptance of many of Wellhausen’s damning critiques of the Sayfian corpus, that one is hard pressed to dismiss all the materials pertaining to the origins, life, and teachings of Ibn Sabaʾ as merely “snatched out of thin air.” The hazards here are numerous though, and aspects of Friedländer’s previous treatment of Sayf’s material demonstrate this vividly. Friedländer’s analysis of the Ibn Sabaʾ often becomes untenable when he adopts an overly cavalier endorsement of Sayf’s information on the origins of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ. By reifying Sayf’s information and harmonizing it with the heresiographical materials, Friedländer’s study of Ibn Sabaʾ subsequently suffers from numerous anachronistic attempts to historicize the heretic, in particular in his connection of the heresiarch with the Ethiopian Jewish community known as the Falashas and their expectation of a Messiah returning in the clouds.  

177 “ʿAbdallāh ibn Sabā (II),” 10.
178 Ibid., 25 ff. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the Falasha community of Ethiopia originated sometime during the 14th–16th centuries A.D. and, therefore, centuries after the events under discussion here. The Judaic influences upon Aksumite civilization have been exaggerated greatly considering the paucity of reliable and datable evidence. What perceivable Judaic influences did occur probably arrived via Aksum’s relationship with Yemen and Southern Arabia. See Stuart Munro-Hay, *Aksum: An African Civilization of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh, 1991), 208 and Steven Kaplan, “Betā Ḫṣraʾeł,” *EAeth.*, i, 552 ff. along with the bibliography cited therein. Much of the confusion arises from the mythic Solomonic origins claimed by the Amhara dynasty, Yekuno Amlak, after toppling the previous Zagwe dynasty in the latter part of the 13th century A.D. Yekuno Amlak’s successors continued this claim of Solomonic descent giving rise to the subsequent dynastic historiography which produced the numerous materials from which works such the famed *Kebra Negast*, albeit a much later work, ultimately derive their inspiration. Discarding this material as unhistorical, one finds that even the 10th century A.D. Queen Judith cannot be regarded as espousing any form of Judaism; see Knude Tage Andersen, “The Queen of the Habasha in Ethiopian History, Tradition and Chronology,” *BSOAS* 63 (2000), 31–63. Aside from the chronological problems, Friedländer’s rather vague parallel between belief among the Falashas in “the Messiah coming in the clouds” and the Sahābiya *topos* (in which Shīʿi ghulāt are reputed to confess that ‘Ali dwells in clouds) often attributed to Ibn Sabaʾ and his followers is unconvincing for a number of additional reasons. Firstly, the messiah’s coming in the clouds is a common biblical trope (see Ps. 104:3, Dan. 7:13, Mt. 24:30, Mk. 13:26, Rev. 1:7, etc.) that remains current well into late antiquite apocalyptic litetature. A *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel* dating to the early 6th century A.D., for instance, describes the coming of the Messiah as a descent “from heaven, with powerful and mighty strength, and in majestic beauty, on clouds of light [‘dal ‘nānē d-nāhrāʾ];” see Matthias Henze, *The Syriac Apocalypse of
While Sayf’s influence on the heresiographical literature should not be underestimated, what is more likely is that Sayf merely drew upon a common repertoire of *topoi*, which preceded his writings and was also later disseminated throughout the heresiographical literature on Ibn Saba’. But even if we concede to Friedländer that the details such *topoi* convey are, perhaps, not wholly arbitrary inventions, it would be unwise to regard them as a solid basis from which one can derive plausible conclusions concerning the historicity of the heresiarch. Sayf’s account adds up to merely one additional, albeit perhaps the most extensive, constellation of literary *topoi* on Ibn Saba’ circulating in the 2nd/8th century.

Nonetheless, Sayf’s iconic depiction of Ibn Saba’ does mobilize these *topoi* in an uncanny form, for he alone historicizes the figure and submerges him into the stream of a larger historical narrative. The geographical schema he lays out to us throughout Ibn al-Sawdā’’s itinerant trouble-making does not provide us with a merely arbitrary chronological visitation of mischief upon the Muslim settlements. Rather, the spread of the influence of Ibn al-Sawdā’ plainly parallels the dissemination of sedition across the community, for Ibn al-Sawdā’ is himself the embodiment and personification of this sedition. His subplot is, indeed, the epitome of *fitna*. He is not its hero, but its villain—its anti-hero: nefarious, opportunistic, deceitful, lowborn and, above all, an outsider with nothing to lose from the division of the community of Muslims.

In addition to the identity of Ibn al-Sawdā’, careful attention must also be paid to Sayf’s indispensable, albeit somewhat brief, catalogue of Ibn al-Sawdā’’s beliefs, for like much of Sayf’s material, it is both

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Daniel: *Introduction, Text, and Commentary*, STAC 11 (Tübingen, 2001), 53 (Syr.), 101 (Eng.). Friedländer’s attempt to connect the trope to Ethiopian Falashas is, therefore, not only tenuous but also superfluous. Secondly, the association of the Sahābiya *topos* with the Saba’iya in the Muslim heresiographies emerges only a quite a later date (see the excursus to ch. 6). To Friedländer’s credit, however, Muḥammad ibn Ḥābīb (d. 245/860) does list Ibn al-Sawdā’ as one of the “sons of Ethiopian women [abnā’ al-ḥabashiyyāt].” See al-Muḥabb, ed. Ilse Lichtenstädter (Hyderabad, 1942), 308. However, this notice may have been adduced from Sayf’s account, or one like it, and seems to be akin to Ibn Ḥazm’s and al-Maqrīzī’s designation of the heresiarch as a Himyarite (see note above).


early and idiosyncratic—departing on important points from the bulk of the Islamic heresiographical corpus, which is predominately the product of a much later period. While the heresiographical tradition will receive fuller treatment in chapter 3, a few words can be said here for the sake of elucidating the distinctiveness of Sayf’s account.

Save for a handful of earlier exceptions, the heresiographical tradition casts Ibn Sabaʾ into the mold of the progenitor of Shiʿī ghulūw, or heretical beliefs (lit. ‘exaggeration’), through whom a litany of aberrant beliefs entered Islam. Of the variant beliefs that the heresiographers tend to assign to Ibn Sabaʾ, the most salient is the belief in the divinity of ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib and the denial of his death, although it is not rare for the scholars to also attribute to him many other beliefs associated with the ghulāt, or ‘exaggerators’. Both the doctrine of denying ‘Alī’s death and his deification of ‘Alī are altogether absent from Sayf’s account. What one encounters, instead, are not the ideas and claims intrinsic to the standard fair of ghulāt-doctrines but, rather, ideas germane to what would later be regarded as two quintessentially Imāmī doctrines: the rajʿa and the wasīya, although slightly askew versions thereof. Admittedly, it would be anachronistic of Sayf to attribute such beliefs as the denial of ‘Alī’s death while ‘Alī still lived within his narrative, so the absence here of at least this doctrine does not strike one as surprising. More important, however, is that neither this belief nor the belief in ‘Alī’s divinity ever emerges as part of the Sayfian corpus relevant to the Sabaʾiya.

Friedländer, attempting to account for this divergence from Sayf’s rival accounts, attributed the discrepancies between Sayf’s material and that of the heresiographers to its distinct chronologcal focus. Given the logical impossibility of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ affirming the parousia, or rajʿa, of ‘Alī while the latter was still alive, Friedländer proposed that what one finds in Sayf’s materials represents not a contradiction but a nuance—a temporally bound statement of Ibn al-Sawdāʾs earliest beliefs.181 However, Friedländer underestimates the extent to which the heresiographical tradition and Sayf’s materials find themselves at cross purposes and are rarely complementary. Whereas Sayf obsesses over fitna, the heresiographers are more preoccupied with ghulūw. That being stated, one may observe the following about Sayf’s account of the doctrines of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ.

Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s Invention of the Rajʿa

Of all the quintessentially Shīʿī beliefs that distinguished Shīʿism from the beginning as identifiably distinct sectarian current, the belief in the rajʿa remains on the most arcane because of the mutable tendencies of its earliest manifestations. The version of attributed by Sayf to Ibn al-Sawdāʾ is particularly compelling. Relating its origins, Sayf narrates:

(Ibn al-Sawdāʾ) would say, “What a marvel it is that some say that Jesus shall return while disbelieving that Muhammad will return! God Almighty has said, ‘Indeed, He who has ordained the Qurʾān for you shall bring you back to a place of return [inna alladhī faradhaʿ alayka al-qurʾāna la-rādduka ilā maʿādin]’ (Q. 28:85). For Muḥammad (s) is more deserving of returning than Jesus!” That was accepted from Ibn al-Sawdāʾ (by his followers). And he fabricated for them (the doctrine of) the return [al-rajʿa], and they began to speculate over it [takallama fīhā].

The proclamation of Muḥammad’s return ascribed to Ibn al-Sawdāʾ has puzzled many insofar as one finds scant parallels outside the Sayfian corpus. However, I contend that the difficulty hitherto posed by Sayf’s text has been due, at least in part, to the fact that previous scholarly readings have often reflected a tendency to interpret Sayf’s text too narrowly—that is, by regarding Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s confession of Muḥammad’s rajʿa as yet another, albeit aberrant, manifestation of the belief in the occultation of a particular imām and his immanent return. The rajʿa, understood in this way, becomes a nearly exclusive preoccupation with the personality of the imām believed to

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182 J. van Ess, TG, iv, 598. The parallels to ´Umar’s initial denial of Muhammad’s death, although often cited (e.g., see Friedländer, “ʿAbdallāh ibn Sabā (II),” 11), are much exaggerated and unconvincing as a real parallel to the beliefs espoused in the above passage. Ibn al-Sawdāʾ never actually denies the death of Muḥammad; he just announces his future return.

yet return and usher in the millennial era preceding the day of judgement. As a result, Sayf’s ascription of the belief in Muhammad’s raj’a to Ibn al-Sawdâʾ appears implausible insofar as it casts Muhammad in the role of the Mahdī, a role for which one finds absolutely no parallel in any extant Shi‘ī writing.

Yet, one can find an alternative, and as of yet unexplored, exegetical option for interpreting this text. An equally early and much more expansive mode of conceptualizing the raj’a illuminates this text considerably: the so-called raj’at al-amwāt, or the return of the dead. This concept—here meaning the return of the righteous faithful who have passed out of this world, although later times saw this concept expanded considerably—came eventually to represent a core tenet of mainstream Shi‘ī dogma. The theologian Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936), for example, claims that by his time the doctrine of that “the dead shall return to this world [dunyā] before the Day of Judgment” was the opinion of the majority of the Shi‘ā184—even if, as others claimed, the doctrine remained among the arcane, esoteric beliefs closely guarded as secret.185 The belief dates to a considerably early date, however, and a variant of this belief also appears as a central tenet of the beliefs attributed to the Saba‘iya in one of the earliest witnesses to the doctrines of the Shi‘a of the Umayyad period.186 Insofar as the Shi‘a obviously numbered the imāms among the righteous, this belief in the raj’at al-amwāt often considered all the imāms, frequently as a group and not merely as single individuals, as worthy candidates to return and lead the believers into a messianic era of peace and justice. The doctrine was not merely an item adhered to by marginal, chiliastic extremists, but it represented, in its moderate form, a mainstay of early


185 According to ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ibn Muhammad al-Khayyāt (d. ca. 300/913), the Imāmī belief in the raj’a was not openly discussed. He states, “(the Shi‘a) do not mention (the doctrine of the raj’a) either in their forums or their books, but only those they have kept secret (and omitted) from their books and have not openly revealed [lā yadhkurūhā fī majālisihim wa-lā fī kutubihim illā fīmā qad asarrūhu min al-kutub wa-lam yuzhirūhu]”; see K. al-intīṣār wa-l-radd ʿalā Ibn al-Rawandi al-muḥīd, ed. Albert N. Nader (Beirut, 1957), 97.

Imāmī eschatology that laid the foundations for later eschatological speculation among the Imāmīs following the occulation of the twelfth imām. As Shi'ite views on the raj'a evolved, so did speculation over which imāms, if not all of them, would return alongside the righteous dead first. It is in this material that one finds the traces of the early belief in the return of the Prophet as well.

This capacious and inclusive understanding of the doctrine of the raj'a accommodates even the belief in the return of Muḥammad. Al-Hasan ibn Sulaymān al-Hillī’s (fl. 9th/16th cent.) abridgement of the Başā‘ir al-darajāt of Sa’d ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Qummi (d. 301/913–14) preserves numerous examples of this material, all of which correspond to an array of exegetical speculation over the interpretation of Q. 28:85, the same Qur’ānic verse cited by Ibn al-Sawdā‘ in the above report of Sayf. The following report attributed to the sixth imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq provides a typical example: 187

Abū ‘Abd Allāh said, “The first to return to this world is al-Husayn ibn Sa‘id and Muḥammad ibn Khalid al-Barqī—al-Nadr ibn Suwayd—Yahyā ibn ‘Imrān al-Ḥalabi—Mu‘allā ibn ‘Uthmān—Mu‘allā ibn Khunays said:

Abū ‘Abd Allāh said regarding the word of Almighty God, “Indeed, He who ordained the Qur’ān for you shall bring you back to a place of return”—he said, “(This means that) your prophet shall return to you [nabiyukum rāji‘un ilaykum].”

187 Hasan ibn Sulaymān al-Hillī, Mukhtasar Başā‘ir al-darajāt, ed. Mushtaq al-Muzaffar (Qom, 2000), 120; cf. Abū l-Hasan ‘Ali ibn l-Brahim al-Qummi, Tajśīr, 2 vols., ed. Tayyib al-Musawi al-Jazā’iri (Najaf, 1967), 11, 147. Qummi’s text adds “nabiyukum wa-amir al-mu’min wa-l-a’imma” (Tafsīr, ii, 147.9–10), which may be the original rendering. However, this addition does not appear in Majlisī’s citation of Qummi’s text (Bihār, lxxx, 56). The textual history Qummi’s tafsīr is complex, but the general trend is towards the abridgement or censorship of the text; see Meir Mikhael Bar-Asher, Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shi‘ism (Leiden, 1999), 38 ff.

188 Although at one time al-Mu‘allā ibn Khunays appears to have been a follower of al-Mughira ibn Sa‘id, he was later a servant of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq said to collect monies on his behalf. At the end of his life, he was imprisoned and crucified in Medina for his sympathies with Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakīya. He is otherwise principally remembered for his confession that the imāms were themselves prophets, “al-awsiyā anbiyā‘” (Kishshī, 247.2). See TG, i, 320 f. and iv, 742; Hossein Modarresi, Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi‘ite Islam: Abū Ja‘far ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and His Contribution to Imāmī Shi‘ite Thought (Princeton, 1993), 13 n. 56 and 30 f. ‘Umar ibn ‘Ali Zayn al-‘Abidin reviled al-Mu‘allā ibn Khunays as “Khunays the pile of shit [khunays al-khuru‘]”; see Ibn Sa‘d, v, 239.8.
The latter half of this report appears in a number of iterations with varying isnāds, and this interpretation was presumably the secret interpretation (Ar. ta’wil) allegedly guarded by the Companion Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī. As noted above, the raj’a as understood in these passages dons an expansive scope encompassing the imāms and the prophet as well as the righteous of their generations. Along similar veins, then, one finds in other interpretations of the verse that Muḥammad and ‘Alī will return alongside each other:

Ja’far ibn Muḥammad ibn Mālik—al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Marwān—Sa’id ibn ‘Ammār—Abū Marwān said:

I asked Abū ‘Abd Allāh about the word of God Almighty, ‘Indeed, He who ordained the Qur’ān for you shall bring you back to a place of return.’ He said to me, ‘No, by God, this world will neither expire nor pass away until the Messenger of God and ‘Alī gather in al-Thawīya. They shall meet one another and build together in al-Thawīya a mosque with 12,000 doors’—by which he meant a location in Kūfa.

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189 See ʿHasan ibn Sulaymān, Mukhtaṣar, 155 f. (no. 122) and Qummi, Tafsīr, 11, 147 where the same interpretation of the verse is attributed to ‘Alī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn. The isnād for this interpretation by Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn cites Abū Khālid al-Kābulī, a well-known authority for the ghulāt, as its ultimate authority. One finds little material on this transmitter other than a series of hagiographic anecdotes (see Kishshī, 120 ff.). From these anecdotes, one gathers that he had been a servant of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīya for a large portion of his life, but later, perhaps after Ibn al-Ḥanafīya’s death, transferred his services to ‘Alī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn. Whether or not Abū Khālid maintained connections with Mukhtār and the Kaysānīya is never stated, and at least one author mentions Abū Khālid as “one of the leaders of the companions of ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn” (see Ps.-Nāshiʾ, Usūl, 25.22). He also appears prominently in the latter part of the mysterious Umm al-kitāb (cf. van Ess, Frühe mu’tazilische Häresiographie, 30 f. and Halm, Gnosis, 302 and n. 661 thereto)—perhaps because of his reputed role in establishing the doctrine that the imāms possessed perfect knowledge even as children (Modarresi, Crisis and Consolidation, 33 n. 92). See also ʿHasan ibn Sulaymān, Mukhtaṣar, 490 (no. 539) where Muḥammad al-Bāqir denies the Prophet’s physical return.

190 ʿHasan ibn Sulaymān, Mukhtaṣar, 151 (no. 117), 155 (no. 121).

191 ʿHasan ibn Sulaymān, Mukhtaṣar, 490 (nos. 550–1); cf. Ibn Juhām, Ta’wil mā nazala min al-qur’ān al-ḥakīm fi l-nabī wa-ālihi, ed. Fāris Tabriziyān (Qom, 1999), 224. According to Yaḥūt, Thawīya acquired its name in Lakhmid times after al-Nūmān ibn al-Mundhir had been imprisoned and remained (Ar. thawā) there. In the early Islamic period, a number of Kūfan ashrāf (e.g., al-Mughīra ibn Shu’ba, Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī and Ziyād ibn Abīhi) had been buried there, and the site thus became known as a cemetery of the Banū Thaqīf. See Yaḥūt, Muḥjam, 1, 940; Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharh, v, 98 ff. Thawīya, it should be noted, also appears in the litany of places rumoured to have served as the burial place of ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib (see Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharh, iv, 64). Balādhuri records an odd account in which two ascetics, ‘Amr ibn ‘Utbā al-ʿĀbid and Mi’ṣad ibn Yazīd al-ʿIlī, attempt to build a mosque in Thawīya, one to two farsakh
The above traditions ought to be regarded as belonging to what Amir-Moezzi has aptly named “the esoteric, non-rational phase of Imāmī doctrine,” and can be viewed as later adaptations of early extremist beliefs revived and transmitted by the neo-ghulāt and Mufawwiḍa from the early ‘Abbāsid period onwards. Although failing to take hold of normative Shi‘ism proper, such passages exhibit the presence of ideas exchanged within early Imāmī circle contemporaneous with Sayf’s composition of his history. Even if Sayf’s writings clearly indicate his lack of Shi‘ite sympathies, the resourcefulness evidenced by the Sayfian corpus points to the clear possibility that the correspondence between Sayf’s account of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ and the Shi‘i reports adduced above is not coincidental.

On a more minor point, one must also deal with Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s polemic against the raj’a of Jesus. Whether or not the place of this polemic in ‘Uthmān’s caliphate marks yet another characteristically anachronistic turn in Sayf’s text is difficult to discern, for it is unclear just how widespread and how early one can date the Muslim disputes over Jesus’ role in the eschaton. Evidence for such an early dispute may be located in the problems surrounding the Qur‘ānic verse, “Indeed he (Jesus) is a portent of the hour [wa-innāhu la-‘ilmun li-l-sā‘a]” (Q. 43:61), the various qirā‘āt of which replace “portent (‘ilm)” with “sign (‘alam)” or “warning (dhikr).” However, this by no means amounts to a definitive confirmation, and its significance is certainly quite limited. Problematic as well are the objections that Ibn al-Sawdāʾ voices to Jesus’ actual return, for while Shi‘i messianism may neglect the parousia of Jesus in favor of the mahdī, Shi‘ism has hardly been known to reject Jesus’ return altogether. Furthermore, the eschewal of belief

outside Kūfā, in order to worship there in isolation from the people. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd, however, hears word of this and rebukes them for building a “mosque of madness [masjid al-khabāl],” leading them to abandon their project. See Balādhurī, Ansāb al-ashrāf, vii, ed. Muhammad al-Ya‘lawī, Bibliotheca Islamica 28j (Beirut, 2002), 215 f.

193 Sayf himself was known to relate traditions on the authority of Ja‘far al-Ju‘fī (d. 128/745), a controversial disciple of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq often associated with the ghulāt; see Halm, Gnosis, 96 ff.
in Jesus’ return invoked by Ibn al-Sawdāʾ—from Sayf’s viewpoint, at least—cannot merely be attributed to his being a Jew.  

Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s Invention of the Waṣīya

An equally central tenet of Shiʿism from its inception is the notion of Muḥammad’s bequest (waṣīya) to ‘Alī designating the latter the inheritor of his prophetic authority, in both its religious and political aspects. ‘Alī, thus regarded, was the Prophet’s wasī, a word variously translated as ‘legatee’, ‘executor’, ‘successor’, and ‘inheritor’. In attributing the waṣīya to the scheming of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, Sayf effectively posits him as the inventor of Shiʿism unequivocally. Sayf thus narrates:  

After that (Ibn al-Sawdāʾ) said, “There have been a thousand prophets and each prophet has an executor [waṣī], and ‘Alī was the waṣī of Muḥammad.” Then he said, “Muḥammad is the seal of the prophets, and ‘Alī is the seal of the executors [awṣiyā].”

Sayf’s text makes little effort to inform us as to the exact nature of the waṣīya of ‘Alī as understood by Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, but the subtext here implies that the waṣīya encompasses an absolute right of ‘Alī to maintain the comprehensive affairs of the community (i.e., whether political, religious, financial or martial) in the Prophet’s stead. While later tradition further fetishized these ideas into specific items of spiritual power and/or gnosis, the above account omits any overtones of these ideas. Later authors would seek to find a Judaizing animus behind this doctrine, claiming that Ibn Sabaʾ established the doctrine as a parallel to Joshua’s succession to Moses.

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195 See for example the prediction of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām, a ‘good’ Jewish convert in Sayf’s narrative, to the rebels: “If you kill (‘Uthmān), the sword of fitna shall be unsheathed against you, and it will not be removed from you until ‘Īsā ibn Maryam returns [in qataltumūhu sullā sayfu’l-fitna alaykum thumma lam yurfa’ ankum hattā yakhruja ‘īsā ibn maryam]” (K al-ridda, i, 188).

196 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 136.


Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s declaration that ‘Alī is the khātam al-awṣiyāʾ just as much as Muḥammad is khātam al-anbiyāʾ is more or less without parallel in the heresiographical literature.¹⁹⁹ Yet, it is not Sayf’s invention but, rather, reflects a trope common to a number Imāmī traditions likely to have been in circulation during his lifetime. Imāmī tradition records numerous references to ‘Alī by the title khātam al-awṣiyāʾ, or its common variant, khātam al-waṣiyīn.²⁰⁰ Abū Nuʿaym al-Īṣfahānī (d. 336/948), for instance, records a story in which Muḥammad announces to his young scribe, Anas ibn Mālik, that the next person to walk through the door shall be khātam al-waṣiyīn; that next person, of course, was ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.²⁰¹ Of all such traditions, however, the Sayfian account of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ’s invention of the waṣiyā doctrine echo rather explicitly an Imāmī tradition in which the Prophet declares to ‘Alī: “Indeed, I am the seal of one thousand prophets (khātam alf wa-nakah lā yaqūluhā ahīdun qablī wa-lā ba-dī illā kadhaba, warithtu nabīya l-rahīmīyyīn. Also, Hasan ibn ‘Alī calls his father khātam al-awṣiyāʾ in a khutba recorded by al-Ṭabarānī, al-Muʿjam al-kabīr, ed. Tāqī ibn Awād Allāh ibn Muḥammad and ‘Abd al-Muḥsin ibn Ibrāhīm al-Husaynī (Cairo, 1995), ii, 337.13; al-Haythami, Majmaʿ al-zawāʾid wa-manbaʿ al-fawāʾid (Beirut, 1982), ix, 165.12.


nabi) and verily you are the seal of one thousand wasīs (khātam al-alf wasī) and I have been entrusted with what you all have not."

The title khātam al-awsīyā’ strikes one as somewhat problematic at first glance inasmuch as it apparently implies that no wasī shall follow after ‘Alī. Indeed, this interpretation finds some warrant in the heresiographical literature as well, which occasionally credits Ibn Saba’ with the doctrine of the cessation of the imāmate (al-waqf) with ‘Alī—an, the title khātam al-awsīyā’ is not rarely applied to the 12th imām with the tacit implication that no wasī shall succeed him. However, its meaning in the Sayfian corpus, as in the other references, most likely only implies that ‘Alī is the last wasī to succeed a prophet directly, whereas subsequent imāms are merely wasīs of other wasīs.

Such parallels illustrate rather vividly that, despite its idiosyncrasies, the Sayfian account of Ibn al-Sawdā’’s beliefs do not appear out of thin air but, instead, profoundly reflect the ‘Abbāsid sectarian milieu within which Sayf composed his narrative. Despite the profoundly inter-textual nature of the Sayfian account, however, one cannot and, for the sake of interpreting Sayf’s material, one should not attempt to harmonize the persona constructed in Sayf’s accounts with the Ibn Saba’ of the heresiographical literature. To do so would only obscure the function of Ibn al-Sawdā’ and the Saba’īya in the Sayfian corpus as a narrative device. This function, which it is our aim to distill, stands in clear opposition to the differing agendas underlying the majority of heresiographical accounts.

What must be recalled in the context of Sayf’s narrative is the underlying moral lesson the Sayfian account of Ibn al-Sawdā’ aims to convey. Particulary prominent in his account is the reliopathic mendacity of the heresiarch. Ibn al-Sawdā’ employs subterfuge and secrecy throughout his meandering journeys in Muslim lands, simultaneously trying his luck with various doctrines that he hopes might lead the Muslims astray and settling only on those he finds most acceptable to his audiences and, hence, most effective for his ends. Thus, to Sayf, Ibn

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203 Nawbakhtī, Firaq, 20; Sa’d al-Quʾmī, Maqālāt, 20.
al-Sawdā’ is not a borrower of quasi-docetic, gnostic ideas or a partisan of ‘Alī whose fervent loyalty and admiration leads him to bizarre excess (as in the heresiographical accounts), but rather he is a detestable virtuoso of heresy and fitna, a chameleon willing to adapt to the expediencies of his surroundings in order to achieve his ultimate aim of sowing chaos.

As the following passage shows, the wasiyya doctrine proves important for Sayf due to the instrumentality thereof in fomenting fitna. The wasiyya only comes to the fore as a tool for fomenting political grievances against ‘Uthmān: 205

After that (Ibn al-Sawdā’) said, “Who is more tyrannical than he who does not apply the testament of God’s Messenger [lam yujiz wasiyyat rasūl allāh], pounces on the wasi of God’s Messenger and then takes charge of the umma?” Then he said to them after that, “‘Uthmān gathered fortunes and took them without a legitimate claim to them [jama’a amwālan wa-akhadhahā bi-ghayr haqqihā]. And here you have the wasi of God’s Messenger! So rise up for this cause and set it in motion. Begin by defaming your commanders [al-ṭa’n ala umarāʾikum], and openly command the right and forbid the wrong. This way you will win over the people, so summon to this cause.”

Indeed, it is the political utility of the doctrine of the wasiyya that, as a prior report states, that causes the Egyptian acolytes of Ibn al-Sawdā’ to fervently rally to his cause. 206 For Sayf, and in this he is unique, Ibn al-Sawdā’ is not a true believer afflicted by pathos so intense as to deny ‘Alī’s death; rather, he is, like ‘King Paul’ his deuteragonist, the consummate opportunist secretly working towards the aggrandizement of his former Jewish community, from which he only outwardly disassociates. He does not believe; he schemes. His true motives are, beyond imperiling the Muslim umma, arcane and hidden, not rooted in extreme and heretical love for a particular imām.

After setting out the teachings of Ibn al-Sawdā’, Sayf details the heresiarch’s activities, thus briefly bringing into one stream, as mentioned above, the multiple strands of his narrative, the chronology of which Sayf had hitherto divided according to geographical interest. In this same report, Sayf informs us that Ibn al-Sawdā’ continued writing to those whose corruption he had already achieved prior to alighting in Egypt. These figures are well known to us by now, including the likes

205 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 136.
206 Ibid., 1, 116; also see above.
of Yazīd ibn Qays in Kūfah and Ḥukaym ibn Jabala in Başra. His followers, in turn, sent letters back to him. Read in secret, these letters function as the principal means through which the movement spreads and coalesces across the geographical distances separating the Muslim garrison towns. Finally, Sayf informs us, “They reached Medina and spread their proclamations across the land while desiring something other than they presented (to their followers) and hiding something other than what they showed (among their followers).” These activities, we are told, blinded the garrison towns from seeing the troubles that afflicted them, save those in Medina; likewise, the inhabitants of Medina naïvely considered their plights to be unaffected by the troubles of the garrison towns. Consider the pervasiveness attributed by Sayf to the influence of the Sabaʾīya and contrast that to the role played by Ibn al-Sawdāʾ versus that of his confederates. In that respect, it is noteworthy that Sayf only rarely names explicitly those persons involved in the most clandestinely activist facets of planning—oftentimes even those mentioned as having associations seem to fall somewhere in the gray, whether duped or not entirely in on the game.

The Betrayal of ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir al-ʿAnsī

For Sayf, all the secrecy and clandestine methods the Sabaʾīya employ in implementing the downfall of the ʿUthmān’s caliphate serve to create a scenario in which the Medinans and, above all, ʿUthmān are caught unawares by the impending crisis. Eventually, they do become cognizant of the crisis, but this realization arrives all too late, and, at that point, the crisis is insoluble. In the following, we dwell on what amounts to an expansion of the khabar related above on the authority of ʿAtiyya from Yazīd al-Faqāsī. Sayf inserts a comment noting, “at this point Muḥammad and Talḥa joined (ʿAtiyya in his narration) [jāmaʿahu muḥammadun wa talḥa min hādhā l-makān],” thereby supplementing the authorities of his isnād. The account begins with a remarkable dialogue between ʿUthmān and the Companions of the Prophet who gather to interrogate the caliph about the recent goings-on in the garrison towns:

207 Ibid., i, 136.
208 Ibid., i, 136 f.
209 Ibid., i, 137; Tābarī, i, 2943.
210 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 137.
“Oh Commander of the Faithful! Have you heard about the people what we have heard?” (ʿUthmān) said, “No, by God, nothing has come to me save (reports on) the orderly state of affairs [al-salāma]!” They said, “Well, it has reached us!” And they told him about what had befallen them.

Immediately, ʿUthmān seeks the counsel of these anonymous Companions of the Prophet, who recommend that the caliph send trusted men to investigate the affairs of the garrison towns and to return with reports about each. ʿUthmān enacts their plan, sending Muḥammad ibn Maslama to Kūfa, Usāma ibn Zayd to Baṣra, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar to Syria and ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir to Egypt.

Each of ʿUthmān’s emissaries return bearing positive reports save ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir. “The people,” Sayf’s report contends, “waited a long time for ʿAmmār until they thought he had been assassinated.” 211 ʿAmmār had not been murdered, however, and news soon arrived via a letter from Ibn Abī Sarḥ, in which the governor claimed that ʿAmmār was not only alive but also had been seduced by a group (qawm) in Egypt. The governor names the prominent individuals in this group as well: ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Sawdāʾ, Khālid ibn Muljam, Sūdān ibn Ḥumrān and Kināna ibn Bishr. 212 ʿAmmār, it seems, had fallen sway to the invidious influence of the Sabaʾīya.

The caliph’s choice of ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir to be his official emissary to Egypt charged with probing into the affairs there appears in the works of Sayf’s akhbarī peers and predecessors as well. 213 The caliph’s selection of ʿAmmār probably arose from the quasi-familial affinities existing between him and Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa. Both ʿAmmār’s father, Yāsir, and his mother, Sumayya, had been slaves of Abū Ḥudayfa, and although Abū Ḥudhayfa manumitted Yāsir, the family maintained close connections with Abū Ḥudhayfa and chose to remain in the household of their former master. By virtue of this, ʿAmmār was himself a client (halīf) of the Banū Makhzūm. 214 In addition to their shared closeness to Ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa’s father, however, both ʿAmmār and Ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa drew from a well of shared, embittering experiences with ʿUthmān. This would work against ʿUthmān’s purposes and prove his choice of ʿAmmār a trifle bit naïve. The same

211 Ibid.
212 Ibid., i, 135.
213 Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv 1, 541.
214 Ibn Saʾd, iii 1, 176.
may also be said of the third figure of the Egyptian triad of Com-
panions leading the opposition against ʿUthmān, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, although he forms an exceptional case in Sayf’s narrative for a variety of different reasons (see below).

As we have seen, Sayf attributes the opposition of Ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa to ʿUthmān’s refusal to appoint him as governor over a province;215 while Ibn Abī Bakr’s opposition, he minimalizes, considering it be motivated by “wrath and avarice.”216 Like the ‘two Muḥammads’, whose motives Sayf treats with similar derision, Sayf’s account throws ʿAmmār deep into the infectious miasma of the Sabaʾiya and depicts his opposition to ʿUthmān as an unwarranted wish for personal vendetta: ʿAmmār’s grievances, Sayf relates, derived from a beating he received at ʿUthmān’s command after a heated dispute (kalām) with ʿAbbās ibn ʿUtba ibn Abī Lahab.217 In any case, the dislike for ʿUthmān harbored by each of the three had been established prior to their journeys from Medina to the garrison cities, as even Sayf admits.

As in all accounts of this period, Egypt serves as the political arena most ideologically apt for the disenfranchised Medinans to find recourse to political actions unavailable to them in Medina, due in part to the tumults and discontents present there, but equally to its geographical distance from Medina.218 In his letter to ʿUthmān, Ibn Abī Sarḥ not only names the ignominious associates who lured ʿAmmār into sedition (although Ṭabarī’s version ceases there), but Sayf’s report actually continues to relate the putative contents of the letter. In this letter Ibn Abī Sarḥ also discusses the persons who are attempting to convince ʿAmmār to endorse their doctrines, stating that the group “claims that Muḥammad shall return, while they summon (ʿAmmār) to depose ʿUthmān and inform him that the view of the Medinans is the same as their view [yazʿamūn anna muḥammad an raʾī wa-yadʿūnahu ilā khāliʿi ʿuthmān wa-yukhbirūnahu anna raʾy ahl al-madīna ʿalā mithl raʾyihim].” Ibn Abī Sarḥ concludes his letter by

215 Sayf, K al-ridda, 126 f. (see also above).
216 Ibid., 1, 127.
217 Ibid. Other accounts state the ʿAmmār’s beating resulted from his criticism of the caliph’s misuse of communal funds. They further contend that he was beaten until his innards burst from his stomach; e.g., see Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv1, 538 ff.; Ibn Aʾtham, ii, 154 f.
218 M. Muranyi, Die Prophetengenossen in der frühislamischen Geschichte (Bonn, 1973), 70.
petitioning the caliph for permission to kill both 'Ammār and those who seek to seduce him.\footnote{Sayf, \textit{K al-ridda}, 1, 138.}

We actually possess a parallel version of Sayf’s rendition of Ibn Abī Sarḥ’s letter preserved by a younger contemporary of his, the Başran akhbārī Ibn Shabba (d. 264/877),\footnote{He was born in 173/789, three years into the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–193/786–809), during whose caliphate Sayf reputedly died; see GAS, i, 345.} who gives a Medinan isnād for the account. In this version of the letter, the governor writes, “ʿAmmār has come to us and said detestable things in public [azhara al-qabīh] and has said illicit things, and a group that is neither from men of religion or the Qur’ān gather around him [wa-qālā mā lā yuhīllu atāfā bihi qawmūn laysū min ahl al-dīn wa-lā al-qurʾān].”\footnote{Ibn Shabba, iii, 1122 f.} One can clearly see how in Sayf’s version the vague, ambiguous “qabīh” and “mā lā yuhīllu” of Ibn Shabba’s report have been transformed into the explicit, determinable doctrine of the Sabaʾiya. Even the anonymous “qawm” receive names.

The parallels continue even further. In Sayf’s account, ʿUthmān’s limitless clemency wins the day, and the caliph composes a letter to stay the hand of a governor all too eager to settle matters through martial means. ʿUthmān pens the following response to Ibn Abī Sarḥ:\footnote{Sayf, \textit{K al-ridda}, i, 138.}

\begin{quote}
By my life, how reckless you are [innaka la-jariʾun]!…No, by God, I would neither kill (ʿAmmār) nor wound him, not (even) them (viz. the Sabaʾiya), until God Himself takes revenge upon them both by the hand of whom He loves. Let them splash around and play as long as they have not forsaken allegiance and obedience (to the caliph) [fa-daʾhum mā lam yakhlaṭū yadūn tāʾāwun yakhūḍū wa-yalʾabū].
\end{quote}

Following this letter comes ʿUthmān’s second letter, this time to ʿAmmār:\footnote{Ibid.}

\begin{quote}
For your sake, I beseech you by God that you not forsake your allegiance and obedience and disassociate from them, because otherwise you will end up in the fires of Hell [fa-tabū fī l-nār]. By my life, I am certain, through God, that my time will extend until its completion and my sustenance will continue until its fulfillment not one bit less [wa-lāʾ amrī...]
\end{quote}

\footnote{Although this reading is supported by the ms (see Sayf, \textit{K al-ridda}, i, fol. 66a), perhaps a better reading here would be “yuharridū”—“they incite” (cf. Ibn Shabba, iii, 1123.12).}
Although Ibn Shabba’s report contains only one letter by ‘Uthmān rather than two as in Sayf’s account, Ibn Shabba’s single letter from ‘Uthmān to Ibn Abī Sarḥ contains numerous parallels to both. Some of the parallels are inexact, yet they are striking nonetheless. Thus, in Ibn Shabbah’s version, ‘Uthmān rebukes Ibn Abī Sarḥ’s proposal to having ‘Ammār assassinated in slightly different wording; it says, “What a horrible idea you have conjured up [bi‘sa al-ra‘y ra‘ayta],” rather than describing him as reckless outright. Most striking, however, is the nearly verbatim matching of the wording of a phrase present in both Sayf’s version of ‘Uthmān’s letter to ‘Ammār and Ibn Shabbah’s longer version of ‘Uthmān’s letter to Ibn Abī Sarḥ. In both ‘Uthmān writes, “By my life, I am certain that my time will extend until its completion, my sustenance will continue until its fulfillment and until I have been brought down to my death [fa-la‘amrī innī la‘alā yaqīn annī astakmilu ajalī wa-astawfī rizqī wa-usra‘u maṣra‘i].”225 The account that Ibn Shabba preserves, or an earlier account equally similar in wording, served in all likelihood as the template for Sayf’s report upon which he grafted his Saba‘īya materials.

As a result of ‘Uthmān’s letter to Ibn Abī Sarḥ, according to both Sayf’s and Ibn Shabba’s reports, the governor supplied ‘Ammār with sufficient provisions for a return journey to Medina to meet the caliph. Only in Sayf’s version, however, does one find that ‘Uthmān’s letter to ‘Ammār actually succeeded in swaying ‘Ammār to some modicum of repentance—a testament to the efficacy of the caliph’s clemency. According to Sayf’s account, the Egyptians rose up and attempted to murder both ‘Ammār and the Saba‘īya around him—the reader is left in the dark as to why—but failed because Ibn Abī Sarḥ prevented them and protected ‘Ammār until he was able to begin his trip to Medina. Upon his arrival in Medina, ‘Uthmān delivered to him a severe rebuke. Afterwards, Sayf’s account informs us: “whenever (Ammār) would encounter crowds, he would make excuses for himself and disassociate himself (from his actions). Whenever he encountered someone who would provide him with safety, he would stay there and make

225 Ibn Shabba, iii, 1123.
known his regret. People reproached him, disassociated from him, and despised him.”

The Assassination of ʿUthmān

Bringing his narrative of ʿUthmān’s caliphate to its inexorable denouement, Sayf compiles a series of lengthy, combined reports ostensibly culled from his most depended-upon and frequently-used informant pairings: Muḥammad and Ṭalḥa and Abū ʿUthmān and Abū Ḥāritha. This technique, as we have seen, allows Sayf to considerably embellish, construct, and shape his narrative in conformity with the viewpoint he is most keen to convey; it also allows him to compose lengthy akhbār containing narratives unimpeded by interruptions introduced by isnāds. Among the bulkier sections of his narrative of ʿUthmān’s caliphate, Sayf’s account introduces a number of events and materials too extensive to cover in all their detail here. Below, one finds a brief overview of those events with a focus of the role of the Sabaʾīya in particular.

Upon hearing the report of the Medinan emissaries dispatched to the various provinces, ʿUthmān sends for the governors from each province in order to give account at an annual meeting. These governors are Ibn ʿĀmir from Baṣra, Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀs from Kūfa, Muʿāwiya from Syria and Ibn Abī Sarḥ from Egypt; they are all joined also by Egypt’s former governor, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs. The caliph also writes to the inhabitants of each garrison city, extending an invitation to them, thereby enabling them to receive a hearing before the caliph. In this letter, ʿUthmān declares:

No request of me or my governors, once it has reached me, will not been granted; neither I nor my governors have any right with regard to the subjects that will not be left to them [wa-laysa li wa-lā ʿummālī ḥaqqa wa-līraʿya illā matrūkun lahun]. Verily, the people of Medina have informed me that certain persons are being defamed and others beaten—whosoever has been beaten in secret, defamed in secret, or claims as much, let him attend the pilgrimage and obtain his right whence he can, whether from me or my governors.

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226 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 138.
227 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 140; Ṭabarī, i, 2944.
The clement tenor of the letter exhibits the quintessential facets of the Sayfian portrait of ʿUthmān. Sayf situates this tenor in stark relief against the individual advice proffered by the caliph’s governors, who themselves advocate harsh measures. The insight of Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ reveals a prescient grasp of the reality of the situation at hand, “This is a contrived matter, hatched in secret; an unknowing person will stumble upon it and will then pass it on so the people discuss in their congregations.”228 When asked by the caliph what action he recommends, Saʿīd’s sternly replies, “Track down this group, then execute those from whom this (talk) is emerging.”229 Saʿīd’s advice, however, does not sway ʿUthmān.

As seen above, the governor’s instincts prove sound as Kūfa, under the leadership of Yazīd ibn Qays al-Arḥābī, falls under sway Sabaʾiya with Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, of course, pulling the strings remotely from Egypt. The Kūfan uprising, however, was scarcely a success, Sayf asserts, for Ibn al-Sawdāʾ orchestrated a far more ambitious scheme intended to transcend the Kūfan sphere. He rather sought to coordinate an empirewide revolt, hoping for commensurate success in each of the outlying provinces (minus Syria, where he lacked the requisite influence), which would successfully take advantage of the annual absence of the governors from their posts. Thus, from the perspective of Sayf’s Sabaʾiya, only Kūfa enjoyed a modicum of success, but even their efforts there were brought to heel by Sayf’s hero, al-Qaʿqāʾ ibn ʿAmr, who forces Yazīd to publicly disavow his actual aim of deposing ʿUthmān, which he veils under objections to Saʿīd’s governorship.230

Unable, therefore, to stage their revolts in the garrison-towns,231 the Sabaʾiya adopt an alternative strategy to assemble in Medina and confront ʿUthmān with his misdeeds, “acting as if they were commanding the good [azharū annahum yaʾtamarūn bi-l-maʿrūf].”232 Once they

228 “ḥādhā amrun masnūn yuṣnaʾu fī l-sīrī fa-yulqā bihi ghayr dhī l-maʿrīfa fa-yukhbiru bihi fa-yataḥaddithu bihi al-nāṣ fī majālisihim.”
229 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 141.
230 Ibid., 1, 150 f.; Ṭabarī, 1, 2950 f.
231 Reading with the ms, “The Sabaʾiya possessed no means revolt (starting out) from the garrison towns [lam yakun li-l-sabaʾiya sabīl ilā al-khuriyīn min al-amṣār]” (Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 150.7); whereas Ṭabarī’s, presumably corrupt, text reads, “The Sabaʾiya possessed no means to go out to the garrison towns [ lam yakun li-l-sabaʾiya sabīl ilā al-khuriyīn ilā al-amṣār]” (Ṭabarī, 1, 2950.10), incorrectly assuming the Sabaʾiya to be outside the garrison cities at the time.
232 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 150.
arrive, 'Uthmān dispatches two envoys to interrogate the assemblage. When interrogated by the envoys as to the number of their supporters in Medina and their plans, the Sabaʾiya are surprisingly straightforward. Among the Medinans, they name only three sympathetic with their cause: ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, and Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālīb. As for their plans, they rather incredulously inform the envoys of everything, declaring:

We would like to mention (to the caliph) some things that we have sown into the hearts of the people. Afterwards, we will return to them and claim that we forced him to admit to them, and that he would neither abandon them nor repent. After this, we will depart for Medina in the guise of pilgrims and surround 'Uthmān and depose him. If he refuses, we'll kill him.

Although 'Uthmān’s envoys swiftly inform the caliph of their intentions, 'Uthmān merely laughs at their attempts and asks that the dissidents come before him.

All of these events appear to serve one central purpose, namely to construct a narrative platform whereby Sayf can give ‘Uthmān a voice to defend himself from the imprecations of his harshest critics. Rejecting outright all calls to kill the dissidents, despite their open avowal of their intent to depose or murder him, the caliph prefers that “we grant them reprieve, accept them and make our best effort to open their eyes [naʾfū wa-naqbalu wa-nubaṣṣiruhum bi-jahdīnā].”

The caliph, thus, meets the dissidents face to face and, in an extended diatribe, answers every objection of the dissidents, refuting each of their claims. The complaints put forward by the Sabaʾiya are quite familiar, although
Sayf’s list of them is by no means a comprehensive presentation against ‘Uthmānī views. Each answer of the caliph to the dissidents’ objections likewise meets the affirmation of its truth by the people, publicly exculpating the maligned caliph.

The device is effective, even if contrived, as it simultaneously provides a litany of the alleged misdeeds of the caliph while juxtaposing them to his own refutation of his accusers. Thus, ‘Uthmān answers his critics’ censure, that he performed two extra bows (Ar. rak‘ā) during the prayer while traveling, by reminding them that he had done so only after entering the environs of his family’s dwelling.\(^{236}\) Against the accusation that he had reserved pasturage (Ar. himā) for personal profit (or that of his clan),\(^{237}\) the caliph reminds his audience that in this he only expanded upon the policy of his predecessors and that such reserved pasturage was utilized solely for the camels given as alms tax (Ar. ṣadaqāt); only those who came with overwhelming numbers of livestock were forbidden to pasture their flocks there.\(^{238}\) As to his personal wealth of livestock, he had lost it all after assuming the caliphate, save two mounts he set aside for the sake of undertaking the pilgrimage. When his accusers decry his collection of the Qur’ān into one book rather than many,\(^{239}\) he points out that the Qur’ān itself is from one God, revealed to one man, and that he merely followed those appointed to carry out the task of its collection. Regarding the caliph permitting his uncle, the Meccan exile al-Ḥakam ibn Abī l-ʿĀs ibn Umayya, to return to Medina, ‘Uthmān asserts that after exiling al-Ḥakam to al-Ṭā‘if the Prophet brought him back to Mecca; therefore, the caliph had not contravened the Prophet in returning him to Mecca, but had followed his precedent.\(^{240}\) In defense of his

\(^{236}\) Sayf, *K al-ridda*, 1, 151. Here Sayf’s account modifies the well-known dispute by treating it as an issue of the protocol governing prayer during travel (*al-ṣalā fi l-safar*), whereas the other accounts explicitly associate this innovative measure in the prayer rite with the *hajj*, placing the events at Minā. See Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 4v, 427 f.; Ṭabarī, 1, 2833 ff.

\(^{237}\) Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 4v, 526 f.; Ṭabarī, 1, 2963; Ibn Abī l-Hadīd, 1, 170.

\(^{238}\) Sayf’s text here reads: “Neither they nor we forbade anyone from it except those who brought large herds [mā manaʿū wa-lā nahnu minhā ahad̲w illā man sāqa duhm̲w]” (*K al-ridda*, 1, 151. ult.). This differs significantly from Ṭabarī’s recension, which implies bribery had been involved, “Neither they nor we forbade anyone from it except those who handed over money [mā manaʿū wa-lā nahnu minhā ahad̲w illā man sāqa dirham̲w]” (*Ṭabarī*, 1, 2952.7).

\(^{239}\) Sayf, *K al-ridda*, 1, 152, “kāna al-qur’ānu kutub̲w fa-tarakahillā wāhīd̲w.”

\(^{240}\) Most accounts assert that ‘Uthmān sought, but failed, to find reprise for his uncle during the reigns of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar (see Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 4v, 513 f. and
Sayf ibn ‘Umar and the Saba’īya (I)

Sayf ibn ‘Umar and the Saba’īya (I) 95
governors, whom the dissidents denigrated as “youths [ahdāth],”241 the caliph declares that he merely appointed capable persons commanding broad support; none were younger than those appointed by his predecessors, let alone the Prophet (citing the appointment of Usāma ibn Zayd over the Balqā’ as proof).242 As for giving Ibn Abī Sarḥ 100,000 dirhams from the fay’ of Egypt,243 Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, too, had paid its like to others, but only ’Uthmān had returned the monies to the army, even though it did not belong to them, after they had objected. Against the calumny that the caliph allowed his fondness for his household to lead him to grant them public wealth, he responds by denying outright that he had handed over any monies save those that which belonged to him personally. The final rejoinder the caliph directs against those accusers who maligned him with the accusation that he handed over lands to men of importance (rijāl) without warrant: no lands in the conquered territories, the caliph asserts, were handed over without demanding the fair exchange of old properties in Arabia for new holdings.244 The manner in which Sayf’s narrative historicizes the numerous ripostes in favor of ’Uthmān’s righteousness against his critics exercised a palpable influence upon subsequent, more theological defenses of his caliphate.245

Largely thwarted in their efforts to publicly humiliate the caliph, the Saba’īya depart from Medina with their safety assured by ’Uthmān. Back in the garrison towns, the Saba’īya correspond with one another and implement their prior plans to reconvene on the outskirts of Medina in the guise of pilgrims (hujjāj) in Shawwāl 35/April 656, at

Ya’qūbi, Ta’rīkh, ii, 164); other accounts also claim that ’Uthmān, once caliph, also granted al-Ḥakam a thousand dirhams upon his return (see Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharh, i, 169). Sayf’s assertion that the Prophet himself had permitted al-Ḥakam to return is, to my knowledge, without parallel, although defenders of ’Uthmān’s conduct often cite a personal assurance privately communicated to ’Uthmān by the Prophet after the former’s pleading on his uncle’s behalf. Abū Bakr and ’Umar’s refusal to permit Ḥakam’s return arose from the lack of corroborating witnesses to validate ’Uthmān’s claim, not his request’s illegitimacy per se. See Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharh, iii, 24 ff.

241 Sayf, K al-ridda, 1, 152.11.
243 According to most accounts, Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, not Ibn Abī Sarḥ, was the recipient of the khums; see Crone and Zimmerman, Sālim ibn Dhakwān, 152.
244 See n. 33 above.
which time they undertake their final attack against ʿUthmān. The dissidents arrive on schedule organized into three armies consisting of four divisions each per garrison-town: Baṣra, Kūfa and Egypt. Sayf lists the leaders of each party, featuring some all too familiar names and others less so, as follows (names followed by an asterisk [*] indicate those hitherto mentioned by Sayf as belonging to the inner circle of the Sabaʿīya).246

**Egyptians**

**Leader:** al-Ghāfiqī ibn Ḥarb al-ʿAkki*

**Commanders:** ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿUdays al-Balawī, Kināna ibn Bishr al-Laythī,* Sūdān ibn Ḥumrān al-Sakūnī,* Qutayra al-Sakūnī247

**Kūfans**

**Leader:** ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAṣāmm

**Commanders:** Zayd ibn Sūḥān al-ʿAbdī,* al-Ashtar al-Nakhaʿī,* Ziyād ibn al-Nadr al-Ḥarīthī, ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-ʿAṣāmm from the Banū ʿĀmir ibn Ṣaʿṣaʿa

**Baṣrans**

**Leader:** Ḥurqūṣ ibn Zuhayr al-Saʿdī

**Commanders:** Ḥukaym ibn Jabala al-ʿAbdī,* Dhurayḥ ibn ʿAbbād al-ʿAbdī, Bishr ibn Shuрайḥ ibn al-Ḥuṭam ibn Dubayʿa al-Qaysī, Ibn Muḥarrish ibn ʿAbd ʿAmr al-Ḥanafī

As the above list indicates, the vast majority of the known Sabaʿīya come from Egypt, and it is no coincidence that Sayf informs us that Ibn al-Sawdāʾ hid himself inside the ranks of the Egyptians. After noting the lurking presence of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ among the Egyptian troops, Sayf never again mentions Ibn al-Sawdāʾ until after ʿUthmān’s death. Like most of Sayf’s material, a number of the names are unknowns and unique to Sayf. Those one can identify number among the ʿIrāqī qurrāʾ—whether or not Sayf deems all these individuals Sabaʿīya remains vague. One finds also notable omissions such as ʿAmr ibn Ḥaṭimiq al-Khuzaʿī, whom other historians not only name as a leader among the Egyptians but also as a companion of Ibn Sabaʿ.248 Indeed, ʿAmr ibn Ḥaṭimiq plays no role in the Sayfian corpus save in a couple

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247 His name is given as Qutayra ibn Wahb al-Saksakī by Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ*, ii, 112.11.

of references found in the bayts of al-Walid ibn ‘Uqba’s poetry, which he preserves.  

Sayf’s list, albeit problematic, reinforces one of our key observations about his Saba’iya; just where membership begins and ends remains perennially vague. Two types of insidious persons populate the dissidents’ ranks to which the Saba’iya belong: those merely manipulated to work towards the cause of the Saba’iya but unaware of the true aims being pursued, and those who actively pursue the cause espoused by Ibn al-Sawda’. Rarely does Sayf explicitly identify the latter to thereby distinguish them from the former. Despite the unified opposition of the dissidents to ‘Uthmān, Sayf takes pains to state that each group actually operated under diverse aims. The Saba’iya and their plot to depose ‘Uthmān, for Sayf at least, do not merely emerge as the spawn of an aberrant, underground Shi‘ite movement. Indeed, aspects of the movement seem hardly Shi‘ite at all. Of the three commands, only the Saba’iya of Egypt wished for ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib’s leadership—the Başrans desired Ṭalḥa ibn ‘Ubayd Allāh and the Kūfans al-Zubayr ibn ‘Awwām. Furthermore, a number of the Kūfan leaders—including ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aṣāmm, Zayd ibn Sūhān, and Ziyād ibn al-Nadr—eventually defect after being moved by the support shown for the caliph among the Companions in Medina.

Once the dissidents arrive, however, ‘Ali, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr unequivocally renounce them and withhold their support from the dissidents. In fact, in Sayf’s narrative, the dissidents err by unintentionally galvanizing ‘Ali, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr to more staunchly defend ‘Uthmān, and their spurning of the dissidents leads to their temporary withdrawal from Medina to Dhū Khushub and al-A‘waṣ. Only the infamously intercepted letter ordering the assassination of the Egyptian leaders, allegedly penned by ‘Uthmān, leads them to return. However, ‘Ali sees through their ruse and accuses the dissidents of forging the letter they themselves claimed to intercept. Once they reenter Medina and begin the siege of ‘Uthmān’s house, the Saba’iya set aside all hope

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249 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 146.-7, 215.9.
250 Ibid., i, 166. Both Ibn Sa’d and Baladhuri include a somewhat parallel account in which ‘Ali advises ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aṣāmm not to depart from Dhū Khushub; see Ibn Sa’d, iii, 45 and Baladhuri, Ansāb, iv, 560.
251 Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 158 ff.
252 Ibid., i, 161. Sayf treats the letter briefly, omitting the infamous orders to decapitate and amputate the hands of the Egyptians and to “leave them drowning in their own blood to die, then fasten their bodies to the trunks of palms trees [da’hum
to find help from the three whose leadership they previously sought and appoint a watchman (Ar. *raqīb*) over each. These impromptu guards of ‘Āli, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr are charged with orders to kill them if they dare to leave their homes in an attempt to aid ʿUthmān. The three, thus, send their sons to ʿUthmān’s side in their stead. 253 As for the caliph, only at this moment of the crisis does he finally send for aid, calling upon whom Sayf names the “*mukhaḍḍadūn,*” or “those stirred to action,” who act as a sort of ‘anti-Sabaʾiya’. The governors of the provinces send these men to fights in ʿUthmān’s defense, and a few individuals of their number are already known in Sayf’s narrative for their opposition to the Sabaʾiya, such as: al-Qaʿqāʾ ibn ʿAmr, ʿUbāda ibn al-Šāmit, and Abū I-Dardāʾ. Other Successors and disciples of the Companions of the Prophet are also named. Their efforts, however, come much too late.

When the caliph finally does meet his death, one finds that Sayf spares ʿUthmān from many of the better-known indignities suffered in the final days of his caliphate. He does so by minimizing the Medinan opposition among the Companions and debunking the disputes put forward by the dissidents from ʿIrāq and Egypt. 254 At the moment of the caliph’s death, for example, Sayf narrates that Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr attempts to murder ʿUthmān but shrinks from the evil act once confronted with the Caliph face to face. 255 The Sabaʾiya, in fact, bear the responsibility for the shedding of ʿUthmān’s blood, as three

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255 The principal motivation for this depiction of events was, of course, to mitigate the scandal of Abū Bakr’s son, also a Companion, having undertaken the murder of the caliph. Sayf, however, was certainly not the only early historian to claim that Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr did not himself murder ʿUthmān (see, e.g., Balādhuri, *Ansāb*, iv, 555 (Wāqīḍī)). However, Madelung astutely points to Sayf’s usage of a considerable body of reports deriving from the renowned Medinan scholar al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr (d. ca. 101–112/719–30), who likely imparted his bias, or his wish to minimize the sins of his father, to Sayf’s history (Madelung, “Sayf ibn ʿUmar”). Indeed, al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad reputedly composed a work on the first civil war during his lifetime; see GAS, i, 279 (cited in Donner, *Narratives*, 194). According to a contemporary, al-Qāsim could allegedly be heard saying in the midst of his prayers, “Oh Lord, forgive my father for his sins against ʿUthmān.” See Balādhuri, *Ansāb al-ashrāf: Sāʾir furūʿ Quraysh*, v, ed. I. ʿAbbās, Bibliotheca Islamica 28g (Beirut, 1996), 178.
of their ranks come forward to act as the ones to strike the final blow: al-Ghāfiqi ibn Ḥarab, Sūdān ibn Ḥumrān and Qutayra al-Sakūnī.256

By all accounts, nearly all of ʿUthmān’s assailants belonged to the Egyptian bloc of the opposition. An exceptional case is that of two Kūfans, ‘ʿAmr ibn Ḥamīq al-Khuzā‘ī and ‘Umāyr ibn Ḍābī’, who, in any case, did not deal the fatal blows and may have played a direct role in inflating their own personal notoriety *ex post facto*. As noted above, Sayf transmits next to nothing about ʿAmr ibn Ḥamīq. As for ‘Umāyr ibn Ḍābī’, even though Sayf designates him unequivocally as a Sabaʿī, ʿUmāyr never appears during Sayf’s actual narrative of ʿUthmān’s death. All other *akhbāris*, for all intents and purposes, largely avoided casting the Egyptian bloc as an opposition movement motivated by a clearly Shi‘ī animus; in this, Sayf’s portrayal offers a unique, albeit perplexing and unconvincing, account of the Egyptian opposition. Indeed, Sayf’s aspersion of the anti-ʿUthmānī opposition rests on this moralizing reconstruction of ʿUthmān’s caliphate, which he musters a levy against the tide of the schismatic contagion saturating the *umma* that the nefarious Sabaʿīya instantiate. The problem lies in the fact that, whenever one looks elsewhere for confirmation of this outlook, one finds none.

What scant evidence one may adduce for the presence of the Sabaʿīya in Egypt beyond the Sayfian corpus comes to us in the form a banal anecdote concerning a certain Abū Zur‘a ʿAmr ibn Jābir al-Ḥadrāmī, who reputedly believed ʿAlī to be in the clouds, a belief frequently imputed to the Sabaʿīya by the heresiographers but never by Sayf. The Egyptian traditionist Ibn Lahī‘a (ca. 96–174/715–790) reportedly described the aforementioned Abū Zur‘a as being “a stupid old man.” Ibn Lahī‘a recounts, continuing, that, “(Abū Zur‘a) used to sit with us and would catch sight of a cloud and would say, ‘This is ʿAlī!’”257 Rather than being a fount of Shi‘ism on par with Kūfā as Sayf would have his readers believe, Egypt during the Umayyad period appears to have been staunchly in the camp of the ʿUthmānīya, although one does encounter seemingly tendentious reports that Egypt—prior to being converted to the ʿUthmānī camp by the likes of Yazīd ibn Ḥābīb

256 Sayf, *K al-ridda*, 1, 190 f; ʿṬabarī, 1, 3018 f. Named as the murderers of ʿUthmān also in Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ*, ii, 125 f.
(d. 128/745) and al-Layth ibn Sa’d (94–175/713–791)\(^{258}\)—had previously been “ʿAlawi,” a rather vague designation by which a sort of ‘soft’ Shi’ism may be intended.\(^{259}\)

Sayf’s Sabaʾiya narratives as examined above offer a complex take on what amounts to rather stock conventions of the historiographical tradition that precedes him: the opposition of the ʿIrāqī qurrāʾ to ʿUthmān’s governors, the discontents of Abū Dharr and ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, the opposition of Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr and Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥudhayfa, etc. Alternative narratives of these events are not necessarily more convincing; modern historians have doubted the historicity of the rival narratives of the aforementioned events leading up to ʿUthmān’s assassination as well, albeit for entirely different reasons.\(^{260}\)

What is most striking, however, is how Sayf’s accounts do not merely posit benignly parallel alternatives to the accounts of his akhbārī rivals but also construct an entirely new version of history turns convention on its head. When read against the backdrop of the broader historiographical tradition of the early period, Sayf’s accounts of the Sabaʾiya especially strike the modern historian, therefore, as derivative and reactionary rather than merely an equally plausible, or implausible, alternative. The Sabaʾiya act mostly as a veneer liberally applied to an earlier stratum of traditions that is largely nescient of the conspiracy Sayf strives to reveal, and although certainly early, the Sayfian corpus certainly does not represent the earliest stratum of the Muslim historiographical tradition.

Two trends, therefore, stand out throughout the Sayfian narrative of ʿUthmān’s troubled caliphate. The first is deconstructive in that the Sayfian corpus erodes, or at least attempts to defuse, the historical critiques of ʿUthmān’s reign as well as the religio-political ideology serving as the basis of the dissidents’ opposition to him. The second is constructive in that the corpus weaves into the narrative of ʿUthmān’s reign the deus ex machina known as the Sabaʾiya and thereby achieves a type of historicized, albeit artificial, vindication of ʿUthmān’s caliphate. Throughout his narrative, Sayf deftly mixes the ingredients in order to fashion an account that is both anti-Shīʿite (or, perhaps more


\(^{259}\) On the various usages of the designation ʿalawi, see W. al-Qādī, “ʿAlawi,” *EI*, i, 804b–806a.

\(^{260}\) E.g., see Noth/Conrad, *Early Arabic Tradition*, 186 ff.
accurately, anti-sectarian) and pro-ʿUthmān. Over a century ago, Wellhausen keenly observed how the tactics of the Sabaʾīya as depicted by Sayf hardly differed from those of the ʿAbbāsid daʾwa, most likely a recent memory for Sayf and perhaps an inspirational archetype for his Sabaʾīya.

Sayf’s viewpoint on these historical events, for all intents and purposes, is an ʿUthmānī one. It would be too hazardous to label him as a Sunni, strictly speaking, for he is particularly fond of traditions that name Muʿāwiya, not ʿAlī, as the successor of ʿUthmān and, thus, knowingly or un-knowingly eschews the so-called ‘four-caliph thesis’ of traditional Sunnism. With this being said, one must also emphasize that he harbors no particular grievance against ʿAlī either, even if he stops short of recognizing him as a caliph, for Sayf maintains a consummate respect for the majority of the Companions, or ṣaḥāba, of the Prophet. Indeed, the lesson here is that the contribution of the ʿUthmānī party to the later Sunni canonization of ʿUthmān among the Rāshidūn was considerable. Taking Sayf as our prime example, one can see how the redemption of ʿUthmān had been accomplished in large effect due to the strident efforts of the ʿUthmānīya to create a historiographical picture of the first civil war that accommodated a sacral, iconic vision of ʿUthmān as a consummately righteous caliph. The popularity and centrality of Sayf for traditionist, Sunni historians such as Tabarī (and in later periods, ʿUthmān’s hagiographers such as Ibn ʿAsākir and Ibn Abī Bakr al-Ashʿarī) derives from this feat, which only Sayf achieves in such a comprehensive, consistent and compelling manner.

261 Wellhausen, Arab Kingdom, 504; idem, Prolegoumena, 124.

262 As observed by Crone in JRAS 6 (1996), 267 ff.

See, for example, the first report of the ms in which the Prophet, Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān are shown to outweigh the umma, but after ʿUthmān, “the scale was removed [ruʾfʿa al-mīzān]” (Sayf, K al-ridda, i, 3). In another report, Kaʾb al-Aḥbar declares a man claiming the next amīr of the community to be ʿAlī a liar, avering instead that it will be Muʿāwiya (ibid., i, 143). In yet another khabar, one finds that there are mentioned only “a prophet, one who speaks to the truth, and two martyrs [nabiyun wa-sīddīqun wa-shahīdān]” (ibid., i, 195). The only chink in the armor of Sayf’s ʿUthmānī viewpoint seems to be a tradition in which a Rabbi in ʿUmān predicts five successors of the Prophet and foretells which each will die as well as the length of their reigns (ibid., i, 206 f. and Tabari, i, 3251 f.; cf. the series of similar reports collected in Ibn Shabba, iii, 1074–84).

264 Indeed, Sayf ibn ʿUmar was known by the ḥadīth-critics for have forged the following ḥadīth, “If you see those who impugn my Companions, curse them [idhā raʾaytum alladhīna yasubbūna aṣḥābi fa-il-anīhum]” (Mizzī, Tahdhib, xii, 327).
Sayf’s ʿUthmānī vision, therefore, casts the third Caliph as a sacral ruler governing in accordance with God’s righteous decrees—a vision that provides the ideal counter-narrative to both Shīʿī and Khārijī moralism, whose ‘piety-minded’ objections to ʿUthmān’s caliphate were earlier, more pioneering, and more activist (initially at least) in terms of the moral vision they proffered for the community’s history. 265 Although Sayf does so at the expense of making ʿUthmān’s clemency nearly comical, he nonetheless succeeds in exculpating ʿUthmān and negating the perspective that viewed the caliph’s policies as not merely disenchancing, but as an orgulous effrontery against the normative practices instituted by ʿUmar and, ultimately, the Prophet. Regardless of the weak historicity of the Sayfian corpus, the myth-making power of Sayf’s narratives of al-fitna al-kubrā displays the actual genius of his narrative of Ibn Saba’. Sayf effectively provides a two-pronged counter-narrative against the moralism espoused by both Shīʿīsm and Khārijism, casting them as sectarian and, thus, an aberrant desecration of the jamāʿa, or communal solidarity, that served as the sacral vision of the Muslim community emerging as so quintessential to, and perennially compelling for, the traditionists and, later, Sunnism itself.

Hence, no other figure serves as a greater paragon and preserver of this sacral vision of the jamāʿa in Sayf’s corpus as ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān. Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, by contrast, functions as the personification of fitna and the invidious polluter of the jamāʿa. The heresiarch, thus, emerges in many ways as a necessary character, acting as the indispensable foil for the martyred caliph. 266 Given the virtual impossibility of assigning blame and/or responsibility for ʿUthmān’s murder to any Companion(s) of the Prophet—the social implications of such an action, deemed enormous and even dangerous, was deftly avoided,

265 The cause of this shared outlook can be attributed to the emergence of both from the early opposition of the qurrāʾ, whose legacy of opposition to the modus vivendi instituted by ʿUthmān’s policies was inherited by both the Shiʿites and Khārijites; see Hinds, “The Murder of the Caliph ʿUthmān,” 451.

266 Heinz Halm’s speculates concerning the possibility that Sayf, in Halm’s view a potential Shiʿi, might have viewed Ibn Sabaʾ as a heroic figure writing: “(Sayf) könnte die Rolle Ibn Sabaʾs also durchaus positiv gemeint haben; seine Version wäre dann ein Versuch, die Ereignisse des Ersten Bürgerkrieges aus der Sicht der kufischen ghulāt zu deuten: Ibn Sabaʾ ist es, der den Bürgerkrieg anstiftet und damit ʿAlī zur Macht verhilft, und er ist es, der ʿAlī seine treuesten Anhänger, die von den ghulāt hochverehrten Abū Darr und ʿAmmār, zuführt; er schließlich steht hinter ʿAlīs Sieg in der Kamelschlaft” (Gnosis, 41). This is pure fantasy.
Therefore, often even by historians of Shīʿī dispositions—one can perceive yet another reason why such a figure became a desideratum for such a narrative of ʿUthmān’s caliphate. Indeed, purging the opposition to ʿUthmān of its ʿaḥābi elements and constituting it of mostly the ‘rabble’ (ghawghāʾ) was a prerequisite of the sacral portrayal of the caliph as one killed unjustly (mażlūm), rather than a tyrant deposed as an oppressor (zālimūn). All of these factors predisposed traditionist, Sunnī historians, such as Ṭabarī and his ilk, to be all too ready to imbibe Sayf’s lenitive elixir for Muslim anxieties over the tumultuous events of their early history.

Yet, the saga of the Sabaʾiʿya in the Sayfian corpus does not end here with the assassination of ʿUthmān. Sayf’s Sabaʾiʿya continue to evolve in new directions immediately following ʿUthmān’s death and don a new method of fomenting sectarian division within the early umma. In the next chapter, we shall encounter this new phase in the Sabaʾiʿya narrative as Sayf turns his attention to the events leading up to and transpiring during the Battle of the Camel between ʿAlī and his partisans on one side and on the other, al-Zubayr, Ṭalḥa, and ʿĀʾisha.

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267 This point is well argued by Tarif Khalidi, Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period (Cambridge, 1994), 226.

268 One can almost hear Sayf’s own voice echoing through the words of the Ashʿari theologian Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī when he writes: “Those who killed (ʿUthmān) were riff-raff and hooligans, a mixed crowd from all over the place, an odd assortment of men of the lowest kind such as (Kināna ibn Bishr) al-Tujibi, al-Ashtar al-Nakhaʾi and those vile men of Khuzāʾa. Even for a person whose killing is justified, it was not up to the likes of these men to do it. There can be no doubt that he was killed unjustly [qutila mazlūm].” See K. al-ʾirshād ilā qawāt al-adilla fī usūl al-iʿtiqād, eds. M. Y. Mūsā and ʿA.-M.ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, 1950), 432. The translation above is adapted from Paul E. Walker, trans., A Guide to Conclusive Proofs the Principles of Belief (Reading, UK, 2000), 236.

269 The salience of the Sabaʾiya persists throughout the works of Tabari’s subsequent imitators such as Ibn al-Jawzī’s (d. 597/1200) al-Muntazam, al-Dhahabi’s (d. 748/1348) Taʾrikh al-islām, Ibn Kathīr’s (d. 774/1373) al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya, among others.
CHAPTER THREE

SAYF IBN ‘UMAR AND THE SABAĪYA (II):
’ALĪ IBN ABĪ ṬĀLĪB AND THE BATTLE OF THE CAMEL

The Sayfian narrative of the fitna during ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib’s efforts to unite the umma under his leadership and, eventually, the events transpiring before, during and after Battle of the Camel (Jumādā II 36/Nov.–Dec. 656) adheres closely to the techniques and precedents that Sayf previously established in his narrative of the opposition to ‘Uthmān. One major thematic difference, however, is the absence of any definitive leader, or caliph, to head the community in its hour of distress. The threat of schism no longer merely looms forebodingly from the shadows. After ‘Uthmān’s death, fitna pervades the Muslim community and afflicts it at every turn. The approach to ‘Ali as he vies for leadership over the umma is strongly colored by this narrative landscape in the Sayfian corpus. Unlike his famous redactor, Ṭabarī, Sayf maintains his ‘Uthmānī slant and carefully refrains from referring to ‘Ali as caliph (khalīfa) and never directly refers to him as Commander of the Faithful (amīr al-muʾminīn)¹—the most exalted title he applies to ‘Ali is that of ruler, or wālī. Although fundamentally an ‘Uthmānī account, its ‘Uthmānī perspective is still rather moderate. Sayf’s narrative is certainly not hostile to ‘Ali, and it continues to cultivate, with few exceptions, a staunchly pro-ṣaḥābī perspective.² Hence,

¹ However, within Sayf’s narrative, many individuals who attach themselves to ‘Ali do either address or refer to him as amīr al-muʾminīn in reported speech. See Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 271.8 (‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām), 273.1 (anonymous), 280.8 (‘Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf), 303.–1 (Hind ibn ‘Amr), 334.6 (Banū Ṣuhān), 344.–5 (al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays), and 355.–8 (anonymous). However, when speaking with his ‘narrative voice’, Sayf never refers to ‘Ali as amīr al-muʾminīn. Ṭabarī’s redaction, in fact, ‘improves’ Sayf’s text in a number of key places in this respect by replacing his references to ‘Ali without a title with the title amīr al-muʾminīn. Compare Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 295.9.–5 with Ṭabarī, 1, 3142.9, 16; Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 318.5 with Ṭabarī, 1, 3180.13; and Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 335.–1 with Ṭabarī, 1, 3212.6.

the Sayfian corpus presents the reader with a scenario that attempts to solve, or get rid of altogether, the moral and theological dilemmas intrinsic to the historical memory of the conduct of the šahāba during these events.

The theological dilemmas of historical interpretation posed by the Battle of the Camel, like those posed by the assassination of ʿUthmān, were many. Most early and medieval Muslim historians regarded the battle as the first time Muslims, particularly Muslims who ranked among the Prophet’s šahāba, clashed and fought against one another in open warfare. Of ʿAlī’s opponents in the battle, ʿAlī, ʿĀʾisha, Tālha and al-Zubayr lost their lives in the struggle, the former in the midst of the battle and the latter while fleeing the conflict, and the otherwise cloistered ʿĀʾisha suffered severe public humiliation and rebuke after she ventured herself onto the battlefield. Their struggles against ʿAlī begg a pressing question for Muslim theologians and (theologically inclined) historians: Who was right and who was wrong in the conflict? How does their conduct relate to normative laws regarding Muslim rebels (bughāt), etc.? Even more prescient is the collective, psychic trauma represented by the Battle of the Camel. If luminaries from the likes of ʿAlī, ʿĀʾisha, Tālha and al-Zubayr could be so inexorably swept away into this fitna—“this vortex of violence”3—what hope could we mere mortals have?

Early Muslims proposed a legion of solutions to these problems. The simplest was to side with one faction over the other, either damning ʿAlī as illegitimate and guilty of ʿUthmān’s death (as did the ‘hard’ ʿUthmāniya) or condemning ʿĀʾisha, Tālha, and al-Zubayr as rebels (bughāt) and insidious ‘oath-breakers’ (nākithūn) who reneged on their bayʿa to ʿAlī as caliph (as did the Shiʿa and later Muʿtazila). Another approach, espoused by traditionists of a jamāʿī disposition, recognized that the conflict was real, but nonetheless insisted that the dead on both sides found felicity in the hereafter.4 Still others, such as the Murjiʿa and the early Muʿtazila (as well as many modern historians, ironically), asserted that even though one of the factions was certainly in the wrong, we ourselves will never know which faction

4 For example, see Abū l-ʿArab al-Tamīmī, K. al-mihan, ed. Yahyā Wuhayb al-Jubūrī (Beirut, 1983), 103.
this was, so there is no use in condemning either. Sayf eschews these positions for a somewhat new view that seems to have developed in the late 2nd/8th century and that he must have played a prominent role in disseminating.

The rhetorical strategy that Sayf pursues exonerates prominent šahābīs who, in earlier historical narratives, otherwise appear as culpable malefactors in the fitna ensuing after 'Uthmān’s death. Sayf achieves this aim to a large extent by positing the Saba‘īya as the main instigators of the ill-will and misdeeds that arose in the wake of 'Uthmān’s assassination. In Sayf’s narratives, the crises conjured into existence by Ibn al-Sawdā‘ always transform into the historical traumas of the early umma—one does not exist without the other. Sayf’s perspective on these events, therefore, is essentially a theological one—one which is, as argued in chapter 1, strongly colored by his 'Uthmānī predilections—and therefore not historical, properly speaking. That Sayf has articulated his theological views so unabashedly within such a comprehensive historical framework is, however, what makes him unique. But one should make no mistake: it is Sayf’s theological views that not only inform his ‘history’ but also create it. Sayf’s *K al-jamal* is, thus, theology as history *par excellence*.

Even if Sayf’s historical narrative is unique, his vision of the first civil war was by no means confined to his own idiosyncratic view of history. The tendency to minimize the role of the šahābā in the Battle of the Camel certainly precedes him. A tradition attributed to ‘Āmir ibn Sharāhil al-Sha‘bī (d. ca. 110/178), for example, finds the Kūfan polymath diminishing the significance of the number of Companions who fought at the Battle of the Camel. In it, Sha‘bī declares, “I swear by God, other than whom there is no god: no more than six Badrīs5 rose up during that affair (i.e., the Battle of the Camel)!”6 One also finds views quite similar to his ascribed to two Mu‘tazili thinkers of the 3rd/9th century, Hishām al-Fuwatī7 and his student ‘Abbād ibn Sulaymān al-Šaymārī.8 According to the Mu‘tazili al-Khayyāṭ

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5 I.e., šahābīs who fought alongside Muḥammad at the Battle of Badr.
8 W. Madelung, “‘Abbād ibn Salmān,” *EIr*, i, 70 f.
(d. ca. 300/900), Hishām al-Fuwatī (like Sayf) regarded 'Uthmān’s assassination as occurring at the hands of bands of men (jamā‘āt) who “killed him without the Muslims knowing it [qatalūhu min ghayr 'ilm al-muslimīn bi-dhālika]”9—that is, without their approval, explicitly or implicitly, and even in their absence. With regard to Hishām’s views on the Battle of the Camel, one encounters yet another attempt to deflect responsibility (and, consequentially, agency) away from the Prophet’s Companions. The blame for the traumas of 'Uthmān’s death and the conflicts to follow thereafter lay not at the doorstep of ‘Ali, ‘Ā’isha, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr and other prominent sāḥibīs, but rather at the doorstep of their less scrupulous followers (atbā’) and companions (ashāb). Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) states that Hishām regarded ‘Ali, ‘Ā’isha, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr on the path of truth, guidance and righteous (ḥaqq wa-hudā wa-sawāb) throughout the Battle of the Camel; rather, it was the rest of their companions who went on the path of perdition and ruin (dalāl wa-bawār). Mufīd continues, summarizing Hishām’s views:10

This is because ‘Ā’isha, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr left for Baṣra only to see after the matter of the shedding of 'Uthmān’s blood and the exacting of revenge on his behalf upon those who killed him unjustly [bi-thā’rihi min zālimihī], whereby they desired to command the good and forbid the wrong and seek the face of God. ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭalib went out only to agree with them on the plan and course of action [al-ra’y wa-l-tadbīr] in the best interest of Islam and its people. He sought to avert further steps into fitna and restrained the masses [al-ʿāmma] from the matters that were not their concern but, rather, the concern of prominent, learned men [wujūh al-ʿulamā’]. (‘Ali tried) to establish their mutual consent on equity, on striving to pursue the truth, and on reaching a unanimous decision. But when the two factions saw this, their mobs [ghawghā’uhum] hastened into battle, and war broke out between them without the decision of the leaders and heads. The ability to remedy the matter went out of their control. Thus, it was from (their) followers that there arose fitna, the shedding of blood and such things that ‘Ali, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, ‘Ā’isha, and those of their prominent followers who were virtuous did not instigate. Thus, their followers fell into perdition, but the leaders were saved (in the Hereafter).

Sayf’s historical narrative of the Battle of Camel is to early Muslim akhbārī-literature what Hishām al-Fuwatī’s historical theology is to

9 Khayyāt, Intisār, 50 f. (Ar.), 56 f. (Fr.).
early Muslim kalām. Throughout the Sayfian narrative, one frequently encounters an array of sentiments sympathetic to the view of Hishām al-Fuwatī, such as a dogmatic contempt for the mob and unruly mass of ne'er-do-wells whom both Sayf and Hishām believed shouldered the responsibility for the schismatic bedlam.

Although one never finds Sayf’s position unmediated by historical narrative, one often finds certain persons articulating, in essence, what amounts to his viewpoint. Sayf, for example, has ‘Uthmān’s governor of Mecca, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Āmir al-Ḥaḍrami, give the following diagnosis of fitna leading up to and following ‘Uthmān’s assasination:

Certain people coming from the garrisons and Bedouins [al-‘rāb] abandoned the raids and jihād outposts [tarakū al-maghāzī wa-mawādī al-jihād] and (instead) attacked God’s Ruler and the Commander of the Faithful [wa-ghazaw sultāna llāh wa-amīra l-mu’mīnīn] inside the sanctuary of God and his Messenger and inside his home—and his walls!”

If Ibn Saba’ is the face of Sayf’s devil and the Saba’īya his demons, then the faceless enemy he equally castigates is the fickle and brutal mob of riff-raff (al-ghawghā’) whom the Saba’īya manipulate to accomplish every evil.

Before turning to a more detailed analysis of the Sayfian narrative of the Battle of the Camel, some remarks are in order concerning Sayf’s K al-jamal and what distinguishes it from his K. al-Ridda wa-l-futūḥ discussed in the previous chapter. Unlike the latter work, Ṭabarī has preserved the bulk of traditions contained within Sayf’s K al-jamal. In fact, Ṭabarī’s text is key to reconstructing many parts of the manuscript of K al-jamal, for the beginning, the end, and a handful of folios in the middle of the text have been lost. The unique manuscript of the book edited by Samarrai is, as noted previously, flawed and imperfect in that it does not give us access to the entirety of the Sayfian corpus even if it allows us to finally gauge accurately its original scope. A fascinating feature of K al-jamal as it appears in the manuscript, however, is that the isnāds accompanying each khabar drop any mention of Sayf’s familiar rāwis from the K. al-ridda—i.e., al-Sarī ibn Yaḥyā and Shu’ayb ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tamīmī. By way of contrast, Ṭabarī’s redaction of the same book comes via the written transmission of al-Sarī via Shu’ayb

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ibn Ibrāhīm, just like Sayf’s other works. This raises the possibility that the manuscript may reflect a copy of Sayf’s own writing, transmitted as a document rather than through aural transmission (al-riwāya al-masmū’a), and thus might be regarded as a version of his own lecture notes, what Gregor Schoeler has referred to as hypomnēma.\(^{13}\)

Lastly, it should be noted that Sayf’s narratives in his K al-jamal are given to taking the form of long, sprawling accounts—particularly those explicitly featuring the Sabaʾīya—which Sayf, almost without exception, attributes to his two favorite authorities: Muhammad ibn Nuwayra and Ṭalḥa ibn al-ʿAʾlam al-Ḥanafi. Accordingly, I have dispensed almost entirely with my previous observations on Sayf’s isnāds, inasmuch as the uniformity of his transmission in K al-jamal—at least with regard to the Sabaʾīya—renders this exercise essentially superfluous.

The Oath of Allegiance to ʿAlī

In the immediate aftermath of ʿUthmān’s death, Sayf’s narrative depicts the Medinan populace as fearfully acquiescent to the de facto control over the city wielded by the bands of Sabaʾīya from Baṣra, Kūfa, and Egypt. For Sayf, their actions had, in essence, achieved a coup d’état that, lacking any legitimate claims to leadership in their ranks, forced the Sabaʾīya to bully and threaten the Medinans into forging a new consensus on the community’s leader. Yet, despite the efforts of the Sabaʾīya, the Medinans remain entirely unforthcoming and refuse to be cowed to the Sabaʾīya’s wishes except under the most extreme duress. Of all the rebel groups in Medina after ʿUthmān’s assassination, the Egyptian Sabaʾīya maintain their pre-eminence as the most activist and enterprising faction—a position that aids them considerably in imposing their will over their Baṣran and Kūfan co-conspirators. It is their leader, al-Ghāfiqī ibn Ḥarb, who for five days usurps control over Medinan affairs and acts as the city’s leader (amīr). This is also commensurate with al-Ghāfiqī’s self-appointed role as the imām of the congregational prayer during the siege of ʿUthmān’s home.

\(^{13}\) “Weiteres zur Frage der schriftlichen oder mündlichen Überlieferung der Wissenschaften im Islam,” Der Islam 66 (1989), 41 et passim. This is merely a possibility that must be entertained. It is equally plausible that the scribe who copied the manuscript chose for whatever reason to omit the redundant section of the isnāds.
As noted in the previous chapter, the Sabaʾīya arrived in Medina not as an alliance of rebel Shiʾi bands, but as a disparate group united only by their vulnerability to the remote influence of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ. Hence, Sayf initially depicts the Sabaʾīya as essentially incoherent in terms of the desires of each faction for a new leader of the *umma*: the Başrans preferred Ṭalḥa, the Kūfans al-Zubayr, and the Egyptians ʿAlī.14 While all of this belies of the duplicity and opportunism characteristic of the machinations of Sayfʾs Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, Ibn al-Sawdāʾ has all but disappeared in the initial leaves of Sayfʾs *K al-jamal*. His plot seems to unfold almost as if on auto-pilot while the narrative remains centered on Medina. The Sabaʾīya remain essentially disunited at first, leading each Sabaʾī faction to simultaneously approach their favorite candidate in order to propose his assumption of the caliphate. As all factions meet strident rebuffs from their respective candidates one after another—leading some to seek out Saʾd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar, who in turn both reject their calls as well—their frustration and desperation increases.15

ʿAlī, of course, is destined to eventually assume leadership, but the course of events leading to his acceptance of this political onus underscores Sayfʾs unique angle on these events. In Sayfʾs account, ʿAlī stands at a considerable distance from these procedures and, like the other favored candidates, rejects the rebelsʾ efforts to find a new leader for the *umma* as too *ad hoc* and too irregular. Frustrated by ʿAlīʾs reticence to accept the rebelsʾ initial, unsolicited *bayʿa*, Mālik al-Ashtar (a Sabaʾī in Sayfʾs account) asks him why he rejected their allegiance and, thereby, the leadership of the *umma*. ʿAlī replies that he will only accept a *bayʿa* resulting from an assembly (*malaʾ*) and consultative council (*shūrā*).16 Almost as if following ʿAlīʾs counsel to the letter, the Sabaʾīya force the Medinans to convene such a *shūrā* after the passing of five days without a leader. Fearing the consequences of the rebelsʾ plotting, many of the Quraysh endeavor to flee Medina;

14 This distinction does not seem to have been entirely without basis; see, for example, the statement in an account of Zuhrī that Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr both had partisans (*shīʿa*) in Kūfa and Başra, respectively, in Baladhuri, *Ansāb*, ii, 203 (cf. also ibid., ii, 192, 201).

15 *K. al-jamal*, i, 232 f.; ʿṬabarī, i, 3073 f.

16 *K. al-jamal*, i, 234 (on the authority of al-Shaʿbī). Compare this account with the similar one in ʿṬabarī, i, 3074 f. (from ʿUmar ibn Shabba citing the authority of Maslama ibn Muhārib); Sayf seems to ’soften’ the originally hostile posture towards ʿAlīʾs implicit in this account (see Madelung, ”Maslama,” 209).
the Sabaʾiya catch Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and al-Zubayr attempting to escape the environs of Medina and find Ṭalḥa sequestered in his walled garden (ḥāʾit). Only the Umayyads succeed in escaping in significant numbers—al-Walid ibn ʿUqba and Saʿīd ibn alʿĀs flee to Mecca, with Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam following quickly in their footsteps. 17

Gathering together in Medina as many Qurashīs as they can muster, the Sabaʾiya issue their severest threat to the Medinans: 18

Take heed, denizens of Medina! We have given you a day. 19 By God, if you do not decide, then tomorrow we will kill ʿAlī, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, and many others.

The Sabaʾiya’s threat here is not extraneous but, rather, indicative of their intent to convene a ṣhirā to whereby the new leader of the ʿumma can be elected. 20 While the Sabaʾiya do indeed ultimately relinquish the decision to the Medinans, the populace deliberates only under considerable trepidation. When the Medinans approach ʿAlī soon thereafter, it is through an appeal to the trials they had faced from the cruelty of these men from the outlying villages operating under the sway of the Sabaʾiya that they finally stir ʿAlī to seize the reigns of leadership. 21

Once the people finally procure ʿAlī’s reluctant acceptance of the bayʿa, the Sabaʾiya seal the deal by forcing those prominent Medinans still reticent to proffer their allegiance to do so under threat of death. While other accounts also famously relate that al-Zubayr and Ṭalḥa offered their oath of allegiance only under compulsion (karḥan) after being seized by Ḥukaym ibn Jabala and Mālik al-Ashtar, respectively, 22 it is only in Sayf’s account that these two are prominent Sabaʾis. 23

In his narrative of ʿAlī’s bayʿa, Sayf rather deftly strikes a delicate balance: on the one hand, he casts ʿAlī’s assumption of leadership as

17 K. al-jamal, i, 236; Ṭabarī, i, 3075.
18 K. al-jamal, i, 237.
19 Reading “qad ajjalnākum yawmakum” with Sayf (ibid., i, 237.1); Ṭabarī, i, 3076.2 reads “qad ajjalnākum yawmayn” (two days).
20 Procedurally speaking, it was normative practice for those who participated in a ṣhirā to be threatened with death if they either failed or refused to arrive at an anonymous decision; see P. Crone, “Shūrā as an Elective Institution,” QSA 19 (2001), 6.
21 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 237.3: fa-qad tarā mā nazala bi-l-islām wa-mā btulīnā min bayni l-qurā. Ṭabarī, i, 3076.5 reads: min dhawī l-qurbā. The latter text seems to be corrupt, changing ʿAlī’s interlocutors into rebels who cite grievances against ʿUthmān’s nepotism.
22 Cf. Madelung, Succession, 143 f.
23 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 238 ff.
the outcome of the plot of the Saba'īya and, on the other hand, he portrays 'Alī as an entirely unwilling and blameless participant. He achieves this by emphasizing that the Medinans faced a situation in which they were terrorized by tribal outsiders (al-nuzzā') and intimidated by brutes (al-ghawghā'). 'Alī accepts the bay’a only under these harried circumstances in order to alleviate the Medinans’ suffering. By bowing to the Saba’īs’ whim, however, ‘Alī opens himself to further manipulation down the road. In a report where Sayf transmits ‘Alī’s first oration (khuṭba) to the Medinans on the authority of his grandson ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, ‘Alī’s oration is immediately followed by an ominous threat by the Egyptians composed in rajaz-meter, whom Sayf identifies as the Saba’īya in a subsequent khabar. The long version of their threat reads as follows:26

Take it for yourself, but beware Abū Ḥasan!
*khudhhā ilayka wa-ḥdharan abā Ḥasan*

For we direct the matter pulling the halter
*innā numirru l-amra imrāra l-rasan*

And we pierce the king with a sword lithe like rope
*wa-na’ānu l-malka bi-layn ka-l-shaṭan*

Until he is trained to acquiesce without guile
*ḥattā yumarranna ’alā ghayri ’athan*27

Sayf is not the only akhbārī to transmit this threat, but he is certainly the only one to attribute it to the Saba’īya.28

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25 Sayf, *K. al-jamal*, 1, 239; Ṭabarī, 1, 3078.
27 The conventional meaning of ‘athan is smoke, but here it is used metaphorically and denotes something akin the notion of a ‘smokescreen’—i.e., an effort to thwart an activity by means of guile. See Lane, 1, 1954.
28 The first line is attributed to Sūdān ibn Ḥumrān in Ibn Shabba, iv, 1278 f. (from Abū Mikhnaf). A report of Ibn Abī l-Hadīd attributes it to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Udays al-Balawī and rebels from Baṣra in *Sharḥ*, iv, 6 f.; cf. the similar statement of ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ in ibid., v, 153.
All of this raises the question of whether Sayf’s ‘soft’-ʿUthmānī narrative depicts ʿAlī as a ruler who obtained the leadership of the community illegitimately. In fact, the narrative remains ambiguous, and this is likely purposeful. Sayf describes in full detail ʿAlī’s recurring delay of his acceptance of any oath of allegiance over a number of days, but the scenario is otherwise foreign to the narratives of his akhbārī peers. Sayf considerably protracts the intervening time span between ʿUthmān’s murder and ʿAlī’s acceptance of the bayʿa to a total of five days. While lacking a legitimate leader, it is al-Ghāfiqī who allegedly acted as the amīr of Medina. As Caetani first noted,29 this serves an apologetic purpose. Although Ṭabarī accepts Sayf’s chronology,30 most of the sources from which he draws, with the exception of Sayf, claim that ʿAlī acted swiftly and without hesitation in assuming the leadership of the community and that, moreover, it was the considerable support he enjoyed among the rebels and particularly Muḥammad’s early Medinese supporters, the Anṣār,31 who aided ʿAlī in doing so. As multiple traditions claim, ʿAlī probably assumed leadership less than 24 hours after ʿUthmān’s death. If ʿAlī would have delayed, these same traditions assert, then Ṭalḥa rather than he would have successfully seized the leadership of the community by procuring the allegiance of the Medinans.32

For Sayf, ʿAlī is a well-intentioned, rather than pernicious, personality. Even though his leadership is enfeebled, even at times hijacked, by the Sabaʾiya, this does not diminish his considerable prestige; his inability to establish complete control over the umma by reining in the Sabaʾiya is indicative of a predicament afflicting all of the Qurashīs and not him alone. This is nowhere more directly stated than in ʿAlī’s response to al-Zubayr and Ṭalḥa’s call for him to take actions against the murderers of ʿUthmān. ʿAlī declares, “Brethren, I’m well aware of what you know, but how shall I deal with a people who rule us rather than we ruling them [kayfa ʾaṣnaʾu bi-qawmīn yamlikūnānā wa-lā

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29 Annali, viii, 321.
30 See Ṭabarī, i, 3078, where he gives the date of ʿAlī’s accession as 25 Dhū l-Hijja 35/24 June 656—i.e., 7 days (5 days of al-Ghāfiqī’s leadership + 1 day to adjudicate ʿAlī’s selection + the following day on which ʿAlī received the baʿya) after the murder of ʿUthmān on 18 Dhū l-Hijja/17 June. Ṭabarī quotes Sayf’s report to this effect elsewhere at ibid., i, 3096 (=Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 259).
32 Ṭabarī, i, 3066 ff. Cf. Madelung, Succession, 142 f.
Punishment of 'Uthmān’s murderers is just, even desirable, in 'Ali’s view, but it is impossible. The power of the Sabaʿīya over Medina—now augmented considerably by nomads (aʿrāb) and the Qurashīs’ slaves (ʿubdān)—preclude the pursuit of justice.

‘Ali’s one attempt to rectify the situation takes the form of his revocation of the protection (dhimma) of all slaves refusing to return to their masters. Perceiving the consequences of ‘Ali’s move, the Sabaʿīya conspire with the Bedouin to dig in; and when ‘Ali issues the order to expel them from Medina, the Sabaʿīya defy him. Their defiance leads ‘Ali to finally command al-Zubayr, Ṭalḥa, and other Companions to take their revenge (thaʿr), but they now protest “(but the rebels) defy that [‘ataw ‘an dhālika]!” ‘Ali warns them that the rebels will only continue to become more defiant and obstinate (aʿtā wa-ʿābā) with the passage of time, but to little avail. ‘Ali is left to ruminate, “If only my people were to obey me and their leaders, then I would grant them a command subduing the enemy.”

Madelung has astutely deemed ‘Ali’s reign as that of a ‘counter-caliph’, who eschewed previous metrics of legitimacy by putting forward his own claims on the basis of his close kinship with the Prophet. As an example of ‘Ali’s counter-caliphal legitimacy, Madelung cites the absence of any convened shūrā conveying to ‘Ali a right to the caliphal office. Sayf may have begged to differ. Albeit forced upon the Medinans by the Sabaʿīya, a shūrā comprised of prominent Qurashīs had been convened nonetheless and selected ‘Ali, even if under the shadow of the sword. ‘Ubayd ibn Abī Salima, Āʾisha’s kinsman from the Banū Layth, conveys this when reporting to the Prophet’s wife the events which had transpired after ‘Uthmān’s death: “They have made the Medinans to reach a consensus on ‘Ali, but only while the band (of ‘Uthmān’s murderers) prevail over Medina [akhadhū ahla l-madīna bi-l-ijmāʿ ‘alā ‘alī wa-l-qawmu l-ghālibūn ‘alā l-madīna].” In turn, Āʾisha provides the verdict as in her address to the Meccans:

33 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 242; Ṭabarī, i, 3080.
34 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 245.6–7. I have emended the text to reflect qurʾānic diction (cf. Q. 51:44). Q. al-Samarrai keeps the reading of the ms “‘ayāʾ an dhālika” and “aʿyāʾ wa-ʿābā” (ibid., ii, fol. 115b.–1–2); citing modern Najdī usage, he reads the verb ‘ayā in the sense of ‘to reject’ (ibid., i, 234 and n. 1227 thereto). Ṭabarī, i, 3081.–1 reads instead ashwān an dhālika (i.e., they have turned away from that); cf. Brockett, Community Divided, 19.
35 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 245; Ṭabarī, i, 3081.
36 Succession, 141.
‘Alī’s election and ‘Uthmān’s murder resulted from the conspiracy of the common mob from the provinces (al-ghawghā’ min al-amsār), the denizens of watering-holes (ahl al-miyāh), and the Medinans’ slaves (‘abīd ahl al-madīna).37 This becomes a veritable mantra in Sayf’s narrative. Yet, even though the Saba‘īya severely curtailed ‘Alī’s ability to act as independently as he wished, Sayf’s ‘Alī still spearheads the most strident, albeit ineffectual, efforts to dislodge the Saba‘īya from power.38

The Opposition to ‘Alī

Once ‘Alī’s efforts to the re-unite the umma begin in earnest, Sayf’s narrative returns to the more conventional, thematic tropes common to the early akhbārī tradition. Yet, the Saba‘īya remain an important element within his narrative landscape, even if their activities remain somewhat more subdued or, at least, less subject to the interventions of Sayf’s commentary. In contrast to Sayf’s narrative of the final six years of ‘Uthmān’s caliphate, Ibn al-Sawdā’ is curiously almost entirely absent. He only reappears much later in the narrative and, then, predictably as an important agent fomenting strife between the two factions at the Battle of the Camel. Sayf remains content with placing the Saba‘īya in the background from the outset. When they do act, or at least are referenced, it is more often than not as a synecdoche for the unruly, faceless mob—viz., the ubiquitous ghawghā’—upon whose doorstep Sayf lays the blame for ‘Uthmān’s murder and the ensuing fitna between the sahāba.39

Sayf’s narratives of the initial signs of an opposition forming against ‘Alī demonstrate this well. After going forward with the (ill-advised) removal of ‘Uthmān’s governors, ‘Alī dispatches to the provinces his new appointees, most of whom he recruited from the Medinan Anṣār. With the exception of ‘Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf, who assumes authority

37 Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 260; Ṭabarī, 1, 3097.
38 Djāït noted (Discorde, 182) that the narratives of the more pro-‘Alid akhbārīs, such as Ibn A’tham and al-Ya‘qūbī, render the point moot altogether by presenting the bay’a to ‘Alī as being wide-ranging and unanimous—minus the Umayyads, of course.
39 This was by no means a universally held view. Zuhrī transmits an account in which an unnamed ‘Abdī man denounces the troublemaking Muhājirūn for bringing their quarrels and disagreements to the provinces. Ṭaḥā and al-Zubayr’s supporters later execute the man along with his tribesmen for his petulance. See Ṭabarī, 1, 3127f.
in Baṣra with little difficulty,\textsuperscript{40} most of ‘Alī’s men encounter problems on the way to their appointments, or upon their arrival, which thwart attempts to establish their leader’s authority in the provinces. The Meccan Muḥājir ‘Umāra ibn Shihāb al-Kalbī approaches Kūfa to act as ‘Alī’s governor but is turned away by the rehabilitated, former pseudo-prophet and ridda leader Ṭulayḥa ibn Khuwaylid al-Asadī, who warns ‘Umāra that he risks endangering his life if he enters Kūfa. ‘Alī’s chosen replacement for Muʿāwiya in Syria, Sahl ibn Ḥunayf al-Anṣārī, likewise encounters a band of Muʿāwiya’s men at Tabūk who force him to abandon his appointment and return to ‘Alī in Medina.\textsuperscript{41} This narrative of ‘Alī’s spurned appointees, in essence, represents Sayf’s explanation, on the one hand, for Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī’s re-confirmation as the governor over Kūfa (an achievement later procured by granting his bayʿa to ‘Alī via an emissary), but, on the other hand, it also provides a context for Muʿāwiya’s emergence as a dissident and rival.

In Sayf’s narrative, Muʿāwiya announces his opposition by means of tersely composed scroll (tūmār) delivered to Medina by a man named Qabīṣa from the Banū ‘Abs. In this scroll, Muʿāwiya addresses ‘Alī directly, but without a title and, therefore, without any recognition of his authority. When the ‘Absī messenger reveals to ‘Alī the Syrians’ intent to exact vengeance (al-qawad) for ‘Uthmān upon ‘Alī himself, ‘Alī predictably asserts his innocence and the injustice of the calumny levied against him. However, he also avails himself of the opportunity

\textsuperscript{40} This is because ‘Uthmān’s former governor, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Āmir ibn Kurayz, had long since abandoned the garrison for Mecca, where he formed an integral part of the opposition to ‘Alī alongside al-Zubayr, Ṭalḥa and ‘A’isha. According to Balādhurī, ‘Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf gained control over Basra only after imprisoning Ibn ‘Āmir’s deputy (khalīfa). Ibn ‘Āmir and Ya’lā ibn Umayya al-Tamīmī, ‘Uthmān’s governor of Yemen, had embezzled a considerable sum of wealth before they left their post and seem to have been the individuals who ultimately provided the resources required for mustering the initial opposition against ‘Alī by the Meccan dissidents. See Sayf, \textit{K. al-jamal}, i, 262–4, 268; Balādhurī, \textit{Ansāb}, ii, 202 ff.

\textsuperscript{41} This story is contradicted by two accounts: one of Madāʾini who has ‘Alī send Yazīd ibn ‘Aṣīm al-Muḥāribī to Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī and the Kūfans to take their bayʿa and another of Abū Mikhrīn, who has al-Miswār ibn Makhrīm travel to Muʿāwiya and the Syrians to receive the bayʿa on ‘Alī’s behalf. Abū Mūsā offers his bayʿa and is thus confirmed in his governorship, whereas Muʿāwiya refuses and enters into rebellion. See Balādhurī, \textit{Ansāb}, ii, 194 ff., 196 and Caetani, \textit{Annali}, ix, 12 ff. Madelung (\textit{Succession}, 184) rejects both accounts of Muʿāwiya’s rebuff as entirely fictitious. Sahl ibn Ḥunayf, moreover, is more conventionally said to have been ‘Alī’s governor of Medina after the latter left the Hijāz for ‘Irāq; however, Sayf, citing the authority of al-Qāsim ibn Muhammad ibn Abī Bakr, has ‘Alī appoint Tammām ibn al-ʿAbbās to this position instead. See Sayf, \textit{K. al-jamal}, i, 270.
to declare his own desire to see the murderers of Ṭḥmān punished as well—voicing a sort of fragile solidarity with the Ṭḥmānī cause. However, after Ṭḥlī grants the messenger safe passage out of Medina, we see the Sabaʾīya emerge from the shadows. Finding the Ṭḥsī man vulnerable, the Sabaʾīya cry out: “This dog is the emissary of (those Syrian) dogs! Kill him!” The Ṭḥsī man summons his protectors from Muḍr and Qays. As he escapes Medina, he threatens the Sabaʾīya who accosted him: if they would dare to kill him, God would surely recompense his death with a force of 4,000 eunuchs.42

It’s a brief incident, but important nonetheless. The Sabaʾīya in this account—as Petersen first noted43—negate the aspersions and blame levied against Ṭḥlī by the defiant (muʿtarīd) Muʿāwiya, for in truth it is they, not Ṭḥlī, whose irascible temperament led to Ṭḥmān’s murder and the perpetuation of its ill-effects. The account confirms, furthermore, that the Sabaʾīya represent a rabble whose ill-will can swiftly overturn the goodwill of the nobler ʾahāba who find themselves as victims, rather than provocateurs, of the present fitna.

The opposition to Ṭḥlī led by al-Zubayr, Ṭḥlha, and ʿĀʾisha arises out of different quarters, culling support mostly from those Medinans, particularly of the Banū Umayya, who sought refuge in Mecca during the chaos ensuing after Ṭḥmān’s death. It is ʿĀʾisha, however, who, when confronted with the news of Ṭḥmān’s murder while returning to Medina from Mecca, returns to Mecca and articulates the principle ideological thrust uniting the Meccans: “Ṭḥmān has been killed unjustly and the matter will not be set right while this mob (in Medina) is in control.”44 For Sayf, the motivating basis behind their coalition (malaʾ) coalesces not around dissent against Ṭḥlī per se—ʿĀʾisha’s coalition in Mecca forms not so much in defiant opposition to Ṭḥlī’s authority, but out of indifference to it. They effectively act as freelance vigilantes without an imām—or at least with one of the same caliber as Ṭḥmān. For them, the dominance of the mob precludes settling

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42 Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 250; Ṭabarī, 1, 3091. Sayf’s account seems to have been adapted from a report attributed to Ṣāliḥ ibn Kaysān wherein the Ṭḥsī messenger—named Yazīd ibn al-Ḥurr in this version, rather than Qabiṣā—hands over the letter revealing that Muʿāwiya was defecting from Ṭḥlī (mubāʾidun lahu) only to then threaten his onlookers with the impending onslaught of 4,000 horsemen; see Baladhuri, Ansāb, 11, 195.
43 Ṭḥlī and Muʿāwiya, 78 f.
44 Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 261: anna ṭḥmānā qaṭila maẓlūmīn wa-anna l-amra lā yastaqīmu wa-hādhahi l-ghawghāʾ amrin; Ṭabarī, 1, 3098.
the matter, for it was the mob that rendered ‘Ali’s shūrā void. As Sayf has ‘Ā’isha declare elsewhere:45

The mob [al-gawghāʾ] attacked ‘Uthmān, and his associates were too weak to aid him [da‘ufa ‘anhu aṣhābuhu]. ‘Ali (r) was given the oath of allegiance, but then he did not establish his power over them. It was improper for him to abide with them in order to seek aid from someone who will grant him victory over them [lam yanbaghi lahu an yuqīma ma‘ahum ḥattā ya’wi ilā man yantaṣiru bihi minhum].

Thus, the alliance of ‘Ā’isha, Ṭalḥa, and al-Zubayr does not march to Baṣra to form a counter-alliance against ‘Ali’s authority, in Sayf’s view, but rather in pursuit of “seeking vengeance for the blood of ‘Uthmān and killing [qīṭāl] the Saba‘īya.”46 Their affront is to treat ‘Ali’s authority in Medina as both moot and superfluous.

When ‘Ali hears word of the Meccans marching to Baṣra, he puts aside all immediate plans to rectify Mu‘awiyā’s intransigence in Syria and attempts to intercept ‘Ā’isha’s faction before they reach ‘Irāq. ‘Ali fails to achieve his aim, however, and decides to settle in al-Rabadha before deciding on what further action to take.

At this point, Sayf recounts an extensive version of a famous exchange between ‘Ali and his son al-Ḥasan at al-Rabadha as recounted by the šahābi Tāriq ibn Shihāb (d. c. 82/701) that evinces poignantly ‘Ali’s dilemma as imagined by Sayf. In this exchange, al-Ḥasan laments his father’s repeated refusal to heed his advice and his insistence on acting in a manner directly contrary to his counsel. Tāriq’s retelling of the exchange, in fact, appears to have been quite popular among the akhbāris and, thus, has been preserved in a large number of sources.47 As usual, Sayf provides a slightly idiosyncratic version, which he has seemingly substantially shortened beyond its original length.48 In Sayf’s version, al-Ḥasan complains to his father:49

I’ve commanded you to do one thing, but you’ve disobeyed and done the other [amartuka fa‘aṣaytani]. Tomorrow, you will be killed in

45 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 267 f.
46 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 265–6; Ṭabarî, i, 3104.10.
47 To cite a handful: Ibn Abī Shayba, xiv, 255 ff.; Ibn Shabba, iv, 1256 f.; Balādhuri, Ansāb, ii, 199; Ibn Abī l-Hadīd, Sharḥ, i, 192.
48 For instance, he omits ‘Ali’s tacit slight against ‘Uthmān, “What is my sin [dhanb] if (such a dispute) was between ‘Uthmān and the people?” See Ibn Shabba, iv, 1257; Balādhuri, Ansāb, ii, 199.
49 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 272.
some desolate place without anyone to protect you [fa-tuqtalu ghad'in bi-madya'ata'in lā nāsira laka].

'Alī reproaches his son’s lack of resolve, saying, “Are you still sniveling like a slave-girl [takhinnu khanīna l-jāriya]? What have you commanded that I have disobeyed?” Al-Ḥasan answers, continuing:

The day 'Uthmān was surrounded, I commanded you to leave Medina so that when he was killed you would not be there. Afterwards, I commanded you on the day he was killed not to take an oath of allegiance until the delegations of Arabs come to you along with the allegiance [bay'a] of each garrison city. Then, when these two men (i.e., Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr-S.A.) did what they did, I commanded you to remain in your home until they settle matters [ḥattā yastatalahu] so that if things worsened [in kāna l-fasād], it would have been by the hands by someone else other than you. But you disobeyed me in all these things!

'Alī proves capable of answering each of his son’s complaints: he and other sahābis were prevented just as much as 'Uthmān from leaving their homes (laqad uhīta binā kamā uhīta bihi) and the right of the Medinans to decide the leadership of the community necessitated his acceptance of the bay'a in the manner he did. Concerning Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, 'Alī declares:

Indeed, that was a great detriment [wahan] to Islam. By God, I’ve been overpowered since I’ve assumed authority and much diminished, never attaining anything that is needed [mā zītu maqẖūr‘in mundhuwalītu50 manqūs‘in lā astilū ilā shay’in mimmā yanbaghī]. As for your saying, “remain in your home,” how can I do this given what is required of me? Who do you want me to be? Do you want me to be like the she-hyena who was surrounded…until its hind legs were snared and then tried to escape?51

Sayf’s narrative thus affirms a paradoxical predicament wherein 'Alī exercises authority yet remains overpowered (maqẖūr) and considerably diminished in strength (manqūṣ). He is bound inexorably to his

50 Brockett loosely translates this phrase as “since I became caliph” (Community Divided, 49); however, Sayf never refers to 'Alī as a khalīfa. Here, as elsewhere in the Sayfian corpus, ‘Alī is merely wālī.

51 This last sentence is a rather famous saying of ‘Alī, of which Sayf gives a longer version (see also Ibn Abi l-Ḥadid, Sharḥ, i, 192). Better known is the shorter version: “By God, I am not one who is like the she-hyena listening to the sound of the falling stone (i.e., triggering the trap’s snare) [mā kuntu la-akānu mithla l-dabū tastami‘u li-l-ladma]” (Ibn Shabba, iv, 1257; cf. Balādhuri, Ansāb, ii, 199 and WKAS, ii, 453 f.).
path by honor and duty, but it is a path whose course he does not set as he is subject to forces and powers beyond his control.

**The Seizure of Baṣra**

The arrival of ʿĀʾisha, Ṭalḥa, and al-Zubayr at the outskirts of Baṣra sets off a series of events that set the stage for the impending conflict with ʿAlī. Non-Sayfian narratives, generally speaking, portray the affair as a brutal one in which the garrison city divides into factions for and against ʿAlī’s cause. During attempts to assuage the violent conflagrations between the two factions, oaths are made and then broken, and stratagems clash. ʿAlī’s governor, Ṣamān ibn Ḥunayf, attempts to fend off the advance of ʿĀʾish’s bellicose faction while biding his time waiting for ʿAlī’s arrival. ʿĀʾish’s faction, on the other hand, undertakes in earnest a propaganda campaign spearheaded by the Mother of the Believers herself: calling for vengeance for the blood of Ṣamān and “islāh”—i.e., the pursuit of Ṣamān’s killers and the restitution of the status quo ante prior to the outbreak of fitna by means of a unanimous shūrā.52

Sayf’s narrative of these events evinces his talent for turning the conventions of earlier narratives on their head. To cite an example, Abū Mikhnaf’s narrative depicts the seizure of Baṣra by ʿĀʾish as a rather underhanded and brutal affair: although they had drawn up an agreement to wait for ʿAlī’s arrival with Ṣamān ibn Ḥunayf, they renege on their pledge once it becomes clear that it places them at a great disadvantage vis-à-vis their opponents. “On a dark and windy night [laylat rīhīn wa-zulma],” Abū Mikhnaf narrates, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr storm the mosque during the evening prayer and seize Ibn Ḥunayf, brutalize him, and humiliate him by plucking out his beard. After securing the mosque and the governor’s residence, they proceed to capture the treasury (bayt al-māl) by brutally murdering 40 (or, less likely, 400) Zuṭṭ and Sayābijja guards.53 The only Baṣran to muster any real resistance is Ḥukaym ibn Jabala al-ʿAbdi, who leads his brothers

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52 Sayf also makes ʿAlī an equal proponent of islāh, though not by means of a shūrā, saying, “It is islāh we desire, so that the umma may once again be brethren [li-taʿūda l-umma ikhwānan]” (K. al-jamal, 1, 293; Ṭabarī, 1, 3140).

53 The Zuṭṭ and Sayābijja are non-Arab soldiers form the Sind often associated with the Asāwira; see Kh. Ṭāhimina, ”Non-Arab Regiments and Private Militias during the Umayyad Period,” *Arabica* 45 (1998), 351 ff. Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd calls them “the special
and son alongside three hundred men to Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr’s outpost in al-Zābūqa. When Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr encounter Ḥukaym at al-Zābūqa, he demands that they recognize the conditions of their previous agreement by releasing Ibn Ḥunayf and relinquishing control of the mosque, the governor’s residence (dār al-imāra), and the treasury. Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, not surprisingly, refuse Ḥukaym’s demands and that leads to a clash of arms. Despite a valiant effort on Ḥukaym’s part, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr defeat his forces in a fierce battle in which Ḥukaym himself perishes. ⁵⁴

Sayf essentially inverts this narrative schema: rather than ‘Ā’isha’s faction acting as the provocateurs, Ibn Ḥunayf and, especially the ‘Saba’ī Ḥukaym ibn Jabala, act as the wrongdoers. Ḥukaym was one of the most ardent opponents of ʿUthmān from the Başran qurrah⁵⁵ and also the individual who allegedly coerced al-Zubayr into proffering his bay’a to ‘Alī by holding a shimmering sword (lujj) to his neck. ⁵⁶ Sayf dwells on Ḥukaym’s misdeeds in damning detail further expanding his notoriety. When ‘Ā’isha, Ṭalḥa, and al-Zubayr arrive at the outskirts of Başra, Ḥukaym and his men attack ‘Ā’isha, unprovoked crying out, “They are Quraysh—their foolishness and stupidity will destroy them [innahā quraysh la-yurdīyannahā ḥaynuhā wa-l-tayshu]!” While ‘Ā’isha’s men successfully fend off Ḥukaym’s attack, they re-secure their position near the house of provisions (dār al-rizq). Unrelenting, Ḥukaym again approaches ‘Ā’isha’s camp in the early morning armed with a spear and cursing ‘Ā’isha under his breath (yubarbiru). When a man from ‘Abd al-Qays dares to upbraid him for cursing the Mother of the Believers, Ḥukaym mercilessly kills him by piercing him through the chest with his spear. Ḥukaym encounters another unnamed heckler soon thereafter, this time a woman who also rebukes him for cursing ‘Ā’isha, but he kills even this defenseless woman with a lethal thrust of his spear. ⁵⁷

As for Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, the Sayfian narrative shows them patiently enduring the unprovoked attacks that they valiantly repel as

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⁵⁴ Balādhurī, Ansāb, ii, 207 ff. and Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ, ix, 254 ff.; cf. also Mādāʾil’s similar account in Ṭabarī, i, 3135 f.
⁵⁵ Ibn Saʿd, iii, 49 f.; Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 549, 590.
⁵⁶ Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 239. The saying is also attributed to Ṭalḥa; see Ibn Abī Shayba, xiv, 243 and WKAŠ, ii, 215b.
⁵⁷ Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 282 ff.; Ṭabarī, i, 3122 f.
they call the Başrans to islâh. Ibn Ḥunayf agrees to draw up a truce (sulh) only after suffering heavy losses. The agreement, rather than ceding to ‘Ali’s governor control of Baṣra’s mosque, the governor’s residence, and the treasury, calls instead for sending a messenger, Ka‘b ibn Sūr al-Azdî, to Medina to inquire as to whether or not Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr had pledged their allegiance to ‘Ali under duress or freely. If they had done so under duress, then Ibn Ḥunayf was required to relinquish his authority and hand Baṣra over to them. 58

Much of this scenario is patently ridiculous: it is unimaginable that Ka‘b could have undertaken his journey to Medina, going and coming, before ‘Ali’s arrival and even more unfeasible that Ibn Ḥunayf—himself a Medinan Anṣârī present at the events in Medina surrounding ‘Ali’s acceptance of the bay‘a from Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr—would have consented to so jeopardize his station as governor. 59 However, for Sayf, the scenario’s incredulity is irrelevant; what is import is how it creates the possibility of legitimizing Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr’s seizure of Baṣra.

According to Sayf’s account, Ka‘b ibn Sūr returns in time, of course, bearing reports confirming the assertions of Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr that they had been coerced into giving their allegiance. Having acquired the requisite mandate to act, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr then enter Baṣra’s mosque—not while Ibn Ḥunayf leads the evening prayer, but in his absence, due to his tardiness for the prayer—and upon entering the mosque, the Zuṭṭ and Sayābija ambush Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr and their supporters unprovoked. In Sayf’s narrative, therefore, the bloody street fight that ensues between the two factions is merely a reaction to the violent protests of Zuṭṭ and Sayābija against Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr’s non-violent, well-meaning entrance into Baṣra’s central mosque. The slaughter of these non-Arab troops, therefore, arises not out of the brutal necessity of securing the wealth of the Başrans’ treasury, asserts Sayf pace his akhbârī predecessors, but in response to these troops’ intransigence—they are merely, as ‘Ā’isha writes to the Kūfans in Sayf’s account, an auxiliary to the infamous “ignoramouses and riff-raff [min juhhāl al-nās wa-ghawghā ihim]” who fomented the strife in the first place. 60

58 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 284 f.; Ṭabarî, i, 3123 ff.
59 See Caetani, Annali, ix, 85; Madelung, Succession, 162 and n. 88. L. Veccia Vaglieri improbably interprets the agreement, which severely weakened Ibn Ḥunayf’s position as Baṣra’s governor, as a delay tactic (“Djamal,” EI 2, ii, 414).
60 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 292; Ṭabarî, i, 3134.
Hukaym ibn Jabala’s clash with Talha and al-Zubayr’s forces at al-Zabuqa transpires in Sayf’s narrative as well but, as one might expect, under entirely different circumstances. While Hukaym also fights to restore Ibn Hunayf to his former station in the Sayfian account, he acts not as a valiant chieftain of Basra’s most powerful tribe, the ‘Abd al-Qays, but rather as a rogue outcast spurned by the Basrans for his cold-blooded public execution of his aforementioned female heckler. In order to muster enough men to fight the Meccan faction, Hukaym’s isolation compels him to gather around him sympathizers from tribal outsiders (nuzz‘ al-qab‘il), the splinter-groups (afnât) from the Rab‘a tribe, and the same perfidious commanders with whom he had marched against ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan from Basra (i.e., the Basran Saba‘iya) such as Dhurayh ibn ‘Abbâd al-‘Abdî, Ibn al-Muharrish al-‘Hanafi, and Ḥurqûs ibn Zuhayr al-‘Abdî. Sayf states in no uncertain terms that Hukaym’s forces comprised the bulk of those Basrans guilty of ‘Uthman’s murder (man ghazâ ma‘ahu ‘uthmâna fa-ḥṣarahu min nuzzâ‘ al-qab‘il).

Hence, in Sayf’s scheme, the battle at al-Zabuqa represents not a Basran attempt to resist Talha and al-Zubayr’s brutal efforts to integrate the city into their sphere of influence but, rather, a last ditch effort of the Basran Saba‘iya to escape Qurashi reprisals for their role in ‘Uthman’s assassination. ‘Ā‘isha’s judicious and single-minded commands to her faction’s troops communicate that their determination not to subjugate the Basrans, but rather pursue those guilty of ‘Uthman’s blood: “Attack no one save those who attack you and tell everyone [nādū] that, ‘Whosever is not one of the murderers of ‘Uthman, let him withdraw from us, for we are only after ‘Uthman’s murderers.” Indeed, in Sayf’s narrative, ‘Ā‘isha’s faction largely achieves this aim and kills each member of the Saba‘iya (Hukaym, Dharih, Ibn al-Muharrish, etc.), with the sole exception of Ḥurqûs ibn Zuhayr al-‘Abdî, who survives the battle at al-Zabuqa and later avails himself of the protection of the Banu Sa‘d.

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61 As most akhbâris are wont to portray him; see W. Madelung, “Rab‘a in the Jâhiliyya and in Early Islam,” JSAI 28 (2003), 161.
62 Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 158, 257 f.
63 Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 287; Tabari, 1, 3129.
64 Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 287; Tabari, 1, 3129.
65 As noted in chapter 1, Ḥurqûs ibn Zuhayr, a partisan of ‘Ali who later defects and is killed at Nahrawân, is the only other Basran Saba‘i other than Hukaym who is known outside the Sayfian corpus. Opponents of Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, particularly
Sayf’s version of events fundamentally contravenes the conventions of the earlier akhbārī corpora of narrations on the Battle of the Camel in other respects, too. According to the earlier tradition, Ḥukaym enters the fray not with his fellow Sabaʾīs, but alongside 300 Başrans who included his own brothers al-Ashraf, al-Ḥakam and al-Riʾl, as well as seventy warriors from ʿAbd al-Qays. Moreover, the Sayfian corpus narrates that, after the events at al-Zābūqa, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr ordered the Başrans to bring forth all those individuals known to be complicit in ʿUthmān’s murder. “So they were brought,” Sayf claims, “as one brings forward a dog, and then they were executed.” Yet, outside of the Sayfian corpus, the early historiographical tradition is wholly unaware of any attempt made by faction of ʿĀʾisha, Ṭalḥa, and al-Zubayr to pursue those with a hand in the plot to assassinate ʿUthmān. Although Sayf preserves the more colorful and entertaining details of Ḥukaym’s death (such as his killing a man with his own amputated foot, etc.), Sayf alone reveals his actual motives as he perishes from his wounds. With his last breath, Ḥukaym curses Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, declaring:

We left these two men, and they gave their bay’a and pledged their obedience. Afterwards they came in opposition making war and seeking vengeance for ʿUthmān’s blood. They divided us ( Başrans) even though we are fellow townsmen and neighbors. Oh Lord, they do not seek (vengeance for) ʿUthmān.

An unnamed man cries out against him (nādāhu munādin):

You wretch! Do you resort to the words of the one who directed you and your companions (i.e., Ibn al-Sawdāʾ) now that you’ve been bitten by God’s punishment [yā khabīth jazīṭa ḥīna ʿaddaka nakālu llāh ilā kalāmi man naṣabaka wa-aṣḥābaka]!

Although he does so somewhat obscurely, Sayf clearly uses this anonymous heckler to confirm that the influence of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ still remains the fount of Ḥukaym’s fractious ideology. Thus, it is not surprising that, whereas in other accounts ʿAlī waxes poetically about the

Shiʿi opponents, alleged (likely wrongly) that he descended from Ḥurqūs ibn Zuhayr; cf. van Ess, TG, iii, 450.
66 Balādhurī, Ansāb, ii, 208. It is also said that al-Ashraf was Ḥukaym’s son rather than his brother. See Jāhiz, Bursān, 243; Khalīfa, Taʾrīkh, 183; and Ṭabarī, i, 3136.
67 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 289; Ṭabarī, i, 3131.
68 Madelung, Succession, 164 and n. 102 thereto.
69 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 288; Ṭabarī, i, 3130 f.
Chapter Three

Virtues of Ḫukaym’s valiant fight after he receives word of his death, in Sayf’s account he reviles Ḫukaym as a thuggish coward, declaring (in rajaz):  

\[
\text{Ḫukaym called a summons to thugs} \\
d'a \text{ḥukaym} \\
d'a\text{wata l-ra'ā'} \\
\text{He arrived thus to a station of cowardice} \\
j'a\text{a biḥā manzilata l-yarā’}
\]

The Saba‘īya Incite War

Upon hearing of Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr’s actions in Kūfa, ‘Alī heads to Kūfa where he settles at the city’s outskirts at Dhū Qār. He sends three waves of emissaries to procure the Kūfans’ allegiance: first Muhammad ibn Abī Bakr and Muḥammad ibn Ja’far, then Ibn ‘Abbās and al-Ashtar, and finally (and most successfully) ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir and his eldest son al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī. ‘Alī’s efforts prove well spent; having arrived in Kūfa with a mere 1,000 men, the Kūfans fill the ranks of his army with an additional 9,000 Kūfan supporters. Sayf splits these Kūfan recruits into two groups: the ‘activists’ (nuffār), who number 5,000, and the ‘moderates’ ([ahl] al-jamā‘a), numbering 4,000. In dividing the Kūfans into two groups, Sayf delineates a pool of bellicose men, the so-called nuffār, who will later serve as fodder for the plot of the Saba‘īya to ruin peace on the one hand,  

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70 Sayf K. al-jamal, 1, 297.–4. Ṭabari’s redaction of Sayf’s report removes the rebuke, reading: Ḫukaym called his summons to boldness/thus he entered the place of battle \([da'ā Ḫukaym\text{"} da'\text{wata l-zimā'/hullā biḥā manzilata l-nizā\"}]\) (1, 3144.11). Sayf’s rajaz verses against Ḫukaym seems to derive from a series of rajaz verses originally attributed to ‘Alī by Abū Mikhnaf, in which ‘Alī, upon hearing of the death of Ḫukaym and those who followed him from Rabī‘a, pronounces a series of verses in praise of the tribe, declaring: \("\text{Ḫukaym called for a summons obeyed/by which he achieved an exalted station \([da'ā Ḫukaym\text{"} da'\text{wata l-rāfī\"}]\)\) (Balādhurī, Ansāb, ii, 213). Sayf, too, records these verses in praise of Rabī‘a but modifies the verse mentioning Ḫukaym by replacing his name with that of ‘Alī’s; see K. al-jamal, 1, 298.5 and Ṭabari, 1, 3144.ult.

71 Indeed, many of those Sayf names as the leaders (ru‘asā‘) of the nuffār, such as Yazid ibn Qays and Mālik al-Ashtar, have a prior history of involvement with the Saba‘īya; see K. al-jamal, 1, 305.
'Ali in arriving at a peaceful settlement. This is clearly demonstrated by an extended narrative unique to the Sayfian corpus in which 'Ali elects one of the moderates’ leaders, Sayf’s favorite hero al-Qa‘qā’ ibn 'Amr, to travel to Basra to engage in negotiations with 'Aisha’s faction. When al-Qa‘qā’ arrives in Basra, he speaks successively with ‘A’isha, Taḥha, and al-Zubayr and, much to everyone’s surprise, he discovers that the three essentially agree with 'Ali on their common cause of achieving islāh. Al-Qa‘qā’ then convinces them to make a common cause with ‘Ali. After al-Qa‘qā’ returns to Kūfa to inform ‘Ali of his successful mediations, ‘Ali receives the news with elated enthusiasm, for “the people were on the threshold of peace [ashrafa l-qawm ‘alā al-sulh].” Thanks to the indefatigable efforts of Sayf’s hero al-Qa‘qā’ ibn ‘Amr, ‘Ali and ‘Aisha’s respective factions had agreed to settle their dispute by peaceable means. However, when speaking with ‘A’isha, al-Qa‘qā’ presciently warned her with foreboding premonition, “Calm is the only remedy for our situation. Once there’s calm, (the Sabaʿīya) will stir.” After ‘Ali announced his intention to march to Basra and codify the peace, al-Qa‘qā’’s worries proved well-founded. “A group gathered,” Sayf narrates, that included a number of Kūfan Sabaʿīya, most of whom Sayf has hitherto neglected to introduce into his narrative: ‘Ilbāʾ ibn al-Haytham al-Sadūsī, Shurayh ibn Awfā ibn Dusta, Sālim 76

73 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 307; Ṭabarī, i, 3158.
74 Ṭabarī, i, 3157: hādhā l-amru dawāʾuḥu al-taskin wa-idhā sakana ikhtalajū. Samarrai has restored this passage to the text in his edition of the manuscript, where pages containing this report have been lost; see Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 307.
75 One of the Kūfan qurrāʾ. This is his first appearance in the Sayfian narratives of the fitna. However, elsewhere, he acts as a member of the provincial opposition against ‘Uthmān who, although he had accompanied Sa‘id ibn al-‘Āṣ during his visit to ‘Uthmān in Medina (ostensibly in order to laud and extol the governor’s conduct to the caliph), in fact leaves Medina early without the governor in order to incite the uprising against ‘Uthmān in Kūfa. See Baladhuri, Ansāb, iv, 553 f.; Aghānī, xi, 30. ‘Ilbāʾ later dies fighting on ‘Ali’s side at the Battle of the Camel. See Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 361; Baladhuri, Ansāb, ii, 222 f.; Ṭabarī, i, 3196, 3214.
76 Presumably he is to be identified with the prominent leader of qurrā’ elsewhere named Shurayḥ ibn Awfā b. Yazid ibn Zahir al-‘Absi, who rioted at the Kūfan residence of Sa‘id ibn al-‘Āṣ when Sa‘id declared the Sawād ‘the garden of the Quraysh’. He also numbers among those who refused to permit Sa‘id to re-enter Kūfa after his return from Medina. See Baladhuri, Ansāb, iv, 528, 534. He later perishes fighting against ‘Ali under the command of Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibi at Nahrawān. See ibid., ii, 317, 320 ff. and vii, 64; Ṭabarī, i, 3363 ff.
ibn Tha’labā al-Qaysī,77 and two of ‘Ali’s most renowned companions, ‘Adī ibn Ḥātim al-Ṭāʾī78 and Mālik al-Ashtar. Even more ominous are the two Egyptians he names: Khālid ibn Muljam and the devil himself, Ibn al-Sawdā’.

Recognizing that any accord reached between the two factions equaled their doom, each of the aforementioned individuals begins lobbying ideas. Al-Ashtar proposes that they rise up against ‘Ali and assassinate him, like they did ‘Uthmān, so that the dark cloud of fitna in which they found shelter might return. Ibn al-Sawdā’ objects:79

Yours is a miserable idea [bi’sa l-ra’y ra’ayta]! You killers of ‘Uthmān from Kūfa here in Dhū Qār! You are (merely) 1,500 men strong, and we (Egyptians) are around 600.80 Ibn al-Ḥanẓaliya (i.e., al-Qa’qā’-S.A.) and his supporters here number 5,000 men, who all long to find a way to fight you. Know your limits [fa-irqa ’alā zīl’ika]!

‘Ilbā’ ibn al-Haytham urges, instead, for everyone to abandon the cities until the situation turns to one more favorable for their faction. Ibn al-Sawdā’ again objects:81

Yours is a miserable idea [bi’sa mā ra’ayta]! These people would love for you to be gathered together in a single like-minded group [annakum ’alā jadīlatin] and for you not to be in the midst of innocent people. If it were as you say, then you’d be snatched away from all sides [la-takhat’tafakum kullu shay]!

‘Adī ibn Ḥātim and Sāлим ibn Tha’labā then begin speaking. Although they offer no new ideas, they express an avowed desire to murder ‘Ali, and their bellicosity garners them the praise of Ibn al-Sawdā’. When Shurayḥ ibn Awfā speaks, he inveighs on behalf of a cautious and well-planned approach to whatever they decide. This sets the stage for Ibn al-Sawdā’ to at last reveal his plan:

Men! Your strength lies in mingling with the people [khultat al-nās]. So woo them! When you encounter them tomorrow, provoke them to fight. Don’t allow them to think it over. Then those who stand with you (i.e.,

77 He is otherwise unknown. His nisba ‘al-Qaysi’ in the MS (Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 309.4) appears as ‘al-‘Absi’ in Ṭabarī, 1, 3163.7.
78 This is Sayf’s first hint at showing ‘Adī ibn Ḥātim to have been a Saba’i. For more on this figure, see E. Kohlberg, “‘Adī ibn Ḥātim,” EF 3 (2007), 83 f.
79 Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 309 f.
80 Ṭabarī, 1, 3124.4 omits the Egyptians reading: antum yā qatalat ‘uthmān min ahl al-kūfa bi-dhi qār ʿalānī wa-khamsumi a aw naḥw min sittimi’a.
81 Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 310.
‘Ali’s army-S.A.) will have to fight in order to defend themselves, and God will divert ‘Ali, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, and those who share their opinion away from what they despise.⁸² So understand this plan [al-ra‘y] and disperse having agreed upon it while the people are still unaware.

And, thus, Ibn al-Sawdā’ masterminds once again the perpetuation of fitna.⁸³

The following day, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr left the city of Başra and made camp alongside their forces near the battlefield where ‘Ali would soon approach to set up camp as well. Once ‘Ali arrived, Sayf writes, each tribe settled opposite their counterparts in the faction: Muḍar facing Muḍar, Rabī‘a facing Rabī‘a, al-Yaman facing al-Yaman, etc. “They entertained no doubts the peace agreement [lā yashukkūna fī l-ṣulh] . . . and they would go out to one another speaking of nothing and intending to achieve nothing except peace.”⁸⁴ In a passage excised from Ṭabarī’s redaction, Sayf even goes so far as to assert that the two factions had arrived at a peace agreement:⁸⁵

When the people had made camp and were content, ‘Ali went out and Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr went out. They spoke of matters in which they were in agreement and those in which they differed, but they found nothing more commendable than peace [al-ṣulh]. They abandoned war when they adopted this opinion and began to disperse, although (the agreement) was not yet fully achieved. They left the meeting place agreed, and ‘Ali returned to his camp and Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr to theirs.

Yet, as the reader knows, thanks to Sayf’s eye for conspiracy, a sinister plan remained afoot. Ibn al-Sawdā’ had marched from Kūfa with ‘Ali, infiltrating his army by placing himself, alongside a certain Ibn al-Jarūd⁸⁶ and Ibn al-Ashajj,⁸⁷ as one of the leaders (ru‘asā’) of ‘Abd

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⁸² Sayf’s text reads (K. al-jamal, i, 311.3–4): wa-yashghalu llāhu . . . ‘ammā yakrahūna. However, Ṭabarī, i, 3165.11 reads: . . . ‘ammā takrahūna. The meaning of Sayf’s original (?) reading is obscure; however, Ṭabarī’s redaction implies that Ibn al-Sawdā’ here addresses the Saba‘īya, implying that ‘Ali and company with be diverted from peace, i.e., ‘what you despise’. Cf. Brocket, Community Divided, 104 f.

⁸³ I must admit to being baffled by Linda D. Lau’s conclusion that Sayf’s account of this meeting and the plot it conspired to be “quite probable” in her article, “Sayf ibn ʿUmar and the Battle of the Camel,” Islamic Quarterly 23 (1979), 109.

⁸⁴ Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 318; Ṭabarī, i, 3180.

⁸⁵ Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 318.

⁸⁶ He is in all likelihood Mundhir ibn al-Jārūd al-ʿAbdī. ‘Ali appointed him as governor over Iṣṭakhr; see Ibn Saʿd, vii, 61 and Baladhurī, Ansāb, ii, 152 f.

⁸⁷ Unknown; he seems to be a son of al-Mundhir ibn al-Ḥārīth al-Ashajj from ‘Abd al-Qays; see Ibn Saʿd, vii, 60 and Caskel, Gamharat, i, 169.23.
al-Qays. Following the aforementioned rapprochement,ʿAlī, Ṭalḥa, and al-Zubayr sent representatives to one another’s respective camps in order to finalize the peace, but that evening, the Sabaʿiya began to enact their plan before the peace could be finalized. Under the cover of night just before the dawn, the Sabaʿis from Muḍar, Rabīʿa and al-Yaman entered the camps of their fellow tribesmen on both sides and unleashed a simultaneous ambush within both camps.88

Thus begins the Battle of the Camel in Sayf’s narrative—a conspiracy of the few that overwhelms the many. Sayf depicts all the main parties concerned as valiant, yet reluctant and unwilling, participants. While ʿAlī attempts to calm his camp, his efforts to rein in the rabble and the mob, as often proved the case since ʿUthmān’s reign, proves to be feeble and futile. Āʾisha, too, assays to bring an end to the hostilities. When surrounded by Muḍar in her howdah, perched on top of her famous camel, she hands a Qurʿān to Kaʿb ibn Ṣūr commanding him to approach ʿAlī’s forces calling for arbitration. The Sabaʿiya, unrelenting in the efforts to thwart peace, swiftly shot Kaʿb through with a flurry of arrows, Qurʿān in hand.89

While the rabble, or al-ghawghāʾ, dominate the lead up to the war, the whirlwind of violence engulfs one and all. Sayf includes a prescient tradition in which ʿAlī declares while surveying the corpses of dead warriors, “Some claimed that only the rabble [al-ghawghāʾ] marched out to fight, but see here this earnest, worshipful man [al-ʿābid al-mujtahid]!”90 This lachrymose spectacle, framed as it were by the mournful words of ʿAlī, demonstrates even Sayf’s capacity for the tragic and, perhaps, even paradoxical nuance.91 By the battle’s end, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, like ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān before them, have perished due to the sordid machinations of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ.

The Sabaʿiya after the Battle of the Camel: Quo Vadis?

By all accounts, ʿAlī treated his vanquished foes leniently and with clemency. As Madelung has noted, given the long-standing rank of his opponents as early converts to Islam, one can hardly imagine that

88 Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 319 f.; Ṭabarī, 1, 3181 f.
89 Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 322, 335; Ṭabarī, 1, 3191, 3211.
90 Sayf, K. al-jamal, 1, 353.
'Alī would have resorted to the harsher precedents established by Abū Bakr during the ridda wars. Whereas Abū Bakr ostensibly framed his wars as against apostates, and conducted warfare against them accordingly, ʿĀ’isha (to cite one preeminent survivor from the losing side) could hardly be condemned as an apostate, no matter how unbecoming her actions might have been. ‘Alī’s conduct towards the Baṣrans and his Qurashī foes exemplified the clemency and generosity that were destined to define the rules of warfare when fighting against Muslim rebels (bughāt).92

It is here, discussing the conduct of ‘Alī towards his enemies in the wake of his victory, that Sayf brings a series of accounts that provide us a rather tantalizing insight into the future trajectory of the Sabaʾiya, who, as a rule, condemn ‘Alī’s clemency. I say tantalizing because this material constitutes the last major theme that Sayf’s K al-jamal treats. Sayf’s own written work, although he might have planned otherwise, seems to have gone no further than this point in the narrative.93 In the first account, Sayf narrates that after ‘Alī had received the bay’a from the inhabitants of Baṣra, he went to the treasury where he found 600,000 dirhams, which he proceeded to divide among those who fought on his side in the battle (man shahida ma’ahu) as compensation while promising, “If God gives you the victory in Syria, then a similar sum will be added to your wages.” Despite ‘Alī’s generosity, “the Sabaʾiya,” Sayf writes, “began to speak falsely about the matter [khāda fī dhālika] and to malign ‘Alī in secret.”94

In the second account narrated immediately following, Sayf relates that it was ‘Alī’s practice (sīra) not to slay the wounded, not to ravish the women,95 and not to seize the property of the defeated. On that day, some people complained, “What is it that makes you render their blood lawful for us to shed but deem their property prohibited [mā tuḥillum linā dimāʿahum wa-tuhrimu amwālahum]!” ‘Alī rebuffed their complaints and reminded them that their foes were their equals (amthāluhum)—i.e., Muslims like themselves—and exhorted them to be content with the wealth of 500 dirhams they had already received.

92 Madelung, Succession, 179.
93 The final folios of the MS edited by Samarrai are missing; however, the additional material included by Ṭabarī in his Taʿrīkh supplements this MS with only a small amount of material.
94 Sayf, K. al-jamal, i, 356 f.; Ṭabarī, i, 3226 f.
95 Lit. “to remove her veil [ṣitr].”
The *khabar* then ends asserting, “It was on that day that Khawārij began speaking among themselves.”

The juxtaposition of these two reports marks Sayf’s first explicit connection between the Sabaʾiya and the Khawārij—asserting in essence that the Sabaʾiya are the first Khawārij. In fact, Sayf had provided us with a clue to this connection before, though more implicitly, in a tradition referring to the besiegers of ʿUthmān’s residence unambiguously as *khawārij*. Sayf emphasizes this connection further by placing Ibn al-Sawdāʾ as an advocate of those who seek to plunder the defeated Basrans. Narrating from an anonymous transmitter from ʿAbd al-Qays, he writes:

When Ibn al-Sawdāʾ saw the Sabaʾiya and for what they condemned ʿAlī regarding his conduct [*min siratihi*], he stood up and said, “If the wrongdoers become numerous, and the unjust rise up and seek to annul (the punishments) of God’s Book from the sins of the Muslims [arādū izālat al-kitāb ʿan al-dhunūb min al-muslimīn], then you are our sanctuary and the arbiter whose virtue and knowledge are well-known. So tend to your concerns, for we are not like those who frequently return to perdition.” Then ʿAlī said, “Of all preachers this one is quite rapacious [*hādhā l-khatīb al-shahshah min al-khutābā*]. We have no claim to their (i.e., the Basrans’) belongings. God’s Scripture rules us in this matter.”

While Ibn al-Sawdāʾ applies more finesse to his entreaties to ʿAlī, his message to ʿAlī is clear: go about your own affairs while we attend to the matters to which we are entitled as the battle’s victors. It is, indeed, more than a little surprising to find here the same Ibn al-Sawdāʾ who

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96 Sayf, *K. al-jamal*, 1, 357; Ṭabarī, 1, 3227.
99 Accepting the reading of Ibn ʿAsākir: idhā kathura al-khātīb min al-muslimīn. The majority of this tradition’s iterations, from which Sayf’s loosely derives (e.g., see also Conc., 11, fol. 172b.4.), read idh kathura al-khātīb min al-dhunūb min al-muslimīn (K. al-jamal, ii, fol. 172b.7) and Samarrai chooses to read khatīb al-salshah (ibid., 1, 258.1; cf. Ṭabarī, 1, 3162.3). In the above translation, I have chosen a more pejorative rendering of the term *shahshah*, for which the medieval lexicographers adduce a wide range of meanings with both negative and positive connotations. According to Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd (Sharḥ, xix. 95), ʿAlī once referred to Ṣaʿṣaʾ ibn Ṣuhān as a khatīb *shahshah* due to his eloquence. See also Sayf, *K. al-jamal*, 11, 356.

100 Sayf: mafzaʿunā; Ibn ʿAsākir reads tazaʿunā—i.e., “you will restrain us.”
101 Sayf: faʿ-ḥmid li-shaʾnika; Ibn ʿAsākir reads “hold your tongue [fa-ḥmid lisānaka].”

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had earlier hailed ‘Ali as the *khātim al-awsiyā*. However, Sayf does not refrain from even painting ‘Ali’s loyal general Mālik al-Ashtar (also a Sabaʾi) as an opponent to ‘Ali in the matter as well, depicting him as complaining, “Why has that which is in the army’s camp been divided among us but not that which is in the houses?” 103

While this is a connection noticed, or at least suspected, by the more astute readers of the Sayfian corpus, 104 it is a point that has quite often eluded modern scholars. Sayf positions Ibn al-Sawdāʾ not only as the ideological founder of Shiʿism, but also Khārijism. The Sabaʾiya of the Sayfian corpus instantiate schism, or *fitna*, itself, not merely one color thereof.

Given the mythology of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ as ensconced in the Sayfian corpus, this should really come as little surprise. Sayf’s first hint comes from his parable of Paul’s corruption of Christianity. Paul does not merely plot to give rise to one deviant form of Christianity; he plots to manufacture sectarianism itself and thereby dilute and pervert Jesus’ message beyond recognition. Like Paul his forerunner, Ibn al-Sawdāʾ acts not as a sectarian but the fount of sectarianism of all stripes. 105

Sayf also clues us into this Khārijite element of the Sabaʾiya quite early on by populating his Sabaʾiya, even as early as ‘Uthmān’s reign, with easily recognizable Khārijī figures, such as ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Kawwā and Ḫurqṣ ibn Zuhayr, known for playing prominent roles in the Khārijite opposition. One particularly prominent Khārijite whom Sayf places with the Sabaʾiya in Egypt during ‘Uthmān’s reign is Khālid ibn Muljam al-Murādī. He reappears also as a companion of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ accompanying his master from Egypt to Baṣra just before the onset of the Battle of the Camel. The name Khālid ibn Muljam, however, is not immediately recognizable because all other *akhbārī* and traditionists refer to him by another name, i.e., ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muljam al-Murādī. He is, of course, ‘Ali’s infamous assassin. Sayf himself makes the identity of his Khālid ibn Muljam with ‘Ali’s assassin explicit when he first introduces him, alongside ‘Uthmān’s assassin

103 Sayf, *K. al-jamal*, 1, 358 f. It is interesting that, in this account, another figure associated with the Sabaʾiya, Yazid ibn Qays (see ch. 1), threatens to kill al-Ashtar if he again opposes ‘Ali in the same manner. This account may be inspired by al-Ashtar’s resentment at having been passed over for ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās in his appointment of a governor for Baṣra; see Madelung, *Succesion*, 182 f.


105 See my essay, “Sayf ibn ’Umar’s Account of King Paul.”
Sūdān ibn Ḥumrān, in the earlier sections of the *K. al-Ridda* preserved in Ṭabari but not appearing in the newly discovered MS.\(^\text{106}\)

All of this raises some rather profound questions concerning what appears to be Sayf’s unfinished account of the Sabaʾiya and Ibn al-Sawdāʾ. In particular, how does Sayf’s Ibn al-Sawdāʾ mesh with other biographical portrayals of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ more generally speaking? I believe one may question whether or not the Sayfian version of Ibn Sabaʾ does mesh with these accounts at all, if even it were ‘complete’. In the *al-Kāfiʾa fi ibṭāl tawbat al-khāṭiʿa* of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), one encounters a fascinating tradition that potentially sheds light on the Ibn al-Sawdāʾ of the Sayfian corpus.\(^\text{107}\) The tradition describes ʿAlī’s approach to Kūfa following his victory at Baṣira. As his followers encounter him they heap on praises and glorify God. One of these men is ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī, the famous Khārijite leader of the dissident forces at Nahrawān, who says, “By God, they (i.e., ʿAlī’s Baṣran foes) are rebels, wrong-doers, infidels and polytheists [innahum al-bāghūn al-zālīmūn al-kāfirūn al-mushrikūn]!” ʿAlī censures him sharply:

You are in error, Ibn al-Sawdāʾ! The people are not as you say. If they were polytheists, then we would have taken them captive and plundered their wealth and would have neither married them nor appointed them heirs.

This fascinating khabar, according to Mufīd’s isnād, derives from the *K. al-jamal* of the controversial Shīʿī traditionist Jābir al-Juʿfī (d. 128/745–6),\(^\text{108}\) who himself was an older contemporary of Sayf. While, as noted in ch. 2, there are many individuals in this time period who are reviled as either Ibn al-Sawdāʾ or Ibn al-Aswad, the case of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī represents a particularly intriguing case insofar as the Khārijī imām’s name so closely resembles the earliest iterations of the name of Ibn Sabaʾ—i.e., ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Hamdānī al-Sabaʾī.

Thus, one must seriously entertain the possibility that Sayf, if his narrative had run its course, would have eventually merged his Ibn


\(^{107}\) Cited in Majlisī, *Bihār*, xxxii, 354. The work seems to be no longer extant.

al-Sawdā’ with that of Khārijī leader, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī.\textsuperscript{109} The final tradition on the Saba’īya preserved by Sayf certainly places ‘Alī in a bellicose posture towards them: they ride from Basra together prompting ‘Alī to hastily pursue them “to put an end to any plan they might have [li-yaqt'a ‘alayhim amr an].”\textsuperscript{110} As Rubin has observed, whereas the opponents of the Shi‘a reviled them for introducing Jewish ideas in an otherwise pristine Islam, the traditionists imputed the blame for the introduction of Jewish models of schism on the Khārijites.\textsuperscript{111} Sayf clearly reviles the Saba’īya as the human vehicles of both refractory tendencies—they are not merely heretics; they are schismatics too.

\textit{Excursus}

\textit{The Sayfian Corpus in the Riwāya of Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim}

In the foregoing analysis of the Sayfian narratives of the Battle of the Camel, our analysis has focused exclusively on those \textit{akhbār} contained in MS of Sayf’s \textit{K. al-jamal} and the transmission (\textit{riwāya}) of Shu‘ayb ibn Ibārahīm al-Tamīmī recorded by Tābarī in his \textit{Tā’rikh}. However, one finds preserved in the \textit{Waq‘at Ṣiffīn} of the Shī‘a \textit{akhbārī} Abū l-Fāḍl Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī al-Tamīmī (d. 212/827) a handful \textit{akhbār} from Sayf that falls outside both the contents of the MS and Shu‘ayb’s \textit{riwāya} in Tābarī’s \textit{Tā’rikh}. In addition to these \textit{akhbār}, Tābarī himself occasionally cites Naṣr’s \textit{riwāya} for Sayf’s material on the Battle of the Camel—materials that apparently derive from Naṣr’s now lost work, \textit{K. al-jamal}, on the same topic insofar as they do not appear in his \textit{Waq‘at Ṣiffīn}.\textsuperscript{112} The surviving traditions that Naṣr does transmit from Sayf, whom he often refers to by his kunyā ‘Abū ‘Abd Allāh’, are not substantial in number: they amount to a mere two reports preserved in Tābarī’s \textit{Tā’rikh}\textsuperscript{113} and four that appear in the introductory materials of Naṣr’s own \textit{Waq‘at Ṣiffīn}.\textsuperscript{114}


\textsuperscript{110} Tābarī, i, 3230.

\textsuperscript{111} Rubin, \textit{Between Bible and Qur’ān: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image}, SLAEI 17 (Princeton, 1999), 125 ff., 147 ff.

\textsuperscript{112} See Yaqūṭ, \textit{Udābā’}, vi, 2750.

\textsuperscript{113} Tābarī, i, 3111 f., 3120 f.

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Waq‘at Ṣiffīn}, 5 f., 9 f. It is not entirely unfeasible that these \textit{akhbār} do not properly belong to Naṣr’s \textit{Waq‘at Ṣiffīn} but, rather, his lost \textit{K. al-jamal}. ‘Abd al-Salām
Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim’s utilization of Sayf’s material provides an important witness to the compositions of Sayf for several reasons. While Naṣr shared many things in common with Sayf on the one hand (both were Kūfān, both were Tamīmī, both were specialists in historical akhbār, etc.), they wrote their histories from opposite ends of the sectarian spectrum. Whereas Sayf wrote predominately from a moderate ʿUthmānī perspective, Naṣr was, by contrast, a Shiʿī akhbārī. Naṣr’s relatively limited usage of Sayfian akhbār indirectly confirms, moreover, that the Sayfian corpus originally never extended beyond the aftermath of the Battle of Camel. Hence, Naṣr provides us with a contemporary’s view of the chronological limits of the Sayfian corpus that, at the same time, presents us with a view of history marked with a tendentious slant strikingly different than Sayf’s as reflected in his K. al-jamal.

Of the akhbār that Naṣr transmits from Sayf that have survived, most are anodyne in content and reveal little by way of the ideological predilections one may surmise from other sections of his corpus. Chronologically speaking, their focus falls on ʿAlī subsequent return to Kūfā after achieving victory in Baṣra.115 Indeed, of all Sayf’s akhbār in Naṣr’s Waqʿat Ṣīffin, the only khabar to boast of truly substantive content relates two conversation of Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad al-Khuzaʿī, one with ʿAlī ibn ʿAbī Tālib and the other with al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī, concerning Sulaymān’s decision not to aid ʿAlī during the Battle of the Camel. These two conversations seem to intentionally augur Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad’s later abandonment of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī at Karbalā’ and

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Muḥammad Hārūn’s edition of Naṣr’s Waqʿat Ṣīffin, which has as of yet not been surpassed, draws from two earlier, inferior printings of the work and those sections found in the Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha of Ibn ʿAbī l-Ḥadīd; the contents of these editions, therefore, are somewhat conjectural inasmuch as no MSS had been consulted for Hārūn’s edition. Martin Hinds consulted the two MSS of the work known to him (the first from the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan and the second from the Preussische Staatsbibliothek) while writing his article, “The Banners and Battle Cries at Ṣīffin,” Al-Abhath 24 (1971), 3–42. I have unfortunately been unable to access either of these MS for this study; however, Hinds list of the authorities contained within the asānīd of these MSS makes no mention of Sayf ibn ʿUmar, suggesting that Naṣr’s akhbār from Sayf may all derive from his K. al-jamal. Further study of the MSS is required, however, to confirm this is the case.

115 E.g., Sayf’s narrative of ʿAlī taking up residence in Kūfā at the house of Jaʿda ibn Hubayra al-Makhzūmī (Waṣfaṣ Ṣīffin, 5), that ʿAlī lead the prayers upon arriving in Kūfā and delivered a sermon the following Friday (ibid., 9), and the transcription of the very same Friday sermon in which ʿAlī exhorts his followers to fear God and take heed of consequences of one’s actions in this life in the hereafter (ibid., 10).
his subsequent efforts to atone for his failure by fighting belatedly on al-Ḥusayn’s behalf by leading the Tawwābūn, or Penitents, to revolt against the Umayyads at ‘Ayn Warda in 65/685.\(^{116}\)

The two akhbār that Tabarī preserves present us with a different case altogether. Likely derived from the now lost book of Naṣr ibn Muzāhim on the Battle of the Camel, these two akhbār exhibit a markedly hostile portrayal of ‘Ā’isha’s involvement in the Battle of the Camel alongside Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr—so hostile, in fact, that they pose ‘Ā’isha, Ṭalḥa, and al-Zubayr as those parties who should bear the brunt of the responsibility for ‘Uthmān’s death and the mayhem resulting from the actions undertaken in his name after his murder. Of the two akhbār, Naṣr intermingles the first khabar, however, with the material of an older, Shi‘ī akhbarī, whose materials he extensively redacts in Waq’at Siffin as well, named ‘Umar ibn Sa‘d al-Asadi (d. ca. 180/796).\(^{117}\) This being the case, one may reasonably assume that the material hostile towards ‘Ā’isha derives from the materials of ‘Umar ibn Sa‘d and not Sayf’s. The second khabar, which presents an even more bellicose attack on ‘Ā’isha and her two confederates, Naṣr transmits ostensibly as a whole, without intermingling additional materials. This second khabar is rather extensive, so it may be merely summarized here.\(^{118}\) It presents the reader with a series of three denunciations by different individuals. The first denunciation is pronounced by a prominent partisan of ‘Alī named Jāriya ibn Qudāma al-Sa‘dī. Other than a short allusion to him in a poem attributed to al-Walīd ibn ‘Uqba, he is a virtual non-entity in the Sayfian narratives of ‘Uthmān’s caliphate and the Battle of the Camel,\(^{119}\) but here he denounces ‘Ā’isha for contravening the qur’ānic and prophetic prohibition on the Prophet’s wives from appearing in public.\(^{120}\) In the second denunciation, this time uttered by an unnamed slave-boy (ghulām) of the Banū Sa‘d, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr receive rebuke for having brought out ‘Ā’isha, the Prophet’s wife and the Mother of the Believers (umm al-mu’minīn), while keeping their own wives at home. The ghulām is even so bold to declare to them in verse, “You have safeguarded your women (at home) but have

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 6 f.

\(^{117}\) Tabarī, i, 3111. Cf. GAS, i, 311; Hinds, “The Banners and Battle Cries,” 5 ff.

\(^{118}\) Tabarī, i, 3120 f. For a complete English translation, see Brocket, The Community Divided, 61–3; see also the discussion in Shoshan, Poetics, 129 f.

\(^{119}\) For Walid’s verse, see Sayf, K. al-ridda, i, 146.–6.

\(^{120}\) A topos that appears elsewhere, too; e.g., see Jāhiz, Bayān, ii, 296.
pimped your mother (i.e., ‘Ā’isha) [suntum ḥalāʾilakum wa-qudtum ummakum]!” The third, final denunciation, again uttered by a ghulām but from the Banū Juhayna, arises from a conversation between this ghulām and Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa, who equally blames Ṭalḥa (whom he references cryptically as the ‘master of the red camel’), ‘Ā’isha, and ‘Alī. The ghulām then rebukes Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa for including ‘Alī in this list, framing his reply within poetic verse.

A great deal is curiously awry in this khabar, especially if one reads it against the backdrop of the predominate riwāya through which the Sayfian corpus has reached us and the contents of the recently discovered MS. Having previously noticed this incongruence, Madelung speculated that Sayf was perhaps so mendacious that he freely transmitted his materials with different biases imbedded therein to fit the expectations of his audience. Thus, in Madelung’s scheme, Naṣr authentically transmits Sayf’s khabar; however, Sayf modified his khabar to suit the Shi‘ī predilections of Naṣr and whoever accompanied him.

Madelung’s conjecture is not the sole possible solution to the problem, however. Naṣr rather interestingly transmits this khabar from Sayf who cites as the ultimate authority for the report al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr (d. 107/725). On the face of it, this is a standard attribution. Sayf frequently cites al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad as a source, usually through the intermediary of Sahl ibn Yūsuf al-Sulami, as he also does in Naṣr’s riwāya.121 Yet, given the putative source of this khabar, much of its content seems oddly strange. To be frank, al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr is the last person one would expect to transmit such an account. Why would al-Qāsim, whom ‘Ā’isha herself reared after his father’s death at hands of Mu‘āwiya’s men, transmit and preserve an account so unfavorably predisposed towards her? What little we do know concerning the life of al-Qāsim derives, in part, from his considerable fame as a transmitter from ‘Ā’isha. As her nephew, and one almost as close to her as a son, his sympathies lied much more with ‘Ā’isha than with his estranged father, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, whose opposition to ‘Uthmān he frequently decried in life.122 These details, albeit admittedly circumstantial, suggest strongly that the account was originally not al-Qāsim’s and, thus, wrongly ascribed; moreover, its content also suggests that this may equally be the case with regard to Naṣr’s ascription of the account to Sayf.

121 GAS, i, 279.
122 Ibn Sa’d, v, 187 ff.; Dhahabī, Ta’rikh, vii, 217 ff.
In the preceding chapters, I have often referred to the reservoir of materials shared not only by the depiction of 'Abd Allāh ibn Saba’ found in the Sayfian corpus but also by the variegated depictions of the heresiarch dispersed throughout the heresiographical tradition. As of yet, our analysis has deferred surveying this reservoir in order to focus more narrowly on the Sayfian corpus and its interpretation. With our analysis of Sayf behind us, it is to the heresiographical materials that our study now turns.

While the materials comprising this reservoir remain indeterminable in terms of their exact content and scope, one can arrive at a reasonable approximation of the traditions circulating by the mid-2nd/8th century and subsequently track their evolution into the 3rd/9th century and beyond, despite the fact that most of the heresiographical works that have survived post-date this period, sometimes considerably. It is possible to make this argument, I contend, thanks in large part to the fact that the common themes shared by the earliest, extant strata of heresiographical accounts of Ibn Saba’, even with the numerous disparities between them, belie a textual complexity that provides evidence not only for the existence such a reservoir but also its diversity.

In our analysis of the Sayfian tradition, for instance, we noted how the Sayfian depiction of Ibn Saba’ as a Yemenite Jew born of a dark-skinned mother utilized a trope that remains prevalent elsewhere: in the portraits of Ibn Saba’ contained within the heresiographical literature and in an array of anecdotal akhbār in which the heresiarch also features. These tropes are not limited to the happenstance details of the heresiarchs personal history either. The attributions to Ibn Saba’ of hallmark Shi‘ite doctrines such as the waṣiyya and the raj‘a in Sayfian corpus and heresiographical tradition equally qualifies as such a common trope. Such commonalities, I contend, reflect not the overwhelming influence of one author (e.g. Sayf ibn ‘Umar), but rather the existence of a corpus of traditions pre-dating Sayf’s writing activity.

1 Generally speaking, Sayf’s account was more idiosyncratic than paradigmatic. Although the imprint of Sayf’s influence may be easily detectable in a handful of
This reservoir, or corpus if you will, circulated in scholastic communities in ʿIrāq in the 2nd/7th century, especially in Kūfa, and exerted its influence on both the Sayfian corpus and the earliest instantiations of Ibn Sabaʾ in the heresiographical tradition. Given the considerable overlap of data recorded in our sources, the task remaining before us is to delineate a chronology of the development of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition and to map out its essential features. The extant heresiographical tradition, though only partially preserved, has reached us in a form complete enough to allow one to chart the evolution of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition throughout its principal phases. It is these heresiographical writings that grant one access to this earliest stratum of the Ibn Sabaʾ materials. In what follows, we plunge the depths of the reservoir of Ibn Sabaʾ traditions, seeking to uncover just how deep, and how early, one may delve.

In this and the following chapter, therefore, the heresiographical tradition shall be our foremost concern, particularly as a source for the construction of the persona of Ibn Sabaʾ as the heresiarch of Shiʿism and/or the Shiʿī ghulāt. With the focus falling nearly exclusively on Ibn Sabaʾ, the body of reports and traditions bearing directly on the Sabaʾiya and interspersed throughout the akhbāri literature shall be put aside for a time. Thus, whereas the focus in the previous chapters has been on Sayf as an historian, his sources and the role of both the Sabaʾiya and Ibn Sabaʾ throughout his narratives, here our attention is directed toward an examination of the evolution of Ibn Sabaʾ as a persona of the heresiographical literature independent of the Sayfian account.

A brief caveat on the use of the term ‘heresiographical’ is in order before analysis can be undertaken. Our usage of the term has been restricted here to the genre predominantly represented by the early Muslim firaq-literature. Speaking broadly, one may characterize the formative and medieval firaq genre as one that functioned as an arena in which issues such as comparative religion, sectarian beliefs, or even religious polemic could be directly addressed by medieval Muslim authors of sundry confessional identities. The stylistic features of the genre vary as widely as do the temperaments and agendas of its

heresiographical accounts of Ibn Sabaʾ, his account's influence actually remained rather limited within heresiography. Rather, his account mostly exerted the bulk of its influence upon Sunnī historiography.
authors, but some broad observations can be made with the Sabaʾiya in mind.2

In dealing with the Shiʿite ‘extremist’ sects, or ghulāt, in general and the Sabaʾiya in particular, one can distinguish an ever-present heresiological mode of writing, which can either be staunchly combative or outwardly sober and descriptive. The characteristic movement in the heresiological mode aims primarily at the construction of an etiology, or even multiple etiologies, for the specific set of beliefs and/or sect espousing said beliefs. The heresiographers most commonly achieve the etiological task by identifying the founder of the sect and the source of the founding ideas professed by the sects’ earliest adherents. As the earliest of the ghulāt sects, the Sabaʾiya thus serve as an exemplary example of this process.

Such aims constitute a motivating perspective for this genre and profoundly shape the presentation and methods employed by its practitioners. The heresiological perspective starkly contrasts with the methodological perspective of the akhbārīs, and this contrast manifests itself in the formal features of the genre. Although the akhbārīs certainly were not without their own agendas, the focus on, and the necessity of, maintaining the coherence of the overarching trajectory of their narratives and, to varying degrees, the necessities of working within the formal constraints of the khabar and isnād often subvert or frustrate this agenda. Not so with the heresiograph, for his genre is exceedingly more modular and compartmentalized and, in many ways, freed from the constraints dictated by historical narrative. Both genres, of course, interpenetrate one another and reveal mutual interdependence, as the case of Sayf bears witness. But, in the case of the heresiographers, their authorial aims veer more towards the encyclopedic and taxonomic desiderata of the heresiographical genre, such as the delineation and establishment of communal and doctrinal boundaries.3 In this encyclopedic approach, the heresiographers share much

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3 State interest in the compilation of heresiographical data appears as early as under the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Mahdī (r. 158–169/775–85), who apparently took an interest
in common with the compilers of prosopographical (tarājim) works and the anthropologists of belle-lettres (adab).

Mapping the Ibn Sabaʾ Tradition

Accounts of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ appear in nearly all firaq-works, and although much of this material is repetitive, it is by no means always coherent or consistent. Nevertheless, there has been an attempt in this chapter to take most of these, and certainly the most important and formative, into account in a comprehensive manner.4 Also falling under the gaze of this chapter are reports, narrations and digressions of what one may call a ‘heresiographical disposition’—that is, passages that one may justifiably characterize as functioning within the ‘heresiological mode’, but that nonetheless appear in works encompassing concerns and interests much broader than that of comparative religion and inter-sectarian polemic. These works encompass mostly

encyclopedia compendia of diverse topical interests such as compilations of belle-lettres, prosopographical works, theological treatises and regional histories. Many of the reports preserved in these latter works constitute our earliest texts on Ibn Saba’ and the Sabaʾiya.

One helpful manner of conceptualizing the differences dividing the Sayfian corpus and the heresiographical traditions, therefore, is to ponder their underlying aims in relating the Ibn Saba’ traditions. For the Sayfian corpus, the underlying concern emerging throughout its narrative of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ and the Sabaʾiya is its construction of an etiology of schism, or fitna, in the Muslim umma. To be certain, the Ibn al-Sawdāʾ of the Sayfian corpus does not merely plot and scheme in the early caliphal political arena—he invents abhorrent and corrosive doctrines, too. However, even these doctrines (i.e., the waṣīya and the raj’a principally) function merely at an instrumental level—not at the level conviction. Ibn al-Sawdāʾ is no true-believer, and as seen in chapter two, the Sabaʾiya and their confederates, even during their fateful march against ’Uthmān’s Medina, still did not adhere to and confess a unified doctrine—only the Egyptian faction resembled proto-Shī’a. Furthermore, while the Sabaʾiya do indeed shore up ‘Alī’s ranks after ’Uthmān’s murder, Sayf’s Sabaʾiya don a role by the end of the Battle of the Camel reminiscent not of the Shīʿa but, rather, the Khawārij.

By contrast, the heresiographs, rather than constructing an etiology of fitna, exhibit entirely different concerns altogether. Generally speaking, the heresiographers’ interests in Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾiya derive from their project of constructing an etiology for ghulūw—i.e., ‘exaggeration’ or ‘excess’ in one’s religious beliefs. Only a handful of staunchly anti-Shīʿi heresiographers actually utilize Sayf as a principal

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source and, thus, recapitulate his account of Ibn Sabaʾ as the originator of the original fitna. However, these authors intermingle his material with that of numerous other authors in order to construct their own account and, thus, augment Sayfʾs account considerably to in order to depict Ibn Sabaʾ as the originator of one or more forms of ghulūw.6 Most heresiographersʾ accounts, however, reveal that in no way did they regard themselves as continuators of Sayfʾs abruptly truncated narrative. The task of casting Ibn Sabaʾ as the originator of ghulūw, regardless of the form, takes the central place in the heresiographical tradition, and for this reason one finds that, although Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya appear in a vast number of works, the heresiographical tradition is, in fact, somewhat patterned and uniform in its general features.

It is helpful, therefore, to view the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition not through an examination of individual authorsʾ views but, rather, through the patterns appearing across the numerous works. The heresiographical tradition in the case of Ibn Sabaʾ can be best conceived of in terms of archetypal models that purport to provide etiologies of certain beliefs, either of Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya in particular or the the Shīʿa and ghulāt in general. In fact, we have already encountered one of the major archetypes in our analysis of the Sayfian corpus. This is what I would call the ‘waṣīyaʾ archetype. Sayf and the heresiographical tradition both record this archetype; its defining feature is the claim that Ibn Sabaʾ invented the notion of the Muḥammad designating ʿAlī as his waṣī, frequently said to have transpired by Ibn Sabaʾ introducing into Islam the Jewish model of Joshuaʾs succession to Moses. Although one finds numerous attestations for this archetype,7 the waṣīya archetype, in fact, does not prove to be the most influential and important. Rather, if one were to characterize the non-Sayfian, heresiographical tradition of Ibn Sabaʾ as a whole, one could broadly observe that this tradition exhibits a tendency to either favor one of two disparate archetypal narratives or, alternatively, to somehow harmonize them. These two etiological myths posit the origins for two, distinct dimensions

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6 Principally, these are: ʿAbd al-Jabbār, Tathbīt, ii, 545 f.; ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, Firaq, 223 f.; Maqrīzī, Khiṭaṭ, iv, 271 ff.
7 For example, see Nawbakhtī, Firaq, 20; Saʾd al-Qumī, Maqālāt, 20; Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, Zina, 305; Kishshī, 108 f.; Shahrastānī, Milal, i, 204; Ṣafādī, Wāfī, xvii, 190 (quoting Ibn Abī l-Dam, d. 642/1244).
of ghulūw and, therefore, represent two different ‘moments’ in the evolution of the Ibn Saba’ tradition.

Of these two, the earliest is what I shall call the ‘parousia’ or ‘raj’ā archetype in that it narrates and describes Ibn Saba’s origination of the belief in the raj’ā, or parousia, of the imām. Here, as always, the focus consistently falls on the parousia of ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib after his assassination and never on the parousia of Muhammad as in Sayf ibn ’Umar’s depiction.\(^8\) Always transpiring after ‘Alī’s murder, then, this first archetype preserves the tale of the heresiarch’s incredulous response to the news of ‘Ali’s death. It is in this account that Ibn Saba’ famously declares: “If you would have come to us with his brains in a hundred bags, we would (still) know that he shall not die until he leads you all with his staff [‘aṣā].”\(^9\) Although discussed partially below, the full analysis of this tradition will be relegated to chapter 6.

Just as the previous archetypal myth focuses on the raj’ā, so the second most influential archetype relates the origins of the belief in the divinity (ilāhīya, rubūbiya, etc.) of the imām, and again, the focus falls upon the veneration of Ibn Saba’ for ‘Alī. Yet, this second archetype presents us with a considerably different scenario from the first: it transpires within the lifespan of ‘Alī and during his caliphate, thereby placing the imām and the heresiarch in stark relief. In this narrative, ‘Alī directly confronts Ibn Saba’ and his followers, denounces their claims and rebukes them for their beliefs. In the course of this confrontation, ‘Alī eventually burns Ibn Saba’ and the Saba‘īya alive for refusing to deny his divinity.\(^10\) For this reason, we have dubbed this archetype the ‘execution archetype’. Charting the evolution of the archetype occupies a central place in chapter 5.

Both the parousia and execution archetypes are mutually contradictory and, thus, represent independent, even competing, etiologies that reflect varying dogmatic agendas within the heresiographical traditions. Although one encounters an array of beliefs attributed to Ibn Saba’, the doctrines of the parousia (raj’ā) and the divinity (ilāhīya) of ‘Alī remain the most salient, and it is upon these two archetypal narratives that subsequent details and/or embellishments of the beliefs of

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\(^8\) Although, as stated in ch. 2, these assertions are not necessarily contradictory if one discards an overly ‘imāmocentric’ view of the raj’ā.

\(^9\) Jāhiz, Bayān, iii, 71.9–10 (perhaps the most standard version; see below for others).

\(^10\) Ibn Qutayba, Tāwil, 87; idem, Ma‘ārif, 266; Ibn Rusta, A’lāq, 218.
Ibn Saba’ aggregate. By contrast, the wašīya archetype, with the exception of Sayf’s ingenious connection of Ibn Saba’ to the Jews’ ‘King Paul’, remains rather static. It seems probable, moreover, that the topoi concerning the identity of Ibn Saba’, such as his conversion from Judaism and dark complexion, co-existed with and were interspersed throughout the various permutations of the two archetypes as well.

Before continuing further along these lines, we should complete our map of the Ibn Saba’ tradition. The Ibn Saba’ tradition contains three further archetypes that play an important, yet somewhat minor, role insofar as they neither enjoy the popularity of the major ghulūw archetypes nor play an extensive role in the narrative components of the Ibn Saba’ lore. They, in fact, represent even earlier iterations of the ‘denunciation’ topos encountered in the execution archetype mentioned above—i.e., a narration wherein ‘Ali denounces a given belief or practice attributed to Ibn Saba’, the Saba’īya, or the Shī’ā at large coupled with a fitting threat, usually exile or execution, intended to dissuade persons from professing such beliefs. These narratives often share this denunciation topos and must, therefore, be genealogically connected to the execution archetype—just how this is the case we will explore further below. All the archetypes, both major and minor, may be listed as follows:

1. Major ghulūw archetypes  
   a. raj’ā archetype  
   b. wašīya archetype  
   c. execution archetype

2. Minor ghulūw archetypes  
   a. cursing archetype  
   b. concealed Qur’ān archetype  
   c. lying archetype

Of all the minor archetypes, each boast an impressive claim to antiquity, and each of the three seem to have served as early prototype versions of what evolves into the execution archetype. The ‘cursing archetype’ credits Ibn Saba’ with originating the quintessentially Rāfīḍī practice of cursing (ṭa’īn) or insulting (sabb) the first two caliphs and the sahāba, a practice which earns Ibn Saba’ the ire of ‘Ali and, in some versions, even results in his banishment to al-Madā’in. This account clearly reflects not only the variant name of the Saba’īya—i.e., the Sabbābiya (lit., the insulters)—but also resonates with the depiction
of the Sabaʿiya found in the Sīra attributed to the Ibāḍī scholar Sālim ibn Dhakwān (fl. ca. 82–100/701–718). It can also be said reflect a polemical, tendentious portrayal of Ibn Sabaʿ and the Sabaʿiya as the originator of one of the more refractory practices of early Shiʿism.

The two other minor archetypes appear to boast equally early origins. In the ‘concealed Qurʾān’ archetype, ‘Ali denounces “ʿAbd Allāh al-Sabaʿī”, whom he names as one deceiver (kadhdhāb) among thirty to precede the coming of the Day of Judgment after he hears him claim that ‘Alī is privy to hidden parts of the Qurʾān. And lastly, in the ‘lying’ archetype, one encounters an anecdote involving al-Musayyab ibn Najaba al-Fazārī, who brings Ibn Sabaʿ to ‘Alī with the ambiguous accusation that “he lies against God and his Prophet [yakdhibu ʿalā allāh wa-rasūlihi].” Both of these later two archetypes mirror key passages in a polemic against the Sabaʿiya contained within the Kitāb al-irjāʿ attributed to al-Hāsan ibn Muhāammad ibn al-Hanafiya (d. ca. 100/719), and probably owe their origins to this treatise.

As will be argued in detail below, this chapter contends that some form or variation of all of these archetypal narratives predate the

12 “By God, nothing has been bestowed to me that he (i.e., the Prophet) concealed from anyone of the people [wa-llāhi mā ʿufdiya ilayya bi-shayʿ “katamahu aḥadu min al-nās],” ‘Ali declares. See Ibn Abī ʿĀsim, K. al-sunna, 2 vols., ed. M. N.-D. al-Albānī (Damascus, 1980), 11, 476 (no. 982); Abū Yaʿlā al-Mawsīlī, al-Musnad, 15 vols., ed. Ḥusayn Salim Asad (Damascus, 1984–94), 1, 349 f.; Ibn ʿAsākir, Dimashq, xxiv, 6 (ed. al-Ṭarābīshī). This archetype appears to belong to the corpus traditions polemicizing against the the Shiʿī belief that ‘Alī possessed a kitāb, or saḥīfa, which the Prophet unique entrusted to him. The appearance of Ibn Sabaʿ in the tradition is merely one variant version of numerous traditions that usually do not feature him at all (see Hossein Modarresi, Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shiʿite Literature [Oxford, 2003], 1, 7 and n. 38 thereto). The transmitter responsible for introducing the heresiarch in the narrative appears to have been the Kūfan tradition-ist Muhammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Asadī. Although the ḥadīth-critics do not provide Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Asadī’s date of death, one can infer from the dates of one of his famous pupils, Abū Bakr Ibn Abī Shayba (159–235/775–849), that he belongs to the early ʿAbbāsid era. See Dḥahabī, Mizān, iii, 512 f.; Ibn Ḥajar, Tahdhib, ix, 117 f.
13 An early, staunch partisan of ‘Alī from the Kūfan qurrāʾ; he perished in Rabiʿ II 65/November 684 alongside Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad al-Khuṣāʿī, leader of the Kūfan Penitents (tawwābūn), at ʿĀyn Warda. See Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 530; Ţabārī, ii, 497 f.
14 Ibn Abī Khaythama, Taʾrīkh, iii, 177 (no. 4360) and Ibn ʿAsākir, Dimashq, xxiv, 5 read atā bihi mulabbibahu. Cf. WKAS, i, 92b. The Shiʿī version reads: jā aʿ ... mutal-abbībun bi-ʿabd allāh ibn sabāʿ. See al-Ṭusi, al-Amāli (Qum, 1993), 347; Maʿṣūmi, Biḥār, xl, 146.
15 Compare with K. al-irjāʿ, §7 “aʿlanū al-firya ʿalā bāni umayyya wa-allāh” and §8 “yazʾamūna anna nabī allāh katama tīʿ at aʿshar al-qurʿān.”
Sayfian corpus and originate from a period at least as early as the first quarter of the 2nd/8th century. In their most rudimentary form, all of these archetypes appear to have been separate accounts transmitted independently in rudimentary *akhbār*, but Sayf and the heresiographers of his generation seem to be the first to fuse them, with mixed success, into integral narratives. At a later date, one finds that the major, contradictory narratives of the parousia and execution archetypes eventually converge and pass, more or less intact, into dutifully harmonized versions, whereas the minor archetypes appear to be relegated to an increasingly minor role along the trajectory of the tradition’s evolution. Once the harmonization of the major archetypes appears on the scene, both archetypes thereafter act as the dual pillars for the heresiographers’ narrative artifice in which Ibn Sabaʾ plays his infamous role as the originator of both types of *ghulūw*. The process of harmonization was, of course, gradual and appears to have been undertaken in Shiʿī scholastic circles starting as early as the latter half of the 3rd/9th century and continuing throughout the 4th/10th. To map out just how this process occurred, we begin below with the earliest known heresiographical account of Ibn Sabaʾ hitherto known to have survived that originates from an early 2nd/8th century Imāmī source likely composed during the reign of the ʿAbbāsid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–193/786–809).

**A Late 2nd/8th-Century Imāmī Account**

One encounters one of the most detailed and extensive heresiographical accounts of Ibn Sabaʾ in the *Firaq al-shīʿa* (or, *The Sects of the Shiʿites*) of the Imāmī scholar al-Ḥasan ibn Mūsā al-Nawbakhti (d. ca. 300–10/912–22). Although we know that Nawbakhtī composed the work just prior to 286/899, it is generally recognized by modern scholars that he nonetheless incorporates the earlier works of his predecessors, albeit often anonymously and without accreditation. On the basis of internal textual evidence, Wilferd Madelung argued a number of decades ago that one can determine within a reasonable degree of certainty that Nawbakhtī not only relied upon but also appropriated the work of a 2nd/8th century Imāmī scholar, whom

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16 For this dating, see W. Madelung, “Das Imamat in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre,” *Der Islam* 37 (1961), 50.
Madelung identifies as Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, a prominent Imāmī mutakallim and companion of the imāms Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) and Mūsā al-Kāzim (d. 183/799). Madelung identified the work that al-Nawbakhtī preserved as a short tract of Hishām’s entitled Kitāb ikhtilāf al-nās fī l-imāma, and in Madelung’s estimation, Nawbakhtī reproduced this work within his own with very few modifications to the original text.

Madelung’s attribution of Nawbakhtī’s source to Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, however, is not watertight, and Modarressi has more recently put forward evidence undermining Madelung’s thesis. Modarressi contends that the title Kitāb ikhtilāf al-nās fī l-imāma, which appears in the lists of works attributed to Hishām, might actually refer to the text of a debate recorded between the Imāmī mutakallim and an Ibāḍī scholar at the court of Hārūn al-Rashid and, therefore, was not Nawbakhtī’s source text. Also, Modarressi suggests, though much less convincingly, that the author of Nawbakhtī’s source may have been Sunnī rather than Imāmī. In Madelung’s defense, the evidence he had adduced for his attribution of the source to Hishām does not solely derive from Nawbakhtī, for he also points to quotations from the tract by the Muʿtazilī Zurqān (d. 278/891–2) preserved in Ashʿarī’s Maqālāt. Zurqān clearly utilizes much of the same text that Nawbakhtī’s account incorporates, and although Zurqān does not attribute the text to Hishām (or anyone else for that matter), Zurqān’s proven, studious knowledge of Hishām attests to a detailed familiarity with Hishām’s work and teachings and, thus, adds to the likelihood that Zurqān borrowed from a text composed by Hishām. This likelihood

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18 For the text, see Ibn Bābawayh, Kamāl, 1, 362–8 (longer version) and Kishshī, 258–63 (shorter version); both are cited in Modarresi, Tradition, 1, 267 f.

19 Modarresi, Tradition, 1, 267 f. Modarresi’s suggestion that the author might be Sunnī falls short in that it does not account for the tract’s popularity in Imāmī circles As Madelung notes, “Eine ganz unbekannte Abhandlung wird es aber nicht gewesen sein, sonst würde nicht auch Sa’d ibn ‘Abd Allāh den Text als Grundlage seiner Darstellung benutzt haben. Vielmehr is anzunehmen, daß es sich um ein von der imamitischen Überlieferung allgemein als maßgeblich anerkanntes Werk handelte” (“Bemerkungen,” 43).

finds, perhaps, further confirmation in the utilization of ps.-Nāshi’ al-Akbar (=Ja’far ibn Ḥarb, d. 236/851) of the same source-text.²¹

To Madelung’s original thesis, one may add still one further comment. Bayhoum-Daou, whose work on Hishām certainly marks the most thorough and well-informed to date, recently affirmed Madelung’s thesis but offered a revised, considerably more nuanced view of Nawbakhtī’s relation to the Kitāb ikhtilāf al-nās. Hers is a view that posits a considerably less passive and more interventionist role for Nawbakthī in the transmission of Hishām’s text. Bayhoum-Daou draws from a thorough study of Hishām’s views as represented by Ash’arī’s Maqālāt, which she utilizes to excise significant sections (although none pertinent to the Saba’īya) from the text postulated by Madelung as less tainted by Nawbakthī’s influence. Although often intriguing, some of Bayhom-Daou’s revisions of Madelung’s thesis depend upon assumptions about Hishām’s views, which she uses to ‘restore’ the pre-redacted wording of Hishām’s text.²² Thus, her analysis at times seems to beg the question as to whether or not Hishām’s text is truly being restored or if Nawbakthī’s source-text is merely being modified to bring it in line with Hishām’s reputed views. To whomever the attribution belongs, the text appears on the basis of the same internal evidence adduced decades ago by Madelung to date to the end or turn of the 2nd/8th century. For our purposes, we will tentatively, and in a non-committal fashion, refer to the author of the text as ps.-Hishām.

Nawbakhtī’s work was itself subsequently utilized by another, contemporary Imāmī scholar, Sa’d ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Khalaf al-Qummī, as a basis of his own work, Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-l-firaq, producing a highly similar account of Ibn Saba’. Sa’d al-Qummī’s redaction, however, does not merely reproduce Nawbakthī’s text; it also supplements the text with numerous expansions, glosses, and insertions culled from sources either neglected or unknown to Nawbakthī. Sa’d also augments the text with information updated in light of more recent events, allowing historians to post-date his redaction after Nawbakthī’s. Thus, in general, Sa’d al-Qummī’s redaction presents the reader with

an expanded text, sometimes considerably so, beyond the contents redacted by Nawbakhtī, whose version reproduces ps.-Hishām’s text most faithfully. Occasionally, it is Nawbakhtī’s text which is slightly longer than Sa’d’s, or they merely differ in wording. But, this is much more rarely the case, and in such cases the differences are usually iterative rather than substantive. It is difficult to determine whether or not Sa’d possessed a copy of ps.-Hishām’s text independent of Nawbakhtī’s recension, but the possibility cannot be altogether excluded.

Below, I have translated the Ibn Sabaʾ account of ps.-Hishām by relying on both the text of Nawbakhtī and that of Saʿd al-Qummī. Whether the textual expansions of Sa’d’s text are due to his glosses of the common source material or Nawbakhtī’s abridgement of this material is not always transparent, but most frequently the former is certainly the case. I have decided to incorporate the entirety of Sa’d’s redaction, marking in [[double-brackets]] those passages not present in Nawbakhtī’s redaction, while annotating those few instances where Nawbakhtī provides the longer text in the notes.

§1. When ʿAlī was killed, [[the community/umma]], those who had affirmed his Imāmate as a binding, sacred duty [fard an wājib an] from God and his Messenger, divided and became three sects. A sect from these claimed that ʿAlī had not been killed and had not died, and that he would not be killed and would not die until he leads the Arabs with his staff and fills the Earth with justice and equity as it has been filled with injustice and inequity. It is the first sect of Islam from this community [umma] to believe in the cessation of the imāmate [al-waqf] after the Prophet and the first of them to confess ghulūw.

§2. This sect is called the Sabaʾīya, the companions of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ, [[who is ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsībī al-Hamdānī, and helping him to do this was ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥārs and Ibn Aswad (sic.?)]—and they were among his most significant companions.] He was the first to publicly denounce Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and the (Prophet’s) companions and to disavow them. He claimed that ʿAli commanded him

24 Ibid., 45 and n. 49 thereto.
25 All of these names are problematic. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsībī al-Sabaʾī is a conflation of the original name of Ibn Sabaʾ with that of the Khārijite rebel (see ch. 3 above). Ibn Aswad appears to be a corruption of Ibn al-Sawdāʾ (see ch. 1 above). In the text, ʿṭirmā ʿṭirmā ʿṭirmā is likely a corruption of ʿṭirmā. The transposition of the original ʿṭimā in Ḥārith with the ʿṭimā of the text in all likelihood arises from the Persianate pronunciation of the former. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥārith is a variant of the name ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥarb, to whom Sa’d connects the Sabaʾīya in a subsequent passage below. Cf. Mashkūr’s comments in Sa’d ibn ʿAbd Allāh, Maqālāt, 162.
to do so [[and that dissimulation [al-taqiyya] was neither permitted nor licit.]] ‘Ali seized him and questioned him about this claim of his. He acknowledged it, so (‘Ali) ordered the execution (of Ibn Saba’). Then the people cried out to him [[from every direction]]: “O Commander of the Faithful, will you kill a man who calls for the loving of you (pl.), the people of the (Prophet’s) household, and for loyalty to you (sg.) and for disavowing your (sg.) enemies?!” Thus, (‘Ali) exiled him to al-Madā’in.

§3. A number of men of learning from ‘Ali’s companions relate a story [hakā] that Ibn Saba’ was a Jew but became Muslim and made ‘Ali his wali [wâlâ ‘alîym].” While he was still in his Jewish beliefs [alâ yahûdiyatihî], he used to hold this belief concerning Joshua son of Nûn, the waṣî after Moses, and so he said the same while a Muslim [fi islâmihî] concerning ‘Ali after the death of the Prophet. He was the first to spread the belief in the religious necessity of (recognizing) the Imâmate of ‘Ali, to publicly denounce his enemies, expose his opponents, [[and to declare them infidels.]] Because of this, those who oppose the Shi’a say that the origin of Shi’ism [al-rafd] is taken from Judaism.

§4. When the news of ‘Ali’s death reached ‘Abd Allâh ibn Saba’ in al-Madâ’in, [[a horserider approached them, and the people questioned him, “What’s the news from the Commander of the Faithful?” He said, “The most wretched of them (i.e., of the Khawārij) struck him with a blow—one might live from a greater one than it and might die from it immediately.” Then he continued the story of his death.]] He said to the one who announced his death: “You lie, [[you enemy of God!] If you would have brought us his brains in seventy bags and brought forth

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26 In the text, “ilâ ḥubbikum”; i.e., not merely of ‘Ali, but of the Prophet’s household as well.
27 In the text, “walāyatika wa-l-barâ’a min a’dâ’ika”; ‘you’ in both instances here is singular, referring to ‘Ali alone.
28 The phrase “from the companions of ‘Ali [min aṣḥâb ‘alî]” appears only in Nawbakhti’s text (see Firaq, 20.1).
29 I.e., Ibn Saba’ became ‘Ali’s mawlā. Compare this with the statement of Ja’far ibn Ḥarb that “Ibn Saba’ became Muslim by the hand of ‘Ali [aslama ibn saba’ alâ yad ‘alî]” (ps.-Nāshi’ī, Usūl, 22.18).
seventy just witnesses, [[we would not have believed you and]] we would (still) know that he had not died and had not been killed. He shall not die until [[he leads the Arabs with his staff and]] reigns over the Earth.

As the above passage demonstrates, the importance of ps.-Hishām’s text derives not merely from the early date of the text, but also from the fact that it represents a cross-section of the Ibn Saba’ traditions of the 2nd/8th century. From the outset, the etiological focus falls upon Ibn Saba’ as the originator of ghulūw—here defined as the belief in the cessation of the Imāmate (al-waqf) with ‘Alī and the disbelief in ‘Ali’s death coupled with an expectation of his messianic return (al-raj’a). One eventually encounters the stock anecdote of the heresiarch’s refusal to believe in ‘Ali’s death at the end of ps.-Hishām’s passage (§4). However, numerous other items of interest appear as well. Preceding assertion that Ibn Saba’ originated ghulūw is the claim that he initiated the practice of cursing Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān and the sahāba (§2). The archetype of Ibn Saba’ being a Jew who invented the doctrine of the waṣī on the model Joshua son of Nūn manifests itself, along with the claim that Ibn Saba’ was a staunch opponent of ‘Ali’s enemies (§3).31 The text, therefore, is a constellation of a number of the aforementioned archetypes enumerated at the beginning of this chapter. More will be said on this below, but for now, some oddities off the text ought to be noted.

If Nawbakhtī’s source is indeed to be attributed to Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, then the appearance of al-waqf in §1 proves particularly problematic insofar as such terminology seems to have emerged only after Hishām’s death. Scholars typically associate the doctrine with the Wāqifa, the sect which derives its name from the belief in waqf. However, the Wāqifa emerged only in the wake of the death of the imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799),32 whom Hishām appears not to have

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31 Also, see Kishshi, 108 f. (apparently quoting Sa’d al-Qummī’s text).
32 The Wāqifa claimed that Mūsā had been the last imām and had gone into occultation. While the belief itself was not without precedent, the terminology of a belief called ‘al-waqf’ appears to have begun with the Wāqifa. See M. Ali Buyukkara, “The Schism of the Party of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and the Emergence of the Wāqifa,” Arabica 47 (2000), 78–99. Note that the Imāmi mutakallim Ibn Qibqa al-Rāzī (d. ca. 315/927) speaks in the same breath of “the al-Saba’iya and those who stopped at the Commander of the Faithful (i.e., ‘Ali) [al-saba’iya wa-l-wāqifa’ ala amīr al-mu’minin]” in his Naqḍ Kitāb al-ishhād li-Abī Zayd al-ʿAlawī, in: Modarressi, Crisis, 177, § 14 (Ar.), 210 (Eng.).
outlived. However, given that Nawbakhtī wrote during the minor occultation (260–329/874–941), Bayhom-Daou has not unreasonably postulated that Nawbakhtī updated his source, replacing the term ‘occultation’ (Ar. al-ghayba) with ‘cessation’ (Ar. al-waṣf), thus suppressing “the text’s identification of the ghayba doctrine as ghulūw.”

However, her suggestion remains somewhat problematic in that, although Ibn Sabaʾ is indeed associated with the denial of ʿAlī’s death, heresiographers rarely directly associate Ibn Sabaʾ with the belief in the ghayba. Furthermore, the second section of the text, which discusses the Jewish origin of Ibn Sabaʾ and his doctrines, strikes one as patently odd, given that this is ostensibly an ‘Imāmī’ text. It is surprising to see just how many of the doctrines of Ibn Sabaʾ confesses actually fall in line with mainstream Shiʿī doctrines of the 2nd/8th century. On the one hand, it is uncanny to find the doctrine of the waṣīya of ʿAlī, a pillar of Shiʿī belief, unassumingly attributed to the intervening scruples of a Jewish mawlā. On the other hand, non-Shīʾī authors frequently attribute the innovation of the practice of cursing the sahāba and declaring them infidels (takfīr) to Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam himself, and one finds no indication that Hishām ever repudiated these beliefs during his lifetime. This feature of the text makes for a strange scenario in which Hishām attributes to a heresiarch what appears to be one of his own more staunchly held positions, potentially lending weight to Modarressi’s suggestion that the text may have been penned by a non-Shīʾī author.

Thus, even if one accepts Bayhom-Daou’s thesis that Nawbakhtī’s dutifully updated his source-text, Nawbakhtī’s version still remains

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33 While later death dates, which post-date Mūsā al-Kāzīm’s passing, are often assigned to Hishām, these appear to be less reliable than the death-date of 179 A.H., which is provided by Hishām’s prominent pupil, Yunūs ibn ʿAbd al-Rāḥmān. Cf. van Ess, TG, 1, 353 f.
34 Bayhom-Daou, “Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam,” 94 f. and n. 82 thereto.
35 An important, albeit late, exception to this is Shahrastānī, Milal, i, 204.
36 The cursing of one’s opponents publicly, of course, has become one of the trademarks of Shiʿī practice and identity; see E. Kohlberg, “Some Imāmī Shiʿī Views on the Sahāba,” JSAI 5 (1984), 145 and n. 15 thereto. Opponents of the Imāmīs, it should be noted, quite often attributed to Hishām the origination of a gamut of Imāmī beliefs; see ibid., 148f. and W. Madelung, Der Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen (Berlin, 1965), 186–91. That it is al-Qādī ʿAbd al-Jabbar who credits Hishām with this innovation, all the while maligning him as crypto-Daysānīte, perhaps should lead one to take his comments cum grano salis; see Tathbit, i, 224 f. and ii, 446 (cited by Kohlberg, art. cit., 148 f. and n. 33 thereto).
problematic in key respects. Sa’d al-Qummī seems to have noted this in general, too, and his textual glosses and deletions are quite instructive here. Sa’d’s entry on the Sabaʾīya accords considerably more material to this sect than Nawbakhtī’s, as indicated by the textual departures bracketed above. Such expansions stand out as largely reflecting the agenda of Sa’d rather than being an integral part of ps.-Hishām’s original text.37 Sa’d’s redaction broadens the scope of ps.-Hishām’s passage insofar as Sa’d augments it with supplemental materials and details38 and, furthermore, provides a text more intentional in its placement of Ibn Sabaʾ into the legacy of subsequent generations of ghulāt.

Sa’d’s additions go beyond mere textual glosses and refinements, however. The following section, for instance, appears only in Sa’d’s text, acting as a sort of ‘appendix’ to ps.-Hishām’s original account:39

[[They (i.e., Ibn Sabaʾ and his companions in Madāʾin) departed that very day until they dismounted (their camels) at ‘Alī’s door. Desiring to see him, they requested permission to enter in the manner of one certain that he was alive. Those of his companions, family and children who were present with him said to them, “Praise be to God!—Have you not heard that the Commander of the Faithful was martyred?” They said, “We know that he was neither killed nor shall he die until he leads the Arabs with his sword and whip, just he has led them with his argumentation and proof [bi-ḥujjatihi wa-burhānihi]. Indeed, he hears what is uttered in secret, knows what lies beneath guarded houses,40 and shines in the darkness like a polished, sharpened sword.”

This is the teaching [madhhab] of the Sabaʾīya and the teaching of the Ḥarbīya, who are the adherents of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr ibn Ḥarb al-Kindī, concerning ‘Alī. After this, they said of ‘Alī that he is the god of the worlds [ilāhu l-ʿālamīn] and that he withdrew from the sight of his creation in anger41 but shall reappear.]]

38 Madelung suggests one of Sa’d’s sources might have been the Kitāb al-radd ‘alā l-ghulāt of Yūnus ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān (d. 208/823–4), a student of Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam and an eminent companion of the imām ‘Alī al-Ridā. See his “Bermerkungen,” 52 and al-Najāshī, Fihrist asmāʾ musannafī l-shīʿa (=al-Rijāl), ed. M. Sh. al-Zanjānī (Qom, 2003), 448.1. Indeed, Sa’d al-Qummī is recorded as citing Yūnus as a source for a report about the Sabaʾīya elsewhere; see Kishshī, 106 f.
40 Reading, conjecturally, al-muqfal, with Mashkūr. There is presumably an allusion here to the Qur’ānic miracles of Jesus; see Q. 3:39.
41 Cf. ps.-Nāshiʾ, Usāl, 23. This statement appears to have been attributed to Ibn Sabaʾ as a parallel to the Wāqifī belief that Mūsā al-Kāzīm chose to remove himself from this world because of God’s ire arising the disobedience of the Shīʿa. See Kulaynī, Kāfī, i, 260 where Mūsā declares, “Verily, God Most High became angry with the Shīʿa
As is evident from the above, Saʿd’s account of Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya not only provides a slightly extended narrative but also associates the sect and its founder with the Ḥarbiya, one of the many ghulāt sects emerging in the wake of al-Mukhtār’s Kūfan revolt (see chapter 5 below). In section §1 above, Saʿd took further pains to identify Ibn Sabaʾ and the important figures in his entourage, although the names he mentions there prove to be problematic (see the note 5 above), and here in his ‘appendix’, he expresses this tendency more explicitly by delineating a genealogical link between the Sabaʾīya and later ghulāt sects.

Most of Saʿd’s changes take subtler forms, however. Saʿd, for instance, deletes what is in Nawbakhtī’s text an explicit attribution of the story of the Jewish origins of Ibn Sabaʾ and his waṣiyya doctrine to companions of ‘Alī in §3. Instead, Saʿd attributes its transmission to merely non-descript ‘men of learning’ without specifying their sectarian proclivities. In Saʿd’s revised text, moreover, Ibn Sabaʾ does not merely insult the first three caliphs and the sahāba, which is hardly a dogmatic infraction by Imāmī standards, but he also forbids his followers from practicing taqiyya (§2)—a normative, Imāmī practice explicitly endorsed by the imāms.42 Thus, Ibn Sabaʾ’s transgression in Saʿd’s text now ‘properly’ offends Imāmī sentiments—not merely those of the jamāʾī traditionists and proto-Sunnī hadith folk. Saʿd thereby casts Ibn Sabaʾ squarely beyond the vale of Imāmī belief. Lastly, there is a certain sharpening of the text where Saʿd’s redaction adds the element of takfīr to the belligerent attitude of the heresiarch to ‘Alī’ s opponents (see §3), although this is by no means as incompatible with Imāmī belief as the rejection of taqiyya.43

Hence, Nawbakhtī’s 2nd/8th century source (our ps.-Hishām) contains elements problematic for later Shīʿī scholars, as Saʿd’s recension bears out. Yet, do these elements necessarily demand that we conclude that ps.-Hishām’s account reflects a non-Imāmī outlook? I do

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not believe it does insofar as ps.-Hishām’s account may not necessarily aim at constructing a cohesive account of Ibn Saba’ but may actually bring together disparate materials of disparate provenance. The conclusion to be drawn here need not be that ps.-Hishām’s text is a non-Imāmī one but, rather, that ps.-Hishām ultimately draws upon an originally non-Shīʿī account, or accounts, of Ibn Saba’, preserving faithfully their contents rather than producing an account entirely of his own concoction. To put the scenario another way: if we read ps.-Hishām’s account as a bricolage cobbled together from the archetypal narratives enumerated above, then one can see the structural themes in each section building upon one another brick by brick while the vestiges of the etiological thrusts behind each of the archetypes remain perceptible. Ps.-Hishām essentially begins his account by positing Ibn Saba’ as the originator of ghulūw, after which he constructs the remainder of his account by stacking a series of these archetypes together to make a wider, even grander, narrative. One of the (unintended?) results of this method is that the disharmony between the archetypes still remains discernible. Given that the ‘bricks’ predate the ps.-Hishām’s arrangement of them, they potentially come from an array of sources, Imāmī and non-Imāmī. Making room for the integration of non-Shīʿī material would explain the sections of ps.-Hishām’s account that run against the grain of a ‘conventional’ Imāmī outlook by attributing mainstream Imāmī ideas to Ibn Saba’ on the one hand, and denouncing him as a heresiarch on the other. In addition to this, such an integration of non-Shīʿī materials also highlights the imperfect integration of the archetypes into a single account, necessitating Sa’d’s subsequent adoption of the onus of ‘improving’ and expanding the text, thus going beyond Nawbakhtī’s redaction to make the text more amendable to an emergent, post-ghayba Imāmī orthodoxy.

What evidence can one adduce for this? The evidence, in fact, comes from the attestations one finds for the early archetypal narratives mentioned above and how such archetypal narratives circulated independently of or across divergent heresiological accounts. Most obvious, of course, is the waṣṭiya archetype, which ps.-Hishām’s contemporary Sayf ibn ‘Umar utilizes as well. One may also cite the aforementioned ‘cursing archetype’, which corresponds to the problematic §2 of

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44 Since Nawbakhtī preserved these elements so unassumingly, it does not strike me as too farfetched to imagine Hishām preserving them as well.
ps.-Hishām’s text. That the archetype circulated independently of heresiographical accounts encapsulated in *akhbār* can be gleaned from accounts like the following recorded by Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038):45

Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad—ʿAbd Allāh (b. Khubayq)—Yūsuf ibn Asbāṭ—Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Taymī al-Kūfī—Mughīra (b. Miqsam al-Ḍabī)−Umm Mūsā said:

“It reached ‘Alī that Ibn Sabaʾ gave him preference over [yufadīluluḥu ‘alā] Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, so (ʿAlī) became determined to kill (Ibn Sabaʾ). Someone said to him, ‘Will you kill a man who only glorifies you and favors you?’ He said, ‘Certainly he will not dwell beside me in any country where I am to be found [lā jarama lā yusākinūnī fī baldāʾ anā fīhā].’”

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Khubayq said, “It was related to me concerning (Ibn Sabaʾ) by al-Haytham ibn Jamīl that (Ibn Sabaʾ) was exiled to a land near al-Madāʾin until the Hour.”

Similar traditions appear elsewhere that exhibit further affinities with §2 of ps.-Hishām’s text—such as replacing ‘preference’ (tafdīl) with ‘insulting’ (sabb)—and one finds attestations for the circulation of versions of the tradition in both Kūfan and Baṣrān traditionist circles of the 2nd/8th century. It seems that accusations of ‘insulting’ Abū Bakr and ‘Umar comes chronologically later than accusations of merely ‘preferring’ ʿAlī, but the former certainly eventually gave way to the latter among critics of the Rāfīḍī viewpoint.46 The *isnāds* of all of these, however, reveal that the tradition ultimate has its origins in Kūfa. The key figure acting as the so-called ‘common link’ in the *isnāds* of two Kūfan accounts is al-Mughīra ibn Miqsam al-Ḍabī (d. ca. 133–6/751–4), a blind *faqīh* from Kūfa. 47 Our sources, in turn, record him as transmitting versions from either ʿAlī’s slave-girl, Umm Mūsā,48 or the Kūfan traditionist Simāk ibn Ḥarb (d. 123/741).49 Although the tradition itself is quite unlikely to have a genuine pedigree, it is fascinating to look at who seems to be its main promulgator.

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48 Ibid., xii, 481. Mughīra ibn Miqsam is the sole traditionist to cite her as an authority.
49 For example, see Ibn ʿAsākir, *Dimashq*, xxiv, 7.5–6 (ed. al-Ṭarābīshī).
Though rather unexceptional as a transmitter broadly speaking, it is notable the ḥadīth critics accused al-Mughīra ibn Miqsam of being mendacious in his isnāds (i.e., of tadlis); he also had a reputation as a ‘Uthmānī, though as one “would not utter any attacks against ‘Ali.”

One finds in Mughīra, therefore, an individual harboring views quite similar to another Kūfan by now all too familiar—i.e., Sayf ibn ‘Umar. It seems both Sayf and al-Mughīra shared an interest in Ibn Saba’ traditions favorable towards ‘Ali as a staunch defender of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar’s honor against the malicious attacks of the Rāfiḍa. The above khabar and ones like it, thus, represent merely one element from what we have previously referred to as the reservoir of the Ibn Saba’ traditions—a reservoir which, in light of the above example, seems to necessarily predate the composition of ps.-Hishām’s account.

In any case, ps.-Hishām’s account was scarcely imitated by later Shīʿī scholars, save by those two redactors who preserve his account, Nawbakhtī and Sa’d al-Qummī. In all likelihood, Hishām’s version failed to become the most widespread and popular version because his account imperfectly combined the elements of the ghulūw archetype mostly favored by the Shīʿī authors with the wasiyya and cursing archetypes, which appear to have been rooted in anti-Shīʿī and anti-Rāfiḍī polemic and, thus, prove to be more closely aligned with the views of a scholar like Sayf or jamāʿī-traditionists. One wonders if the above Kūfan tradition, or one like it, also served as one among many of the initial inspirations for Sayf’s larger, fitna-obsessed account.

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50 Mizzi, Tahdhib, xxviii, 401. A Baṣran version of the tradition seems to have been brought into circulation by Shuʾba ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 170/776), who, however, suspiciously transmits the tradition on the authority of a series of Kūfan traditionists known for their pro-ʿAwwāmi and anti-‘Uthmānī stances (See Ibn Abī Khaythama, Tāʾrikh, iii, 177, nos. 4358–9; ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Tāthbit, i, 546 f.; Ibn Ḥajar, Lisān, iii, 360 f., Ibn ‘Asākir, Dimashq, xxxiv, 5.14–17): first his Kūfan teacher Salama ibn Kuḥayl al-Ḥadrāmi (d. ca. 122/740) who then quotes two Kūfan tābiʿis, Zayd ibn Wahb al-Juḥānī (see Modarressi, Tradition, 1, 81) and Suwayd ibn Ghafala al-Juʿfī. It is suspicious that Salama ibn Kuḥayl in particular was known for his preference (tafdīl) for ‘Alī over Abū Bakr and ‘Umar (e.g., see ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Mughnī, xx, 115.6), making him an odd candidate for transmitting this tradition to Shuʾba. For further reasons to doubt the veracity of other transmissions of Shuʾba from Salama ibn Kuḥayl, see Juynboll, ECH, 471. One should also note that Ibn Saba’ does not appear in all versions of this tradition. See Abū Ishaq al-Fazārī, K. al-siyar, ed. Fārūq Ḥamāda (Beirut, 1987), 327; Abū Nuʿaym, Ḥilya, vii, 201; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, al-Kifāya fi ḫīl al-riwāya, eds. A.-H. M. ‘Abd al-Halīm and A.-R. Ḥ. Maḥmūd (Cairo, 1972), 535; Ibn ‘Asākir, Dimashq, xliv, 214 f. (ed. al-ʿAmrawi).
Ps.-Hishām’s Ibn Sabaʾ account does leave us with one further mystery. As an early Imāmī account, it is keen to depict Ibn Sabaʾ as the first individual to deny ṬAliʾs death and, consequentially, to profess the cessation of the imamate with him and to preach his messianic return. The account does not, however, reveal even a shadow of an awareness of one particularly important archetypal narrative that is key to the heresiographical portraits of Ibn Sabaʾ hereafter, especially among the Imāmīs—i.e., Ibn Sabaʾ’s execution by ṬAli after declaring the *imām* to be divine. Why would ps.-Hishām neglect this narrative in particular? It is to this question that our study now turns.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE EXECUTION OF IBN SABA’

Because of their antiquity, the accounts of Sayf ibn ‘Umar and ps.-Hishām reveal to us numerous indispensible insights into the shape of the Ibn Saba’ tradition at the end of the 2nd/8th century. Among these is the observation that the Ibn Saba’ tradition remained in considerable flux while simultaneously coalescing around a handful of archetypal narratives. In all likelihood, these early archetypal narratives first assumed the form of anecdotal akhbār, which pioneers of the Ibn Saba’ tradition re-fashioned and redacted into newer narratives that were grander in scale and scope.

Yet curiously, the evidence for the above hypothesis applies to all the archetypal narratives of the Ibn Saba’ tradition except for one conspicuous exception: the execution archetype. This leads us to a rather straightforward question: Why does the execution archetype not appear in any of the earliest narratives of the Ibn Saba’ tradition—whether in heresiography or in anecdotal akhbār? If we accept the hypothesis that ps.-Hishām’s account is an Imāmī one—and in my view it likely is—an additional, equally probing question emerges given the relative antiquity of his heresiographical treatise: Why would ps.-Hishām’s account have neglected the narrative of ‘Alī’s execution of Ibn Saba’ for proclaiming his imām’s divinity in favor an account that, for all intents and purposes, appears to be an anti-Shī‘ī, Kūfan tradition positing Ibn Saba’ as the originator of the Imāmī practice of cursing the šaḥāba? After all, why would an Imāmī author favor a narrative maligning his own cherished beliefs and portray these beliefs as the invention of a heresiarch? Why not utilize, instead, a version of the execution archetype that exposes the beliefs the ghulāt, whom he and his community reject, and champions ‘Alī as the ghulāt’s most unrelenting adversary, as did subsequent Imāmī heresiographers?

In my view, two scenarios offer the simplest and most elegant resolution of this enigma: either the execution archetype did not yet exist in the late 2nd/8th century, or it had not yet become widespread within the Ibn Saba’ tradition. The evidence, I contend, strongly supports the view that the execution archetype did not yet exist by the
time ps.-Hishām began composing his treatise during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd. To further support this view, we turn to the earliest extant attestations of the execution archetype.

The Origins of and Precursors to the Execution Account

Of all the archetypes enumerated in the previous chapter, the execution archetype seems to have been a relative late-comer to the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition. The ʿAbbāsid-era polymath Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) offers us our earliest testimony to this archetype in two laconic mentions of Ibn Sabaʾ’s execution in his works al-Maʿārif and Taʾwil mushkil al-hadīth permitting one to surmise that the narrative had entered circulation at least by the mid-3rd/9th century. Dating the story of Ibn Sabaʾ’s immolation before this time, however, is problematic.

The 4th/10th century Imāmī scholar al-Kishshī provides two noteworthy traditions that putatively offer the earliest extant attestations to an execution archetype in which Ibn Sabaʾ figures prominently. Prima facie the narratives ultimately derive from fifth and sixth imāms Muhammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, and Kishshī thus dutifully transmits the reports with fully robust isnāds. A curious feature of Kishshī’s traditions, however, is that he transmits both on the authority of none other than Saʿd al-Qummī, who, it seems, played an important role in the dissemination of the Ibn Sabaʾ traditions within Imāmī circles even beyond what one finds in his Maqālāt.

Of these two reports, however, one in particular stands out in that it may indeed have been derived from a written work of a prominent pupil of Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, Yūnus ibn ʿAbd al-Rahmān (d. 208/823–4). Yūnus himself composed an anti-ghālī polemic entitled K. al-radd ʿalā l-ghulāt—a work that, although no longer extant, may have served as one of Saʿd al-Qummī’s sources in his Maqālāt for the revisions he added to Nawbakhti’s text.1 The second, shorter tradition that Saʿd al-Qummī transmits in Kishshī’s text reproduces essentially the same information as the previous though in an abbreviated form; however, the isnād of the second attributes the report to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, on the authority of the Imāmī mutakallim Hishām ibn Sālim al-Jawāliqi,2 whose school rivaled that of Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam.

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1 Najāshī, 448.1; cf. van Ess, TG, i, 387–92.
2 On whom, see van Ess, TG, i, 242–8; Modarresi, TS, i, 269–71.
Below, I quote the first, longer tradition as transmitted on the authority of Yūnus ibn 'Abd al-Rahmān:3

Muhammad ibn Qūlawayh al-Qummī—Sa’d ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Khalaf al-Qummī—Muhammad ibn ‘Uthmān al-ʿAbdī—Yūnus ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān—‘Abd Allāh ibn Sinān—his father (Sinān ibn ʿArif)—Abū Ja’far (Muḥammad al-Bāqir) said:

‘Abd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ made a claim to prophecy while asserting that the Commander of the Faithful (ʿAlī) is God. Word of this reached the Commander of the Faithful, so he called for him and questioned him. (Ibn Sabaʾ) reaffirmed this and said, ‘Yes, you are he! It was cast into my heart that you indeed are God, and I am a prophet.’ The Commander of the Faithful said to him, ‘Woe to you, for Satan mocks you! Turn away from this, lest your mother be bereaved of you, and repent!’ (Ibn Sabaʾ) refused. (ʿAlī) imprisoned him and urged him to repent for three days, but he did not repent. Then ʿAlī burned him alive with fire [fa-ḥraqahu ʿalī bi-l-nār] and said, ‘Satan led him astray with false imaginings [istahwāhu]. He would come to him and cast such things into his heart.’

It is noteworthy that Yūnus’ isnād goes back to Muḥammad al-Bāqir through his teacher ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sinān, who in turn quotes his father, Sinān ibn ʿArif. Yūnus’ teacher Ibn Sinān rose to notable prominence both among Imāmī scholars and among the ‘Abbāsid administrative élite, serving as treasurer (khāzin) during the reigns of al-Manṣūr, al-Mahdī, al-Hādī, and lastly Hārūn al-Rashīd, in whose reign he died sometime after 175/791. Albeit a prolific Imāmī ḥadīth transmitter in his time, Ibn Sinān does not appear to have authored any works on theological matters, predominately focusing his attention instead on fiqh-related topics.6 This increases the likelihood that the earliest period in which the above tradition could have appeared in writing must be assigned to a time after Yūnus composed his K. al-radd ʿalā al-ghulāt in the late 2nd/early 9th century.

The contrast between the portraits of Ibn Sabaʾ found in the 2nd/8th-century account of ps.-Hishām and the 3rd/9th-century reports

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3 Kishshī, 106 f; also in Ibn Shahrashūb, Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib, 5 vols., ed. Y. al-Biqāʾī (Qom, 2000), i, 325.

4 Father of the famous author of Kāmil al-ziyārat and teacher of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, Abū ʿl-Qāsim Ja’far ibn Qūlawayh (d. 368/978 or 369/979); see M. McDermott, “Ebn Qulawayh,” Elr, viii, 47b.

5 The nisba here should likely be amended to read Muhammad ibn ‘Uthmān al-ʿAmrī (d. ca. 304–5/916–17), the second wākil of the twelfth imām.

6 Modarresi, TS, i, 157 f.
transmitted by Saʿd al-Qummī immediately present themselves. No longer the instigator of a belligerent anti-ṣaḥābi discourse, Ibn Saba’ transforms into a figure hell-bent on professing ʿAlī’s divinity and, therefore, more iconically suited for his role as the originator of the Shiʿi ghulāt. The role of ʿAlī, moreover, shifts as well. No longer staunchly opposed to Ibn Saba’s inflammatory cursing of the ṣaḥāba—a picture incongruent with Imāmī conceptions of the imām’s persona—ʿAlī now opposes Ibn Saba’ for his claim to prophetic inspiration and his reverence of the imām as God incarnate. The positions of Ibn Saba’ in this account, thus, offer grounds for reviling the heresiarch that are more germane to Imāmī ears. Finally, ʿAlī delivers a stern message against the ghulāt in the report: the ghulāt and their doctrines are but a cruel, mocking deceit wrought by Satan.

From what one can glean in the extant accounts of the Ibn Saba’ tradition, the execution archetype proved to be somewhat unpopular on its own. It appears, for example, in the laconic notices of two of Saʿd al-Qummī’s contemporaries, the aforementioned Ibn Qutayba (d. 272/889) and the geographer Ibn Rusta (d. ca. 290–300/903–13), who both briefly note that Ibn Saba” “said ʿAlī is the Lord of the Worlds, so ʿAli burned him and his companions alive with fire.”7 However, the portrayal of Ibn Saba’ only as the figure who first professed ʿAlī’s divinity and subsequently suffered death at the imām’s hands rarely appears detached from other narratives as a self-contained unit. More commonly, however, the execution archetype emerges as a narrative unit grafted onto and integrated with other, pre-existing Ibn Saba’ narratives. Although originally an independent account, the execution archetype often appears alongside the parousia archetype. Another interesting feature emerges as well: almost invariably, the execution archetype supplants the position held by the cursing archetype as found in ps.-Hishām’s account.8 The process by which the parousia and execution archetypes came to be integrated into a united, harmonized narrative is instructive and deserves to be spelled out, for it also aids us considerably in our attempts to provide a firmer date for the origins of the execution archetype. It may be characterized as follows.

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7 Ibn Qutayba, al-Maʿārif, 622.ult. Cf. idem, Taʾwil, 87; Ibn Rusta, Aʾlāq, 218.8; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, al-ʿIQd, 11, 405.5; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Iʿtiqādāt, 57.
8 See §2 of the translation of this account in Ch. 4 above.
The earliest and most artful exemplar of the harmonized accounts appears in an unnamed work of the Shi‘i scholar and historian Abū l-ʾAbbās ʿĀḥmad ibn ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAmmār al-Thaqafī (d. 314/926),9 whose work, although no longer extant, the Muʿtazili Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd (d. 656/1258) extensively quotes in his Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha.10 In constructing his account, Abū l-ʾAbbās himself redacts an account ultimately derived from the work of an earlier Shi‘i akhbārī of some prominence known as ʿAlī ibn Muhammad ibn Sulaymān al-Nawfalī (fl. first half of the 3rd/9th cent.). Of this earlier figure, ʿAlī al-Nawfalī, we know exceedingly little in terms of biographical details; what little we do know is from the extensive role he played as a source for numerous akhbār collected by later historians such as Ṭabarī, Masʿūdī and Abū l-Faraj al-Īṣafānī. This is a fact that, at the very least, attests to his wide-ranging activity as an early transmitter/redactor of historical reports. Abū l-ʾAbbās al-Thaqafī consistently appears among the most prominent pupils transmitting akhbār from him.11

The significance of Abū l-ʾAbbās’ transmission of al-Nawfalī’s account for delineating a chronology of the major components of the Ibn Saba’ tradition derives not only from its length and the numerous topoi from the tradition contained therein, but also from the fact that Abū l-ʾAbbās constructs his account in a conservative, ‘akhbārī’ fashion—i.e., the seams of the traditions which he quotes remain relatively transparent due to the isnāds he incorporates. Furthermore, Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd has fortunately preserved two versions of Abū l-ʾAbbās’s account which bifurcate towards the end: a truncated version of al-Nawfalī’s account with a new ending authored by Abū l-ʾAbbās and

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9 As an historian, he predominately has been viewed as one of the later compilers of Maqātil works, although his writing activity seems to have gone beyond this narrow genre to include histories of the Battles of the Camel, Siffin, and others. See al-Khaṭib al-Baghdādi, Tāʾrikh Madinat al-Salām wa-akhbār muḥaddithīhā wa-dhikr quttānīhā al-ʾulamāʾ min ghayr aḥlihā wa-wāridīhā al-ʿulamāʾ min ghayr aḥlihā wa-wāridīhā, 16 vols., ed. B. ʿA. Maʿrūf (Beirut, 2001), v, 417 f. and Yāqūt, Muʿjam al-udabāʾ, 6 vols., ed. I. ʿAbbās (Beirut, 1993) i, 364–7.

10 Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, although possessing pro-ʿAlid leanings, did not seem to have ever embraced confessional Shi‘ism; however, he compiled his Sharḥ of ʿAlī’s khutbah for the Shi‘i wazīr Ibn al-ʿAlqāmi, which must account, at least in part, for his broad erudition in and usage of numerous Shi‘ī materials. See W. Madelung, “ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ibn Abū l-Ḥadīd,” EIr, 1, 108–10.

another continuing the older, fuller account with al-Nawfalī’s original ending left intact. Hence, the two accounts provide considerable insight into the composition history of the Ibn Saba’ traditions in the 3rd/9th century.

In my translation of the account below, I provide both versions while labeling those sections authored by ‘Alī al-Nawfalī as ‘N’ and those sections authored by Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Thaqafī as ‘AA’. The first half of the account reads as follows:12

§N1 Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn ῆUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAmmār al-Thaqafī narrated from ‘Alī ibn Muhammad ibn Sulaymān al-Nawfalī, from his father and his other teachers that:

‘Alī said, ‘Two sorts of men shall perish on my account: an admirer who loves me and places me in a station not befitting me and lauds me for that which I do not possess, and a slanderer who hates me accusing me of what I am innocent.’14

§AA1 Abū l-ʿAbbās said: “This is the meaning of the hadīth narrated from the Prophet concerning (ʿAlī), which is: ‘There is a semblance between you and Jesus, the son of Mary. The Christians loved him, so they raised him above his capacity. The Jews hated him so much that they defamed his mother.’”15

§AA2 Abū l-ʿAbbās said: “ʿAlī encountered a group of people that left (the confines of) his affections16 due to Satan’s possession of them so that they even disbelieved in their Lord, denied what their Prophet had brought forth, and took ʿAlī as a lord and (claimed him to be) a god.17 They said, ‘You are our creator and provider [khāliqu n wa-rāziqu n]!’ Then he urged them to repent, (waited)18 and threatened them harshly. They persisted in their belief, so he dug for them pits. He suffocated them with smoke in the pits [dakhkhana ʿalayhim fīhā] all the while

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12 Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ, v, 5.1–6.3 and ibid., viii, 94.–8–95.11.
13 Reading “ن” instead of “ص”; see Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ, viii, 94.–1 and van Ess, Das Kitāb al-Naikt, 55 n. 23.
15 Cf. the same (also combined with elements from the previous tradition) in Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, ii, 354 f. (no. 1376); Abū Yaʿlā, Musnad, i, 406 f. (no. 534); Majlisī, Bihār, xxxix, 74.
16 In ibid, v, 5.6: “kharajū min maḥabbatiḥ”; in ibid., viii, 94.–8: “kharajū min hadd maḥabbatiḥ.”
17 In ibid., v, 5.7: “ittakhadhūhu rabb wa-ilāh”; in ibid., viii, 94.–7: “ittakhadhūhu rabb wa-idda awhu ilāh.”
18 Ibid., viii, 94.–6 adds: “istaʾnā.”
wishing for their return (to Islam). They refused, so he burned them alive with fire, saying:

Do you not see that I’ve dug these pits!
When I reckoned the affair something reprehensible
I kindled a fire and summoned Qanbar’19

...20

§N2 Abū l-ʿAbbās narrated from Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān ibn Ḥabīb al-Miṣṣiṣī, from Ṭāliʿ ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfali, from his father and his other teachers that:

ʿAlī passed by them while they were eating during the month of Ramaḍān during the daylight hours. So he said, ‘Are you traveling or ill?’ ‘Neither of the two!’ they said. He said, ‘So you’re from the People of the Book (and protected by the dhimma and the jizya)?’21 They said, ‘No.’ ‘So what business do you have eating during the daylight hours of Ramaḍān!?’ They said, ‘You are you [anta anta]!’ They added nothing more to this, but he understood their meaning.22 He dismounted his horse and pressed his cheeks against the dusty earth,23 then he said, ‘Fie on you! I am only a slave among God’s servants! Fear God and return to Islam!’ They refused. He summoned them numerous times (to repent), but they persisted in their error. He rose up from them and said, ‘Fasten them with chains—I’ll take care of the fire and the firewood.’ Then he ordered for two wells to be dug, and both were dug. One of them was made under

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19 In Arabic: a-lā tarawna qad ḥafartu ḥafarā/ lammā raʿaytu l-ʿamra amrūn munkarā/ adramtu nār ʿawtu qanbarā. This epigram remains popular throughout the Ibn Saba’ traditions. Qanbar is the name of one of ʿAlī’s slaves; see Friedländer, “Het-

20 Ibn Abī l-Ḥadid inserts his own text here, commenting, “Our colleagues narrate in the books on religious beliefs that when he burned them alive, they cried to him, ‘Now it has become clearly manifest to us that you indeed are God, because your cousin (i.e., Ibn ʿAbbās) who wrote to you said, “None chastise with fire except the Lord of fire”’ (Sharḥ, v, 5.12–13). On this passage and others like it, see the following section below.

21 Ibid., viii, 95.2 adds: “fa-taʿṣimukum al-dhimma wa-l-jizya.”

22 Following, ibid., v, 5.–6: “lam yazidūhu ʿalā dhālika fa-fahima murādahum.” One finds a significant departure in Ibn Abī l-Ḥadid’s second version from Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Thaqāfī (ibid, viii, 95.3), which reads instead: “so indicating his divinity [fa-yūmūna lā labbābiyyatihī].”

23 Lit., “he joined his cheek to the dust [alsaq khaddahu bi-l-turāb]”; see WKAS, ii, 659b.
the ground and the other open (to the air above). He tossed the firewood into the open well and made an opening between the two. He cast the fire on the firewood, and it suffocated them with smoke. He began to cry out to them and to implore them, ‘Return to Islam!’ They refused, so he ordered more fire and kindling and threw it on them. They were burned alive. The poet\textsuperscript{24} said:

\begin{quote}
Let Fate toss me where she wills
if you do not toss me in the two pits

If they had not been burned with kindling and fire
then such a death would be a criticism, not judgment
\end{quote}

(al-Nawfali) said: “He remained standing over them until they became ashes.”

Both versions preserved by Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd remain exactly the same in content, and nearly so in wording as well, up until this point. Afterwards, they bifurcate. In the first version, Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd’s text immediately proceeds with the account of Abū l-ʿAbbās as though al-Nawfali’s account ends here:\textsuperscript{25}

\section*{§AA3} Abū l-ʿAbbās said: “Then a group of ‘Ali’s companions, among them ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās, interceded on behalf of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Saba’ specifically.\textsuperscript{26} They said, ‘Oh Commander of the Faithful, he has repented, so spare him!’ ‘Ali released him after he stipulated that he not settle in Kūfa. Ibn Saba’ said, ‘Where shall I go?’ ‘Al-Madā’in,’ he said, and he exiled him to al-Madā’in. When the Commander of the Faithful was murdered, (Ibn Saba’) publicly declared his doctrine. A group gathered to him, and a sect believed him and followed him. When news of ‘Ali’s murder reached him, he said, ‘By God if you would have brought us his brains in seventy bags, we would still know that he did not die and shall not die until he leads the Arabs with his staff.’ When this reached Ibn ʿAbbās, he said, ‘If we would have known that he was coming back, then we wouldn’t have married off his wives and divided his estate!’ ”

Thus, Abū l-ʿAbbās leads us to believe that Ibn Saba’ and his ilk numbered among the misguided violators of Ramadān who even trespassed the bounds of religion so far as to proclaim ‘Ali’s divinity.

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\textsuperscript{24} These verses are often attributed the Qabiṣa ibn Jābir, a ṭabiʿī and milk-brother of Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyan, who reportedly died during the governorship of Muṣʿab ibn al-Zubayr over ʿIrāq (65–71/684–691); see Ibn ʿAsākir, \textit{Dimashq}, XLIX, 248 (ed. al-ʿAmrawi).

\textsuperscript{25} Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, \textit{Sharḥ}, v, 6.4–8.

\textsuperscript{26} Abū l-ʿAbbās’ account here seems to backtrack here to before ‘Ali undertakes the execution of the group professing his divinity.
Yet, the seam at which Abū ʿAbbās adds his own account does not leave al-Nawfalī’s version intact. In the second version cited by Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Abū ʿAbbās transmits the original account in full providing al-Nawfalī’s account as it continues uninterruptedly to narrate the events transpiring after ‘ʿAlī’s immolation of those proclaiming his divinity:27

§N3 Afterwards this belief disappeared for a year, or for about a year. Then ‘ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ appeared. He was secretly a Jew while in Islam after the death of the Commander of the Faithful, then he proclaimed (this belief). A group followed him called the Sabaʾiya. They said that ‘ʿAlī had not died and that he was in the heavens and that the thunder and lightning were his voice. If they hear the sound of thunder, they say ‘Peace be upon you, Commander of the Faithful!’ They said about the Messenger of God the vilest things and slandered him in the worst way. They said, ‘He concealed nine-tenths of the revelation.’ Al-Ḥasan ibn Muhammad ibn al-Hanafīya rebuked them for their belief in his letter in which he mentions al-irjāʾ…

Al-Nawfalī continues to briefly describe what scholars now know as the Kitāb al-irjāʾ and as well as its discussion of the Sabaʾiya; its contents will be discussed in detail in chapter 7. For now, we’ll have to be content with teasing out the differences between the accounts of Abū ʿAbbās and al-Nawfalī.

None of the reports of al-Nawfalī mention Ibn Sabaʾ as being among those burned alive by ‘ʿAlī, but he does mention an unidentified group who worship ‘ʿAlī and whom ‘ʿAlī subsequently executes on those grounds. Hence, according to al-Nawfalī, Ibn Sabaʾ, while associated with this specie of ghulūw, nevertheless appears and revives this doctrine only after the death of ‘ʿAlī. Al-Nawfalī, therefore, denies implicitly that Ibn Sabaʾ had ever been among the companions of ‘ʿAlī and asserts that Ibn Sabaʾ only began to spread his beliefs in the years following ‘ʿAlī’s death, separating him from the milieu of those burned alive by ‘ʿAlī.

Abū ʿAbbās, however, takes al-Nawfalī’s account, truncates it, and appendages to it his own version of the ‘ʿAlī’s exile of Ibn Sabaʾ to al-Madāʾin, a decision he attributes to the intervention of Ibn ʿAbbās. Abū ʿAbbās uses the exile topos common to the ps.-Ḥishām account and the ‘minor’ denunciation archetypes encountered above as a

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27 See Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ, viii, 95.12–16.
means to insert Ibn Sabaʾ into al-Nawfalī’s account, while sparing the heresiarch the punishment suffered by the rest of the group. This was an ingenious step that effectively dissolved the chronological impediments preventing the simultaneous affirmation of the claims of both, main archetypal narratives: i.e., Ibn Sabaʾ’s connection with ʿAlī’s fiery execution of the ghulāt and his proclamation of ʿAlī’s parousia. Abū l-ʿAbbās thus realized that only a living Ibn Sabaʾ, spared of ʿAlī’s wrath, could disbelieve ʿAlī’s death and declare his imminent, messianic return. However, Abū l-ʿAbbās wanted to still maintain that ʿAlī had sentenced Ibn Sabaʾ to the ignominious death he deserved. By judiciously including only sections of Nawfalī’s reports in his later account, Abū l-ʿAbbās clearly intends to aggrandize the role of Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya in these earlier narratives and to cast on him the responsibility for the origins of both sorts of ghulūw.

The changes transpiring between ʿAlī al-Nawfalī’s account and that of Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Thaqafī, therefore, reveal an important generational shift in the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition within Imāmī circles. The generation gap between the teacher’s account (Nawfalī) and his pupil reflects, of course, the defining generational shift among Imāmī scholars—i.e., the shift punctuated by the ghayba of the 12th imām. Abū l-ʿAbbās, it will be recalled, writes as a contemporary of both Nawbakhtī and Saʿd al-Qummī; however, Abū l-ʿAbbās’ writing on Ibn Sabaʾ more closely parallels that of Saʿd al-Qummī (i.e., outside his redaction of Nawbakthī’s text). Both Abū l-ʿAbbās and Saʿd al-Qummī represent the efforts of Imāmī scholars to both preserve earlier accounts of their teachers in which Ibn Sabaʾ does not feature as well as efforts to integrate and adopt traditions which include Ibn Sabaʾ in a narrative of ʿAlī’s execution of ghulāt. It is Abū l-ʿAbbās who proves much more successful in the enterprise, however, because he most deftly creates a seamless bridge between past and future tradition by creating a fusion between the execution archetype and the parousia archetype. Abū l-ʿAbbās consequentially transforms the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition and, furthermore, creates a shift that reverberates among scholars even beyond the Imāmī tradition.

The utility offered by the combination of both ghulūw archetypes is that it accommodates both of the etiological myths proffered by the two. It should be no surprise that the abbreviated versions of this harmonization subsequently become the stock and trade of most entries on Ibn Sabaʾ in the classic heresiographical works: al-Maqālāt of Ashʿarī, al-Milal wa-l-nihāl of Shahrastānī, al-Farq bayna l-firaq of
'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Fiṣal* of Ibn Ḥazm, etc. All of these are successful and purposeful in their utilization of the harmonization and employ additional materials in varying degrees, but the precedent of Abū l-ʿAbbās serves most often as their model (even if uncredited or indirectly). They all exhibit the composite pattern although they each ostensibly offer a united narrative.

As one can glean from al-Nawfalī’s version above, the execution archetype originally appears not to have mentioned Ibn Sabaʾ at all. One may thus speak of an execution archetype *before* Ibn Sabaʾ—the introduction of Ibn Sabaʾ being merely a secondary development in the transmission of the tradition. Al-Nawfalī himself did not number Ibn Sabaʾ among those executed for professing ‘Alī’s divinity but instead placed Ibn Sabaʾ and his movement *after* ‘Alī’s lifetime, positing a modicum of historical distance between the imām and the heresiarch. Few, if any, scholars imitated al-Nawfalī’s chronological scheme. His main contribution, rather, laid in fashioning a tradition in which ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib executes a deviant group of his followers for proclaiming his divinity. Al-Nawafalī, plays a key role in the gradual attempt of Imāmi authors to refashion the very nature of the ghulūw as professed by Ibn Sabaʾ, but only indirectly through providing narrative framework into which subsequent scholars can insert Ibn Sabaʾ.

Until relatively late in the 2nd/8th century, therefore, the story of Ibn Sabaʾ as a heretic executed by ‘Alī did not predominate the traditions circulating about the heresiarch. Where one did find traditions about an antagonistic encounter between ‘Alī and Ibn Sabaʾ, it seems to have been in one of the ‘minor archetypes’ popular among the ‘Irāqī traditionists wherein ‘Alī exiles Ibn Sabaʾ as guilty one of three sorts of ghulūw: cursing the Sahāba, claiming that parts of the Qurʾān had been concealed, or lying against God and his Prophet—ie., the typical accusations the ḥadīth-folk leveled against Shīʿa in general and Rāfīḍa in particular.

Yet, as al-Nawfali’s account testifies, a story certainly did exist at quite an early date in which ‘Alī executes an anonymous group of ghulāt for declaring him to be divine. This tradition, however, circulated independently of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition as a whole and only gradually came to be integrated into the Sabaʾiya lore. One finds further support of this in an incidental reference to Ibn Sabaʾ in a famous saying attributed to the Kūfān *faqīh* Āmir ibn Sharāḥil al-Shaʿbī (d. ca. 103–10/721–8), in which he imprecates the Rāfīḍa—i.e., the Shīʿa—as ‘the Jews of this umma.’ This report has been preserved in numerous
versions, all of which vary from one another considerably. As far as one can determine from the fuller versions of the report with complete isnāds, the originator of this tradition appears to have been a certain ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Mālik ibn Mighwal, a contemporary of both Sayf and Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam. ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Mālik transmits the report in the form of a conversation between al-Shaʿbī and his own father, Mālik ibn Mighwal al-Bajalī (d. ca. 157–9/774–6). Although his father garnered a revered reputation as a hadīth authority, the traditionists characterized his son as an unrepentant forger and liar—known, moreover, for forging traditions he attributed to al-Shaʿbī. ʿAbd al-Rahmān, therefore, in all likelihood authored the account himself. In one version of his account, Mālik ibn Mighwal questions al-Shaʿbī about his opinion of the Shīʿa/Rāfidīa, whereupon the latter declares:

ʿAlī ibn Abī Tālib burned them (i.e., the Rāfidīa) alive with fire, and he exiled them to (different) lands. Some of those (whom he exiled were): 'Abd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ, a Jew from Sanʿāʾ, he exiled him to Sābāṭ (al-Madāʾin); ʿAbd Allāh ibn Yasār (sic.), he exiled him to Khāzir. ʿAbd al-Rahmān's death date is uncertain, but his activity seems best situated in the late part of the 2nd/8th century. Yahyā ibn Maʿīn (158–233/775–847) claimed to have met him (al-Khatīb al-Baghdādi, Madīnat al-Salām, xi, 507), and Dhahabī in his Taʾrīkh (xii, 262) places him in the 19th ūjbaq (181–190 a.h.). In the version of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, the text should be amended to read Mālik ibn Mighwal in place of Mālik ibn Muʿāwiya (ʿIqd, ii, 409.5). Known for anti-Shīʾī antipathies, Mālik's companions describe him as mild-mannered except when someone mentioned the Rāfidīa, whereupon Mālik would spit on the ground (see Dhahabī, Taʾrīkh, ix, 583; cited in van Ess, TG, 1, 308).


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31 See Juynboll, ECH, 404 f.

32 See Ibn ʿAdi al-Jurjānī, Kāmil, iv, 1598; al-Khaṭṭīb al-Baghdādi, Madīnat al-Salām, xi, 505–8; Dhahabī, Mizān, ii, 584–5; Ibn Ḥajar, Lisān, iii, 519–21.

33 Ibn Taymiya, Minhāj, i, 23 (quoting the K. al-latīf fi l-sunna of Ibn Shāhīn, d. 385/996). One should perhaps read ʿAmmār ibn Yaṣār in place of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Yaṣār; however, the assertion that ʿAli exiled ʿAmmār ibn Yaṣār would be anachronistic, for he died fighting alongside ʿAli at Siffin. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s text reads, instead, the equally problematic ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabbāb (ʿIqd, ii, 409.13).
There are two groups of persons: those whom ʿAlī burned at the stake, and those whom he exiled. Both are broadly conceived of as Rāfidā, but the anecdotal mention of Ibn Sabaʾ places him among those exiled, not among those executed. That this distinction remained a salient feature of this tradition is further confirmed by another version of this tradition appearing an extant fragment from a the now lost work of the Sunnī heresiographer Abū ʿĀsim Khushaysh ibn Aṣram al-Nasāʾī (d. 253/867) known as K. al-istiqāma fi l-radd ʿalā ahl al-bidaʾ, which, written after ʿAlī al-Nawfalī’s death, exhibits a marked dependence on his account of the execution of the anonymous ghulāt, reading:\(^{34}\)

(The Rāfidā) wish ruin the religion of Islam like Paul the son of Joshua, the king of the Jews, ruined the Christian religion.\(^{35}\) Their prayers do not go past their ears. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib burned them alive with fire and exiled them from the cities [min al-bilād]. Among those (he exiled were): ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ, one of the Jews of Ṣanʿāʾ, he exiled him to Sābāt; and Abū Bakr al-Karawwas,\(^{36}\) he exiled him to Jābiya. He burned alive among them a group who came to him and said, “You are he!” He said, “Who am I?!” They said, “You are our Lord!” He then ordered for some fire to be kindled, and they were thrown in it.

Khushaysh’s account then concludes with ʿAlīʾs epigram on the execution of these ghulāt as found in al-Nawfalīʾs account, copying the words of his account nearly verbatim.

Yet, a considerable body of evidence exists suggesting that even these early narratives of the executed ghulāt evolved from still earlier traditions. Indeed, ʿAlī al-Nawfalī constructed his narrative of the executed ghulāt in all likelihood by employing and expanding upon stories of ʿAlīʾs punishment that pre-dated his writing activity by at least a century. But what did these original traditions look like?

Looking to the hadīth-literature, one finds a bevy of different versions of a report in which ʿAlī executes ‘zanādiqaʾ with fire, the isnāds of which indicate that the tradition had already been circulating in Baṣra as early as the late Umayyad period. Kūfan versions of this

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\(^{34}\) Ibn Taymiya, Minhāj, i, 29 f.; see also the shorter quotation in Malaṭi, Tanbīh, 118.

\(^{35}\) This passage seems to reveal a knowledge of Sayfʿs parallel between the origins of Shiʿism and Paul’s corruption of Christianity.

\(^{36}\) Otherwise unknown. In Malaṭiʾs text, the name reads instead “Abū l-Kardūs” (Tanbīh, 18.10).
tradition, which seem to be a bit later, appear as well, although usually in Shi‘i works, albeit not exclusively. One finds an early example of the latter, Kufan version in the Musnad attributed to Zayd ibn ‘Ali (likely collected by Ibrāhīm ibn Zibriqān, d. 183/799). This account states in simple, laconic prose that ‘Ali “burned alive zanādiqa from the Sawād with fire” and constitutes our earliest extant Shi‘i version of the tradition. The lion’s share of the parallels to this laconic report, however, appear among the ḥadīth-folk and in their collections and come almost invariably attached to a Başra anṣād, for which Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī (d. ca. 125/743) serves as the common link (narrating from ‘Ikrima, the mawlā of Ibn ‘Abbās). Almost inevitably, this Başra version of the report appears attached to a dictum of the Prophet relayed by Ibn ‘Abbās condemning the practice, in which he declares: “It is not befitting for one to chastise with the chastisement of God (viz., nār, or hellfire).” The section of the tradition in which Ibn ‘Abbās proscribes punitive immolation also circulated independently in numerous permutations. Ibn ‘Abbās’ dissenting objection to this method of execution, not to mention his renowned sympathies and familial ties with ‘Ali, probably provided the principal motive for linking Ibn ‘Abbās with the amnesty granted to Ibn Saba’. For in the harmonized tradition (e.g., see Abū l-‘Abbās’ account at §AA3 above), it is invariably Ibn ‘Abbās who intercedes on Ibn Saba’s behalf and enables the


39 “Lā yanbaghī li-ahādīn an yu‘adhdhiba bi-ta’dhib allāh.” See Conc., i, 448b, s.v. ḥarraqa for most versions. For others, see ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, al-Muṣannaf, ed. H. A.-R. al-Aẓami (Beirut, 1970–72), x, 213 (no. 9413); Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī, al-Umm, 10 vols., ed. ‘A. Muḥammad and ‘A. Ṭāhir (Beirut, 2001), x, 560; Balādhurī, Ansāb, ii, 167.16–18; Ibn Ḥazm, al-Muhallā, 11 vols., ed. A. M. Shākir (Beirut, 1969), xi, 189 f. Not all Başra versions go back to ‘Ikrima; some are attributed to Anas ibn Mālik via Qatāda ibn Dāma. This version, however, is textually corrupt; see Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, iv, 349 (no. 2968) and Nasā‘ī, Sunan, ii, 670 (no. 4082). Cf. the analyses of Suliman Bashear, Arabs and Others in Early Islam (SLAEI 8; Princeton, 1997), 78 and Juynboll, ECH, 146a.

40 Conc., iv, 164b.44–7, s.v. adḥāb. Ibn Sa’d records an account taking place during, the caliphate of Abū Bakr recounting how Khālid ibn Walid executed a number of participants in the ridda of the Banū Sulaym by gathering them in pens (ḥazā’ir) and burning them alive. In a typical fashion, ‘Umar reproaches him for this before Abū Bakr in words that seem to prefigure Ibn ‘Abbās’ objections to ‘Ali’s similar actions. See the references in Juynboll, ECH, 280.
heresiarch’s escape from death through exile.\footnote{Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, \textit{Sharḥ}, v, 6 f.} Viewing the traditions more broadly, however, it must be emphasized that, in contrast to what one finds in Nawfalī’s version (see §N2 above), both the earliest Sunnī and Shi`ī versions often noticeably lack any information regarding the actual beliefs of the \textit{zanādiqa} in question. Although on occasion it is stated that they were apostates (Ar. \textit{murtaddūn}), these earliest versions never delineate a criterion for determining exactly who qualifies as a \textit{zindīq} or \textit{murtadd}. Indeed, the antiquity of these reports’ provenance, even if not verifiable with exact precision, must be taken seriously by virtue of the accounts’ sobriety and simplicity.

What is apparent is that by the 3rd/9th century these pithy accounts, among the Shi`ī at least, quickly gave way to fuller, more embellished narratives in which are recorded details such as the beliefs of the executed, the method of their execution, and even various vignettes and exchanges that had taken place between them and ‘Alī prior to their execution. Whereas the reason for the execution of the \textit{zanādiqa} remains in large part inscrutable in the earliest traditions (aside from the fact of their being \textit{zindīqīs}),\footnote{Interpreting the term \textit{zindīq} and whether to take it in its literal or figurative sense poses a perennial problem for scholars of early Islamic history (see F. C. de Blois, “Zindīk,” \textit{EI}², xi, 510 ff.), but likely the intent, as often implied in the Sunnī traditions is that the \textit{zanādiqa} are merely apostates, or \textit{murtaddūn}. Likewise, al-Qādī al-Nu`mān records a parallel tradition in which the apostates are from Basra, which may reflect a Kūfīan tendency (\textit{Da`ā’im al-islām}, 2 vols., ed. Ā. A. Faydī [Cairo, 1951], ii, 479, no. 1724; cf. van Ess, \textit{Das Kitāb al-Nakt}, 56 f.). ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Nu`mān records a similar tradition in which ‘Alī orders the execution and subsequent immolation of the body of an anonymous man from the Banū `Ijl who had converted to Christianity (\textit{al-Muṣannaf}, v, 170; Ibn Ḥazm, \textit{al-Muhallā}, xi, 190.1–7). ‘Abd al-Razzāq (\textit{op. cit.}) also cites further, parallel traditions in which, by contrast, the man burned alive is specifically named as al-Mustawrid al-`Ijlī. Al-Qādī al-Nu`mān records this tradition, too, but in the latter’s version, ‘Alī orders that Mustawrid be trampled to death, not burned (\textit{Da`ā’im}, ii, 478, 480). As van Ess notes (\textit{op. cit.}, 55), it is perhaps significant that two founders of \textit{ghulāt} sects, Abū Mansūr and al-Mughīra Ibn Sa`īd, were said to have come from the Banū `Ijl (although the latter was likely actually from Bajīla rather than `Ijl; see W. Madelung, “al-Mughirīyya,” \textit{EI}², vii, 347b). Michael the Syrian also records a nearly identical story dated to 152/769 wherein a reluctant Christian convert to Islam named Cyrus reneges on his conversion and returns to Christianity. Once news of his apostasy reaches the authorities, he is executed and his corpse burned. See \textit{Chronique}, ii, 527 (Fr.) and iv, 477 (Syr.). Execution of ‘apostates’ and Bātīnīs by fire remains a common practice even throughout the Seljūq period; see Christian Lange, \textit{Justice, Punishment, and the Medieval Imagination} (Cambridge, 2008), 68 f.} later Shi`ī works starting as early as al-Nawfalī’s time provide additional expository details making
the issues at stake considerably less opaque—they are not so much zanādiqa in his account as unrepentant ghulāt.

When did the khabar of ‘Alī’s execution of the zanādiqa/murtaddūn by fire entered into the arena of anti-ghulāt polemics—i.e., when and why did the apostasy story become a story about ghulūw? In his study of the Kitāb al-nakth of the Muʿtazili scholar al-Nazzām (d. ca. 220–30/835–45), Josef van Ess suggested an interesting scenario, which he theorized led to the mutation of this tradition into its anti-ghulāt versions. Following Friedländer’s earlier interpretation, van Ess surmised that the anti-ghulūw tendency entered the tradition in the wake of the activities of the Shiʿi extremists during the reign of the Umayyad caliph Hishām (r. 105–125/724–743), particularly in response to the increased activities of the Bayāniya and the Mughīriya. In this interpretation, the emergence of the earliest stratum of the execution archetype would approximately correspond to the execution of the two sects’ respective heresiarchs, Bayān ibn Simʿan al-Nahdī and al-Mughīra ibn Saʿīd al-Bajalī, and thus arose from the need to provide normative justification for the state’s practice of burning heretics. And, indeed, one does encounter a significant number of accounts claiming that Khālid al-Qasrī burned both al-Mughīra and Bayān alive. Ţabarī, whose account is the most detailed, claims that in 119/737 Khālid forced both Bayān and al-Mughīra to gather reeds and tar (qasab wa-nift) as fuel for their own execution pyres. Khālid al-Qasrī was notorious for his public execution of wayward sectarians, and the public execution of Bayān and al-Mughīra seems to offer a parallel scenario to ‘Alī’s execution of his own misguided admirers.

Yet, Friedländer’s and van Ess’ association of the genesis of the anti-ghulāt tendency of the later tradition with Bayān and al-Mughīra proves too arbitrary when viewed in a wider perspective. For one, the

43 van Ess, Das Kitāb an-Nakht, 54 ff.
44 Friedländer, “ʿAbdallāh ibn Sabā (I),” 321.
The execution of Ibn Sabaʾ

Historicity of the above narrative of Khālid’s execution of Bayān and al-Mughīra suffers from a number of uncertainties and, under further scrutiny, proves to be contradicted by numerous other accounts. Furthermore, al-Mughīra and Bayān were neither the first nor the only Shiʿite insurrectionists whose bodies our sources tells us the state authorities burned. After the Zubayrids successfully quelled the Kūfān revolt al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafī in 67/686, Muṣāb ibn al-Zubayr, according to some accounts, burned the corpse of the rebellion’s leader. Later, the corpse of al-Mukhtār’s general, Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar, suffered the same fiery desecration at the bidding of the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik. The Umayyads also burned Zayd ibn ʿAlī’s crucified corpse after it hung for years upon the cross (famously leading to the ʿAbbāsids vengeful exhumation and roasting of Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik’s corpse after their assumption of the caliphate). Furthermore, while the punishment remains the same in nearly all traditions, the religious infraction of the executed malefactors does not. Indeed, the anti-ghulūw topos appears overwhelmingly in the Imāmī versions of the tradition, the transmitters of which certainly would harbor no interest in justifying Umayyad practices.

One finds more compelling evidence, I believe, for attributing the transformation of the tradition into anti-ghulāt polemic when one looks to the changing Shiʿī views regarding the nature of ghulūw itself throughout the early ʿAbbāsid period. The manifestation of ghulūw as the principal infraction in narratives such as al-Nawfalī’s and its parallels points to the moment in which doctrines once denounced as ghulūw (such as the rajʿa of an imām and/or his ghayba) are normalized and gradually replaced by newer doctrinal developments that subsequently serve as principle criteria for ghulūw among the Shiʿa. These include, but are not limited to, a spectrum of esotericist beliefs regarding the supra-human, and even divine, identities and powers

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49 Such was done, it is claimed, in retaliation for the same indignity Ibn al-Ashtar inflicted on the corpses of al-Husayn ibn Numayr and ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād after their defeat at al-Khāzir; see Ibn ʿAsākir, Dimashq, xiv, 388.10–12; Masʿūdī, Murūj, iii, 309 (§2008).

Although the earliest narratives of the immolation of the zanâdiqa/murtaddîn almost certainly harkens back to the late-Umayyad period, if not even earlier, the ghulūw-as-divinization tendency more likely reflects a mutation in the tradition emerging during the late-2nd/early-9th century at the earliest.

Two further points are significant here. Firstly, although one may cite numerous accounts in which 'Alî executes anonymous ghulāt, 'Alî al-Nawfalî seems to be the first author to narrate an account claiming that the offense of the executed had been to profess 'Alî's divinity. There are a number of reasons that suggest Nawfalî’s account came first rather than, for example, the account preserved by al-Kishshî and the like. Firstly, Nawfalî’s account offers what is by far the earliest extended narrative of events in that it elaborately dwells on how 'Alî constructed two pits, a subterranean one in which the executed were placed and one next to it visible from above ground. With this dual-chambered construction, the account relates, he kindled flames on one side to produce smoke on the other, which suffocated the offenders. Once they proved too stubborn to denounce their belief in his divinity, he poured flames of fire upon them until they burn to ashes—a fate strangely resembling the fate of the Qur'ânic așhâb al-ukhdûd (Q. 85:4–9). Subsequent anti-ghulūw accounts inevitably follow this precedent. The following account of Kishshî, for example, clearly shows a strong dependency on al-Nawfalî’s version:

When 'Alî had finished battling the inhabitants of Baṣra, 70 men from the Zuṭtî came to him. They greeted him and spoke to him in their tongue, and he responded to them in their tongue. ('Alî) said, 'I am not as you say! I am a mortal [makhlaq], a servant of God!' They rejected this and said to him, 'You are he!' Then he said to them, 'If you do not recant what you have said about me and repent before God, I will kill you!' But they refused either to recant or to repent, so he ordered pits to be dug for them and so they were dug. He impaled them to one another

52 See Friedländer, “Heterodoxies (II),” 99.
55 A northwest Indian people also known as the Jhâts, they had been among the Sasânian cavalry men who defected to the Arab general Abû Mûsâ ʿAshârî; see C. E. Bosworth, “Asawera,” Elr, ii, 706b and idem, “al-Zuṭî,” EF, xi, 574b.
56 A feat reputed to be common to all of the imâms. See Kulaynî, Kâfî, i, 227 f.; Majlîsî, Bihâr, xi, 371 ff.
and flung them into (the pits). Then their heads were immersed (in the flames), and the fire blazed in the pit because of them. There was not one of them in there that was not overwhelmed by the smoke and, thus, died.

The overlap between this story and that of Ibn Saba’ as it comes to be canonized is considerable. What appears above as the sin of the Zuṭṭ becomes in later narratives the fatal sin of Ibn Saba’ and his acolytes. 58

It is notable that the Zuṭṭ famously declare ‘Ali’s divinity through the esoteric phrase “You are he [anta huwa]”—or in some accounts, “You are who you are [anta anta]”—an unambiguous parallel the declaration found in al-Nawfalī’s account.

Secondly, al-Nawfalī’s role in the creation of the anti-ghulāt account in its basic structure and wording seems to be confirmed by the fact that in another khabar recorded by Ṭabarī, al-Nawfalī attributes the very same declaration attributed to ‘Ali’s misguided admirers—i.e., “You are you”—to the rioting, disenfranchised Rāwandīya from the ‘Abbāsid-fringe of Baghdād in 157/773–4. Al-Nawfalī relates that the Rāwandīya rioted in Baghdād’s streets and, led by a leper named al-Ablaq, attacked the city’s inhabitants while calling out to see the ‘Abbāsid caliph al-Manṣūr. Among the cries of the Rāwandīya that al-Nawfalī relates is the phrase “You are you.” This cry, al-Nawfalī informs us, expressed their conviction that the caliph was divine by virtue of the indwelling of the same Spirit that abided in Jesus, ‘Ali and subsequent imāms. After circling al-Manṣūr’s green-domed palace al-Khadrā’, many desperately threw themselves from its zenith expecting to fly. 59 Al-Nawfalī integrates these same words into his

57 Majlīṣī reads “marraqahum fihā” instead of “farraqahum fihā” (Bihār, xxv, 288.5 and n. 1 thereto), a word choice that is strongly reminiscent of the hadith typically associated with the Khawārij who “leave true religion like the arrow leave the bow [yamruqūn min al-dīn kamā yamruqu al-sahmu min al-ramīya]” (see Conc., vi, 204a; Juynboll, ECH, 671).

58 In the version attributed to Anas ibn Mālik, the zanādiqa are also identified with the Zuṭṭ, but worship idols instead of ‘Ali (Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, iv, 349 and Nasāʾī, Sunan, ii, 670). See also Ibn Qutayba, al-Maʿārif, 622.19; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, ʿIqd, ii, 405.5.

59 Ṭabarī, iii, 418 f. Ibn al-ʿAdim cites similar behavior by the Rāwandīya near Harrān and Aleppo at the same time, but he adds that they expected to fly thinking themselves to be angels; see his Zubdat al-halab min taʿrikh halab, 3 vols., ed. S. Dahhān (Damascus, 1951), i, 59 f. (cited in E. Kohlberg, “al-Rāwandiyya,” El2, viii, 462a). The Rāwandīya of Syria are also noted by Theophanes the Confessor (d. ca. 818 A.D.), who calls them the ‘Persian’ Maurophoroi (i.e., ‘Abbāsids; lit. ‘black-clothed Persians’); see Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (trans. and comm.), The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813 (Oxford,
anti-ghulūw version of the execution archetype. Although al-Nawfali does not mention Ibn Saba’ in his acccount, the heresiarch, thanks to Abū l-‘Abbās al-Thaqafī’s adept pen, is destined to parrot these words in later accounts.

**The Evolution of the Execution Archetype**

In its original form, the execution archetype of the Ibn Saba’ tradition derives from an Imāmī-Shīʿī provenance. The motive behind placing ‘Abd Allāh ibn Saba’ and/or his followers at the mercy of ‘Alī’s unmitigated punishment lay in the service that such accounts would render to defining the dogmatic and confessional boundaries of the Shīʿite community. The story of ‘Alī’s fiery execution of Ibn Saba’ thus came into existence at a relatively late date—certainly no earlier than the 3rd/9th century. As the above analysis demonstrates, the execution archetype ‘evolved’ from an earlier set of ‘Irāqi traditions relating ‘Alī’s execution of a group of zanādiqa or, alternatively, apostates by casting them into flames. Although unrelated to either ghulūw or ghulāt initially, in the hands of Shīʿī scholars of the 3rd/9th century this tradition transformed significantly. The Shīʿī version relates that, rather than being burned alive for apostasy, the hapless transgressors suffer ‘Alī’s ire for the sin of ghulūw—here defined as equating the imām with God. However, even the earliest Shīʿī versions, such as al-Nawfali’s, neglect to mention either Ibn Saba’ or the Sabaʾiya; the condemned either remain anonymous or are described as Zuṭṭ, presumably meant to stand in as ersatz ghulāt. The key stage in which Ibn Saba’ and the Sabaʾiya enter the tradition comes with the writings of Shīʿī scholars such as Abū l-‘Abbās al-Thaqafī and Saʿd al-Qummī—perhaps even as early as Yūnus ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān. At this stage, Ibn Saba’ and his followers simply replace the ghulāt and/or Zuṭṭ who in former traditions professed ‘Alī’s divinity and suffered the dire consequences.

1997), 595 (am 6250), 597 (am 6252). For contemporary Jewish parallels, see I. Friedländer, “Jewish-Arabic Studies, I: Shiitic Elements in Jewish Sectarianism,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 2 (1912), 503 ff. Maqdisī attributes similar beliefs to the Sabaʾiya, whom he also designates as the ṭayyāra (lit., ‘those who fly’). He states that “they claim they do not die, but rather their deaths are merely the flight of their souls into the darkness of night [innamā mawtuhum ṭayarān mufūshiḥ fī l-ghalās]” (Badʾ, v, 129). Cf. Modarressi, *Crisis*, 22.
Insofar as the body of traditions based upon the execution archetype were diverse—probably even more diverse than our extant materials reflect—it is difficult to assign a firm date or attribution for the appearance of each of the key features of the archetypal narrative. More readily discernable are the generational shifts involved over the course of the tradition’s evolution. The above analysis of this body of traditions demonstrates that the execution tradition of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition emerges contemporary with the concerns most prominent throughout the tumultuous 3rd/9th century—a century punctuated by numerous divisions and controversies within the Imāmī community and culminating with the occultation of the twelfth imām. It seems that as the nature, and even the definition, of ghulūw changed over the 3rd/9th century, so did Imāmī polemics against the ghulāt as they became ever more focused and refined.

The execution archetype was essentially one of many counter-arguments the Imāmī traditionist bloc inveighed against the ghulāt of old and the ‘neo-ghulāt’ of their own day. What proves most fascinating is the fact that the execution archetype drew upon the earlier, ‘minor’ archetypes of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition that each exhibit a fundamentally anti-Shīʿī animus. This animus comes across unmistakably in the early akhbār about Ibn Sabaʾ circulating in the ‘Irāqī circles of the ḥadīth-folk of the 2nd/8th century. Although only imperfectly appropriated by the account of ps.-Hishām, the Imāmī assimilation and transformation of these akhbār had been essentially perfected (i.e., for Imāmī purposes) by the time of Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Thaqafī.

A key effect of the traditions depicting ʿAlī as denouncing Ibn Sabaʾ, the Sabaʾīya, and, consequentially, their beliefs is that scholars hostile to the view they represent can thereby expunge such ghulāt from the purview of community’s confessional identity. It is no surprise that this technique recurs in the case of other imāms of the Imāmī pantheon as well. One also encounters several reports on Ibn Sabaʾ in which ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn declares that Ibn Sabaʾ made his hair stand on end and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq anathematizes Ibn Sabaʾ as a false prophet (kadhdhāb).  

These new accounts detailing the fiery death of Ibn Sabaʾ at the hands of ʿAlī fell short, however, in one regard. They stopped just short of explaining the reasoning (or error) that gave rise to the abhorrent beliefs of the ghulāt; these accounts constituted a genealogical polemic

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60 Kishshī, 106 ff.
against ghulūw, not a rationalist one. Left unanswered in such accounts is the underlying question as to why anyone would regard the imāms as either semi- or fully-divine in the first place. There seems to have been attempts to remedy this not merely in the elevated realm of intellectual discourse but also in how the execution archetype was re-narrated by subsequent generations.

One finds a compelling example of this in the following Shīʿī tradition, which constructs yet another explanation for the emergence of Ibn Sabaʾ’s belief in ʿAlī’s divinity by adapting a popular story about Jesus from the qisas al-anbiyāʾ. The original story describes an incident in which Jesus finds a skull and then resurrects the skull back to life. Once revived, the skull relates to Jesus and his onlookers a description of the afterlife. This story appears in many permutations both inside and outside the Islamic tradition, but eventually, it makes forays into the Shīʿī tales of ʿAlī’s miraculous deeds. In a later version in which ʿAlī, rather than Jesus, acts as the story’s miracle-worker, the miracle inspires its witnesses to mistakenly believe in ʿAlī’s divinity. In this version, ʿAlī makes his camp in the former ceremonial hall (īwān) of Chosroes after approaching al-Madāʾin, the traditional hive of the ghulāt. After concluding the prayer, ʿAlī strolls around Chrosroes’ abandoned palace accompanied by a crowd of locals. They stumble across a desiccated skull (jumjuma nakhira), and ʿAlī orders for the skull to be brought back to his camp in a basin. Once everyone returns to the īwān, ʿAlī places the skull before him and asks:

“Who are you, and who am I?”

The skull speaking eloquently said, “As for you, you are the Commander of the Faithful, the Lord of the wasīs, and the imām of those who fear God. As for me, I am your servant and the son of your handmaiden, Khusraw Anūshirvān.”

The skull, speaking as Khusraw Anūshirvān, continues to address ʿAlī all the while bemoaning the errors of his earthly life: his heedless adherence to the Magian religion, his failure to believe in the prophecy of

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63 Following Shādhān’s Fadāʾil (71.10): “abduka wa-ibn amatika”; both Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (ʿUyūn, 11.2–3) and Majlisī (Bihār, xli, 214.4) read, “abd allāh wa-ibn amat allāh”.
Muhammad, and (most bitterly) his eternal damnation. These events inspire the locals to weep, and many were greatly perplexed as to the meaning of such a wonder.

In the tradition’s concluding passages, a common heresiological *topos* ensues describing how three groups subsequently emerged among ‘Ali’s audience. The ‘redeemed’ among them recognize ‘Ali as God’s servant (*abd*), his friend (*walī*), and the *waṣī* of God’s Messenger. But others (who essentially are an allegory for the *ghulāt*) regard him as a prophet, and still others consider him divine. ‘Ali seizes this latter group—one account says that they were Ibn Saba’ and his companions, others that they were merely similar to the Saba’īya—and burns them alive.

All these narrative variations on the execution archetype, whether featuring the Saba’īya or not, acted as a sort of literary exorcism of the demons of *ghulūw* undertaken by Imāmī Shi’a fearful of the perceived potential of the doctrines of the *ghulāt* to jeopardize the welfare and doctrinal identity of the Imāmī community. Most acutely perhaps, these scholars perceived *ghulūw* as threatening to unravel a coherent, and thus cohesive, understanding of the *imām*’s identity around which the Imāmī scholars strived to form their sect’s identity as an integral faith-community—whether in *historical* or *doctrinal* terms. It was not accidental, therefore, that these scholars often associated *ghulūw* with those Shi’ī sectarians who disputed or modified the Imāmīs’ vision of imāmic succession after Ja’far al-Sādiq. The attention lavished upon Ibn Saba’ derived not from an antiquarian, historical interest in his persona, but rather from the manner in which the heresiarch functioned as a paragon for the folly of *ghulūw* as it manifested in 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries—its main representatives being proto-Ismā’īliya, proto-Nuṣayriya, and those sectarians following the doctrines of figures such as Abū l-Khaṭṭāb, al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ’Umar al-Ju’fī, and their ilk.

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64 See Anthony, “Sayf ibn ’Umar.”
67 See F. Daftary, *The Ismā’īlis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 2007?), 88 ff. For example, Ibn Bābawayh in his *Risāla fī l-iṭiqādāt* includes a statement made by the Imāmī *mutakallim* Żurārā ibn A’yān (d. ca. 149/765–6) to Ja’far al-Sādiq that a descendent of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Saba’ adhered to the doctrine of *tafwīd*. See Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Risāla fī l-iṭiqādāt*, in: *Musānnafāt al-Shaykh al-Mufīd* (Qumm, 1993), v, 100. This is a clear attestation to the early attempts to connect Ibn Saba’ genealogically to the *ghulūw* of the Mufawwida—i.e., those Shi’a of the ’Abbāsid period who regarded
Such accounts were, in short, ready means for the community to distance itself from the political and doctrinal excesses of the ghulāt and to shore up assurances for outsiders that they, too, rejected many of the aberrations of which their opponents accused them.

The Execution Archetype among the Ghulāt and Mufawwīda

It is curious that the response of the Shīʿī ghulāt of the ‘Abbāsid era was not, as one might expect, to reject the Ibn Saba’ tradition. Rather than polemicizing against Ibn Saba’—as one finds in the initial approach of the Imāmīs to his persona—the Shīʿī ghulāt re-appropriated the tradition and transformed it in order to make it suitable for their unique aims. This phenomenon usually manifested itself primarily in the form of a subtly modified version of one of the many archetypes enumerated above, which, once placed into circulation, offered a counter-narrative to the polemical usages of Ibn Saba’ by the opponents of the Shīʿī.

Of all the archetypes of the Ibn Saba’ tradition, the execution archetype proved to be the most thoroughly re-imagined narrative to appear in the writings and traditions of the ghulāt. However, evidence exists for other archetypes undergoing similar transformations, too. One significant example survives for the aforementioned ‘lying archetype’ in which al-Musayyab ibn al-Najaba brings Ibn Saba’/Ibn al-Sawdā’ before ‘Alī accusing him of “lying against God and his Prophet”. In the more widespread version, known and transmitted among both among Shīʿī and non-Shīʿī scholars, ‘Alī denounces the heresiarch as a vile black man. However, the K. al-ghayba of the Imāmī author Ibn Abī Zaynab al-Nu’mānī (fl. mid-4th/10th century) records an alternative version of this tradition that displays an entirely different take on the anecdote. In Nu’mānī’s version, ‘Alī’s reaction to Ibn al-Sawdā’ changes altogether. ‘Alī does not denounce Ibn al-Sawdā’, rather he inquires about what Ibn al-Sawdā’ had said to so upset his followers. When ‘Alī’s interlocutors answer that Ibn al-Sawdā’ is spreading word among his followers of “the troops of anger (jaysh al-ghadāb),” ‘Alī’s reactions is not hostile as in the better known versions. Instead, the imām declares: “Let this man go on his way. These (troops) are a people who shall come at the end of time like the scattered clouds of

the prophet and the imāms as possessing supernatural, semi-divine, or fully-divine attributes that are received by divine dispensation, or tafwid (see ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Mughnī, xx., 175; cf. Modarressi, Crisis, 21 ff.).
autumn [qazaʾun ka-qazaʿ al-kharif]…

The so-called ‘troops of anger (jaysh al-ghaḍab)’ of which Ibn Sabaʾ speaks and whose existence ʿAlī confirms in this tradition are a common motif of Imāmī apocalypticism, playing the role of divine aids of the Mahdi as he exacts vengeance on the enemies of the Prophet’s household.⁶⁹ Here, ʿAlī’s affirmation rather than denunciation of the speech of Ibn Sabaʾ/Ibn al-Sawdāʾ stands in marked contrast to the better known, condemnatory version of the tradition.

Yet, as noted above, the appropriation and re-interpretation of the execution archetype comes in far more numerous forms and versions than other archetypes of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition. As early as the 4th/10th century, outside observers bore witness to the existence of new, esoteric (bāṭini) re-interpretations of the execution story among the Shīʿa. Al-Maqdisī (fl. 355/966) provides one of the earliest attestations to the existence of an interpretation of the execution archetype that is sympathetic rather than vehemently opposed to Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya. According to Maqdisī, a number of the “brethren” of the Sabaʾīya regarded the execution of the Sabaʾīya as proof of ʿAlī’s divinity. As proof of their claim, they cite, albeit in a modified form, Ibn ʿAbbās’ dictum that, “None (should) chastise with fire save the Lord of fire [la yuʿadhdhibu bi-l-nār illa rabb al-nār].”⁷⁰ Subsequently, Maqdisī writes, these Sabaʾīya “claimed after (the execution) that the fire did not touch them but became cold and harmless as it did for the prophet Abraham” (cf. Q. 21:68–71, 37:97).⁷¹ Thus, ʿAlī’s chastisement transforms into a miraculous, esoteric disclosure of the true reality of the imām for the heedful initiate. The above version achieves this effect by playing off Ibn ʿAbbās’ proscription of chastising with fire and, demonstrating the dynamism and malleability of the esoteric hermeneutic of the ghulāt, turns the conventional interpretation on its head.

Writing in 385/995, ʿAbd al-Jabbār also observes in his Tathbīṭ dalāʾil al-nabūwa that persons claiming that ʿAlī approved of the beliefs of Ibn Sabaʾ and those whom he burned alive were quite numerous in his day in the regions around Kūfa and the Sawād of ʿIrāq. ʿAlī killed

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⁶⁸ Nuʾmānī, Ghayba, 212. The tradition is attributed to Abū Jamīla al-Mufaḍḍal ibn Śāliḥ al-ʿAsadī; on whom, see Modarressi, TS, i, 333.
⁶⁹ Amir-Moezzi, Divine Guide, 120 ff.; idem, La religion discrète, 300 f.
⁷⁰ Cf. the same in Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharh, v, 5.12–13. Note that both texts modify the conventional wording of Ibn ʿAbbās’ tradition in order to accommodate the esoteric interpretation.
⁷¹ Badʾ, v, 125.
them, they allege, not for their belief in his divinity but for revealing openly his true, secret identity. They also claimed that ʿAlī subsequently resurrected them back to life—citing the mitigation of Ibn Sabaʾ’s punishment to exile as further proof of ʿAlī’s secret approval of their beliefs. 72

Although our knowledge remains limited and partial with regard to the writings and teachings of the ghulāt, let alone the non-Imāmī Shiʿa of the early ʿAbbāsid period more generally speaking, what works do remain confirm the existence of that such a positive ‘reversal’ in the interpretation of the execution archetype was very real indeed. The groups to which both al-Maqdisī and ʿAbd al-Jabbār refer undoubt-edly belong to the so-called Mufawwida, or adherents of tafwīd—i.e., the doctrine that the imāms where ‘supernatural’ beings to whom God had delegated (fawwāda) his unlimited knowledge, his power to create and provide all creation, and the authority to legislate and abrogate the sharīʿa at will. A key characteristic of the Mufawwida trend was its immersion in and elaboration of the esoteric currents emerging in Shiʿi beliefs. These ‘neo-ghulāt’—who would later give rise to such movements as the Ismāʿiliyya and the Nuṣayriyya—drew extensively from the thought of their ghālī—predecessors of the Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid periods, whose movements tended more towards an activist and messianistic apocalypticism. 73

An esoteric work preserved only in Persian known as Umm al-Kitāb offers one of the keenest exemplars of the Mufawwida’s appropriation of the execution archetype and the Ibn Sabaʾ persona. This anonymously


73 Modarressi distinguishes between the Mufawwida and their opponents in the Imāmī community—derided by them as ‘Muqassiraʾ (‘those who fall short’, or ‘deficient’ Shiʿa)—and the ghulāt, whom he regards as even more marginalized than the Mufawwida (see his Crisis, 35 f and n. 101 thereto et passim). This, however, has recently been disputed by T. Bayhom-Daou, “The Imām’s knowledge and the Quran according to al-Fadl ibn Shādhān al-Nisābūrī (d. 260 A.H./874 A.D.),” BSOAS 64 (2001), 204 f. and n. 89 thereto.
authored, ‘proto-Ismāʿīli’\textsuperscript{74} work likely originates from Southern ‘Irāq and portrays Ibn Sabaʾ as an old man who, when he attempts to instruct the young Muhammad al-Bāqir in his letters, experiences a revelatory self-disclosure of the imām al-Bāqir’s true identity through a series of epiphanies and esoteric revelations. Ibn Sabaʾ exuberantly attempts to share his experiences with the inhabitants of Mecca and announces the true identity of the imām in center of city, but Ibn Sabaʾ meets only an incredulous and hostile reception. The city’s people subsequently execute the elderly Ibn Sabaʾ by burning him alive, doing so even at the instigation and instruction of the boy-imām al-Bāqir and his father ‘Ali Zayn al-ʿĀbidin.

After this narrative of Ibn Sabaʾ’s execution, the account of Umm al-Kitāb continues (italicized words in the translation are in Arabic rather than Persian in the original text):\textsuperscript{75}

When Bāqir al-ʿIlm returned home and those similarly enlightened of the same mind and age as Bāqir al-ʿIlm [rowshaniyān-ke hambāl-o hamsāl-e bāqer al-elm] gathered around him, such as Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī, Jābir al-Juʿfī,\textsuperscript{76} Jaʿfar al-Juʿfī,\textsuperscript{77} and Saʿṣaʿa ibn Ṣūḥān.\textsuperscript{78}

Each one gave thanks and praise and said to Bāqir al-ʿIlm, “O Master of

\textsuperscript{74} In calling the work ‘proto-Ismāʿīli’ here, I follow convention, which is largely influenced by the fact that Umm al-Kitāb has only been discovered among the Nizārī-Ismāʿīlīs communities of the Pāmīr and Karakorum regions. More recent research, however, seems to tip the scales more strongly in favor of a ‘proto-Nusayri’ provenance; see Y. Friedman, The Nusayrī-Alawīs (Leiden, 2010), 241 f.


\textsuperscript{76} Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Juʿfī (d. 128/746 or 132/750).

\textsuperscript{77} Tūsī lists a certain Jaʿfar ibn Ḥabīḥ al-Juʿfī as a companion of Muhammad al-Bāqir (Rījāl, 129.–4), with whom van Ess and Halm attempt to identify with the person named here in the text (cf. Halm, Gnosis, 369 n. 239 and van Ess in Der Islam 46, 1970, 96). However, Tūsī’s text has likely been corrupted; one should perhaps read the nisba as al-Jaʿfārī rather than al-Juʿfī. Jaʿfar ibn Ḥabīḥ al-Jaʿfārī—called ‘al-Jaʿfārī’ because he was a descendent of ‘Alī’s revered brother, Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib—was the companion of three imāms: ‘Alī Zayn al-ʿĀbidin, Muhammad al-Bāqir (if our emendation to Tūsī’s text is accepted), and Jaʿfar al-Sādiq (see Tūsī, Rījāl, 111.7, 175.4). It seems, though, that it is only from ‘Alī Zayn al-ʿĀbidin that one finds a significant body of reports transmitted on his authority; cf. Ibn Ḥajar, Lisān, ii, 135 and Majlisī, Bihār, lxxii, 40 and lxxiii, 287. Hence, the text of UK probably read ‘Jaʿfar al-Jaʿfārī’, but the nisba was corrupted to read ‘al-Juʿfī’ due to a later copyist’s attempt to ‘correct’ the text so as to resemble the nisba of the most prominent companion of al-Bāqir in UK, Jābir al-Juʿfī.

\textsuperscript{78} One of the prominent qurrāʾ forming the opposition to ‘Uthman and, later, a celebrated partisan of ‘Alī who died during the caliphate of Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān. His appearance here poses an intractable chronological difficulty, for Muʿāwiya’s reign
the Age [vali l-zamān]!—ʿAbdallāh ibn Sabaʾ spoke the truth! But you ordered that he be killed and burned at the stake! He did not deserve such a fate for what he said. All of us give the same testimony that he gave, except we do not know its true meaning [maʿnā].”

Then Bāqir al-ʿIlm said, “O enlightened ones, there is great danger in removing the veil from us. For six thousand years of the cycle of the law [dawr-e sharīʿat] the veil has not been removed from us and has not been spoken openly. Only at the appearance of the Qāʾim79 may one speak of the meaning of this: that the Mighty King (viz., God) appears as the Qāʾim. Today it is untimely to bear testimony to all these things. ʿAbdallāh removed the veil from us, and all who remove the veil from us we must also remove the veil from them.80

As Muḥammad al-Bāqir continues discoursing with his students, however, they are suddenly made witnesses to a miraculous resurrection of Ibn Sabaʾ:81

As Bāqir al-ʿIlm recited this verse, a form [shakhsī] neither living nor dead—“there one does not die, nor does one live” (Q. 20:76)—came out from the wall of Fāṭima’s chamber. Bāqir al-ʿIlm blew a breath on him, and as the spirit appeared from the lips and teeth of the moonfaced child, it went down the throat of this form. It straightened up and then recited, “...the testimony, the great and the exalted!” (Q. 13:9) and testified to the divinity of Bāqir [khodavāndi-ye bāqer] before all the enlightened ones.

Bāqir said, “O ʿAbdallāh, what have you seen and in what state were you?”

ʿAbdallāh said, “O Lord of lords and Light of all lights, I saw myself asleep [dar khwāb] in paradise seated alongside houris inside palaces and inside spiritual and luminescent pavilions alongside young boys and youthful servants (cf. Q. 56:17) and ‘demure houris in pavilions’ (Q. 55:72). I saw Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn to whose divinity all the inhabitants of paradise bore witness, and I also bore witness and said, ‘God testifies that there is no god but he, the living.

ended a mere three years after Muḥammad al-Bāqir’s birth in 57/677 whereas the events here putatively occur while the imām was five years old.

79 Lit., “the standing” or “the riser”; cf. Madelung, “Kāʾim Āl Muḥammad,” EI², iv, 456. A common name of a messianic figure often identified with the imām or mahdī among the Shiʿa, the full significance of the term as employed is not entirely clear, but it should not be conflated with its later, Ismāʿīlī expansion: “al-qāʾim bi-amr allāh”—i.e., “he who undertakes the command of God.” Antecedents of the term can also be found in Samaritan and Gnostic texts; see Halm, Gnosis, 362–3 at n. 77.

80 Cf. the Nuṣayrī work of Maymūn b. al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (d. 426/1034–5), Majmūʿ al-ʿayād, ed. R. Strothman in: Der Islam 27 (1944): 381.7 in which the death of Ibn Sabaʾ is described in terms of a ‘trial’ (Ar. miḥna).

81 Umm al-Kitāb, 49–52.
the execution of Ibn Sabaʾ. And I saw you, my Lord, as though a hundred thousand moons and suns appeared from your lips and teeth. As I awoke from sleep, I saw none of this but saw you blowing breath into my mouth, and all my limbs were able to speak, and I bore witness!"

The account of Ibn Sabaʾ in *Umm al-Kitāb*, albeit extraordinarily idiosyncratic in many ways, nonetheless provides one of the profoundest re-envisionings of the execution archetype.82 Yet another, lengthy re-appropriation of the Ibn Sabaʾ legend appears in a proto-Nuṣayrī work known as *al-Risāla al-rastbāshiya* (from the Prs. ‘*rast bāš*’; viz., ‘be righteous’) — a treatise written by al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣibi (d. 358/969) and dedicated to the Būyid prince ʿĪzz al-Dawla Bakhtiyār (r. 334–56/967–77 in Baghdād).83 Although many of Khaṣibiʾs works were accepted by mainstream, Imāmī Shīʿism, as Yoran Friedman has recently demonstrated, Khaṣibiʾs oeuvre in fact bifurcated between those works more famous among the Imāmī-Shīʿa, such as his *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, and those intended for his sectarian following of ‘*muwahhidūn*’ who formed the core of what soon evolved into the Nuṣayriʾ-ʿAlawī branch of Shīʿism. The *Risāla al-rastbāshiya* falls unambiguously into the latter category of Khaṣibiʾs writings and preserves what is likely to be the earliest, surviving esoteric reinterpretation of the execution archetype of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition.84

In Khaṣibiʾs treatise, the event pertains to one the many ‘terrestrial signs [āyāt arḍiya]’ of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, evidencing the *imām*’s ability to bring the dead back to life. Khaṣibiʾs version presents us initially with a scenario in which Ibn Sabaʾ and ten of his associates are burned alive and then concealed in a pit in the manner akin to that which

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82 As a text, however, *Umm al-Kitāb* is notoriously difficult to date — some scholars boldly assigning a 2nd/8th-century provenance and others pushing to text’s composition to as late as the 6th/12th century. The most cogent and systematic attempt to date this point can be found in H. Halm, “‘Das Buch der Schatten’: Die Mufaddal–Tradition der Gulat und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairitiertums (II),” *Der Islam* 58 (1981): 36 ff.; idem, *Gnosis*, pp. 113 ff. He dates some sections of the work, including the story translated above, to 2nd/8th century, while dating other textual layers centuries later. In a recent study, however, I have argued that this early dating is untenable and postulate that the earliest stratum of *Umm al-Kitāb* dates no earlier than the mid-3rd/9th century; see S. W. Anthony, “The Legend of ʿAbdallāh ibn Sabaʾ and the Date of *Umm al-Kitāb*,” *JRAS* 21 (2011), 1–30.

'Alī al-Nawfalī and Kishṣī describe in their respective accounts. After thus burning Ibn Saba' and his companions alive and then burying them in the pit, however, the account claims that the following morning 'Alī “brought them back to life [ahyā̃hum],” and the Kūfans saw Ibn Saba’ and his ten companions “sitting in green robes and perfumed with scents the likeness of which has not been smelled even in the good things of this world, sitting at the doors of their houses and in their shops, and walking in the markets and fairways (of Kūfa).” Awestruck, the Kūfans approach 'Alī to ascertain the meaning of these events, whereupon he answers, “Indeed, I burned them alive with fire yesterday and covered them in their pit while you all watched. I even prayed (over them) while you bore witness. If God makes them alive once again after this, then by God he does whatsoever he wills.” In subsequent Nuṣayrī thought, this version of Ibn Saba’s execution becomes quite influential. Ibn Saba’ effectively attains the status of a saint, and his quasi-docetic martyrdom assumes further paradigmatic importance for the Nuṣayris in their doctrine of the nidāʾ (call), also called the tasrīḥ (declaration), in which an initiate publicly declares the divinity of the imām knowing full-well that he will be martyred and even suffers the humiliation of a public denunciation by the imām, albeit as an act of dissimulation (taqīya). A similar, yet much shorter, esotericist version of the execution archetype appears in the Persian treatise Haft bāb-e Bābā Sayyednā but representatively a Nizārī-Ismāʿīlī version of the execution archetype dating from the Alamūt period (483–654/1090–1256). Under the heading, “Concerning the matter of declaration of obeisance [labbayka zadan] of ‘Abdallāh-e Saba’ to the divinity [khodāʾī] of Mawlānā ‘Ali,” one reads: 

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87 Although erroneously attributed to Hasan-e Sabbāh, as first noted by Ivanow, S. J. Badakhchani has recently identified the previously unknown author of the Haft bāb as Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ḥasan-e Maḥmūd, a Nizārī dāʿī and poet with close associations with Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, thanks to a recently discovered manuscript indentifying him as the individual who authored the work in 602/1205. See Badakhchani, ed. and trans., The Paradise of Submission: A New Persian Edition and English Translation of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī’s Rawḍa-yi taṣlīm (London, 2005), xv–xvi and 244, n. 15.
It is well-known that Mawlānā ʿAlī commanded for fire to be brought and for them to take back these words. “If not, I will burn all of them,” (he threatened). They said: “What is better than this!—that our essence, all that you are, and the duality that is an impediment between us would be made one, all that you have been and you shall be! Have us burned!”

Then he ordered for fire to be thrown upon them, and also that the bodies of these people would be burned. Then, one day they were seen in the bazaar selling bread. They underwent this affair in service of Mawlānā (ʿAlī).

Here ʿAlī’s worshippers speak with words overlaid with Mandaen and Zoroastrian beliefs of the identity of the divine essence with light, or fire, and their fiery death, moreover, remains a mere illusion—a mere trial suffered as an unquestioned sacrifice on behalf of their imām. This sanctification of the fire in the execution narratives features grandly in Nuṣayrī doctrine as well, wherein fire is accorded mystical significance—in particular as it appears in the Ibn Sabaʾ story—as a representation of the resurrection of the dead.

Returning, however, to Khaṣībī’s version in the Risāla al-rāshtbāshiya, one finds further details in his account that are absent elsewhere and that offer what amounts to yet another chronological re-imagining of the biography of Ibn Sabaʾ that is not altogether unlike what one finds in the aforementioned story contained in Umm al-Kitāb. Khaṣībī’s account actually continues the story of Ibn Sabaʾ after his execution, recounting two incidents wherein he is burned alive and resurrected yet again. The first of these mentioned actually occurs in the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad himself who delegates ʿAlī to execute Ibn Sabaʾ and his followers after they refuse to recant their dissemination of the doctrine of the Prophet’s divinity. Rather than transpiring in Kūfa, however, the events take place in al-Ṭāʾif—where Ibn Sabaʾ arrives preaching his doctrine from Yemen with his ten associates, among whom he names a certain Abū Bakr al-Jummāl (i.e., the camel seller)—and subsequently, the story of his first execution concludes at al-Safā in Mecca, where ʿAlī undertakes the first (mock) execution the heresiarch and his followers.

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89 keh dhāt-e mā hama tū ī in dū ī keh dar meyān-e mā ḥāʾel-ast yākī shavad chūnkeh hama tū būdā-ye va-tū khū āhi būdan be-sūzān.
90 Reading jesm-e khalq rather than Ivanov’s reading, chashm-e khalq.
92 Majmūʿ al-aʾyād, 5–6; cf. Friedman, Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs, 168.
The third fiery execution, which Ibn Saba’ and his acolytes endure in Khaṣbihi’s account, occurs under the Umayyads, specifically at the command of the caliph Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam (r. 64–65/684–5). Ibn Saba’ this time appears in al-Madā’in alongside his acolytes who continue to preach their doctrine—al-da’wa in Khaṣbihi’s terminology—whereupon the Umayyads arrest him and burn him and his acolytes alive. During the finale of the account, Khaṣbihi presents the reader with a clever reversal of roles: when the news of how the Umayyads executed Ibn Saba’ and his associates and then scattered their ashes to the wind reaches ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, the imām declares, “Even if I saw the brain of Ibn Saba’ and the brains of his companions enclosed in a bag, I would bear witness that they are alive and provided for [law ra’aytu dimāgh ‘abdallāh wa-admīght asḥābihi maṣhrūtam bi-ṣurra tam la-shahidtu annahum aḥyā yurzaqūn].”

Concluding Remarks

Although not among the earliest archetypal narratives of the Ibn Saba’ tradition, the execution archetype nonetheless merits consideration as one of the more formative due its emergence in the era contemporary with the systematization of heresiological portrayals of Ibn Saba’. The path of its evolution from an unassuming khabar of Başran origin, wherein ʿAlī executes a nameless group of apostates, into a narrative relating ʿAlī’s confrontation with Ibn Saba’ and his ghālī acolytes illuminates our understanding of the Ibn Saba’ tradition considerably. The diverse array of roles that the execution archetype played in its many iterations vis-à-vis other key archetypes and topoi of the Ibn Saba’ tradition exemplifies the multiple valences the story carried as it passed from the hands of one sectarian community to another.

The complexities and subtleties characteristic of the inter-textual relationships between the texts examined above, however, are exceedingly complex, inasmuch as the execution archetype, as does all the archetypes of the Ibn Saba’ tradition, manifests in different genres and sundry forms and is subjugated to manifold didactic and polemical agendas. Often, the archetypes undergo subtle transformations, too, amalgamating with one another and absorbing topoi tertiary to the

93 Al-Risāla al-rastbāshiya, 35–7.
archetypes in their original forms. The present account of the evolution of the execution archetype and the inter-relationships between the other main archetypes of the Ibn Saba’ tradition has necessarily been undertaken in the absence of a comprehensive view of the literature in which they appear of the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries, for our knowledge of this period is, and will likely remain, partial and incomplete. Yet, even within these limitations, sufficient materials seem to have survived to allow us to hazard a cogent, albeit approximate, reconstruction of the evolution and formation of the Ibn Saba’ tradition with reasonable certainty.

In the table below, the reader will find a simplified, graphical representation of the processes of transmission and inter-textual relationships posited in the analysis of the present chapter. Many of the subtleties of inter-textual relationships necessarily exceed the capacity for graphical representation, so the table is intended to serve merely as a thumbnail sketch of sorts. What results, therefore, is a rough chronological map of the Ibn Saba’ tradition as seen through the transmission of its various constituent archetypes. Including both major and minor archetypes, the following symbols have been employed to represent each:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Archetypes</th>
<th>Minor Archetypes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$M_1$ = ṭawṣiyya archetype</td>
<td>$m_1$ = cursing archetype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M_2$ = ṭabī’a archetype</td>
<td>$m_2$ = concealed Qur’ān archetype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M_3$ = execution archetype</td>
<td>$m_3$ = lying archetype</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Redaction & Transmission of the Major and Minor Archetypes of the Ibn Saba’ Tradition
CHAPTER SIX

THE PAROUSIA OF ‘ALĪ IBN ABĪ ṬĀLIB

Of the major archetypal components of the Ibn Saba’ tradition, we have yet to treat the parousia, or *raj’a*. In light of the analysis of the preceding chapter, one may safely dismiss the parousia archetype’s main rival—i.e., the execution archetype—as essentially non-historical, an invention emerging in the era spanning the late 2nd/8th and mid-3rd/9th centuries. Rather than representing the beliefs of a historical Ibn Saba’, the execution archetype is actually the product of the crucible of Shi‘ī sectarian divisions leading up to, during and immediately following the *ghayba* of the 12th imām. On this point, however, the parousia/raj’a archetype differs considerably from its counterpart. Whereas in the previous chapter the scholastic circles of the Imāmīs living under the ‘Abbāsid yoke proved to be the best arena in which to explore the execution archetype’s origins and significance, the *raj’a* archetype forces us to plunge much deeper into the well of Islamic and late antique history. The *raj’a* archetype must be read not so much in light of the *ghayba* of the twelfth imām in the 3rd/9th century, but rather in light of the various apocalyptic expectations contemporary with the early Islamic conquests.

The *raj’a* archetype exhibits a common narrative scenario in all its iterations, which although subject to embellishments over time, nonetheless remains the skeletal outline for providing an etiology of the *raj’a* doctrine. In this scenario, Ibn Saba’ hears the news of ‘Ali’s death in al-Madā’in and denies the truth of the reporter’s claim. Just why Ibn Saba’ is in al-Madā’in, who accompanied him, what exactly was said, etc.—all of these details vary from account to account. The notion, for example, that Ibn Saba’ alighted in al-Madā’in after ‘Ali exiled him from Kūfa, as we have seen above, is a relatively early one that eventually plays a key role in the harmonization of the *raj’a* and execution archetypes; however, it is not the earliest and, as the traditions examined below demonstrate, this *topos*, appearing first among the ‘minor’ denunciation archetypes, only enters the Ibn Saba’ tradition as a later development.
Even older and more substantive are the pronouncements Ibn Sabaʾ utters in the rajʿa archetype upon hearing of ʿAlī’s assassination. These utterances boil down to two fundamental assertions: 1) that ‘Alī will not die until he leads the people/Arabs with his staff, and 2) that ‘Alī shall fill the Earth will justice just as it is now filled with injustice. Later traditions add to these two items, but such expansions are subsidiary and minor (see below). What is truly uncanny here is that the ‘substance’ of Ibn Sabaʾ’s utterances seem to be not really ‘substantive’ at all when viewed in light of the broader Islamic tradition. As with all traditions, we have traditions of short, long, and intermediate length, but regardless of length, the components of Ibn Sabaʾ’s confession, as Halm has observed, harken back to the earliest Islamic beliefs in an apocalyptic messianic figure.1 Indeed, the confession of Ibn Sabaʾ strikes one as a deliberate pastiche of such materials, as each of its major elements, even down to the structure of its phraseology, constantly surfaces in the oldest messianic traditions of Muslim apocalyptic. Thus, just like Ibn Sabaʾ’s ‘Ali, one finds in numerous ḥadīth that the Qāʾim/Mahdī shall fulfill his prophesied destiny by filling the Earth with justice.2 When Ibn Sabaʾ proclaims that ‘Alī will lead the Arabs/people with his staff, these traditions echo the role the Qahṭānī, the South Arabian redeemer of the Yamanīs, dons in apocalyptic ḥadīth.3

This raises profound concerns as to whether the utterances of Ibn Sabaʾ share the apocalyptic imagery exhibited in these traditions and, therefore, evince an interconnectedness and mutual dependence between these traditions, or whether his utterances represent merely derivative concoctions imputed to the heresiarch and are, therefore, entirely disconnected from historical reality. Early Muslim apocalyptic, as David Cook observed, knew an exceedingly “wide field of competitors, both in terms of messianic titles (e.g., al-Qaḥṭānī, al-Jurhumī,  

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1 Gnosis, 36.
2 Cf. Conc., 1, 398b–5, s.v. jawr and ibid., v, 378b.39, s.v. qist for the standard Sunni versions. While this tradition can apply to a number of figures, Both Imāmī and Sunni versions inevitably identify the figure as a man from the household of the prophet, later to be identified in Imāmī thought with the twelfth imām. See ibid., vi, 255.14, 22–4 and al-Ḥūr al-ʿĀmilī, Ithbāt al-hudā, 7 vols. (Tehran, 1974), vii, 8 f. Cf. Michael Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, SLAEI 21 (Princeton, 2002), 196, n. 21.
3 Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, iii, 1438 (no. 7202) and Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, ii, 1224 (no. 7492): là taqūmu l-sāʾa hattā takhrura rajulw min qaḥṭānā fa-yasūqī l-nās bi-ʾasāhu. Cf. W. Madelung, “Apocalyptic Prophecies in Ḥimṣ in the Umayyad Age,” JSS 31 (1986), 149 ff.
al-Yamanī, etc.), and the candidates for the title Mahdī, and each of these messianic personalities bear with them the promise of some eschatological destiny. Perhaps, one should not be surprised, then, to find a charismatic persona such as ‘Alī among this panorama of messianic figures. Early Islamic apocalyptic offers a protean pool of traditions, whose elements constantly divide and amalgamate. Much of this chapter will be dedicated to locating the utterance of Ibn Saba’ in the raj’a archetype within this early pool.

The most important item of the raj’a archetype, insofar as it is its most distinguishing feature, is the denial of ‘Alī’s death, which although interwoven with messianic clichés, implicitly portends the imām’s triumphal return, or parousia. Over a century ago, Friedländer characterized this denial of ‘Alī’s death as ‘docetic’, thereby drawing a direct parallel between Ibn Saba’ and so-called Christian Docetists of 2nd century A.D., who, according to heresiological polemics, regarded the corporeality of Christ and, therefore, his crucifixion to have only been ‘apparent’ (Gr. dokéō, dókēsis), but in truth not part of the terrestrial, phenomenal world. In designating Ibn Saba’s denial as an Islamic permutation of docetic gnosticism, subsequent Islamicists have mostly followed Friedländer’s precedent. This is most unfortunate, for his precedent needlessly introduced a designation of quite dubious historical utility to the study of early Christian sectarianism—let alone Islamic sectarianism—into the quest for an historical account of the beliefs of the Saba’īya. I wish to contend that the most reasonable and compelling models for understanding Ibn Saba’s denial of ‘Alī’s death is not Docetism, but rather the qur’ānic depiction of Jesus’ Passion viewed against the backdrop of late antique apocalypticism.

Much more will be said on centrality of the apocalyptic models for Ibn Saba’’s beliefs with regard ‘Alī further below; however, some further comments on the qur’ānic model of Jesus’ Passion are first in order by way of caveat. Misperceptions of the qur’ānic denial of Christ’s crucifixion have become rather widespread due to the fact that it has often rather hazardously been compared with the ‘docetic’ view of Christ’s crucifixion—especially that of the Egyptian gnostic

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4 Muslim Apocalyptic, 139.
Basiledes (ca. 100–60 A.D.) who, like many Qurʾanic exegetes, claimed the Simon the Cyrene had been crucified in Jesus’ place. This comparison is understandable given the wording of Q. 4:157. The Qurʾanic declaration that “they (i.e., Christ’s enemies) neither killed him nor crucified him but it was made to appear so to them [mā qatalūhu wa-mā șalabūhu wa-lākin shubhiha lahum]” strongly mirrors, on the surface, the docetist sentiment that Christ only ‘appeared’ to be flesh and bones. The Qurʾanic denial of Jesus’ crucifixion, however, only shares a superficial similarity with the docetist denial. The two views, in fact, could not be farther apart. The Qurʾanic view of Jesus is so emphatically human (even if exceptionally so inasmuch as God adorns his birth and life with miraculous dispensations) that any comparison with the docetic view of Jesus, which is so emphatically non-human and otherworldly, renders what parity one finds between the two limited to only surface similarities. Ibn Sabaʾs denial of ʿAlī’s death likewise contains no indication that he regarded ʿAlī as anything other than human or that ʿAlī existed in corporeal form “only seemingly”. Just as docetism fails to offer a satisfactory insight into the Qurʾanic denial of Jesus’ crucifixion, so docetism also cannot provide a conceptual framework for interpreting the rajʾa-belief as confessed by Ibn Sabaʾ.

Ibn Sabaʾ espouses in the parousia archetype an adaptation of Qurʾanic messianism—i.e., the parousia archetype appropriates the Qurʾanic perspective that looks to Jesus as the primary messianic figure for the eschaton, a destiny only deferred by his temporary assumption

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7 This is not to say that later Muslim authors—especially the Ismāʿīlīs—did not attempt to combine these views centuries later by taking advantage of this surface similarity. One may, thus, speak of gnostic influences on Qurʾanic exegetes, or at least the appropriation by the latter of the former’s ideas, but scholars should remain reticent to posit a docetistic interpretation of the Qurʾanic text. For examples, see G. C. Anwati, “ʿĪsā,” *EF*, iv, 84 f.; H. Busse, “Jesu Errettung vom Kreuz in der islamischen Koranexegese von Sure 4:157,” *Orients* 36 (2001), 160–195, esp. 186 ff.

8 The rationale behind the Qurʾanic denial of the crucifixion of Jesus, even if one rightly rejects a ‘docetic’ exegesis for the text, nonetheless remains inscrutable. As Michael Cook astutely notes, the doctrine of the so-called Docetists had “its primary appeal…to those who regarded Jesus as God, and were accordingly disturbed by the idea that God should have died. Since the Koranic Jesus is so emphatically human, the appearance of this doctrine in the Koran is on any showing a puzzle” (*Muhammad*, Oxford, 1996, 79).
to heaven.9 For the Ibn Sabaʾ of the parousia archetypes, however, the messiah is ‘Ali, not Jesus, and it is ‘Ali who undergoes the vicissitudes of providence accorded to the Qurʾānic Christ. David Cook has noted the considerable flux in which the messianic role of Jesus existed in the first centuries of Islam—a flux that was due, in large, part both to Islam’s polemical antagonism towards Christianity and, more importantly for our purposes here, the “developing cult of the Prophet’s family,” which led to a considerable reduction and circumscription of Jesus’ messianic role. As the cult of the Prophet’s family ascended and assumed an ever larger role in Muslim eschatology, the net effect diminished, although certainly did not eradicate, the role of Christ as the premier harbinger of the end of time.10

This dynamic plays directly into a number of common tropes attributed to the Sabaʾīya. Most famously, one encounters this in their alleged claim that, just as Jesus had been spared an ignoble death and a shaytān had been crucified in his place, so ‘Ali escaped a similar indignity thanks to a satanic doppelganger who suffered his apparent death in his place.11 However, this trend extends beyond the limits of the texts attributed to the Sabaʾīya. We have previously encountered in the series of traditions in which, for example, Muhammad declares ‘Ali to be “like Jesus,” declaring that his enemies will curse him like the Jews cursed Jesus and his misguided followers and admirers will regard him as god just as the Christians declared Jesus to be god (see ch. 5 above). One can multiply these examples. Aṣbagh ibn Nubāta allegedly heard ‘Ali claim that the Prophet prophesied to him that he would receive a mortal blow on 17th of Ramaḍān, the night of Moses’ death, and

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9 It is certainly valid to question whether or not there exists such a thing as ‘Qurʾānic messianism’ at all, and Fred M. Donner done just this in his, “La question du messianisme dans l’islam primitive,” REMMM 91–4 (2000), 17–27. Donner argues the Qurʾānic occurrences of title Messiah, or al-masīh, “ne son pas le signe d’une conception messianique” (ibid., 21); his argument would convince but he does not take into account the early interpretations of Q. 43:61, which in several, early qirāʿāt make Jesus “the sign of the hour [ʿilm/ʿalam li-l-sāʿa];” see ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Khatīb, Muʿjam al-qirāʿāt, 9 vols. (Cairo, 2002), viii, 392 f. This early interpretation of the Qurʾān may also find an echo in the statement of 7th/1st century Christian apologetic text, Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati, that “a prophet has appeared... [who] proclaims the arrival of Christ the anointed who shall come” (cf. the text in G. Dagron and V. Déroche, “Juifs et Chrétiens dans l’Orient du VIIe siècle,” Travaux et Mémoires 11 [1991], 208, v. 16).

10 Cook, Muslim Apocalyptic, 139.

die on the 22nd of Ramaḍān, the night Jesus ascended to heaven.\textsuperscript{12} In other versions, al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī announces to his father’s partisans that ‘Alī was assassinated on the day God revealed the Qurʾān to Muḥammad, the day God raised Jesus to heaven, and the day Joshua son of Nūn was killed.\textsuperscript{13} The Ibn Saba’ of the parousia archetype thus utters pronouncements which exhibit a displacement of Jesus as the messianic personality in favor of ‘Alī in a degree commensurate with these examples—even when not explicitly stated as such. Positing ‘Alī, or any other member of the \textit{ahl al-bayt} for that matter, as the central heroic figure of the eschatological drama almost always necessitates a displacement or limitation of the role of Jesus as the messianic hero of early Muslim apocalyptic, but rarely is such displacement as complete as one finds it in the \textit{raj’a} archetype.\textsuperscript{14}

Before our analysis can proceed further along these lines, it is first necessary to establish a fuller picture of the earliest stratum of the Ibn Saba’ tradition. It is this stratum, I contend, from which the parousia archetype first emerges and, moreover, that bears the most promise of fruitful insight into the historical origins of the \textit{raj’a} doctrine of early Shi‘ism.

\textit{The ‘Archaic’ Raj’a Archetype}

As noted above, the heresiological etiology of the \textit{raj’a}-doctrine appears to have taken the form of an archetypal narrative that served as the foundation of subsequent embellishments and expansions. Unlike

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Ivanow} An important exception to this can be found in the literature of the Ismā‘īlīs, where one finds Jesus’ messianic identity collapsed into ‘Alī rather than displaced by him. Take, for example, the following report related on the authority of Jābir al-Ju‘fī, “I heard my lord and master Abū Ja‘far al-Bāqir Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī relate the following incident on the authority of his father from ‘Alī, that he ascended the pulpit in Kūfa and said, ‘O People, I am the Messiah who heals the blind and the leper, who creates birds, and dispels the clouds’—meaning the second Messiah—‘I am he, and he is 1….Verily the Messiah is \textit{al-qāʾ in bi-l-haqq}, and he is the Lord of this world and the next….Īsā ibn Maryam is from me, and I from him. He is the greater world of God \textit{[kalimat allāh al-kubrā]} and the witness \textit{[shāhid]} and I am the one witnessed by the unseen \textit{[al-mashhūd alā al-ghāʾibat]}.” The passage comes from a text attributed to the Fāṭimid author Ja‘far ibn Maṣḥūr al-Yaman (fl. 4th/10th century); see R. Strothmann (ed.), \textit{Kitābu’l-kashf of Ja‘far ibn Maṣḥūr’l Yaman} (London, 1952), 8. Cf. Ivanow, \textit{Haft Bāb}, 14 and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, \textit{Madinat al-Salām}, xvi, 607 f.
\end{thebibliography}
the story of the fiery execution of Ibn Saba’, however, this archetype belongs to the early strata of the Ibn Saba’ tradition—perhaps the earliest. As was the case with the archetypes examined above, the raj’a archetype also harkens back to a ‘prototype’ khabar, which appears in various works as a self-contained narrative capsule.

For the raj’a archetype, one encounters three inter-related akhbār, all of which purport to narrate the arrival in Madā’in of the news of ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib’s death as witnessed by ‘Alī’s then commander Zuhar ibn Qays al-Ju’fī. All three of these akhbār appear in writing as early as the 3rd/9th century in the work Kitāb maqtal Amīr al-Mu’minīn of Ibn Abī l-Dunyā (d. 281/894), but the reports likely predate Ibn Abī l-Dunyā’s work by at least a century and a half. Two of these akhbār are related from Zuhar on the authority of the Kūfan polymath ‘Āmir ibn Sharāhil al-Sha’bī (d. ca. 110/178); one is not. We start with the version of Sha’bī as related on the authority of his student Mujālid ibn Sa’īd (d. 144/762),\(^\text{15}\) which enjoyed the most widespread circulation. This version reads as follows:\(^\text{16}\)

\begin{align*}
\text{Sa’īd} \text{ ibn Yahyā al-Qurashi—‘Abd Allāh ibn Sa’īd—Ziyād ibn ‘Abd Allāh—al-Mujālid ibn Sa’īd—al-Sha’bī—Zuhar ibn Qays al-Ju’fī said:}
\end{align*}

‘Ali put me in charge of 400 men from the inhabitants of al-‘Irāq and ordered us to establish an outpost in al-Madā’in [amaranā an nanzila l-madā’in rābiṭasān]. By God, while we were sitting on the road at sunset, suddenly there came a man striking his mount. We said: “Where are you coming from?” ‘From Kūfa,’ he said. ‘When did you depart?’ we asked. ‘Today,’ he said. So we asked, ‘What’s the news?’ He said, ‘The Commander of the Faithful went to the prayer, the dawn prayer. Ibn Bujra and Ibn Muljam, one of the two struck him with a blow—a man could survive a harsher blow and die from a lesser one [inna l-rajul la-ya’ishu mimmā huwa ashaddu minhā wa-yamītū mimmā huwa ahwanu minhā]!’ Then he departed. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Saba’i lifting his hands to the sky said, ‘God is great! God is great!’ I said to him, ‘What’s wrong with you [mā sha’nuka]?’ He said, ‘If he had informed us that he saw that his brains spilling out, I would still know that the Amīr al-Mu’minin will not die until he leads the Arabs with his staff [law akhbaranā ħadhā annahu nazarā ilā dimāghihi qad kharaja’ araithu

\(^{15}\)Kūfan and generally harangued as a liar by the hadīth-critics, Mujālid nevertheless functions as the primary transmitter for quite a significant proportion of al-Sha’bī’s reports in the akhbāris’ collections. Cf. Ibn Ḥajar, Tahdhib, x, 39–41 and U. Sezgin, Abū Mihna, 210.

\(^{16}\)Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, Maqtał, 83 f. See the same transmission of this khabar in al-Khaṭṭīb al-Baghdādī, Madīnat al-Salām, ix, 516 f.; Ibn ‘Asākir, Dimashq, xviii, 444; Ibn al-‘Adīm, Bughyat al-talab, viii, 378 f.
We had remained there only a night when the letter [kitāb] of al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī came to us (stating):

‘From the servant of God, Ḥasan, Commander of the Faithful: Take the oath of allegiance [bay’a] from those under your control.’

Then we said (to him), ‘What do you think now [ayna mā qulta]?’ He said, ‘I didn’t see him die.’”

Reading Jāḥiz’s (d. 255/868–9) abbreviated transmission of the above account, Friedländer believed himself to have stumbled upon the ‘Archimedean Point’ of the Ibn Saba’ tradition, and in many ways unforeseen even by Friedländer, he was correct. Although Jāḥiz’s account represents a considerably abbreviated version of the above account (a fact made clear by comparing it with the above version recorded by his slightly younger contemporary, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā), the two share many of the same features which struck Friedländer as so unique. Friedländer marveled in particular at the casual, almost incidental tenor of this early khabar-form of the rajʿa archetype. The khabar struck him as more sober and much less polemical than the conventional accounts—i.e., as functioning outside the ‘heresiological mode’ in which most heresiographers depicted Ibn Saba’ and the Sabaʾiya.

In speaking of the relative sobriety of the above khabar, one must do so keeping in mind its juxtaposition to the considerably embellished heresiographical tradition. As to its veracity, there is little one can say based on the mere fact that our sources offer us scant means to undertake an analysis capable of determining the unassailable historicity of the khabar’s claims. All we can argue here is that this tradition belongs to the earliest recoverable stratum of Ibn Saba’ narratives, and while the feasibility of its veracity might be inveighed for, its actual historicity cannot be ascertained beyond a shadow of doubt.

Nevertheless, it is particularly striking that the presence of numerous elements of the later Ibn Saba’ tradition emerge here as unassuming tidbits of narrative. These items later expand into full blown confessional doctrines: the denial of ʿAlī’s death deriving from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb’s incredulous response, the rajʿa doctrine emerging from his allusion to ʿAlī’s awaited messianic rule over the Arabs, and perhaps even the allegation of the Sabaʾiya’s reverence for the clouds

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17 “ʿAbdallāh ibn Sabā (I),” 321.
deriving from his dismayed pronunciation of the *takbîr* while looking to the sky.

A number of variant traditions may be cited that exhibit notable departures from the text quoted above. Two are notable in that key aspects of the wording of Shaʿbī’s tradition from Zuḥar remain preserved, but the name of Ibn Sabaʾ disappears altogether. The first instance occurs in Balādhurī’s *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, in which Balādhurī cites Mujālid’s transmission from Shaʿbī but through the authority of the Kūfan akhbārī al-Haytham ibn ʿAdī (d. ca. 206–9/821–4), and not the Kūfan traditionist Ziyād ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Bakkāʾī (d. 183/799) as above. Balādhurī, or his source, considerably truncates the *khabar* including an iteration of the phrase, “If you would have brought us (ʿAlī’s) brains in a bag, we would have known he would not die until he leads you with his staff”; however, the phrase in Balādhurī’s *khabar* has been attributed to an unnamed ‘*rajul*’, or man, without an explicit attribution to Ibn Sabaʾ.18 Thus, Ibn Sabaʾ remains unnamed in this account, and the unnamed man appears to be speaking for a group rather than just for himself.

The second variant of Shaʿbī’s Zuḥar-tradition bypasses Mujālid and, unlike the previous two, comes to us on the authority of the Kūfan traditionist Abū Hudhayl Ḥusayn ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulami (d. 136/753–4).19 This *khabar* presents to us a considerably different scenario as well. Zuḥar, rather than receiving the news in Madāʾin, himself rides there from Kūfa to deliver the news of ʿAlī’s fatal injury. He arrives in Madāʾin whereupon “the city’s inhabitants [*ahluhā*]” ask him of what news he brings. Zuḥar replies with the famous report of ʿAlī’s fatal wound and declares, “One might die of a lesser wound and survive one greater [*qad yamūtu al-rajulu mimmā huwa adnā minhā wa-yaʿishu mimmā huwa aktharu minhā*].” It is then not Ibn Sabaʾ, but the inhabitants of al-Madāʾin who reply, “By God, if you brought us his brains in sixty bags, we would have known that he will not die until he leads the Arabs with his staff [*wa-llāhi law jiʿtanā bi-dimāghīhi fī sittīn ṣūrahūn la-ʿalimnā annahu lā yamūtu ḥattā yasūqa lʿarab biʿašāhu*].”20 This tradition’s exchange of the inhabitants of al-Madāʾin with Ibn Sabaʾ paints a picture vaguely reminiscent

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20 Ibid., 82.
of the Shi‘i tale of the Madā‘inīs’ response to ‘Ali’s brief resurrection of Khusraw Anūshirvān’s skull encountered in the previous chapter.

Such a detailed examination of the variants in the transmission of Sha‘bī’s khabar finds its justification insofar as it is indispensable for surmising how early Ibn Saba’ featured in the narrative. Most salient is Sha‘bī’s colorful depiction of seventy bags containing ‘Alī’s brains as insufficient evidence for those denying the imām’s death, but as seen above, there is cause for skepticism when it comes to attributing the saying to Ibn Saba’ in that his name occasionally drops from the narrative. Is his presence, therefore, a secondary development? I would contend that any doubts in this regard can be allayed by a number of considerations. Firstly, although Balādhurī’s account omits Ibn Saba’, the sharply abbreviated form of his transmission adds to the likelihood that Ibn Saba’ had been simply ‘left out’. Secondly, despite the fact that Ḥuṣayn ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s transposition of Ibn Saba’ for the inhabitants of al-Madā‘in clearly marks a significant departure from the ‘Mujālid-branch’ of Sha‘bī’s tradition (Balādhurī’s version aside) and, therefore, may feasibly represent an earlier version of Sha‘bī’s report into which Ibn Saba’ was subsequently introduced, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā records a third version of Zuḥar’s report not transmitted from al-Sha‘bī, which appears to exclude this possibility.

This final khabar comes from the akhbarī Hishâm ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. ca. 204/819), whose authority for the report is Abū ‘Abd Allāh ‘Amr ibn Shamir al-Ju‘fī, a Kūfan traditionist who served as imām of the Ju‘fī Mosque in Umayyar Kūfa for thirty years21 and who in turn transmits his account from a lesser known Kūfan tābī‘ī named ‘Urwa ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Qushayr al-Ju‘fī.22 Thus, Ibn al-Kalbī effectively transmits a ‘Ju‘fī’ tradition transmitted on the authority of two of Zuḥar’s fellow tribesmen. Like al-Sha‘bī, ‘Urwa ibn ‘Abd Allāh relates the account of Zuḥar ibn Qays, who purports to have been an eyewitness to these events in Madā‘in. However, in Zuḥar’s account, Zuḥar stands alongside al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Ali as the news of the death of ‘Alī reaches al-Madā‘in. Zuḥar expresses his fear to al-Ḥusayn over a group of individuals who refuse to believe in ‘Ali’s death, so he advises

21 See Ibn Ḥajar, Lisān, iv, 422 f.; Ibn ‘Adī, Kāmil, v, 1889. Although Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ju‘fī is best known as a transmitter of the materials of the controversial Shi‘ite traditionist Jābir al-Ju‘fī, he does not seem to have fully identified himself with the Shi‘a of his day. Cf. Modarressi, TS, i, 204 f.

22 Mizzi, Tahdhib, xx, 27–9.
for them to all be gathered together to attend the reading of al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī’s letter announcing his father’s death and demanding their oath of allegiance. Zuḥar reads the letter before the congregation, and narrates:23

A man named Ibn al-Sawdā‘ from tribe of Hamdān, who was called ‘Abd Allāh ibn Saba’, said, ‘By God, if I had seen the Commander of the Faithful in his grave, I would still know that that he will not go (from this world?) until he is victorious (or appears) [wa-llāhi law ra‘aytu amīra l-mu‘minin fi qabrihi la‘alimtu annahu lan yadhhaba ḥattā yazhara].’

This final part of the ḥabar offers an array of fascinating tidbits of data. It includes not only well-known variants on Ibn Saba’s name, but also attests to an alternative version of his denial of ‘Alī’s death. Gone is any mention of ‘Alī’s brains in bags or bursting from his skull—both topoi reflected the nature of the fatal head-wound inflicted by ‘Alī’s assassin—and now merely ‘Alī’s grave features. Particularly fascinating is the phrasing of ‘Alī’s current state, “lan yadhhaba ḥattā yazhara”—a statement vague enough to lend itself to a number of interpretations. One can only speculate as to why Sha‘bī’s account ultimately proved to be the most influential, although factors such as the obscurity of ‘Urwa ibn ‘Abd Allāh and the bland wording of his account certainly must have come into play. Yet, even though this final account does not enjoy the broader attestation of the Sha‘bī account—whether among the akhbārīs or the heresiographers—it provides an important testimony to the possibility that Ibn Saba‘ belongs to the most archaic versions of this tradition.

The history behind the putative source of the narrative, Zuḥar ibn Qays al-Ju‘fī, merits some examination as well. Although an early supporter of ‘Alī during the imām’s lifetime, Zuḥar ibn Qays veered widely from the path of ‘Alid partisanship soon thereafter, most infamously and definitively in 61/680 when he served as ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād’s courier and transported the severed head of al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī to the court of Yazīd I ibn Mu‘āwiya (r. 60–64/680–83).24 Although not always an Umayyad loyalist, Zuḥar figures prominently as an

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23 Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, Maqtal, 88.4–6.
24 Tabārī, ii, 374 f. (according to Abū Mīkhnaf and Ibn al-Kalbī). Although later historians such as Ibn al-‘Adīm deny his role in al-Ḥusayn’s death (see Bughyat al-ṭalab, viii, 3786), this view appears to be merely a reflection of later scholars on the incongruence between Zuḥar’s initial service to ‘Alī and his subsequent opposition to nearly every ‘Alid cause thereafter.
opponent of overly zealous ‘Alid insurrectionists. One sees this in his pro-Umayyad stance during the conflagration resulting in the arrest and execution of Ḥujr ibn ‘Adī al-Kindī and his associates in 51/671 as well as his frequent appearance as a staunch opponent of al-Mukhtar ibn Abī ‘Ubayd al-Thaqafī. In the latter case, his opposition had been cut short, like many other ashraf in Kūfa, once he fled to Baṣra. While there, he remained loyal to the Zubayrids for the short period of their domination over the city, but not much later we hear of him negotiating the recognition of ‘Abd al-Malik as caliph leading up to the defeat of Muḥammad ibn al-Zubayr in 71/691.25 Thereafter, he served the Umayyads loyally until his death, apparently at the hands of the Khārijite leader Shabib ibn Yazīd al-Shaybānī in 76/695.26

As a candidate for our earliest source of the Ibn Sabaʾ narrative (if the isnāds are accurate), Zuḥar certainly strikes one as an unexpected candidate for the ultimate origins of the heresiographers’ infamous heresiarch. We find in Zuḥar a relatively pragmatic sharif attempting to navigate the often fatal upheavals of contemporary Umayyad politics in keeping with his own interest in self-preservation. At the furthest extreme, one might imagine him as a disgruntled, former partisan of ‘Alī and, thus, potentially given to introducing exaggerations and embellishments into his narratives of certain events within the recall of his memory; however, it seems to me unlikely that he would fabricate Ibn Sabaʾ out of thin air and, then, even more unlikely to describe him as a fellow comrade in arms. Then again, Zuḥar may have been more of a hard-boiled, anti-‘Alid propagandist than our sources belie to the modern reader, or not even the true source of the khabar. In such a case, one may be led to attribute the account to Shaʾbī or his student, al-Mujālid ibn Saʿīd, who is also the best-candidate for the ‘common-link’. Mujālid’s reputation as a transmitter among the hadith-folk scarcely inspire confidence, yet even Mujālid would represent quite an early stratum of the tradition—as early as the end of the 1st or the beginning of the 2nd century a.H. All of these options are equally as plausible as they are tenuous when examined in such a narrow fashion. Broadening our perspective of the tradition’s place considerably elucidates the problem and provides the desired evidence

25 Ṭabarī, ii, 804.
that we are dealing here with a thoroughly Umayyad stratum of traditions, dating perhaps to a period as early as the mid-1st/7th century.

Two Non-Archetypal Akhbar on ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Hamdānī

Perhaps one of the most important items of information present in the above account of Zuḥar related on the authority of al-Shaʻbī is the form of Ibn Sabaʾ’s name in the tradition: ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Sabaʾī al-Hamdānī. Other versions, such as that of Jāḥiz and Ibn al-Kalbī, also confirm the nickname Ibn al-Sawdāʾ as being attached to this figure.27 These two names of Ibn Sabaʾ also emerge, as noted in the previous chapter, in the early version of the minor ‘denunciation’ archetypes, in which ‘Alī denounces Ibn al-Sawdāʾ or ‘Abd Allāh al-Sabaʾī for espousing various types of ghulūw. Below, we shall examine two other key instances in the akhbar literature in which Ibn Sabaʾ appears as ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb with nisba ‘al-Sabaʾī’ or, alternatively, with the nisba al-Hamdānī. Both nisbas are entirely in keeping with his reputed Yamanī origins.

Like the Zuḥar-traditions above, these two akhbar exhibit a strikingly incidental and casual style in referring to the presence of Ibn Sabaʾ among ʿAlī’s partisans. The very tone of these two reports suggests that they comprise the detritus of a potentially larger corpus, now lost, and, thus, belong to the earliest stratum of reports on his persona. This stratum potentially even predates the notoriety acquired by Ibn Sabaʾ in the late Umayyad period. Also striking is that both traditions provide enough information to enable one to construct a rough patchwork chronology of the activities of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Sabaʾī leading up to his reception of the news of ‘Alī’s death in Madāʾin as depicted in the above, early archetypal accounts above.

Of the two, the first account examined below communicates most clearly the ideological position and sympathies of this persona—equating his station with that of a number of ‘Alī’s better-known, and certainly more revered, partisans. Balādhurī provides us with the earliest version of this report in his Ansāb al-ashraf, but his version seems to have been considerably abridged.28 The fullest versions appears in Ibrāhīm al-Thaqafī’s (d. 283/896) al-Ghārāt and ps.-Ibn al-Qutayba’s

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27 Jāḥiz, Bayān, iii, 81; Ibn Abī Dunyā, Maqtal, 88.
(=Ibn Qūṭiya?, d. 367/977)\textsuperscript{29} al-Imāma wa-l-siyāsa.\textsuperscript{30} Only Ibrāhīm al-Thaqafi attaches an isnād to the report, which is ostensibly related on the authorouity of the relatively unknown Shīʿi traditionist named ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Jundab (d. ca. 80s/700s?), who cites his father, the pro-ʿAlid Kūfan Jundab ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Asadi, as the ultimate authority for the text.\textsuperscript{31}

The context of the report unfolds in the wake of the arbitration between ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān concluded at Ṣiffīn in 37/657 and the subsequent defeat and murder of Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, ʿAlī’s then governor over Egypt, by the forces of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ in 38/658. In this khabar, a number of prominent partisans from ʿAlī’s camp approach the imām seeking a definitive declaration on Abū Bakr and ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. ʿUthmān’s reviled status, it seems, stood as a foregone conclusion. ʿAbd Allāh al-Wahb appears among these persons alongside three other individuals: Ḥujr ibn ʿAdī al-Kindī, ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥamiq al-Khuḍāʾ, and Ḥabba ibn Juwayn al-Bajalī al-ʿUranī.\textsuperscript{32} The last individual, the somewhat obscure Kūfan ṭābiʿī Ḥabba al-ʿUranī (d. 76/695–6), is known mostly to us as a companion of ʿAlī at Ṣiffīn and Nahrawān and, thus, as a source of akhbār relating these events. During the former conflict, for example, Ḥabba had apparently fought alongside ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, for he narrates the story of his death. Other accounts also compare him to the likes Rushayd al-Hajārī and Asbagh ibn Nubāta (on whom see below), who are both strongly associated with traditions about the rajʿa circulated among the early Shīʿa.\textsuperscript{33} More interesting here, however, is the appearance of two other names: Ḥujr ibn ʿAdī and ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥamiq.

Both Ḥujr and ʿAmr survived ʿAlī, and even long after his death they maintained a reputation for being among his staunchest supporters until they met their death at the hands of Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān’s faction. Ḥujr’s unswerving loyalty to ʿAlī resulted in his martyrdom at

\textsuperscript{29} See G. Lecomte, Ibn Qutayba (mort en 276/889): L’homme et son œuvre, ses idées (Damascus, 1965), 174 ff.
\textsuperscript{31} See Bellamy, “Ibn Abī Dunyā’s Kitāb,” 8 and Sezgin, Abū Miḥnaf, 195.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibrāhīm al-Thaqafi also names the famous Shīʿī traditionist Ḥārith al-ʿAwar as among their ranks (Ghārāt, 1, 302); on him, see Modarressi, TS, 1, 45 ff. Ps.-Ibn al-Qutayba drops any mention of Ḥabba al-ʿUranī (Imāma, 113).
\textsuperscript{33} See Ṭabarī, 1, 3317 f. and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Madīnat al-Salām, 9x, 198–201.
the hands Muʿawiya, who, with the aid of Ziyād ibn Abīhi, also executed Ḥujr’s supporters. Ḥujr’s execution canonized him as a perennial paragon of Shiʿī martyrdom. A discussion of the full extent of Ḥujr’s associations with the Sabaʿiya must be delayed until the following chapter, but for now, let is suffice to say that Ḥujr, like the others, represents the most radical core of ‘Alī’s unswerving loyalists.

ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥamīq likewise continued to adhere to ‘Alī’s legacy of opposing Muʿawiya’s claim to the caliphate, rejecting al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī’s more conciliatory approach, and supported Ḥujr in his defiance of the Umayyad authorities. Even though ʿAmr, unlike Ḥujr, absconded with his life by avoiding Ziyād’s roundup of Ḥujr’s key supporters, in the course of the conflagration with Umayyad authorities in al-ʿIrāq, ʿAmr would also be counted among the casualties by the time events had unfolded. ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥamīq, our sources inform us, first gained notoriety among the ʿUthmānī party as one of the murderers of ʿUthmān, whose lifeless corpse ʿAmr boasted to have brutally stabbed repeatedly. After ʿAmr fled to Mosul hoping to escape with his life, he was suddenly overtaken by dropsy of the stomach (“qad saqā baṭnuhu”), and Muʿawiya’s men apprehend him while he lay immobilized by his illness. When Muʿawiya’s henchmen happened upon him, they stabbed ʿAmr’s abdomen nine times until he expired—the same number of blows ʿAmr allegedly inflicted upon ʿUthmān’s corpse.

In the account in which they appear at the side of Ibn Sabaʾ, however, ʿAmr and Ḥujr are clearly Ibn Sabaʾ’s peers. When, according to this account, these partisans petition ʿAlī for a definitive statement of his position on Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, ʿAlī, crestfallen at the news Muhammad ibn Abī Bakr’s death and Egypt’s loss to Muʿawiya’s faction, responds impatiently to their request. Despite his impatience, ʿAlī musters the resolve to compose a letter (kitāb) to settle the matter definitively, which he then commands to be read to his partisans. Balādhurī, who provides the ‘abridged’ account, claims that the letter did ʿAlī no good. However, Balādhuri also asserts that Ibn Sabaʾ

35 Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 272 f. (according to whom, his head was the first to be transported from one region, “balad”, to another); Yaʿqūbī, Taʾrikh, ii, 231 ff.; Ṭabarī, ii, 127 f; Aghānī 3, xvii, 137 ff. Wāqidī and others, although not Sayf, have him enact his claim to have stabbed ʿUthmān nine times in his account of ʿUthmān’s murder; see Hinds, “Murder of ʿUthmān,” 456; cf. Ibn Shabba, iv, 1232 f.; Masʿūdī, Murūj, iii, 88 (§1602).
maintained a copy (nuskha) in his possession and that he perverted its contents (ḥarrafahā). Presumably under this pretext, Baladhuri preferred to expunge the text from the khabar in his Ansāb. Ibn Abī l-Hadid, who also knew of the letter, opted for the opposite approach: he omits the introductory materials mentioning Ibn Sabaʾ originally attached to the letter but reproduces the text of the letter more or less completely. Fortunately, the Ghārāt of Ibrāhīm al-Thaqafi preserves both the introductory passages and the text of the letter providing us with the entire khabar largely intact. Reading the text of ʿAlī’s alleged letter, one soon finds numerous grounds for Baladhuri’s trepid reservations. The letter itself reads like a veritable rāfīḍī manifesto, pronouncing imprecations against ʿAlī’s predecessors and dissenters alike while detailing with colorful commentary the community’s gradual, inexorable fall into perdition after Muḥammad’s death due to its obstinate refusal to hand over leadership to ʿAlī as was his due. Towards the end of the letter, ʿAlī finally berates the Kūfans for their passivity and reluctance to fight the Syrians and rouses them to muster their strength and resources for one last, decisive offensive.

The complete text of the letter has been translated at the end of this chapter as an excursus, its length being too prohibitive to include here in full. In all likelihood the letter originated from Umayyad Kūfā, where it would have circulated as a type of Shīʿī sectarian pamphlet. The letter, in effect, represents an exceedingly rare instance in which Ibn Sabaʾ appears as a transmitter of knowledge and teaching from ʿAlī himself. There can be little doubt that the letter’s circulation in Kūfan circles served as the inspiration for the Kūfan traditionists’ transmission of the report in which ʿAlī denounces Ibn Sabaʾ for criticizing Abū Bakr and ʿUmar—i.e., the ‘cursing’ archetype examined in the previous chapter.

In the second non-archetypal account, this time recorded solely by Baladhurī, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Sabaʾī appears alongside Maʾqil ibn Qays al-Riyāḥī, Ziyād ibn Khaṣafā al-Bakrī, and (again) Ḥujr ibn

36 Sharḥ, v, 94–100.
37 Ghārāt, i, 302 ff.; cf. also the version of ps.-Ibn al-Qutayba, Imāma, 113 ff., which also preserves the introductory material, but more partially.
38 Another example of this sort of pamphlet can be found in Kitāb al-masāʾil allatī akhbara biḥa Amīr al-Muʾminin al-Yahūḏi allegedly transmitted by the Kūfān tābīʾī al-Ḥārith al-Aʿwar, in which one finds a series of replies to questions posed to ʿAlī by the head of the Jewish community in ʿIrāq. See Modarressi, TS, 1, 59.
'Adī as one of the leaders (ruʿasā) from ‘Alī’s partisans. This second account seems to portray the Kūfan notables and key supporters of ‘Alī as answering his summons to gather together once again for yet another offensive against the Syrians. Ḥujr ibn ‘Adī gathers nearly four thousand men under his command, Ziyād ibn Khaṣafa and Maʿqil ibn Qays gather two thousand each, and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb a thousand. Ziyād ibn Khaṣafa swiftly marches towards Syria where, after undertaking a number of minor excursions against the Syrians, he settles in Hit awaiting the approach ‘Alī’s forces. ‘Alī charges Maʿqil ibn Qays with gathering his men dispersed throughout the Sawād and its surrounding regions. When a gang of Kurds raid Shahrūzūr, Maʿqil redirects the energies of his men against them. After successfully putting the Kurds to flight near Jibāl, Maʿqil returns and waits in al-Madāʾin for ‘Alī’s next command. Of course, no word comes from ‘Alī, whose impending doom renders such a word impossible, and the offensive never materializes. News of ‘Alī’s death soon reaches Maʿqil in Madāʾin and Ziyād ibn Khaṣafa in Hit forcing both to return to Kūfa at which point the khabar ends.

The presence of Maʿqil ibn Qays, who is elsewhere derided as a Sabaʾī, in Madāʾin as he receives the news of ‘Alī’s death naturally leads one to wonder if ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Hamdānī al-Sabaʾī had been in his company at this time. Note that Shaʿbī’s khabar above states that Zuḥar and Ibn Sabaʾ had been sent to al-Madāʾin to establish an outpost there with four thousand men. Could this khabar have served as a segue into the narrative of Ibn Sabaʾ receiving the news of ‘Alī’s death as narrated by Zuḥar ibn Qays?

Ibn Sabaʾ and the Rajʿa

Distinguishing the tradition attributed to Zuḥar ibn Qays al-Juʿfī from the two, ‘non-archetypal’ traditions discussed above, however, is the fact that Zuḥar’s account transformed into and served as the

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40 Balādhurī, Ansāb, ii, 420 f.
41 Madelung rightly noted that, if Ibn Sabaʾ was able to recruit and gather so many fighting men, it is exceedingly unlikely that he was a mawlā rather than an Arab. See W. Madelung, “Shiʿism in the Age of the Rightly Guided Caliphs,” in: L. Clarke, ed., Shiʿite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions (Binghamton, NY, 2001), 18 (pace Halm, Gnosis, 35).
42 Ṭabarī, ii, 43. This text is discussed in the following chapter.
43 See Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, Maqṭal, 83: “amarānā an nanzila al-madāʾin rābīṭaʾin.”
fundamental basis for the major archetypal narrative for the *raja* belief that was destined to be reproduced again and again throughout the heresiographical tradition. While ‘Ali’s alleged letter written for Ibn Saba’ and his comrades certainly led to the creation of one the minor archetypes—what I deemed the ‘cursing’ archetype (see ch. 4 above)—its content and import seems to have been nearly lost to the Islamic historiographical tradition. The appropriation of Zuhar’s *khabar* resulted in a much grander effect, insofar as it led to the creation of one of the most widespread etiological myths of *ghulūw*.

But what of the oldest versions of Zuhar tradition? The *raja*-doctrine in these *akhbār* consistently exhibit two features: namely, 1) Ibn Saba’s disavowal of ‘Ali’s death and 2) his declaration of his messianic victory and/or parousia. The denial of ‘Ali’s death always comes coupled with a counter-confession, whether of ‘Ali’s predestined role ‘to rule the Arabs with his staff’ or simply of ‘Ali’s coming victory over his enemies. Many traditions add to these two features an unabashedly messianic resonance by depicting Ibn Saba as proclaiming ‘Ali’s destiny ‘to fill the earth with justice as it had been filled with injustice.’ The Zuhar traditions attributed to Sha’bī represent the earliest of the traditions of the later type and may in fact faithfully reproduce the original contents of the earliest renditions of the parousia archetype.

Messianic *topoi* have a tendency to accumulate and expand upon these rather laconic mentions of ‘Ali’s messianic destiny. Sa’d al-Qummī, for example, records at least two versions of the messianic confession: one Ibn Saba’ utters when he hears of ‘Ali’s death in Madâ’in and the other after he arrives in Kūfa and is refused an audience with the deceased *imām*.44 In another expansion, the Sunnī heresiographer ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī claims that Ibn Saba declared that ‘Ali would descend from heaven upon his return and take revenge upon his enemies.45 The Mu’tazili ‘Abd al-Jabbār records an account claiming that Ibn Saba’ affirmed the *raja* of ‘Ali because he heard ‘Ali declare to him that, “I shall not die until I have taken my feet from the environs of Kūfa, brought forth its forces and marched to Damascus where I shall demolish its mosque, brick by brick!”46

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44 *Maqālāt*, 21. See ch. 3 above.
45 *Farq*, 224.
46 *Tathbit*, ii, 439.
Given these accretions and expansions, one could justifiably succumb to the temptation of dismissing all of these pronouncements as mere *topoi* unconnected with the historical Ibn Saba’—if ever there was such a figure. However, a compelling body of evidence can be amassed, which, I believe, recommends against adopting such a dismissive approach. This evidence, however, comes only by adding considerably more context to the utterances attributed to Ibn Saba’. To provide this context, it would be fortuitous to divert our attention briefly away from Ibn Saba’ to an equally shadowy figure associated with the Saba’iya: Rushayd al-Hajarī.

Although an obscure personality, Rushayd al-Hajarī acquired a revered and unimpeachable status in Shi‘ī historiography due to the record of him as a crucified Shi‘ī martyr who withstood ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād’s unrelenting efforts to force him to renounce ‘Alī, but interestingly enough, the image one finds of Rushayd’s beliefs concords neatly with beliefs one finds associated with Ibn Saba’ in the parousia archetype and the earliest stratum of the Ibn Saba’ tradition to which it belongs. Most Sunnī sources, which exhibit a hostile attitude towards him overall, denounce Rushayd as a believer in the *raj’a* of ‘Alī. One source even explicitly calls him a Saba’ī. This sole source is the *Uṣūl al-nihal*, a work probably authored by the Mu‘tazī Ja‘far ibn Ḥarb (d. 236/850–1), known more widely as ps.-Nāshi’ al-Akbar. Ja‘far ibn Ḥarb gives the following account of Rushayd’s reaction to ‘Alī’s death:

It is narrated concerning Rushayd al-Hajarī—and he was among those who adhere to the beliefs [*madhāhib*] of the Saba’iya—that he entered to see ‘Alī after his death while (*‘Alī’s body*) was wrapped in his death shroud and then greeted him. He told his companions: “Indeed, even now he understands speech and greets in return! He’s alive and breathing, relaxing under a snug blanket. For he is the *imām* who will fill the Earth with justice and equity, just as it is filled with injustice and inequity!”

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Note that Rushayd’s denial of ‘Ali’s death feature here as well as Rushayd’s repetition of the messianic formula also frequently attributed to Ibn Saba’. The Sunnī sources relate similar details but also add that Rushayd identified ‘Ali with the dābba min al-ard, or ‘Beast of the Earth’, of Q. 27:82 (see below), although none explicitly identify Rushayd as a Sabaī. It is fascinating that the authority cited by the Sunnīs often proves to be Sha'bī, a key source of the archaic version of the parousia archetype. According to these accounts, Sha'bī heard Rushayd deny ‘Ali’s death with his own ears.50

Although also occasionally drawing upon Sha'bī for their narratives as well,51 Shi‘ī accounts in contrast omit any references to Rushayd al-Hajarī’s belief in the raj’a and, instead, highlight his unwavering devotion to ‘Ali and focus on the circumstance leading up to his gruesome death.52 Shi‘ī accounts do claim, however, that ‘Ali granted Rushayd “knowledge over death and tribulations ['ilm al-manāyā wa-l-balāyā].”53 Inasmuch they depict Rushayd as entrusted by ‘Ali with preternatural knowledge of the future events, Shi‘ī accounts tout Rushayd’s ability to declare to a man the manner of his death before it occurred.54 This insight into future events comes to the fore in the accounts of Rushayd’s martyrdom—perhaps representing a vestige of evidence for Rushayd’s alleged belief in ‘Ali’s return and his association with apocalyptic and messianic beliefs. Kishshī provides two accounts of his execution of this sort, one of which ostensibly comes from Rushayd’s daughter Qunwāʾ.55 In Qunwāʾ’s account, she claims that after ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād had severed Rushayd’s hands and feet, her father requested a sheet of paper and utensils for writing

50 ‘Uqaylī, Du‘afā’, ii, 417; Dhahabi, Mizān, ii, 52; Ibn Hajar, Līsān, ii, 568.
51 E.g., see Mufīd, Irshād, i, 325 f. and Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ, ii, 231 f. where Rushayd’s executioner is, rather than ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād, Ziyād ibn al-Nadr al-Hārithi, a former partisan of ‘Ali (see also Madelung, Succession, 218 and Hinds, “Murder,” 459). It is, perhaps, this Ziyād and not governor of ‘Iraq, Ziyād ibn Abīhi, who executes Rushayd in the Sunni transmissions of Sha'bī’s account. See Dhahabi, Mizān, ii, 52.–3; Ibn Ḥajar, Līsān, ii, 568.–4.
53 Kishshī, Rijāl, 76.–7.
54 Ibid., 76. See Kulaynī, Kāfī, i, 484 where Ishāq ibn ‘Ammār narrates how the sixth imām Musā al-Kāzīm (d. 183/799) reproached him for doubting the imām’s ability to announce to a man his death before it occurs. Also in Ṣaffār, Baṣāʾir, 264 f. (nos. 9 and 13). Cf. Amir-Moezzi, Le religion discrète, 162.
55 Kishshī, Rijāl, 75 ff.; see also ps.-Mufīd, al-Ikhtisās (Najaf, 1971), 73.
the parousia of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib

(ṣāhīfa wa-dawā) hoping thereby to record before his death “what shall come to be before the coming of the Hour [mā yakūnu qabla l-sā'ā].” In the second account, Rushayd takes to speaking with the people of wondrous things (al-'azā'im) while being tortured for defying 'Ubayd Allāh’s command to denounce 'Alī—prompting the governor at last to cut off his tongue. These accounts likely gave rise to the hostile accusations that Rushayd claimed to be a prophet.

One is hard-pressed to penetrate Rushayd’s obscure origins and background, but most indicators point to a Yamānī origin. Van Ess has attempted to identify Rushayd with a slave (ghulām) of the same name belonging to Ḥuji ibn 'Adī who the latter took from the captives of Iṣfahān. While, as van Ess notes, this identification nicely matches with Kishshī’s statement that Rushayd had been “lowly [mustaḍaf],” it is ultimately insupportable. Rushayd’s nisba, ‘al-Hajarī’ denotes, like the name “Ibn Sabaʾ,” a Yamānī origin rather than a Persian one—harking back to a town (ḥajar) located near the environs of Ṣanāʾ. If Rushayd’s origins go back to the Yemen, then, Ibn Sabaʾ and he clearly represent similar historical types, even if their fate in the memory of the Imāmīs could not be more different. Whereas Rushayd by virtue of his cruel death enjoyed enfranchisement and reverence in the panorama of Shī‘ī martyrologies, the persona of Ibn Sabaʾ—especially after passing through the alembic of crises facing the Imāmīs in the

56 Kishshī, Rijāl, 76.9.
57 Ibid., 78; cf. Ya‘qūbi, Ta’rikh, 11, 214.1 who lists Rushayd among “those who transmitted knowledge [ʿilm] from ‘Alī.”
59 Tabarī, 11, 119, 126; cf. Aghānī, xvii, 138, 143. ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād reputedly also had a Turkish mawlā named Rushayd who died alongside him battling against the armies of al-Mukhtār and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar at the battle of al-Khāzir; see Baladhuri, Ansāb, 11, 97 and Muḥi, Irshād, 11, 64. It is interesting to note that al-Wāqidi transmits a story about a Persian mawlā of the Banū Mu‘āwiya called Rushayd al-Hajarī al-Fārisī reputed to have participated in the Battle of Uḥd (see Ibn Ḥajar, Isāba, 1, 502, no. 2655); however, it is dubious that a nearly identical narrative includes a mawlā by the name of ‘Uqba al-Fārisī (ibid., 11, 486, no. 5623).
60 Kishshī, Rijāl, 409.6; cf. Šaffār, Ṣaḥāra, 264 and Kūfaynī, Kāfī, 1, 484.
61 See also the entry on the Kūfān traditionist Ibrāhīm ibn Muslim, known as al-Hajarī, who is described as “rajul min al-ʿarab” who arrived in Kūfa from Ḥajar in Mizzī, Tahdhīb, 11, 203.
3rd/9th century—morphed into that of a reviled heresiarch who acted as the fount of *ghulūw*. It is transformation of Ibn Sabaʾ that likely led the Imāmī-Shīʿa to discard a stratum of material that, for all intents and purposes, harbored no ill-will against him.

Rushayd al-Hajarī and Ibn Sabaʾ shared not only a common Yamāni background, but also a common reverence for ʿAlī as a suprahistorical persona—a messianic redeemer if you will—whom they regarded as immune from death. They both also refused to acknowledge his death as a definite reality, holding fast to the belief that even ʿAlī’s death could not impede his messianic destiny of “filling the Earth with justice as it is filled with injustice.” In Rushayd’s material, however, one encounters a new *topos*—the identification of ʿAlī as the *dābbat al-ard*, or ‘Beast of the Earth’. The phrase, as noted above, is qurʾānic and derives from an eschatological scene depicted in Q. 27:82. The verse in question reads:

> When the verdict is given against them, We shall bring a creature out of the earth, which will tell them that people had no faith in our signs [wa-idhā waqaʾa l-qawl ‘alayhim akhrajnā lahum dābba’ ann min al-ardī tukallimuhum anna l-nās kānū bi-ayātinā lā yūqinūn].

In the broader context of early and medieval qurʾānic exegesis, the *dābbat* represents an arcane corner of qurʾānic apocalypticism, and beyond its role of testifying against those who refused to pay heed to God’s revelatory signs, the *dābbat* predominately served as fallow ground for subsequent generations to expound numerous speculative interpretations. Often the *dābbat* appears as one among the many beasts of the preternatural menagerie of apocalyptic entities such as the *jassāsa* and the like. Given that the qurʾānic pericope on the *dābbat* remains rather opaque, despite venerable attempts at decipherment, modern scholarship has had to content itself with merely documenting the bewildering history of its interpretations. However, in the Shīʿī *tafsir*, one frequently encounters an acceptance of Rushayd’s identification of the qurʾānic *dābbat* not with a supernatural beast but, rather,

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63 The most obvious parallel for the qurʾānic *dābbat* is the second Beast of Rev. 13:11; however, whereas the former is a benevolent agent of divine providence, the latter certainly is not. Cf. D. Brady, “The Book of Revelation and the Qurʾān: Is there a possible literary relationship?” *JSS* 23 (1978), 222 ff.

with 'Ali. Rushayd’s identification of ‘Ali with the dābba, therefore, manifests itself the pages of Shīʿi taṣfīṣ as well, adding testimony the belief in ‘Ali as some sort of messianic figure foretold by the Qurʾān.

One only finds a small trace of evidence for Ibn Saba’s potential connection to this belief in the form a report preserved by Ibn ‘Asākir. In this account, Ibn Saba identifies ‘Ali first as the qurʾānic dābbat al-ard, but when rebuked by him speaks of ‘Ali as an angel (malak). Rebuked once again, he finally declares ‘Ali to be the Creator. However, this report suffers on two accounts: firstly, it is—to my knowledge—unparalleled in the Ibn Saba tradition and, secondly, the report, as preserved for us by Ibn ‘Asākir comes to us in rather late and corrupt form.

One finds an even more compelling, albeit much more implicit, evidence connecting this belief to Ibn Saba in a number of traditions collected by Ibn Sa’d (d. 230/845) from the Kūfan tābiʿī ‘Amr ibn al-Asamm. In these traditions, ‘Amr describes a scene transpiring after ‘Ali’s death keenly parallel to that found in Ja’far ibn Ḥarb’s account of Rushayd al-Harajī and that found in Sa’d ibn Abd Allāh’s ‘appendix’ to Nawbakhti’s account of Ibn Saba (see ch. 3 above). In

66 Ibn ‘Asākir, Dimashq, xxxiv, 7.7–19 (ed. al-Ṭarābīshī). This tradition is attributed to Ja’far al-Ṣaḥiq, who in turn quotes Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī as the source of the report, and in this feature, the isnād seems typically Shīʿi. See E. Kohlberg, “An Unusual Shīʿ Isnād,” IOS 5 (1975), 142–9. However, intervening between Ja’far al-Ṣaḥiq and the next named transmitter, Abū al-‘Abbās Ṭhala’ab al-Shaybānī (see Ṭarābīshī’s comments in n. 2), are unnamed sources, or ‘rijāl.’ This suggests that either Ṭhala’ab (d. 291/904), a well-known Ḥanbalī grammarian of Baghdād (see M. Bernards, “Ṭhala’ab,” EF, x, 433), or his student Abū ʿUmar Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Zāhid, who transmits the account from him, adapted an originally Shīʿi account but omitted his source(s) from the isnād. According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Abū ʿUmar al-Zāhid in particular “was extreme in his opposition to and bias against ‘Ali [kāna nihāyatan fī l-nasb wa-l-mayl alā ʿalī]” (Fihrīst, 2 vols., ed. G. Flügel [Leipzig, 1871–2], i, 76.3), and given the suspicions generally voiced about his veracity, the responsibility for the account’s wording as provided by Ibn ‘Asākir most plausibly lies with him. Cf. Ibn al-Nadīm, Fihrīst, i, 76 f.; al-Khaṭṭāb al-Baghḍādī, Madinati al-Salām, iii, 618–24; Yaqūt, Udaḥā, vi, 2556–60. Regardless of its authorship, the account makes mention of the Qarāmīṭa, dating it firmly to the late 3rd/10th century at the earliest. As for the report itself, it provides a ‘harmonized’ account in which, however, the chronological order of Abū l-‘Abbās al-Thaqafī’s harmonization is uncannily reversed. Hence, Ibn Saba confesses the divinity of ‘Ali, but ‘Ali exiles him to al-Madāʾin. There Ibn Saba establishes a following, and when the influence of the Sabaʿiya becomes widespread, ‘Ali executes them by fire.
67 He leads the Kūfans in their march against Ḫūmān but later defects according to Sayf; see K. al-ridda, i, 166 and cf. Ibn Sa’d, iii, 45 and Balādhūrī, Ansāb, iv, 1, 560.
Ibn Sa’d’s accounts, ‘Amr ibn al-Aṣamm narrates how he came to the house of ‘Amr ibn Ḥurayth—to see al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī and inform him of certain “people claiming that (‘Alī) is the dābbat al-ard and that he will be resurrected before the Day of Judgment.” Ibn Sa’d, iii1, 26: yaz’amūna annahu dābbat al-ard wa-annahu sayub’athu qabla yawm al-qiyāma. Cf. Balādhurī, ii, 444.

While those persons hailing ‘Alī as the dābbba and discounting his death remain unnamed, the scenario ‘Amr ibn al-Aṣamm describes clearly creates the same scene at which other accounts place both Rushayd al-Hajarī and Ibn Saba’ after ‘Alī’s death and, at the very least, establishes a strong evidentiary confirmation for the historicity of this belief.

With regards to the raj’ā idea, then, one encounters essentially four topos associated with the raj’ā doctrine as articulated by both Ibn Saba’ and Rushayd al-Hajarī that occur consistently enough and with such recurring frequency as to make a strong claim on historicity. They are: 1) the denial of ‘Alī’s death, 2) the affirmation of ‘Alī’s return, 3) ‘Alī’s messianic victory either a. leading the people/Arabs with his staff or b. filling the Earth with justice, etc.; and lastly, 4) the identification of ‘Alī with the Qur’ānic dābbba. Although these topos come to us via an array of disjointed traditions, all these tradition consistently orbit a limited number of events and persons that subtly imply that they interconnect with one another. The question only remains as to how. The third and forth topos, I would like to suggest, provide our most compelling clues.

As noted above, early on one finds in the Sha'bī transmissions of the Zuḥar-tradition mention of ‘Alī’s ruling with his staff (Ar. ‘aṣā). This topos contains a certain modicum of promising insight and carries considerably more weight than the brevity of its mention initially communicates, for it actually subtly appropriates a potent theme and symbol not only of early Islamic apocalypticism but also of late antique

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69 This is according to Sunni accounts; the Shī‘ī account typically describe his cross as fashioned from the trunk of a date-palm as foretold by ‘Alī.
70 Perhaps the earliest attestation to this belief appears in Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī, ed. Muḥammad Bāqir Anṣārī (Qom, 1995), ii, 562–3.
71 The ‘Ju’fī’ transmission of the Zuḥar story lacks mention of an ‘aṣā, but nevertheless has Ibn Saba’ declare ‘Alī’s imminent victory unimpeded by his death; see Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, Maqtal, 88.6.
apocalyptica more generally speaking. Its thematic importance to the Qaḥṭānī redeemer has been noted above, but here I would also like to suggest that the ‘āšā of ‘Alī (and subsequently the mahdi/qāʾim of later tradition) derives its importance from the late antique expectation of the eschatological reappearance of the staff of Moses.72

Although not immediately obvious, the ‘āšā of the Qaḥṭānī, Mahdi, and ultimately Ibn Sabaʾ traditions reflects a robust late antique, and particularly Jewish, tradition anticipating the reappearance of an array of temple vestments inaugurated by the Messiah’s appearance.73 ‘Alī’s ‘āšā, at least in Shaʾbī’s take on Ibn Sabaʾs denial of the imām’s death, draws subtly upon motifs that transcend and even predate the early Islamic apocalyptic tradition. As John Reeves has noted in a recent study of late antique Jewish apocalypticism, the reappearance of the relics of Moses—particularly his staff and the so-called ark of the covenant which contained it74 (on the latter, see following chapter)—“is interwoven throughout the parascriptual eschatological lore of late antique Judaism and early Islam.”75 The depiction of the Messiah’s triumphal return to Jerusalem bearing the staff of Moses featured frequently in post-talmudic midrashim and certainly exercised considerable influence upon early Islamic apocalyptic conceptions of Messiah’s advent.76 One reads, for example, in the Sefer Zerubbabel, an early Jewish apocalypse dating to the early 6th century A.D., of Hephṣibah, the mother of the Davidic Messiah, recovering Moses’ staff from its place of concealment in the Galilee, which she subsequentlyields to aid armies of Messiah to defeat Armilos, the ‘antichrist’ of late antique Jewish apocalypticism.77 There can be little doubt that the currency of these ideas continued and flourished well into the early Islamic period. Proof for this derives not only from its continual importance in the Jewish and Muslim sources post-dating the Arab conquests, but also in, for instance, Jewish sectarian movements, such as that of Abū ʿĪsā

74 In the biblical account, Aaron’s, not Moses’, staff resided with the ark in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle and, subsequently, the temple (Ex. 30:22–31, Num. 17:23–5); however, subsequent traditions, both Jewish and Muslim, eventually aver both staffs to be one and the same (Reeves, Trajectories, 188 f.).
75 Reeves, Trajectories, 187.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., 55–9.
al-Iṣfahānī, who allegedly wielded a rod of myrtle (Ar. ʿūd ās) during his military confrontation with al-Manṣūr at Rayy, a rod he claimed would miraculously protect his followers from the caliph’s impending onslaught.78

Moses’ staff and the qur’ānic dābba converge early on in the Islamic tradition, and in the Islamic case, the dābba initiates the eschatological era bearing with the staff of Moses and the seal of Solomon. Thus, in the most widespread version of the tradition (usually attributed to Abū Hurayra, d. ca. 58/678) one reads79

The Beast of the Earth [dābbat al-ard] will emerge and with him will be the staff of Moses [ʿāsā mūsā] and the seal of Solomon [khātim sulaymān]. By the staff, the face of the believer [al-muʾmin] will be made known. By the seal, the nose of the infidel [al-kāfir] will be marked. This is so that the people of faithlessness shall be gathered together, and this one will say, “O believer!” and this one will say, “O infidel!”

This tradition represents merely one of numerous traditions in which the staff of Moses figures prominently alongside the dābba.80 Rushayd’s declaration of ʿAlī as the qur’ānic dābba and the proclamation of Ibn Saba’ of ʿAlī’s destiny to rule with his staff are clearly two pieces belong to the same puzzle.81

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78 Shahrastānī, al-Milal, i, 257. Cf. Reeves, op. cit., 198 and Yoram Erder, “The Doctrine of Abū ʿĪsā al-Iṣfahānī, and its Sources,” JSAI 20 (1996), 184–92. The date of Abū ʿĪsā’s movement cannot be definitively established due to the fact that the Muslim and Jewish sources contradict one another irreconcilably. Shahrastānī places the origins his movement during the reign of the Umayyad caliph Marwān II (r. 126–132/744–750), whereas Jewish sources, such as the Karaite polymath al-Qirqisānī (fl. 4th/10th century), place the beginning of his movement as well as his subsequent uprising against the Muslim authority within the reign of the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 65–86/685–705). See S. Wasserstrom, “The ʿĪsawiyya Revisited,” SI 75 (1992), 58 ff.


80 Cf. the same in an alleged response of ʿAlī to an inquiry by Aṣḥāb ibn Nubātā in Ibn al-Munādī (d. 336/947), al-Malāḥim, ed. A.-K. al-Uqaylī (Qom, 1998), 302. ult.-303.2; see Cook, Muslim Apocalyptic, 340–2 and n. 38 thereto for a translation and further references.

81 E.g., see Ṣaffār, Baṣāʿir, 200.1–2 where ʿAlī declares “wa-innī la-sāhīb al-ʿāsā wa-l-mīsam wa-l-dābbā allāti tukallimu al-nās.”
One of the more interesting traditions that identify ʿAlī with the *dābba* of Q. 27:82 comes to us in the form an allegedly firsthand account Aṣbah ibn Nubāta recalls concerning a dialogue with between himself, Muʿawiya ibn Abī Sufyān, and eventually the Jewish exilarch. It reads:82

Muʿawiya said to me (i.e., Aṣbah), “O you Shīʿa! You claim that ʿAlī is the Beast of the Earth!” So I said, “We say this, and the Jews says this, too.” Then (Muʿawiya) sent for the Jewish exilarch [*raʾs al-jālūt*], “Damn you! Do you know of the Beast of Earth among your people [*wayḫka tajdūn dābbat al-ardʾ indakum*]?” “Yes,” said the exilarch. Muʿawiya said, “What is it?” “A man,” said the exilarch. Muʿawiya said, “Do you know his name?” The exilarch said, “Yes, his name is Iliyā (i.e. Elijah–S.A.).”83 Muʿawiya then turned to me and said, “Damn you, Aṣbah! How close Iliyā is to ʿAliyā!”

This tradition’s equation of ʿAlī with the *dābba*, coupled with its subsequent attribution to the Jews of the equation of the *dābba* with Elijah, offers still further insight into the profound influences exerted by late antique Judaic apocalyptic on the Shīʿī identification of ʿAlī with the quʾānic *dābba*. Shīʿī writers often equate the biblical prophet Elijah with ʿAlī, for this identification also serves the primary mechanism in uncovering biblical prooftexts foretelling the advent of ʿAlī as Muḥamamd’s wasī in the Hebrew Bible. The phonetic similarities shared by the two names clearly aided the process considerably.84 Biblical legends of Elijah’s role in the Messiah’s advent (e.g., see Mal 4:5; Mk 9:11f.) certainly must have exerted considerable influence over the Shīʿī apocalyptic imagination once the connection between Elijah and ʿAlī had become a firmly established conviction of the Shīʿa; however, parascriptual legends prove to be equally influential. From an early date, Jewish writers amalgamated the prophet Elijah with the priest Phineas, the grandson of Aaron (see Num. 25:7), and attribute to Elijah/Phineas the concealment of the very staff of Moses and, although less consistently, the staff’s recovery at the advent of the Messiah as well.85

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82 Ḥasan ibn Sulaymān, *Mukhtasar*, 487.
83 Heb. ʾēliyāh; Syr. ʾiḷīyā.
85 See *Sefer Zerubbabel* and *Pirqe Mašiah* in Reeves, *Trajectories*, 57 and 159, respectively. For the merging of Elijah and Phineas into one person, see Robert Hayward, “Phineas—the Same as Elijah,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 29 (1978), 22–34 (cited also in Reeves, *op. cit.*, 57 n. 122).
Yet, all of these connections and intersections must take us back to Ibn Sabaʾ, and indeed, eventually they do. The point at which this most vividly occurs is at the very fulcrum of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition: the death of ʿAlī ibn Abī Tālib. Having rejected docetism as a cogent paradigm for comprehending Ibn Sabaʾs denial of ʿAlīʾs death, I suggested that his denial was, rather, rooted in an eschatological and messianic vision of ʿAlīʾs persona. Here it is important to note that late antique Jewish apocalypticism, in fact, knows of two Messiahs: one ‘precursor’ Messiah from the tribe of Ephraim, frequently named the Messiah son of Joseph, and another ‘final’ Messiah, the Messiah son of David. Our main interest lies in the former. The Messiah son of Joseph appears to don the typical messianic role of fighting the enemies of Israel; however, despite his victories and successes, he inevitably dies on the field of battle—usually, but not always, at the hands of Armilos. Targum Tosefta Zech. 12:10 even speaks of this precursor Messiah as having died, like ʿAlī, from a stab-wound, reading:

Then (Israel) will look to Me and seek from Me the reason why the nations have stabbed the Messiah of the lineage of Ephraim, and they will mourn him as a father and mother would mourn their only child, and they will grieve for him the way they would grieve for (the death of) a firstborn.87

However tragic his initial career, though, the role of the Messiah son of Joseph does not cease with his death; rather, the second, Davidic Messiah emerges from ‘hiding’ to save Israel at its darkest hour by resurrecting the Messiah son of Joseph, along with the rest of the righteous dead, and vanquishes the wicked Armilos.88 Jewish apocalypses such as Sefer Zerubbabel and apocalypses featuring ‘ten signs’ (i.e., of the Davidic Messiah’s advent) testify to the sustained, constant currency of these ideas among Jewish communities well into the Islamic period.89

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86 On the origins of this idea, see David Berger, “Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: The Messiah son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations, and the Figure of Armilus,” AJS Review 10 (1985), 141–64.
88 Berger, art. cit., 148 ff.
89 See Reeves, 58, 61, 118–20, 124–9; cf. also Nicholas de Lange, “Jewish and Christian Messianic Hopes in Pre-Islamic Byzantium,” in: M. Bockmuehl and J. C. Paget,
Such ideas appear not only among writers of Jewish apocalyptic, however, but also Christian ones as well. The Christian version of this apocalyptic chronology focuses not on two Messiahs, however, but rather draws from the ‘two witnesses’ tradition of Rev. 11. Thus, they depict a climatic clash of the saints with the Antichrist just prior to the coming of Christ led by the two witnesses of Rev. 11 whom these authors identify as Enoch and Elijah—the two biblical figures who were communicated to heaven rather than dying a natural death (cf. Gen 5:24 and 2 Kings 2:11). In the most common scenario, popular in both Byzantine and non-Chalcedonian texts, the Antichrist executes Enoch and Elijah towards the end of their confrontation. Their deaths, too, are not final. In the 1st/7th-century, Jacobite *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephraem*, for example, God sends the angels Michael and Gabriel to restore the two prophets to life as well as the rest of the saints just on the cusp of Christ’s parousia and the antichrist’s defeat. Muslim tradition, interestingly enough, shows cognizance of this tradition relating Elijah and Enoch as the principle opponents to the *dajjāl*—although they survive the encounter in the Muslim version.

Ibn Sabaʾ and Rushayd al-Hajarī—as well as others perhaps about whose beliefs nothing has reached us—confess beliefs that appear to interpret ‘Alī’s death along lines quite similar to the apocalyptic fantasies of the Jews and Christians of the 1st/7th century. ‘Alī, thus, suffered in his confrontation with evil the same fate, according the Ibn Sabaʾ’s confession, as his biblical Doppelgänger Elijah, or even the Messiah son of Joseph, suffers in late antique Christian and Jewish apocalyptic; thus, in refusing to acknowledge ‘Alī’s death, Ibn Sabaʾ perhaps anticipated ‘Alī’s impending resurrection.

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92 For references to Michael and Gabriel acting as ‘Alī’s aids as well, see Ibn Saʾd, III, 23 f.
We are dealing here in the earliest stratum of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition and with a constellation of partial apocalyptic images that, once decoded and placed against the across backdrop of late antique apocalypticism, constitute striking attestations for early Shiʿī messianic beliefs regarding not only ʿAlī, but also the chiliastic resurrection of the righteous dead (rajʿat al-amwāt) to a second terrestrial life under the utopian reign of the Messiah/Qāʾim. The latter doctrine of the resurrection of the righteous dead, in particular, constitutes a uniquely Shiʿī appropriation of an idea that, although of central importance for Islam’s Jewish and Christian forbearers, came to play nearly no role whatsoever in Sunnī apocalypses. The general rajʿa remained throughout the Umayyad period, and remains even to this day, a salient fixture of Shiʿī apocalyptic beliefs—one that even a rationalist such as al-Mufīd applied his considerable talents to defend from the mockery of his skeptical, Muʿtazilī opponents—and it is fitting that this belief originated simultaneously with the emergence of the messianic cult of the household of the Prophet.

Sectarian boundaries were perhaps nowhere more permeable and porous than they were in the arena of late antique apocalypticism. The above analysis offers just one of a vast array of examples in this regard that are by no means merely limited to early Shiʿism. We shall encounter even more in following chapters. Still, the precise means by which this cross-pollination occurred for early Shiʿism in general, and Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya in particular, remain mysterious. The allegedly Jewish identity of Ibn Sabaʾ is, in fact, a false, reductionist explanation; the conversion of one Jewish man surely cannot account for the entire phenomenon. And besides, the full extent of Jewish influence (or Christian, Zoroastrian and Manichaean for that matter) on early Islam cannot be localized or limited within the confines of a single sectarian trend—let alone within a single individual’s biography. These sorts of influences were, rather, pervasive and much more mutual and dialectic than has, until very recently, been appreciated. There is really, therefore, no need to bury these materials under layers of speculative interpretation. It suffices merely to point to the continuity existing between the developing trajectory of late antique apocalyptic and the Shiʿī messianism espoused by Ibn Sabaʾ as we encounter him in the earliest stratum of reports. These symbols, mythemes, prophecies,

etc. were ‘in the wind’, and somehow—the fog of historical distance hinders our ability to find the precise intermediaries—they came to be attached to the person of ‘Ali and the hopes and ambitions of his partisans. In the raj’a archetype of the Ibn Saba’ tradition—and one can add to these the traditions of neo-ghulāt who preserve vestiges of their views—one finds, therefore, a vision ‘Ali’s death interpreted through the lens of late antique apocalyptica.

Finally returning, then, to the raj’a archetype itself, one may still ask—what exactly was meant by Ibn Saba’ in his seemingly absolute denial of ‘Ali’s death? It is uncanny that the actual corpse of ‘Ali, whether one is reading the ‘Ju‘fi’ version of the Zu‘har-tradition or Sha‘bi’s, will not serve as sufficient evidence to overturn the conviction of Ibn Saba’ that ‘Ali will nonetheless defeat his enemies. What does it mean to deny the death of someone whose brains, as Sha‘bi’s version words it, can be carried in seventy bags? There appear to be, in my view, only two interpretative options: 1) ‘Ali’s death was a divine ruse (modeled on the qur‘ānic, not docetist, model), or 2) ‘Ali’s death would be ‘reversed’, as it were, by divine intervention and would be resurrected to fulfill his messianic destiny (the apocalyptic model). The evidence against the former lies in the fact that this interpretation is only made explicit at a relatively later date. Against the latter option, one must deal with the wording of the raj’a archetype itself, which does not mention resurrection. However, it is notable that ‘Amr ibn Aṣamm’s report recorded by Ibn Sa‘d notes that the people awaited for ‘Ali, as the qur‘ānic dābba, to be resurrected before the day of judgment: “sayub‘athu qabla yawm al-qiyāma,” and it is, moreover, a resurrection (Ar. ba‘th) which is awaited by the Saba‘iya whom Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiya condemns in his Kitāb al-irğā.96

94 Certainly these reports gained currency by the 3rd/10th century (see the comments to Abū l-‘Abbās al-Thaqafī’s text in ch. 3 above), but it is feasible that they are even earlier. Again, Sha‘bi appears as one of the first to accuse the ghulāt of erring with regard to ‘Ali in the same manner the Christians erred with regard to Jesus; see Malatī, Tanbih, 119.7–9.
95 Ibn Sa‘d, iii, 26.
Excursus 1

ʿAlī in the Clouds

In the foregoing discussion of the Ibn Sabaʾ traditions, I had delayed addressing one of the most salient tropes of the heresiographical tradition—namely, the claim that Ibn Sabaʾ, in addition to his belief in ʿAlī’s messianic return, also asserted that ʿAlī dwelled in the clouds in the interim period. The heresiographers allege that this belief could be seen in the Sabaʾiya’s practice of directing salutations towards the clouds whenever they heard mention of their awaited imām’s name. These same heresiographers often include other embellishments too, adding that the Sabaʾiya claimed the thunder to be ʿAlī’s voice (sawt) and the lighting his whip (sawt) or, in a variant, his smile (tabassum).

These beliefs do not appear among the litanies of beliefs attributed to the Sabaʾiya until quite late in the development of the heresiographical tradition—i.e., from approximately the latter half of the 4th/10th century onwards. Properly speaking, therefore, they do not seem to have been an integral component of the beliefs of the historical Sabaʾiya. These beliefs, however, appear to predate their explicit association with the Sabaʾiya by at least two centuries. Polemical poetry directed against the Shiʿa from the late Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid eras attests to currency of a belief in ʿAlī dwelling in the clouds by at least some individuals. For example, the Qurashī poet Ishāq ibn Suwayd al-ʿAdawī (d. 141/748) famously declared:

I renounce the Khawārij, I am not of them,
bariʾtu mina l-khawārij lastu minhum
as well as the Weaver among them and Ibn Bāb
mina l-ghazzāl minhum wa-ibni bābī

So too the people, when they mention ῬAlī
wa-min qawmīn idhā dakharu ʿaliyīn
Call out “Peace!” to the clouds
yaruddūna l-salām ʿala l-sahābī

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97 Malatī, Tanbih, 14; Baghdādī, Farq, 233; Maqdisī, Badʾ, v, 129; Shahrastānī, Milāl, 1, 205; Šafādī, Wāfī, xvii, 189 f.; Maqrizī, Khītāt, rv., 323 f.
98 Yahyā ibn Maʿīn, al-Taʾrīkh, 2 vols., ed. ʿAbd Allah Ahmad Ḥasan (Beirut, 1990), ii, 141; Jāḥiz, Bayān, 1, 23; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbīḥ, ʿĪqd, ii, 405 f.
99 An allusion to two Muʿtazilī thinkers, Wāsīl ibn ʿAtāʾ (d. 131/728–9) and ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd ibn Bāb (d.144/761); see Halm, Gnosis, 361, n. 35.
The Khurasānī traditionist ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mubārak (d. 181/797) describes similar beliefs in a poem in which he disassociates himself from the Shīʿa declaring:\(^{100}\)

I curse neither Abu Bakr nor ‘Umar
wa-lā asubbu abā bakr\(^{\text{m}}\) wa-lā ‘umaran
Nor would I, may I find refuge in God, curse ‘Uthmān
wa-lā asubbu ma‘ādha llāhā uthmānā

Nor do I say of the Mother of Believers as
wa-lā aqūlu li-ummi l-mu‘minā kammā
the envious speak lies and falsehood against her
qāla al-ghuwātu lahā zūr\(^{\text{m}}\) wa-buhtānā

Nor do I say that ‘Alī resides in the clouds for,
wa-lā aqūlu ʿaliyun fī l-sahāb laqad
by God, I would have then spoken unjustly and with enmity
wa-lālihi qultu idhan jawr\(^{\text{m}}\) wa-ʿudwānā

What is most notable for our purposes, of course, is that neither of these poems attributes the doctrine to a sect called the Sabaʾīya; rather, what one encounters—particularly in Ibn Mubārak’s case—is a blanket denunciation of the Shīʿa. While Ishāq al-ʿAdawī’s and Ibn Mubārak’s poems may somewhat parody the beliefs mentioned in their poems, one nevertheless finds anecdotal reports about individuals adhering to such even outside the heresiographical works.\(^{101}\) The belief, therefore, seems not to have been entirely the product of calumnious accusations. In fact, the belief that ‘Alī shall return in the clouds appears frequently enough in a variety of contexts to suggest that the tropes stand as merely of one of many in a repertoire of polemical denunciations of ghulūw at large.\(^{102}\)

Of all the beliefs attributed to Ibn Sabaʾ, Friedländer declared that “this belief [i.e., that ‘Alī dwelled in the clouds] is no doubt authentic.”\(^{103}\) While on the face of things it does not seem too much of a stretch to imagine that Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya espoused such beliefs, the

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\(^{101}\) Such as Abū Zurʿaʾ Amr ibn Jābir al-Ḥadrāmī discussed in ch. 1 above. See also van Ess’ comments on Furāt ibn al-Aḥnaf al-Hilālī in *TG*, iii, 189.

\(^{102}\) E.g., see the various groups to whom the belief is attributed in Muslim, *Sahīḥ*, 1, 13, no. 65 (Jābir al-Juʿfī and the Rāfīḍa); Saʿd al-Qummi, *Maqālāt*, 27 (al-Kaysānīya); Ashʿārī, *Maqālāt*, 16 (al-Ghālīya); al-Qalqashāndī, *Ṣhibḥ al-ʿāshī fi ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ*, 14 vols. (Cairo, 1964), xi, 249 (al-Nuṣayrīya).

\(^{103}\) Friedländer, “Heterodoxies (II),” 42 f.
connection between the Sabaʾiya and the ‘Ali-in-the-clouds trope is too late to entertain seriously. To posit the connection, in my view, requires too much speculation. One could conjecture, for example, that the same circumstantial factors that may have contributed to the spread of the belief that ‘Alī would return or did not die, such as the attempt to conceal ‘Alī’s gravesite and the rumors of the disappearance of the camel carrying ‘Alī’s body, might have contributed to rumors about ‘Alī’s abode among those predisposed to believe in his victorious return. Yet, the evidence for such a connection proves to be rather thin historically speaking.

While Friedländer was certainly correct to affirm the fundamental affinity of this belief with the messianic core of the doctrines of the Sabaʾiya, I would like to list several more reasons raising doubts concerning an explicit association between Ibn Sabaʾ and this belief—especially with the belief that ‘Alī manifested his voice and anger through thunder and lightning. One of these reasons comes from Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), who preserves a fascinating tradition in his Khisāl that posits Ibn Sabaʾ as a direct interlocutor with ‘Alī on the matter of supplication (duʿāʾ). Albeit of doubtful historicity, the tradition offers an uncanny counter-portrayal of Ibn Sabaʾ that contrasts sharply from the cloud-revering heresiarch popularized by the later heresiographers. The tradition begins with the following admonishment of ‘Alī to his followers:

“Once one of you finishes with the obligatory prayer [al-ṣalā] let him lift his hands towards heaven and straighten up during the supplication [al-duʿāʾ].” But ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ said, “Commander of the Faithful!—is not God in every place?”

‘Alī said, “Yes, (he is).”

(Ibn Sabaʾ) asked, “Then why does the servant (of God) raise his hands towards heaven?”

(‘Alī) replied, “Have you not read, ‘In heaven is your sustenance and what you have been promised [fi l-samāʾ rizqukum wa-mā tuʾādūn]’ (Q. 51:22). So where does one seek sustenance if not from its location? Heaven is the location of sustenance and that which God has promised.”

104 Ibid.
It is notable that the above tradition undermines the depiction of Ibn Sabaʾ found in the heresiographical works as an individual espousing a peculiar reverence for the clouds. In fact, the tradition casts Ibn Sabaʾ as somewhat of a skeptic—if anything, he appears a bit petulant for questioning ‘Alī’s prescribed manner of practicing duʿāʾ. One naturally wonders if the above tradition derives from Kūfan circles which regarded Ibn Sabaʾ as merely one among many prominent partisans of ‘Alī to receive the imam’s teachings. Although Ibn Bābawayh’s version lacks an isnād, al-Ṭūsī (d. 459/1067) provides an isnād for his abridged version of the tradition in his Tahdhīb al-ahkām that suggests just such a Kūfan origin for the tradition.106 His isnād attributes the report to the blind Shīʿī traditionist Abū Başīr Yaḥyā ibn al-Qāsim al-Asadī (d. ca. 149–50/766–7), a prolific scholar of some prominence in the Kufa of his day.107 Although one cannot know for certain, it seems plausible that this isnād provides us with a probable date for the tradition’s origin. It is likely that such a tradition, with its unassuming and non-polemical mention of Ibn Sabaʾ, entered into circulation by the mid-2nd/8th century, or before the Imāmiya began reviling Ibn Sabaʾ as the originator of ghulūw.

The trope of ‘Alī’s overly zealous partisans believing that he dwells in the sky has yet another layer to it as well. If one peers beyond the boundaries of the heresiographical works, one finds the very same topoi mobilized in this polemical trope against the Sabaʾīya and ghulāt but in contexts lacking any connotations of the ghulūw whatsoever. This occurs mostly in a body of traditions offering counterpunctal reading of the statement that ‘Alī was in the ‘clouds’, wherein ‘the clouds’ (Ar. al-sahāb) are not literally clouds but rather a turban worn by ‘Alī so-named. The late ‘Irāqī Shīʿī scholar Murtadā al-ʿAskarī first noticed this and adduced several examples from both Sunnī and Shīʿī works,108 to which I have added some further examples below.

Shīʿī tradition specifically describes the Prophet as donning a black turban (ʾimāma sawdāʾ), which he called ‘the clouds’, or al-sahāb.109 This turban appears alongside other apparel the Prophet customarily

107 Modarressi, TS, i, 395.
108 ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sabaʾ, ii, 335–58.
wore in the lists of items that the imams inherited as the scions of the Prophet’s household. The turban, in essence, plays the same key role as the other physical artifacts of the Prophet’s wasṭiya that were believed to have been transferred from imām to imām as a part of their rightful inheritance. In Shīʿī sīra-materials, one also finds the Prophet placing this turban on ʿAlī at important moments during his prophetic career, presumably as a not-so-subtle indication of ʿAlī’s designation as his successor. Hence, one reads that the Prophet wrapped his turban around ʿAlī’s head at the battle of Khandaq as well as Ghadīr Khumm. The belief of ghulāt that ʿAlī dwelled in the clouds, later Imāmits asserted, derived from a poorly comprehended statement of the Prophet that “ʿAlī comes to you in al-sahāb”; i.e., not the clouds in the literal sense as the ghulāt say but merely in the Prophet’s turban, which he had bequeathed to ʿAlī, known as al-sahāb.

Although the earliest accounts of the hadith-folk mention the black turban’s existence from at least as early as the mid-2nd/7th century, they do not actually transmit any traditions that described the turban as possessing a name. Medieval Sunnis subsequently incorporated the relatively innocuous reports about the Prophet’s turban that first became popular among the Shīʿa, if not originating among them altogether. They incorporated such reports predominantly under the rubric of faḍāʾil and manāqib traditions and, thus, ostensibly accepted Shīʿī claims that Muḥammad’s turban had been named al-sahāb and/or that he subsequently passed it on to ʿAlī who wore it after him. Presumably,

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110 Kulaynī, Kāfī, i, 236 f.
111 Abū ‘Ali al-Faḍī Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, Majma’ al-bayān, 5 vols. (Sidon, 1937), iv, 343.8
112 ʿAlī ibn Mūsā ibn Tawāṣ, al-Amān min akhṭār al-asfār wa-l-azmān (Beirut, 1989), 103 (quoting the Kitāb al-Walāya of Ibn ‘Uqda, d. 332/944).
113 Abū Naṣr al-Ṭabrisī, Makārim, 35.–5.
114 See M. J. Kister, “‘The Crowns of This Community’… Some Notes on the Turban in the Muslim Tradition,” JSAI 24 (2000), 236 ff.
then, *al-sahāb* was the same turban the Prophet donned while delivering Friday sermons as well as the day he conquered Mecca.\(^{116}\)

The origins of the assertion that the *ghulāt*’s belief in ‘Alī’s celestial abode in fact arose from a simple misunderstanding seems to derive ultimately from a Başran traditionist of more or less ill-repute named Mas‘ada ibn al-Yasa’ al-Bāhili. Citing a *ḥadīth* related by Muhammad al-Bāqir, Mas‘ada asserted that after the Prophet had placed his turban on ‘Alī, and upon seeing his son-in-law approaching, the Prophet declared, “‘Alī has drawn near in the clouds [*qad aqbala fi l-sahāb]*.”\(^{117}\) It was upon hearing this tradition and misunderstanding it, Mas‘ada claims, that the *ghulāt* began to say that ‘Alī would return in the clouds. Known for his pro-‘Alawī leanings, Mas‘ada earned his poor reputation among the *ḥadīth*-folk for his transmission of *mursal* traditions, particularly from Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, but the *ḥadīth*-folk seem to have never rejected him as fully enfranchised member of the Imāmiya. By contrast, the Imāmis held him in high-esteem as a transmitter of the *imām* Ja‘far’s teachings.\(^{118}\) It seems that it is at Mas‘ada’s door that one must lay the responsibility for the spread of traditions about the Prophet’s black turban named ‘*al-sahāb*’.

**Excursus 2**

*The Letter of ʿAlī Given to Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Hamdānī*  
(Ibrāhīm al-Thaqafī, Ghārāt, i, 302 ff.; Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, Sharḥ, v, 94 ff.)

Translated below one will find the letter concerning Abū Bakr and ‘Umar attributed to ‘Alī and written at the request of his followers, among whom was Ibn Saba’. The *imām* allegedly commanded this letter to be read to all his partisans, meaning the letter would have been transmitted and propagated by Ibn Saba’ as well. As noted above, Balādhurī claims that Ibn Saba’ changed the wording of the document, thus thwarting ‘Alī’s efforts to presumably achieve a conciliatory disposition towards the two caliphs among his partisans. This claim ought

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\(^{117}\) Ibn ‘Adī, *Kāmil*, vi, 2386. Cf. the same in Dhahabi, *Mīzān*, iv, 98 f. and Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān*, vi, 27 where, however, it is the Prophet’s black outer-garment (*burda*), rather than his turban (*imāma*), which he calls *al-sahāb* and gives to ‘Alī.

\(^{118}\) Cf. Modarressi, *TS*, i, 322 f.
to be read as merely a statement of Balâdhurî’s own objections to the letter’s contents and, thus, essentially without substantiation. The letter’s original form has been most faithfully preserved in the Ghârât of Ibrâhîm al-Thaqafî but also rather faithfully in Ibn Abî l-Hadîd’s Sharh Nahj al-balâgha. Madelung, who appears to be noncommittal with regard to authenticity of letter, observes keenly that the content of this letter overlaps often with that of other letters putatively exchanged between ʿAlî and Muʿâwiya ibn Abî Sufyan.\(^\text{119}\) That the letter itself is authentic, however, is clearly open to doubt. The role of the letter as a literary device in late antique historiography ought to predispose us to regard a great number of such ideologically tendentious letters of dubious attribution, regardless of their obvious literary merit, unless there are explicit indications to the contrary.\(^\text{120}\) I myself find no reason to regard the letter as authentic, in the sense of being the verbatim dictation of ʿAlî; however, the text should nonetheless be taken seriously as an early example of Shîʿî religio-political propaganda circulating in Umayyad Kûfa.

In general, I have noted direct quotations of the qurʾānic text but have deferred documentation of all qurʾānic usage, since qurʾānic diction so saturates the text that to do so would be overly burdensome on the reader. The version of al-Thaqafî presents a slightly longer version of the letter Ibn Abî l-Hadîd. Those passages and phrases only occurring in the version of al-Thaqafî have been marked off by [double brackets]. In keeping with usual conventions, the caliphal office scarcely ever receives direct reference throughout the letter; rather, throughout the letter ʿAlî mentions it only obliquely as “the affair/matter/rule [al-amr]” or merely “it”—but notably always using the feminine Arabic suffix “-hâ” in the pronominal references, indicative of either the term khilâfa or imâra, both of which are feminine nouns.\(^\text{121}\) Such a convention reflects no new departure but exhibits a feature

\(^{119}\) Succession, 270–1, 210 ff.; see also idem, “Shîʿism in the Age of the Rightly Guided Caliphs,” 16.


\(^{121}\) See the comments on the use of ‘amr’ by Khalid Y. Blankinship, “Imâmah, Khilâfa, and Imâmah: The Origins of the Succession to the Prophet Muḥammad,” Clarke, ed., Shîʿite Heritage, 27.
common similar to other like manifestos attributed to ‘Alī such as the well-known *Shiqshiṣiya*.

Verily God sent forth Muḥammad as a warner to the worlds, one faithful to the revelation and a witness for this community. You, O company of Arabs, are on this day corrupt in station and religion, having alighted on sharp crags, deaf serpents [ḥayyātum ṣumni’u?] (؟), and thorns scattered across the lands. You imbibe putrid water and consume foul food.122 You shed your own blood, slay your own children, and sever the ties of kinship. You consume in your midst one another’s possessions unjustly. The paths you tread are full of fear, your idols raised up. “Most of them do not believe in Allah except while making partners with him.”123 God blessed you with Muḥammad and sent him to you as a messenger from among your own. [[He said in what he revealed from his Book: “It is he who sent forth to the heathen peoples [al-umīyīn] a messenger from their own, reciting his verses, sanctifying them, and teaching them the Scripture and Wisdom. Verily, before they were in manifest error.”124 And, he said: “A messenger has come to you from your own. Aggrieved that you might perish, eager for your sakes, he is kind and benevolent towards believers.”125 He said: “God has blessed the believers since he sent forth to them a messenger from their own. . .”. 126 “Such is God’s favor which he bestows on whomever he wills. And God possess magnificent favor.”127 He was the Messenger sent to you from amongst your own in your tongue, and you were first to believe knowing his countenance, his people,128 and his kinsmen.] He taught you the Scripture and Wisdom, religious duties and the righteous path [al-kitāb wa-l-hikma wa-l-farā’id wa-l-sunna]. He commanded you to treat your kin well, to desist from bloodshed and act to as arbiters of peace, “to render oaths back to whom they are due”129 and to fulfill bonds, not to shirk from pledges after affirming them, and that you should act compassionately, piously, generously, and mercifully. He forbade you to engage in rapine, oppression, envy, strife, slander, the drinking of wine, and dishonestly fixing weights and balances for measure. You had heard before in what was recited (from scripture) to you: that you shall not fornicate, nor practice usury; that you neither shall spend the wealth of the orphan unjustly, “nor shall you act corruptly in the land and with

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123 Q. 12:104.

124 Q. 62:2.

125 Q. 9:128.

126 Q. 3:164.


128 Reading sha’bahu, for shī’atahu.

129 Q. 4:58.
enmity.”130 “Verily God does not love those full of enmity.”131 Every good that he commands of you brings one nearer to heaven and takes one farther from hellfire; every evil that he forbade takes one farther from heaven and brings one nearer to hellfire.

When his time [[in this world]] came to an end, God took him unto himself in felicity and high-esteem, but a disaster overtook (the community), especially for his kindred and generally for all the Muslims. Never had they been afflicted with its equal, nor would they after it ever see one akin to it. When he departed on his course, the Muslims contested the matter132 after him. By God, my heart did not foresee nor did I imagine that the Arabs would divert the matter from his household after Muhammad, nor that they would be the ones diverting it from me after him. Suddenly I noticed the throngs of people around Abū Bakr and their rush to him to give him their allegiance. I held back my hand and reckoned that I was more deserving of the Messenger’s place [maqām] among the people than the one who took on the matter after him. I remained this way as God willed until I saw the apostasy of the people who had withdrawn from Islam calling for the effacement of God’s religion [din] and the faith [milla] of Muhammad [[and Abraham.]]133 I feared lest I did not aid Islam and its people that I would see in it such rift and destruction that there would be a catastrophe far greater than the recent managing of your affairs, which were merely the product of a few days, dissipating like a mirage and dissolving like a cloud. At that time I walked over to Abū Bakr and gave him my oath of allegiance. I rose up amidst these harmful events [ahdāth], so that falsehood would depart and come to nothing. “The word of God was highly exalted”,134 “even though the unbelievers detest it”.135

So Abū Bakr took charge of the affairs. He made easy, and he made light. He embraced, and he eschewed. I accompanied him as a counselor and obeyed him insofar as he struggled to obey God. I did not expect that if an ill were to befall him while I lived that the matter, which I struggled over striving to realize, would fall back to me—nor did I forgo the matter as one who does not hope for it. If it wasn’t for the intimacy between ʿUmar and him, I would not have thought that he would deny me it. When he was at death’s door, he sent for ʿUmar and appointed him to it. We heard, we obeyed, and we counseled.

Then ʿUmar took charge of the affair. His conduct was satisfactory and blessed with good fortunate until the moment death visited him. I

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130 Q. 7:74.
131 Q. 2:190.
132 Here, al-amr, translated as ‘matter’ throughout, refers specifically to the leadership of the community.
133 A reference to the so-called wars of apostacy, or ridda, that arose during and occupied the energies of most of Abū Bakr’s short tenure as caliph.
134 Q. 9:40.
135 Q. 9:32.
said in my heart, 'He will not deprive me of it,' but he made me the sixth of six (on the shūrā council). None were opposed to the leadership of anyone as severely as they were opposed to my leadership over them. They had heard me after the Prophet’s death contesting Abū Bakr saying, “Oh company of Quraysh! We people of the (Prophet’s) household have more right to this matter than any of you as long as there exists among us one who recites the Qurʾān, who knows the sunna and who judges according to the religion of truth!” Then the group feared that if I ruled over them, then they would not have a share in the matter over their lifetime, so they came to a unanimous consensus. Rule then passed to ʿUthmān, and they excluded me from it with the hope that they would obtain it and confer it to one another since they worried lest they hand it over to me. They said, “Get up and give your oath of allegiance or else we’ll force you!” I gave my oath under duress and waited, plotting [muhtasib]. Their spokesman said, “Ibn Abī Tālib! You certainly are covetous of this matter!” Then I said, “All of you are more covetous than I, but even farther from it! Who among us desires it more? I who have merely requested my inheritance and rightful due to which God and his Messenger made me most entitled!—or all of you, since you are the ones who strike my face to keep me from it and come between it and me!” They were dumbstruck, “and God does not guide the unjust.”

(Thus I prayed) “Oh Lord, I implore you to oppose the Quraysh, for they have severed the ties of kinship, cheated me of my right, diminished the greatness of my station, and gathered to contest my rightful due. I was more entitled to it than them, so they snatched it away from me.” Then they said, “Is it not that it is right for you to take it and right for you to forbid it? So either wait bitterly and quietly or die full of rage and regret.” Then I waited without any support, defender or aid except my kinsmen. I clung to them avoiding destruction, closing my eyes in agitation, swallowing the harsh misfortune, waiting with concealed rage more bitter than colocynth and more painful to the heart than the cuts of daggers until when your rancor against him came to a pitch, and you came to ʿUthmān and killed him. Afterwards, you came to me to give me the oath of allegiance. But I refused you and withdrew my hand. You contended with me and forced me to put out my hand, so I yielded it. You drew it open, while I clasped it shut. You crowded around me until I thought that you might kill one another, or that you would kill me. Then you said, “We give you our oath of allegiance—we find none besides you, nor shall we be satisfied except with you! We have given our oath. We do not disagree, and our word does not differ.” So I gave my oath to you and invited the people to give their oaths to me. Whosoever

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136 The caliphate.
137 hulamma tubāyi wa-allā jāhadnāka
138 Q. 2:258.
139 fa-aghdaytu alā l-qadhā wa-tajarra tu riqī alā al-shajā
gave their oath in obedience, I accepted him; whosoever refused, I did not force him and left him alone.

Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr gave their oath to me along with those who gave their oath to me. If they would have refused, I would not have forced them, as I had not forced others. We were not at ease long before it reached me that the two had went out from Mecca heading for Basra in an army, not one of whom had not pledged to me their allegiance or given me their obedience. They came to my governor, the keeper of my treasury, and the inhabitants of my garrison, all of whom were under my allegiance and obedient to me, and spread dissension and corrupted the lot of them. Afterwards, they attacked my partisans among the Muslims and killed a group of them treacherously, another in cold-blood, and yet another they beheaded with their swords and struck them until they met the Lord witnessing to the truth. By God if they had injured even one man deliberately to kill him, then to me the murder of that entire army once captive would be licit, not to mention those they killed from the Muslims who were more in number than those they encountered. And God removed his favor from them, “so away with the people of injustice!”140

Afterwards I looked towards the issue of the inhabitant of Syria and saw nomads banded together [aːr̥abmun aḥzābmun] and crude, vulgar people covetous (after power) gathering from every direction in need of restraint and discipline or to be commanded over and be taken by the hand. They were neither among the Emigrants nor the Helpers, not even the second-generation in good deeds [al-tābīʿīn bi-iḥsān]. I marched off to them and summoned them to obedience and unity, but they refused except a splinter and dissenting faction rising in the face of the Muslims showering them with arrows and planting spears into them like trees. There I fought alongside the Muslims and battled them. Once our weapons bit into them and they faced the pain of their wounds, they lifted the leaves of the Qur’ān [masāhif] and summoned you to its contents. I told you that they were neither a people of piety nor of the Qur’ān and that they lifted them as a cowardly, weak, and deceptive ruse. They did away with your rights and your armed opposition, then you refused my counsel and said, “Accept (the arbitration) from them, for if they were to answer to what is in the Qur’ān, they would agree with us about our position towards the truth. And, if they were to refuse, it would greatly amplify our case against them.” I accepted it from them and relented from them since you had rejected (my arguments) and lost your zeal (for battle). The peace agreement between you and them was the responsibility of two men who commanded what the Qur’ān commanded and forbade what the Qur’ān forbade, but their viewpoints diverged and their ruling split. They eschewed what was in the Qur’ān and contradicted what was in the Book. God kept them from carrying out (the arbitration)

140 Q. 23:41.
and led them both into perdition. A faction broke off from us, and we abandoned those who abandoned us until the time they spread mischief across the land, killing and sowing corruption. We came to them and said, “Hand over the murderers of our brethren, and let God’s Book be between you and us.” They said, “We are all those who murdered them, and all of us consider their blood [(as well your blood)] licit.” They sent against us their cavalry and infantry, but God brought them low, the ignoble defeat of the wicked.

When they fared thus, I commanded you to make off at once to your enemies. You said, “Our swords are satiated with blood, our arrows exhausted, and the tips of our spears have fallen off and most of them have been rent asunder. Return with us to our garrison so that we may ready ourselves with the best equipment. If you return, you will add to our warriors the number of that has fallen or left our ranks. Surely this will strengthen us against our enemies.” Thus, I turned around with you until once you came into sight of Kufa I ordered for you to set up camp in Nukhayla, to remain in your encampments, to keep your bows strung, to settle yourselves on jihād, and not to visit your sons and women often. Indeed, men fit for war are steadfast in it, and those prepared to fight in it are those who are unmoved by sleepless nights, the thirst of the risen sun, the lankness of their stomachs, and the exhaustion of their bodies. A group of you settled alongside me with an excuse, and a group of you entered the city disobediently. Not one who remained endured and stood firm, nor did one of you who entered the city come back or return. I looked at my encampment, and not even fifty men remained. When I saw that you had not come, I went in after you, but I was incapable of making you come out (to battle) with me until this day! What are you waiting for! Do you not see your borders embroiled in war, that Egypt has been conquered, that my partisans there have been slain, that your borders are defenseless, and your lands raided!? You are great in numbers, might, and strength, so what gives you pause! You belong to God and from him you came! What use is it to lie to me and seek to beguile me!

If you would harden your resolve and unite, then you would not fail. But the enemy has recouped, stuck together and reaffirmed their loyalties while you have lost vigor, been deceitful to one another, and divided. If you are done with me, you will have no portion in the felicity (of the hereafter). So rouse the sleeper among you! Gather around your rightful cause and commit yourself absolutely to fighting your enemies! The call has gone out [qad baddat al-raghwa an al-ṣarīḥ], and daylight appeared to anyone with two eyes. You fight against mere freedmen and the sons of freedmen—coarse men who only became Muslims

141 mā antum in atmamtum ‘indī ʿalā dhi suʿadā’
142 “tulaqā wa-abnā tulaqā,” viz., among those Meccans whose lives were spared by the Prophet after the capitulation of the Quraysh.
under duress! They were the first to declare war on the Messenger of God and the enemies of God, the *sunna*, and the Qurʾān—innovators and corruptors [*ahl al-bida* `wa-l-ahdāth*]! They were eager for misfortune to befall (the Prophet) and to dissuade (others) from Islam [[and to intimidate its people.] They dealt in bribes and worshipped this world. It was communicated to me that Ibn al-Nābigha\textsuperscript{143} did not give his oath to Muʿāwiya until he paid him, with the condition that he would hand over to him something even greater than what authority he possessed! Has not this monger left his religion for this world! The integrity of the purchaser has been tarnished by aiding a perfidious profligate with the wealth of the Muslims. Verily, among them are those who drank wine in your midst and were flogged for it and who are known for being corrupt of religion and for ill-deeds. Verily, among them are those who did not become Muslim until they were bribed at a price.

Such are the leaders of this people. Whomsoever I neglected to mention their misdeeds from their leaders are the same as those I mentioned—but even worse! These people whom I mention would love to be put in authority over you and so spread among you disbelief, corruption, immorality and oppressive leadership. They follow ungodly whims and rule unjustly. You are better than they and your paths more guided despite the mutual trust and mistrust among you. Among you are men of learning and knowledge, men of distinction and wisdom, upholders of God’s Book who strive to pray throughout the night filling mosques with the recitation of the Qurʾān. Are you not enraged and anxious lest the impudent, evil and despicable among you seize authority over you?!

Listen to my word—may God guide you—if I have spoken! Obey my command if I have commanded! By God if you obey me, you shall not be vanquished; if you disobey me, you shall not be rightly-guided. Make ready for war and ready the preparations for it. Its fires now roar, and its spears are raised. The dissolute have left all behind to battle against you, to chastise the servants of God, and to extinguish the light of God. Are they not the associates of Satan from covetous, mendacious and coarse people—more steadfast in their sin, in their damnation [[and in their error]] than the people of piety, devotion, and humility are in their rightful due, in obedience to their Lord, and in counseling their *imām*. By God, if I were to face them alone while they filled the Earth, I would not care or despair, for I am confident, convinced, certain, and unwavering from the guidance we follow and (reject) the misguidance which they are in. I yearn for my Lord and await the goodly rewards of my Lord, although he exposes me to sorrow and fills me with sadness since the insolent and ungodly control the affair of this *umma*, taking

\textsuperscript{143} I.e., ‘Amr ibn al-ʿĀs. He was so called as a manner of insult, the lowly origins of his mother, al-Nābigha, who was a slave woman prostituted by her Qurashi owner, cast considerable doubt on his paternity (cf. Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ*, ii, 100 and vi, 284 f.; cited by Madelung, *Succession*, 92, 185).
the property of God as (their) fortunes, the servants of God as their chattel, and the dissolute as cohorts. I swear by God that if it were not for that, I would not have so frequently rebuked you and incited you and would have left you to meet them myself at the time ordained for me since you despaired and refused. For by God I am in the right, and I desire martyrdom! “So hurry off whether lightly or heavily equipped and strive in the cause of God with your possession and your persons. This is better for you if only you knew.”[^144] Do not sink into the Earth, settle with disgrace and yield to ignominy that your lot might be complete forfeiture. The brother of war is awake and vigilant [[and whoever sleeps does not sleep safely]] and whoever is weak perishes and whoever abandons jihad shall be like one disdained and defrauded (of his right).

O Lord, gather us and them to right guidance, turn us and them from this world, and make the last better for us and them than the first!

[^144]: Q. 9:41.
Thus far, the path of our analysis has treaded the winding trail of reports about Ibn Sabaʾ, his beliefs, and his activities. We have traversed an expansive landscape of traditions and legends purporting to unveil the heresiarch’s persona. Many of these traditions have been found lacking with regards to historicity, but of all the stories related about Ibn Sabaʾ, the most compelling evidence on the side of historicity relates to his belief in ʿAlī’s rajʿa, or parousia. This belief in ‘Alī’s apocalyptic return appears not only in the earliest reports about Ibn Sabaʾ but also in the earliest traditions about ‘Alī’s death as well. What has hitherto been lacking in our study, however, is a sense of the scope and breadth of such beliefs in ‘Alī as a type of messianic redeemer destined to return and the numbers of those who professed such beliefs. As a result, several important questions remain. For example, how widespread was the belief in ‘Alī’s apocalyptic return, and how long did it persist? To what degree did this belief influence the course of the development of the Islamic religion? And, finally, to what degree can one ascertain that such beliefs shaped early Shiʿism? In order to answer such questions, it is necessary to turn away from the heretic and to focus on the heresy.

An investigation into the place of the Sabaʾīya in early Islamic history is not as straightforward as one would like. The Sayfian corpus offers no help in this regard, as the Sabaʾīya of his account are largely fictitious. Outside the Sayfian corpus, however, one finds substantial evidence that the Sabaʾīya did in fact continue as a sectarian movement decades after all mention of the sect’s eponymous founder disappears. One finds in the historical literature numerous references to either the Sabaʾīya, or the Sabbābiya (or, more accurately, al-Sabbāba) as they are sometimes called, throughout the Umayyad period and even into the early ʿAbbāsid era, albeit with much less frequency in the latter era. With surprising regularity, one finds mention of the Sabaʾīya, for instance, popping up during the arrest of Hujr ibn ʿAdī al-Kindī and denounced in the orations of Ziyād ibn Abīhi, or appearing in prominent roles during the revolt of al-Mukhtār ibn Abī Ubayd.
al-Thaqafi and reviled in the poetry of A’shâ Hamdân. The question as to how one should interpret such references to the Saba‘iya is one that is not necessarily easy to answer. Certainly in light of our analysis of the Ibn Saba‘ tradition, one cannot simply assume that the Saba‘iya one encounters in these instances may be equated unequivocally with the acolytes of Ibn Saba‘ described by the heresiographers. The heresiographical tradition coalesced largely in the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries and at a great distance from the time and events described in such accounts. Utilizing their sectarian typologies and reading such passages through their heresiological filter, therefore, would most likely obscure, rather than illuminate the problem at hand.

These early references to the Saba‘iya appear intermittently throughout numerous genres and writings (oratory, poetry, *akhbâr*, etc.), and many of these ostensibly represent the words and compositions of either contemporaries or late-Umayyad and/or early-‘Abbâsid *akhbâris* who purport to recorded eyewitness accounts. The original context of many of these seemingly random literary apparitions of the Saba‘iya has been lost, and given this reality, the challenges of interpretation such scattered references pose are formidable. Many of these references to the Saba‘iya are pithy, obscure, or encapsulated in poetic verses that may imply various elliptical meanings and insinuations that are not easily discernable. Although the task of delineating just what it meant to be a Saba‘i or who exactly were meant by the Saba‘iya is complex, the good news is that this is due to the fact that these sources are early and, therefore, archaic. Thus, despite such difficulties, these references complete the final hermeneutic layer against which both the Sayfian corpus and the heresiographical tradition must be interpreted and critically examined. Moreover, such references provide the only key whereby the Saba‘iya can be comprehended as an historical phenomenon. These sources enable us, in a manner speaking, to peer beyond the limited horizons heresiographical tradition and ascertain the historical depths lurking behind these rather laconic passages.

*Saba‘iya, Saba‘, and the Saba‘iyûn*

Discarding temporarily the heresiographical tradition, then, how does one determine what, or who, exactly a Saba‘i is? Reports frequently seem to equate a Saba‘i with an adherent of any Shi‘i creed deemed pernicious and, therefore, not necessarily a member of the *ghulât*. These
reports tend to be mostly anecdotal, where the term Sabaʾiyya is used in a collective sense as an odious denigration of the Shiʿa as a whole. We see this, for instance, in a report in which Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/686–7) opines that, “If the Qadarīyya become numerous in Baṣra, they shall be overtaken by its inhabitants [iʿtakafat bi-ahlihā]; if the Sabaʾiyya1 become numerous in Kūfā, they shall be overtaken by its inhabitants.”2 Similarly along these lines, the Baṣran exegete and traditionist Qatāda ibn Diʿāma (d. 117/735) identified “those in whose hearts lies perversity and who follow the ambiguous verses (of the Qurʾān) while seeking discord” of Q. 3:7 as the Khawārij and the Sabaʾiyya, averring that: “If it were not for the Ḥarūrīya [i.e., the Khawārij] or the Sabaʾiyya, I would not know who they (i.e., those persons mentioned in this verse) are!”3 In this passage, the word ‘Sabaʾiyya’ is merely an alternative designation for the Shīʿa, just as the term Ḥarūrīya stands in for the Khawārij.

Even more abundant are references to the ḥadīth-folk disavowing the Sabaʾiyya and accusing certain untrustworthy and/or rival transmitters of ḥadīth of being from their numbers. The Kūfan traditionist ʿIrāhīm al-Nakhaʾī (d. ca. 96/717) reportedly disclaimed being either Murjiʿī or Sabaʾī, thus disavowing both dominant religious positions in his native town (i.e., those of the the Murjiʿa and the Shīʿa).4 Oftentimes, however, the designation of a person as a Sabaʾī clearly implies a specific brand of Shīʿite—a ghālī, and not merely your run-of-the-mill Shīʿī or Shīʿī sympathizer. The Baṣran traditionist Yazīd ibn Zurayʿ (d. ca. 183/799–800)5 provides us a clear example of this when he maligned the Kūfan traditionist al-ʿAʾmash (d. 61/681) for being a “Ḥarbī-Sabaʾī”. His accusation associates al-ʿAʾmash with two ghālī-sects, the Sabaʾiyya and one its offshoots, the Ḥarbīya; it certainly aims at denouncing al-ʿAʾmash’s reputed Shīʿī inclinations as well as his associations with certain well known ghulāt.6 As seen in previous chapters,
the heresiographers often assert a direct link between the Sabaʾiya and heresiarchs of the ghulāt of the Umayyad period. The founding arch-heretic of the Ḥarbiya, ʿAbd Allāh ibn (ʿAmr b.) Ḥarb is only one of the more famous examples. Also in this vein, al-Mughira ibn Saʿīd, the heresiarch of the Mughīrīya and mawlā of the governor of ʿIrāq Khālid al-Qasrī (gov. 105–20/724–38), often receives the appellation ‘sabaʾiʾī’. The Imāmī poet Maʿdān al-Shumaytī (fl. ca. 160/786) also lists the designation ‘sabaʾiʾī’ alongside appellations of other ghulūw such as ‘ḥarbī’, ‘khashabī’, etc., thereby providing proof that the association of the Sabaʾiya with ghulūw clearly occurs from an early date.

The Başan Yazīd ibn Zurayq accused more than one Kūfan of having been a Sabaʾi, for he also appears among the traditionists decrying the Kūfan ḥakhbārī and exegete Muḥammad ibn Sāʿib al-Kalbī (d. 147/763) for being a Sabaʾi. Muhammad ibn Sāʿib al-Kalbī is somewhat of an anomaly in the traditions on the Sabaʾiya. For one, he is the only

7 of a later generation and rival school, is likely a calumnious one; however, Jāḥīz too declares concerning al-ʿAmash that “he was among the extreme-Shīʿa [huwa min al-ghāliya]” (Bursān, 75.9). Elsewhere, however, one finds an explicit denunciation of the Sabaʾiya attributed to al-ʿAmash in which he declares, “Beware of those Sabaʾiya! I have met these people and they are only known to be liars [ittaqi hādhahi l-sabaʾiʾīa fa-innī adraktu l-nāsa wa-innamā yusammūnahum al-kadhdhābīn]” (ʿUqaylī, Dhuʿafāʾ, iv, 1236–8; Ibn ʿAdī, Kāmil, vi, 2128.16–17). It is notable that al-ʿAmash reputedly befriended the Kaysānī poet al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī whom he aided by contributing materials for the eulogies he composed in honor of ‘Ali. See C. Brokelmann/Ch. Pellat, “al-ʿAmash,” EF, i, 431b.

One, however, cannot on the basis of his seemingly cordial relations with the Kaysānī poet infer an adherence to either the poet’s sect or a similar one beyond the pale of the pedestrian tashayyuʿ for which al-ʿAmash was known. Indeed, al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī’s skill permitted him to enjoy good relations with the ʿAbbāsid caliphs as well. See W. al-Qādī, “al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī,” EI2, ix, 116b–117a.

7 On whom, see I. Friedländer, “Heterodoxies of the Shīʿites in the Presentation of Ibn Hazm (II),” JAOS 29 (1908), 125, 161 and Halm, Gnosis, 69 ff.

8 Ibn Qutayba, ʿUyūn, ii, 148 f.; idem, Maʿārif, 623; Ibn Rusta, Al-lāq, 218; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, Iql, ii, 405 f. The veracity of these reports are met with skepticism by W. F. Tucker, “Rebels and Gnostics,” 45 f. The claim that al-Mughira, according to Ibn Qutayba, had been “a practitioner of magical arts [sāhib nīrānjāt]” (ʿUyūn, ii, 149; cf. Tucker, art. cit., 34) resembles many similar claims made about the Sabaʾiya. E.g., see the discussion of Sayf’s treatment of Ibn Dhi l-Ḥabaka in ch. 2 above.

9 Ch. Pellat, “Essai de Reconstitution d’un poème de Maʿdān aṣ-Ṣumayṭī,” Orients 16 (1963), 99 ff. and esp. 103 f. The date of the qasida is uncertain, but ps.-Nāshīʿ al-Akbar attributes it to a contemporary of the heresiarch Bayān ibn Simʿān (d. 119/737); see the discussion in J. van Ess, “Neue Verse des Maʿdān aṣ-Ṣumayṭī,” Der Islam 47 (1971), 250–1.

individual reputed to have been an unabashedly self-confessed Sabaʾī, and, secondly, he stands as a rather late example of the sect’s adherents. Our sources know of no other contemporary adherent of the Sabaʾīya. Confirmations for al-Kalbī’s adherence to the beliefs of the Sabaʾīya are limited to the numerous doctrines the traditionists—usually Başran—aspire to him. These include an array of clichés, the ascription of which may be dubious. One of the beliefs the traditionists enumerate and ascribe to al-Kalbī is his alleged belief that Gabriel recited the Qurʾān to ʿAlī while Muḥammad was in the privy and that ʿAlī consequently knew hidden parts of the Qurʾān. They also claim that al-Kalbī believed that ʿAlī would one day return on the clouds. All of these, of course, represent the stock and trade of ghulūw attributed to Ibn Sabaʾ, the Sabaʾīya, and the ghulāt more generally speaking. In the case of the prolific al-Kalbī—who left behind a rather large corpus of materials on a range of topics spanning Qurʾānic exegesis, genealogy, and history among others—one has the benefit of perusing the textual artifacts remaining from his works. What one finds in these materials, however, is that, although at times transmitting mahdī-traditions and vaguely pro-Shīʾī Qurʾānic-exegesis and akhbār, al-Kalbī’s transmissions are only of the most pedestrian sort. Al-Kalbī never comes remotely close to crossing into the realm of the Shīʾī ghulāt.

Muḥammad ibn Sāʾib al-Kalbī’s case could, perhaps, be best examined in light of a well-known contemporary of his, Jābir al-Juʿfī (d. 128/745–6). In the case of Jābir, one encounters another personality equally known for his prolific career as a transmitter of aḥādīth and

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11 ‘Uqaylī, ʿUqaylī, ʿUqaylī, Ducciā, iv, 1237; Ibn Adi, Kāmil, vi, 2128; Dhahabi, Mizān, iii, 557. Cf. two similar reports in Ibn Hibbān’s Majrūḥin, but from two other Başran contemporaries: Hammām ibn Yahyā ibn Dinār (ii, 252–6) and Abū ʿAwāna (ii, 252 f.).
12 Ibn Hibbān, Majrūhin, ii, 253; Dhahabi, Mizān, iii, 558.
akhbār on the one hand, and known for his notorious links to Shīʿī ghulāt on the other. Whereas al-Kalbī’s alleged associations find virtually no echo in the corpus of akhbār credited to him, the transmissions of Jābir al-Juˈfī’s materials attest to both sober-minded, non-ghālī traditions and traditions strongly ensconced within the doctrines of the ghulāt.¹⁴ It seems that in Jābir’s case not even the discretions of pious dissimulation could totally efface the record of such material, even if much of it is falsely ascribed. In al-Kalbī’s case though, one finds the exact opposite: hardly any of the traditions attributed to him exhibit even a shadow of ghulūw. A rare exception does come in the form of an anecdotal tale preserved in the rijāl-collections. In this tale, al-Kalbī tells of an affliction of his memory, which caused him to forget his knowledge. To have his memory restored, he sought out “the family of Muḥammad [al muḥammad].” After meeting them, he says, according to one account, his memory returned once “they had spit in my mouth [tafalū fī fīya].” In a variant, al-Kalbī claims his memory was restored after, he says, “they poured me milk in a wooden cup [saqawnī qaˈbān min laban]”.¹⁵ The former version story may strike modern readers as strange, but it reflects the widespread Arabian practice of taḥnīk—i.e., the use of saliva for thaumaturgic transmission (of blessings, curses, knowledge, etc.). According to a number of jamāˈī-Sunnī traditions, taḥnīk was practiced often by the Prophet himself, and it is not unparalleled for persons to attribute such similar practices to either the imāms or their descendents.¹⁶ In the end, al-Kalbī’s precise religious views must be regarded as somewhat a mystery. There are other traditionists, for example, who aver that he was a Murjiˈī.¹⁷ Regardless of his views, however, al-Kalbī was certainly no Sabaˈī.

The anecdotal accusations leveled against alleged Kūfan Sabaˈīs raise questions of greater significance for the origins of the Sabaˈīya than the quarrels of rival muḥaddiths. Such accusations, in fact, strike

¹⁴ Modarressi, TS, i, 86 ff.
¹⁵ ‘Uqayli, Dīˈafāʾ, iv, 1237; Ibn Hibbān, Majrūḥīn, ii, 253; Dhahabi, Mizān, iii, 557 (from Yahyā ibn Yāˈlā from his father and Zāˈida ibn Qudāma).
¹⁷ ‘Uqayli, Dīʿafāʾ, iv, 1238.7. One finds, for example, a tradition attributed to him wherein al-Kalbī praises (!) Muˈawiyā as “Uncle of the Faithful [khāl al-muˈminīn],” being that he was a brother of Umm Ḥabīb bint Abī Sufyān, who married the Prophet and, thus, regarded as “Mother of the Faithful [umm al-muˈminīn].” See Ibn ʿAdi, Kāmil, vi, 2129.7–11 (citing the tafsīr attributed to al-Kalbī).
right to the core of the fundamental problem facing any attempt to provide a coherent account of ‘Sabaʾiʾi’ sectarianism—i.e., whether or not the term had any specific or identifiable meaning at all before the emergence and compilation of the Ibn Sabaʾ lore in late-Umayyad and early-’Abbāsid ‘Irāq. To pose the problem in another way: if the terms Sabaʾi and Sabaʾiyya could potentially mean the Shīʾa at large or, in other contexts, denote the Shīʾī ghulāt, how exactly did this term come to connote either of these associations, and what, if any, specific and/or unique significance did the appellation carry?

A number of scholars, having rejected the existence of Ibn Sabaʾ as an unpalatable fiction, sought to dissociate the Sabaʾiyya one encounters in the Umayyad period from their putative heresiarch and the legends surrounding him. Taking to heart the axiom that the simplest explanation is usually the best, these scholars most frequently have proposed that the term Sabaʾiyya innately communicates how the term ought to be interpreted. That is, the term Sabaʾiyya simply denotes the Sabaean inhabitants of Sheba (Sabaʾ) and the Yamanī tribes associated with the region—viz., the Sabaʾiyyūn, the descendents of ancient patriarch Sabaʾ ibn Yashjub ibn Yaʾrub ibn Qahṭān.18

Certainly Sabaʾ was well known to early Muslims, both as a region from which many of the early Yamanī tribesmen who embraced Islam hailed and as the common Qahṭānī ancestor of all Yamanī tribesmen from whatever region they hailed.19 The region of Sabaʾ, after all, lent its name to the 34th sūra of the Qurʾān. A ḥadīth attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās tells a story of an unnamed man who approached Muḥammad and inquired as to whether the qurʾānic Sabaʾ was a man, woman or land, to which the prophet replied:

Rather, he’s a man who begat ten boys. Six of them settled in Yemen, and four of them in Syria. As for the Yamanis, they are Madhhij, Kinda, al-Azd, the Ashʿarīs, Anmār, and Ḥimyar. All of them are Arab. As for those of al-Shām, they are Lakhm, Judhām, ’Āmila, and Ghassān.20

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20 Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, iv, 322 (no. 2900); Abū Dāwūd, Sunan, ii, 669 (no. 3990); cf. the version in Tirmidhī, Sunan, 157, 824 (no. 3528) which further disambiguates Anmār as being Bajīla and Khathʾam.
The *nisba* ‘al-Sabaʾī’ appears with a great deal of frequency denoting just such a descendant of Sabaʾ and obviously connotes no overtones of *ghulūw*.

Albeit exceedingly rare, one does find indications of the usage of the term Sabaʾīya as a collective noun referring to ‘Sabaʾīyūn’, the putative descendants of Sabaʾ. An instance of this occurs in a verse attributed to a certain Bukayr ibn Wāʾil al-Ṭāhī, a man who once escaped with his life from a group of Khārijites by tossing his cap (*ṭaylasān*) at his attackers. The *imām* of these Khārijites was a certain ‘Southern’ Arab named Qurayb ibn Murra al-Azdī, who led the band alongside his maternal cousin, al-Zahāf ibn Zahr al-Tāʾī, wreaking havoc in ‘Irāq during the governorship of Ziyād ibn Abīhi. Recalling his near miss during his encounter with Qurayb’s troops, Bukayr declares:

1. Late this evening if not for the *ṭaylasān*, then
   ṣaḥiyata law lā al-ṭaylasānu la-qutṭiʾat
   Slices of me might have been cut off, or my right hand might have withered!
   ṭawābiqū minnī aw yaminī la-shallatī

2. Late this evening, they said, “These people are just élite troops.”
   ṣaḥiyata qālū innaṃa l-qawmu shurtaʾun
   And these Ḥarūris of the lands seceded
   wa-tilka ḥarūrīyū l-bilādi istaqallatī

3. What are they but a band of Sabaʾīya!
   wa-hal hiya illā ʿusbaʾun sabaʾīyatun
   A misleading man called them and into perdition they were misled!
   daʾāhā mudillun wa-uḍillatī

Bukayr’s dismissal of Qurayb’s band as Sabaʾīs certainly cannot mean that they had been Shiʿī ghulāt, so the appellation must be connected to the fact they were led by a man from the Azd and from the tribal affiliation of the bulk of his followers.

One finds yet another instance where the appellation ‘Sabaʾīya’ means ‘Sabaʾīyūn’ in an invective (*hijāʾ*) composed by the Umayyad poet al-Farazdaq against Ibn al-Ashʿath and the rebels under his leadership.

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21 Cf. the examples in al-Samʿānī, *Ansāb*, vii, 23 ff.
23 Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, iv, 177.4.
Speaking of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafi’s defeat of Ibn al-Ashʿath at Dayr al-Jamājim in 83/703, Farazdaq declares:\textsuperscript{24}

1. The Hamdānīs and Sabaʾīs survey (the slaughter)

\textit{taʿarrafu hamdāniyatus sabaʾiyyatus}

and you force their eyes upon a detestable sight

\textit{wa-tukrihu ‘aynahā ‘alā mā tanakkara}

\textellipsis

2. Whether they be from the oath-breaking Sabaʾīs

\textit{min al-nākithīna l-ʿahdi min sabaʾiyyatin}

or a Zubayrī, they are more treacherous than the wolf

\textit{wa-immā zubayrī min al-dhiʿī bi aghdarā}

Farazdaq’s Sabaʾīya here are not the acolytes of Ibn Sabaʾ, but rather the Yamanī tribesmen who filled the ranks of the rebel forces of Ibn al-Ashʿath.\textsuperscript{25} Despite amorphous notions of Ibn al-Ashʿath assuming the eschatological title of the Qahṭānī in the course of his revolt,\textsuperscript{26} Ibn al-Ashʿath held no Shiʿī or pro-ʿAlid pretensions, \textit{ghālī} or otherwise.\textsuperscript{27} Farazdaq’s celebration of al-Ḥajjāj’s triumph denounces a people, not a sect.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Dīwān}, ed. R. Boucher (Paris, 1870), 210.ult. and 211.3.


\textsuperscript{26} As noted in the previous chapter, the pronouncement of Ibn Sabaʾ about ʿAlī “filling the Earth with justice as it is filled with injustice” clearly exhibits an interdependence between the \textit{mahdi}-traditions that also occasionally feature the Qahṭānī. As noted by Friedländer, Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī speaks of the Qahṭānī as “rajal sabaʾi himyarī” (“Abdallāh ibn Sabā,” 16, n. 8). It has often been observed that the idea of a Qahṭānī redeemer sprouted from the fertile soil of an unrequited yearning among Yamanī tribesmen for the return of the powerful and dominant past once enjoyed by southern tribes such as Ḥimyar and Kinda, which the dominance of the Quraysh precluded. It was, indeed, this \textit{status quo} of Qurashī dominance over the Yamanī tribesmen that the Qahṭānī would reverse in his apocalyptic triumph, thus restoring the glory of his people. In a way much akin to the messianism espoused by Ibn Sabaʾ, but lacking either Shiʿī overtones or overtures to the Banū Hāshim, these apocalyptic fantasies likewise show the profound influence exerted on the ascendance of Judaism among the Yamanī tribes before the rise of Islam (see Bashear, “Yemen and Early Islam,” 241 ff.). For more on this figure, see C. L. Geddes, “The Messiah in South Arabia,” \textit{MW} 57 (1967), 311–20; W. Madelung, “Apocalyptic Prophecies in Ḥimṣ in the Umayyad Age,” \textit{JSS} 31 (1986), 141–185; Cook, \textit{Muslim Apocalyptic}, 179 \textit{f. et passim}.

\textsuperscript{27} Such, for example, can be seen in the enthusiastic support he enjoyed by the likes of the virulently anti-Shiʿī poet Aʾshā Hamdān. See for example, the poem in which Aʾshā Hamdān contrasts the ‘heroic’ Hamdānī Ibn al-Ashʿath to the two ‘liars’ of Banū Thaqīf (i.e., al-Mukhtār and al-Ḥajjāj) in Ṭabarī, \textit{i}, 1056.
Yet, if one were to accept such an explanation of the designation ‘Sabaʾiya’ in all instances, one quickly encounters a number of intractable problems that immediately militate against this interpretation and render it untenable. For one, one must provide a plausible explanation underlying the transformation of the usage of ‘Sabaʾiya’ in its ethnic sense to its usage exclusively in the context of ghulūw. There have been rather unconvincing attempts to do so. Watt, for example, suggested that the sectarian associations of the appellation had arisen from the proverbial status accorded to Sabaʾ by Q. 34.15–16, which likely recounts the destruction of the dam of al-ʾArim near the beginning of the 7th century A.D. Since the dam’s destruction scattered the neighboring inhabitants of the Sabaen city of Maʾrib, Watt imagined that this event made Sabaʾ a proverbial symbol of fractitiousness. How Watt believed it became intimately connected with the origins of Shiʿism remains unclear, and he never offers an explanation.28

Most problematic for attempts to interpret the term Sabaʾiya as a designation indicative of ethnicity, however, is the fact that the term ‘Sabaʾiya’ hardly ever refers to a homogenous group of Yamanī tribesman. Furthermore, some of the most passionate opponents one encounters vitiating the Sabaʾiya and their beliefs, such as the poet Aʾšā Hamdān (see below), are themselves sabaʾīs in the ethnic sense and, therefore, certainly cannot be said to renounce the tribal allegiances of which they boast in other contexts. Rather, more often than not, the Sabaʾiya represent a cadre of individuals defined by their beliefs rather than their genealogy.

One finds one of the clearest examples of the designation of ‘Sabaʾiya’ used in this non-ethnic sense in an anecdotal report about Maʿqil ibn Qays al-Riyāhī. As noted in the chapter 4, Maʿqil ibn Qays, like Ibn Sabaʾ, had been among those ʿAlī dispatched prior to his death in order to rally sufficient troops to muster a final offensive against Muʿāwiya. If the chronology Balādhurī offers for the events leading up to ʿAlīʾs murder is sound, Maʿqil had alighted in al-Madāʾin in preparation for this offensive and was present there when the news of ʿAlīʾs murder

28 W. W. Müller, “Mārib,” EI2, vi, 564. Watt cites a maxim concerning Sabaʾ recorded by Yāqūt in which the Arabs say of dispersed peoples that “They split like the paths of Sabaʾ [tafarraqū aydī sabaʾ].” A hadith suggests that by the Prophet’s time, Maʾrib’s population had almost entirely abandoned the settlement; see Abū Dāwūd, Sunan, ii, 526 (no. 3030). Contrary to Watt’s suggestion, however, the sense in this maxim is neither fitna nor ghulūw, but that of diaspora.
reached his partisans. That is, Maʿqil had been present in al-Madāʾin at the same time ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Hamdānī (Ibn Sabaʾ) uttered his incredulous denial of ʿAlī’s assassination.

Although once a leader in ʿAlī’s shūrta, Maʿqil seems to have made his livelihood after ʿAlī’s death by making an accommodation with the Umayyads, whom he joined in order to reprise the command of the Kūfans and combat the threat of the Khawārij.29 It is while he was in this latter capacity that one encounters in Ṭabarī’s Taʾrikh an interesting report about his campaign against the Khārijī leader al-Mustawrid ibn ʿUlla in 43/663–4. Pursued by Maʿqil’s forces, al-Mustawrid addresses his men, declaring: “This senile old man Maʿqil ibn Qays is heading for you. He is one of the deceitful, lying Sabaʾīya and is an enemy to you and God [huwa min al-sabaʾīya al-muftarīn al-kādhibīn wa-huwa li-llāhi wa-lakum ʿadūw]”.30 Even if placed in the mouth of a hostile opponent, al-Mustawrid’s denunciation of Maʿqil as a Sabaʾī is significant, because, unlike the examples adduced above, Maʿqil ibn Qays was a ‘Northern’ Arab, a Riyāḥī from Ghaṭafān.31 Furthermore, one cannot look to the forces of Maʿqil for an explanation of the appearance of the Sabaʾīya here, for Maʿqil’s forces hailed from numerous tribes, both Northern and Southern: Muḍar, Rabīʿa, Tamīm, Hamdān and Yaman are all explicitly mentioned.32 It is surely, therefore, his former associations with ʿAlī—perhaps even with Ibn Sabaʾ—that garners him the designation of a Sabaʾī in the eyes of his Khārijī adversary.

Our second instance provides more tantalizing evidence and involves Ḥujr ibn ʿAdī al-Kindī. Like Maʿqil ibn Qays, Ḥujr appears in the same cadre of ʿAlī’s partisans as Ibn Sabaʾ—he is particularly associated with ʿAlī’s inflammatory letter that Balādhurī accused Ibn Sabaʾ of corrupting (see the excursus to ch. 6 above). Unlike Maʿqil, however, Ḥujr rejected the accommodationist stance adopted by the former towards the newfound dominance of Muʿawiya and the Umayyads.

29 Ibn Habīb, Muḥabbbar, 373; Ṭabarī, i, 3418 ff. and ii, 28 ff. Cf. Saleh Said Agha, “Did Qaḥṭabah ibn Shabib al-Ṭāʾī Hail from Kūfa?” Sī 92 (2001), 188 ff. One wonders if a motivation for Maʿqil’s accommodationist stance may have been the chance to take revenge on the Khawārij he regarded as complicity in ʿAlī’s death, since he also, according to some accounts, vanquished Farwa ibn Nawfal al-Ashjaʾī and Shabib al-Ashjaʾī (a companion of Ibn Muljam). However, other sources name the Kūfan sharifs Shabath ibn Ribʾī and Khālid ibn ʿUrfūṭa, rather than Maʿqil, as responsible for their deaths. See Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv2, 166.
30 Ṭabarī, ii, 43.13 f.
31 Caskel, Gamharat an-Nasab, ii, 19 f.
32 Ṭabarī, ii, 53.
When Muʿāwiya initiated the practice of the compulsory cursing of 'Ali in Kūfa, first under his governor al-Mughīra ibn Shuʿba and then more forcibly under Ziyād ibn Abīhi, Ḥujr ibn 'Adī swiftly became the most prominent of 'Ali’s partisans to manifest a strident defiance against this practice. Although Ḥujr was spared the full wrath of the Umayyads under the more forbearing governorship of al-Mughīra, when he crossed Ziyād, it cost him his life. Ziyād arrested him as well as his cohorts and rendered them to Syria, where Muʿāwiya ordered their execution outside Damascus at Marj ‘Adhrāʾ in 51/671.

It is in the context of these events that one encounters two instances in which Ziyād ibn Abīhi explicitly denounces Ḥujr ibn ‘Adī and his sympathizers as Sabaʾīya. One of these instances ostensibly occurs in a statement from an oration Ziyād delivered soon after his arrival in Kūfa in 50/670. Standing before the Kūfans, he denounced Ḥujr and his supporters’ defiance of the late al-Mughīra ibn Shuʿba, declaring:

Verily, these budding, befuddled Sabaʾīya have mounted the rear end of matters that caused the one who mounted the fore end (i.e., 'Ali) to perish [inna hādhahi l-sabaʾīya al-haʾina... al-mutaḥayyira rakibat aʾjāza umūrīna halaka man rakiba ṣudūrahā].

Ziyād portrays his opponents as those partisans of 'Ali still pining after the Hāshimid cause and derides them for their stubborn refusal to acknowledge Muʿāwiya’s caliphal authority. Ziyād’s second denunciation of Ḥujr occurs in a letter he composes to be sent along with Ḥujr and his captive companions to Muʿāwiya in Syria. Ziyād writes as follows:

Verily, devils [tawāghīt] from these Turābīya, Sabaʾīya—their leader is Ḥujr ibn 'Adī—have defied the Commander of the Faithful, split from

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33 Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 245.2. It is notable that Ibn Taymiya preserves a report in which the Kūfan polymath al-Shaʾbī speaks of the Sabaʾīya and the Rāfīda in very similar terms. See his Minhāj, 1, 29.3 (citing al-Istiqāma of Khushaysh ibn Asram, d. 253/867): mā raʾaytuhum illā yaʾkhudhūna bi-aʾjāz lā sudūra lahā.

34 Here Balādhurī (or his source?) adds the gloss: “that is, the Shiʿa [yaʾni al-shīʿa].”

35 Tābarī, 1, 136; cf. the slightly different version in Aghānī, xvii, 148.


37 Aghānī, xvii, 148.12 reads “al-sābba” instead of “al-sabaʾīya”, which is likely corrupt. Tābarī’s reading al-sabaʾīya should be favored not only because it finds a parallel in Ziyād’s sermon recorded by Balādhurī (see note above) but also because it reproduces better consonance with al-turābīya.
the united community of Muslims [jamāʿat al-muslimīn], and declared war against us.

Ziyād’s accusations vary slightly here, but their net effect is essentially the same. He accuses Ḥujr and his fellow partisans of ‘Alī of refusing to acknowledge Muʿāwiya’s authority and, thus, separating themselves off from the religio-political community of the Muslims. But, is this what Ziyād means by a Sabaʿī?

Although Ḥujr himself hails from the Yamanī tribe of Kinda and is, therefore, certainly a ‘sabaʿī’ in the ethnic sense,38 it is impossible to maintain that the Sabaʿīya Ziyād reviles in either his khutba or risāla are merely Yamanī tribesmen, for Ḥujr’s support drew from a considerably wide base of tribal support, which could not be broadly characterized as Yamanī. Such can be gleaned most clearly from perusing the list of Ḥujr’s associates whom Ziyād arrested and sent to Muʿāwiya. Examining the tribes of the fourteen individuals usually named by the akhbāris as accompanying Ḥujr, one finds not a predominance of Yamanī tribesmen, but rather an even mixture of representatives from both Northern and Southern tribes.39 Hence, of the six other Kūfans who shared Ḥujr’s fate and were executed alongside him, only one, Sharīk ibn Shaddād al-Ḥadramī, was of Yamanī descent besides Ḥujr himself.40 Of the seven Kūfāns Muʿāwiya spared, five out of seven were Southern tribesmen.41

Even with the appearance of the epithet ‘al-Sabaʿīya’ in the two instances, one learns little from Ziyād’s usage as to what exactly the ‘Irāqī governor intended by the term. Ziyād’s denunciations reveal essentially three qualities about the Sabaʿīya: 1) Ziyād regarded Ḥujr as their leader, 2) the Sabaʿīya rejected the caliphate of Muʿāwiya, and 3) they thereby effectively separated themselves from the Muslim community (jamāʿa).

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38 E.g., see his genealogy in Ibn ‘Asākir, Dimashq, xii, 207.
39 See Tābarī, ii, 143 f. and Baladhuri, Ansāb, iv, 253 f.
40 The others were: Ṣayfī ibn Fasīl/Fashīl al-Shaybānī (of Bakr ibn Wā’il), Qabīṣa ibn Ḕuṭayba al-ʿAbsi (from Ghaṭafān), Muhriz ibn Shihāb al-Ṣaʿdi al-Minqarī (from Tamīm), Kidām ibn Ḩayyān al-ʿAnazi (from Rabīʿa), and ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Ḥassān al-ʿAnazi.
41 The northern tribesmen were: ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥawīya al-ʿArajī al-Tamīmī and ʿUtba ibn al-Akhnas from the Banū Saʿd ibn Bakr; the southern tribesmen were: Karīm ibn ʿAfīf al-Khathami, ʿĀṣim ibn ʿAwf al-Bajali, Wafī/Warqāʾ ibn Sumayy al-Bajali, al-Arqam ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Kindī, and Saʿd ibn Nimrān al-Hamdīn.
Ziyād ibn Abīhi’s denunciations as preserved in Ṭabarī offer evidence that is historically problematic because it is impossible to confirm that such denunciations are actually from either Ziyād or even from his contemporaries. The authenticity problems posed by the more literary modes of prose, such as khūţbas and risālas, in historical writing are well-known;42 however, if such pieces are viewed within a larger context, the historicity of the picture painted by the above reports appears increasingly plausible. Firstly, Ḥujr clearly represented a disaffected sector of ʿAlī’s partisans who, although deprived of the means to form any meaningful resistance to Umayyad preeminence, rejected outright the position adopted by ʿAlī’s son al-Ḥasan. Their reaction to al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī’s policy of patiently waiting on Muʿāwiya to fulfill his vow to pass the caliphate to al-Ḥasan after the caliph’s death was one of virulent opposition. Just how broad the disaffection from al-Ḥasan penetrated ʿAlī’s former partisans in Kūfa is difficult to gauge, for the evidence comes to us mostly in anecdotes. Ḥujr ibn ʿAdī, however, appears as one of the most prominent of ʿAlī’s partisans to take umbrage, and, according to some, he was the first to denounce al-Ḥasan’s treaty with Muʿāwiya. In one report, Ḥujr denounces al-Ḥasan, crying out, “You have blacked the faces of the believers [sawwadta wujūh al-muʾmīn]!”43 His denunciation is subsequently seconded by a certain Sufyān ibn Layl (or Laylā) al-Hamdānī who scorns al-Ḥasan as “the Denigrator of the Faithful [mudhill al-muʾmīn].”44 Elsewhere Ḥujr declares to al-Ḥasan, “I would have preferred to have died before seeing you expel us from justice into injustice [la-wadadtu annī mittu qabla mā raʿaytu akhrajetanā min al-ʿadli ilā l-jawri].” In this last account, it is Ḥujr who alongside ʿUbayda ibn ʿAmr al-Baddi first approaches al-Ḥasan’s younger brother al-Ḥusayn to reject al-Ḥasan’s peace with Muʿāwiya and revive ʿAlī’s cause.45

42 See for example Stephan Dähne’s examination of the transmission history of Ziyād’s most famous khūţba in his excellent monograph, Reden der Araber: Die politische ḥuṭba in der klassischen arabischen Literatur (Frankfurt am Main, 2001), 53 ff. and the discussion of the akhbār’s usage of risālas as a narrative device Noth/Conrad, 76 ff.
45 Dīnawārī, Akhbār, 233; cf. Balādhurī, Ansāb, ii, 551.
Huṣr and al-Hasan, it seems, never came to a rapprochement. Even prior to the imbroglio with Ziyād ibn Abīhi and Muʿāwiya that resulted in his death at Marj ʿAdhrāʾ, Huṣr remained steadfast in his defiant stance and continued to censure al-Hasan ibn ʿAlī for his accommodation of Muʿāwiya’s demands.\(^{46}\) While Huṣr’s discontents with al-Hasan’s leadership does not smack of the eschatological hopes one finds attributed to Ibn Sabaʾ and Rushayd al-Hajarī, Huṣr’s continued dissent nonetheless raises a rather probing question as to whom he regarded as the leader of the community. There is certainly no indication that he arrogated that right to himself. Did he perhaps yearn, like Ibn Sabaʾ, for ʿAlī’s return?

Such a question remains unanswerable due to the fact that Huṣr’s martyrdom canonized him an exemplar of pious resistance to tyranny among Shiʿīs and non-Shiʿīs alike. We have seen how the martyrdom of another Shiʿī believer in the parousia of ʿAlī, Rushayd al-Hajarī, erased the memory of him as an adherent of the belief in ʿAlī’s rajʿa among the Imāmīya. A further example of this might even be found in another early Shiʿīte martyr, the Persian mawłā and devotee of ʿAlī Mīthām al-Tammār (‘the date-seller’), whom Ḫubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād ibn Abīhi, in one early Imāmī account, denounces as “one of these vile, fiery Sabaʾīya whose skin has shriveled up.”\(^{47}\) Mīthām’s famous martyrdom at the hands of Ibn Ziyād guaranteed that he, much like Rushayd al-Hajarī, would never be denounced by Shiʿī historians as an actual follower of the Sabaʾīya. One wonders if the widespread sympathy for Huṣr’s cause and reverence for the dignity of his death led to a similar result in the preservation of his memory, but in a manner that was more complete, insofar as the reverence for Huṣr’s martyrdom transcended sectarian boundaries.\(^{48}\) This would account for a lack of any definitive attribution to him of a belief in the rajʿa of ʿAlī.

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\(^{46}\) Balādhūrī, Ansāb, iv., 243 (from Abū Mikhnaf and ‘others’): lam yazal ḥuṣr b. ʿadī munkir ʿalā l-ḥasan ibn ‘alī ibn abī ʿālib ʿalā ṣulḥihi li-muʿāwiya wa-kāna yaʾdhuluhu ʿalā dhālika. This may have been akin to the position of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī as well; see ibid., ii, 549 f.


\(^{48}\) Even an Ṭūmānī like al-Ḥasan al-Ṭalṣrī regarded Muʿāwiya’s killing of Huṣr as a pernicious crime (mūbīqa); see Madelung, Succession, 339. Some traditionists, it seems, were even keen to regard Huṣr as a ʂahābī (see Ibn Ḥajar, Iṣāba, i, 313 f.).
In our search for the identity and beliefs of the Sabaʾiya in the Umayyad period, the most promising historical materials relate to the religio-political upheavals resulting from the Kūfan revolt of al-Mukhtār ibn Abī ʿUbayd al-Thaqafī in 66–67/685–687. This revolt at the very least galvanized if not outright produced manifold religious movements and doctrines, of which the Kaysānīya (or, the Mukhtārīya) were merely the most famous and influential. The heresiographers often regarded the Sabaʾiya as the source of the most extreme elements of the revolt, and it is perhaps no coincidence that the earliest sources on Mukhtār’s revolt revile his most extreme partisans as Sabaʾiya rather than Kaysānīya, as they were later known. It was this core group of Sabaʾiya that the heresiographers describe as splintering into the alarming array of sectarian ghulāt of the late Umayyad period. The Sabaʾiya of Mukhtār’s revolt are largely anonymous, due to the fact that, as noted above, the epithet sabaʾī never became an appropriated identity of the Shīʾa, ghulāt or otherwise. Nonetheless, it is within the context of this revolt that the religious beliefs and practices of the ghulāt enter most visibly onto the stage of history. Such currents achieve their prominence in the midst of the revolt’s most astonishing success, and, emboldened by the victories of al-Mukhtār’s movement, one glimpses here the key historical moments when the actors behind these currents were least wary of the dangers and pitfalls of excessive zeal.

In the intervening decade and a half between Ḫujr’s martyrdom and beginnings of al-Mukhtār’s revolt, one finds no mention of the Sabaʾiya, whether as a term of abuse or otherwise. This is all the more uncanny given the prominence of place they achieve in Mukhtār’s revolt. Their absence cannot be attributed to an abeyance in pro-ʿAlid activism in Kūfa during this period. Kūfa never became a placid political landscape during the Sufyānid period—perhaps equally because of as in spite of the draconian policies of the Umayyad governors. Rather than void of pro-ʿAlid upheavals, Kūfa experienced its most spectacular. The most perennial and mythic in scale proved to be the failed revolt of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī at Karbalāʾ in 61/680. Ḥusayn’s revolt was then followed in 65/684 by the fiasco suffered at ʿAyn Warda by the tawwābūn, or ‘Penintants’, a group lead by an old companion of ʿAlī, Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad, who fought the Umayyads with reckless abandon hoping to somehow redeem the Kūfans’ prior abandonment of al-Ḥusayn, which resulted in his tragic death. The Umayyad’s Thaqafī
governor of Kūfa, ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād, proved equally adept at eliminating both al-Husayn’s revolt and the belated insurgency of the Penintants. Yet, Shi‘ī hopes of casting off the Umayyad yoke did not diminish in light of these failures, but festered unrequited beneath the surface.

Although there can be no doubt that the Kūfan Shi‘a remained unpacified, the political scene upon which Mukhtār staged his revolt occurred in an environment that also starkly contrasted from those of the preceding Shi‘ī confrontations with the Umayyads. With the death of Umayyad caliph Yazīd I in 64/683 and the ensuing civil war, the Sufyānid order in al-ʿIrāq swiftly collapsed. Kūfa and Baṣra removed themselves from the orbit of Umayyad control and opted for throwing their lot in with the ascendant Zubayrids based in the Ḥijāz. Sulaymān ibn ʿSurad and his Penintants sought to take advantage of this Umayyad weakness, but his efforts were premature and fell short before the still formidable might of ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād. By the time of Mukhtār’s revolt, however, Umayyad control and influence over the region had eroded considerably more and had even been entirely displaced by Zubaryids. At the time of Mukhtār’s revolt, Syria was embroiled in the flames of internecine Umayyad conflicts, ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr vied for caliphal dominance over the entire umma from Mecca, and his brother Muṣ’ab had successfully swept away the old Sufyānid politics of al-ʿIrāq. Mukhtār’s revolt, therefore, was necessarily of a different color.

It would be a mistake to assume that the events of the early 60’s/680’s did not loom large in Mukhtār’s Kūfan revolt. Both victims and participants recalled such events within their living memories. Initially at least, though, the interested parties acted on a parochial stage, and the revolt aspired more for Kūfan autonomy than for grandiose aims such as control of the umma. For Mukhtār’s part, he conceived his revolt as a movement charged with the mandate of exacting vengeance against the ‘Alids’ enemies on behalf of the Prophet’s household. He articulated this ideology through various, propagandistic slogans (al-ṭalab bi-dimāʾ ahl al-bayt, yā li-thārati l-husayn, etc.) also proclaimed by his immediate predecessor movement—Sulaymān ibn ʿSurad’s Tawwābūn⁴⁹—which demonstrates both the continuity of his movement with and its indebtedness to prior Shi‘ī revolts.

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⁴⁹ E.g., see Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 174.7 and Ṭabarī, ii, 637.3.
Yet, Mukhtār’s movement was not merely one-dimensional either. One encounters intimations of economic motivations behind the revolt as well. The Kūfans seemed to have objected to the Zubayrids’ endorsement of the policies and conduct of ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb and ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān when it came to the distribution of salaries from the fay. The Zubayrids’ intentions in heralding the renewed application of ʿUmar and ʿUthmān’s policies were clear: it marked a repudiation of the ancien régime of Umayyad administration and inaugurated a restoration of the pre-Umayyad ‘conquest’ paradigm. Vocal opposition to these policies from Kūfans arose from many quarters. The representatives of the pro-ʿAlid bloc inveighed passionately on behalf of instituting ‘Ali’s policies as an alternative to the Zubayrid preferences for those of ʿUmar and ʿUthmān.50 Not surprisingly, one never finds the specific differences between the policies spelled out in a detailed fashion. Mukhtār and his entourage articulated their counter-policy, and presumably ‘Ali’s as well, only in general terms as one based on “the Book of God, the sunna of his Prophet, seeking vengeance for the blood of ahl al-bayt, the killing of the violators of God’s law, and the defense of the weak.”51

It was essentially on the basis of one’s loyalty to these tenets that Mukhtār demanded the oath of allegiance (bayʿa).52 This ‘ideology’, if you will, enabled Mukhtār to garner a broad base of support initially, and he proved amenable to the ashraf willing to accommodate his demands to be recognized as the revolt’s unrivaled leader. It is significant, however, that despite demanding an oath of allegiance (bayʿa), Mukhtār never made claims to an office remotely akin to the caliphate or to titles such as ‘Commander of the Faithful (amīr al-muʾminīn)’. In any case, Mukhtār framed the revolt primarily in terms of righting wrongs and restoring justice, which was, truth be told, rather conventional as far as revolts go.

‘Conventional’, however, was something that Mukhtār and his revolt emphatically avoided. It is perhaps due solely to the personality and talent of Mukthār himself that his revolt proved to be considerably more formidable—and fascinating, for that matter—than that of his predecessor Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad. Mukhtār’s station as both the

50 Ṭabarî, ii, 603 f.
51 Ṭabarî, ii, 609 f.: kitāb allāh wa-sunnat nabīhi (ṣ) wa-l-ṭalab bi-dīmāʾ ahl al-bayt wa-qītāl al-muhillīn wa-l-dafʾ ‘an al-duʿāʾfāʾ.
52 Ṭabarî, ii, 633.
revolt’s instigator and leader was itself somewhat peculiar. He himself was not a Hāshimid and, strictly speaking, possessed no special claim on Shi‘ī leadership. To procure his mandate, Mukhtar appealed to a son of ‘Ali living in the Hijāz: Muḥammad ibn ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, who was known as Ibn al-Ḥanafīya due to the fact that, unlike his brothers al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, he was not Fāṭima’s son, but rather the son of Khawla, ‘Ali’s slave-woman from the Banū Ḥanifa. Mukhtar nonetheless regaled Ibn al-Ḥanafīya as ‘al-mahdī ibn al-wasī’—i.e., ‘the guided one’ son of ‘legatee’ (of the Prophet)—and heralded him as the spiritual patron and representative of the revolt.

Ibn al-Ḥanafīya, it seems, played no role in instigating Mukhtar’s movement. On the other hand, he also made no unequivocal denunciations of either the revolt’s actions or those of its leader. In moments of crisis, when Ibn al-Zubayr imprisoned Ibn al-Ḥanafīya near Mecca’s Zamzam well and threatened to burn him and the Banū Ḥāshim of Mecca alive if they did not give him their oath of allegiance, Ibn al-Ḥanafīya understandably showed no hesitation in imploring Mukhtar for aid and to enlist the help of his revolutionary Kūfan devotees.

While it is difficult to evaluate the messianic import of the title “mahdī” as it first appears on Mukhtar’s lips, the apocalyptic interpretation of the appellation, even as applied to Ibn al-Ḥanafīya, certainly became the dominant one with the advent of Mukhtar’s revolt. In the immediate Kūfan milieu, the consequences of this reverence for the taciturn and cautious Ibn al-Ḥanafīya as the figurehead of the movement translated into a considerable aggrandizement of Mukhtar’s station as his representative and proxy. To silence the objections of his skeptics, Mukhtar employed a letter he claimed was composed by Ibn Ḥanafīya bestowing on Mukhtar titles such the mahdī’s aid (wazīr), assistant (zahrī), trustee (amin), messenger (rasūl), confidant (khalīl), elect (muntakhab), etc.53 A contemporary poet, ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Hammām al-Salūlī, even regaled Mukhtar as “the Aid of the Legatee’s (i.e., ‘Ali’s) son [wazīr ibn al-wasī].”54 Mukhtar is purported to have conjured a clever ploy to keep his mahdī from coming to Kūfā and, thus, undermine his control over the city. He allegedly spread the word that when the mahdī would arrive at the market of Kūfā he would be struck on the neck by a sword yet miraculously remain

53 Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 150.–4 and 157.13; Ṭabarī, ii, 608.11–12 and 611.10.
54 Ṭabarī, ii, 638.5.
unharmed. Fears that someone might actually be so bold as to test the truth of this claim seem to have been sufficient enough to keep Ibn al-Ḥanafiya at an arm’s length where he could neither undermine nor mitigate Mukhtār’s authority in Kūfā.\footnote{Ibn Sa’d, v, 74; cf. al-Qādī, Kaysāniya, 79.}

Combined with his bold claims to spiritual authority, Mukthār was given to extolling his acolytes in ebullient, provocative irruptions of rhymed prose, or saj', reminiscent of the Arabian soothsayers of old. This in turn led to accusations of charlatanism and false-prophecy—whether these accusations against Mukthār are true or not we probably shall never know.\footnote{Wellhausen perhaps expressed the issue best when he wrote, “Es kann sich bei der Frage nach seiner Aufrichtigkeit nur darum handeln, ob er selber an sich geglaubt habe. Anfangs scheint das in der Tat der Fall gewesen zu sein” (Oppositionparteien, 88).} What is certain is that his tolerance of otherwise peripheral elements during his revolt eroded with time his initially broad base of supporters so severely that it proved to be his undoing.

Hence, Mukthār’s Kūfā was first to be an autonomous city-state on the one hand, and on the other a restoration of governance by the principles of ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib’s former ‘theocracy’. It was under the umbrella of this primarily political program that Kūfā’s denizens rallied around Mukhtār. The Kūfans were eager to see the fulfillment of Mukhtār’s promises to restore what they regarded as the most just administration for the management of affairs and the distribution of the wealth of the city’s hinterland. Yet, the more political success Mukhtār achieved, the more he and his movement embraced the religious fringe. This tendency to embrace the bizarre takes its most visible shape after his crushing defeat of the Kūfan ashrāf at the battle of Jabbānat al-Sabī’ and on the eve of Mukhtār’s most lauded achievement: the military defeat and slaying of the Umayyad general ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād.

The death of this old nemesis who had crushed many an ‘Alid and Shi’ite uprising before, including that of al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī himself, marked a great victory for the ‘Alids over the man who indubitably loomed large as the most formidable opponent of the Shi’a. Despite the controversy surrounding Mukhtār, this achievement alone guaranteed that there would always be efforts to rehabilitate his image. For some, he would always be remembered as a heroic champion
of the ‘Alids who exacted pitiless revenge against the enemies of the Prophet’s household.\(^{57}\)

The Saba’iyya belong to that enthusiastic moment in Mukhtār’s revolt when, having achieved enormous political gains, peripheral elements in the revolt began to make their entrée into the center. The scene that concerns us most here transpired in the middle of two key events: 1) the killing of the ashraf involved in al-Ḥusayn’s betrayal and 2) ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād’s defeat on the banks of Khāzir. This scene is Mukhtār’s infamous unveiling of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib’s ‘chair (kursī) as his movement’s holy relic from the Prophet’s family and as a talisman of impending victory. The scene is dated to the end of Dhū l-Ḥijja 66/July 686 (some nine months into the revolt which began in the middle of Rabī’ 1 66/October 685) when, according to a number of accounts of the events of this month, the armies of al-Mukhtār, led by his chief commander Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar al-Nakha’ī, marched off to face the Syrians and to engage ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād in battle. As the army’s leaders and its regiments left the environs of Kūfa crossing the two bridges of Dayr ʿAbd al-Rāḥmān ibn Umm al-Ḥakam and Ra’s al-Jālūt, an entourage carrying this chair (kursī) that allegedly belonged to ʿAlī marched in the middle of an elaborate procession. Those surrounding the chair circled around it as though they revered it as a shrine and called out to the heavens as though seeking divine assistance through it. Our sources call these persons associated with the chair and its pagentry ‘Saba’iyya’.\(^{58}\)

For the details of the events connected to ʿAlī’s kursī, three sources have survived, and each putatively preserves an eyewitness account. Ṭabarī provides the most extensive versions of all three, although other historians provide extra details here and there. The first account Ṭabarī provides, transmitted from Abū Mikhnaf, offers the most widely transmitted version with an isnād going back the Kūfan rāwī al-Fudayl ibn

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\(^{57}\) As exemplified especially in the various Mukhtār-nāmahs which came to be an integral part in the expansive, epic pageantry associated with al-Ḥusayn’s death; on which, see J. Calmard, “Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya dans la religion populaire, le folklore, les legends dans le monde turco-persan et indo-persan,” Cahiers d’Asie Centrale 5–6 (1998), 201–20. A modern instantiation of the Shi’ite valorization of Mukhṭār and his revolt has been recently realized in the 2009 Iranian serial Mokhtar Nameh directed and written by Davoud Mirbagheri.

\(^{58}\) Ṭabarī, ii, 701 ff. Cf. Ibn al-Kalbī, Nasab Maʿadd wa-l-Yaman, ii, 196; Balādhuri, Ansāb, iv, 184 ff.
Khadij al-Kindi.\textsuperscript{59} The second account,\textsuperscript{60} probably first compiled by the traditionist ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mubārak (d. 181/797)\textsuperscript{61} or his prominent pupil Sulaymān ibn Šālih (d. ca. 210/825),\textsuperscript{62} ostensibly derives from another eyewitness named Ma’bad ibn Khālid al-Jadalī (d. 118/736).\textsuperscript{63} Our last source comes to us in the form of a poetic invective composed against the chair’s entourage attributed to A’shā Hamdān (d. 83/702). This last, perhaps most important source, will be treated more extensively further in the next section below. Of these three, only al-Fudāyil ibn Khadij neglects to name the chair’s admirers’ as being Sabaʾīya (however, he does connect them to the ghulāt; see below). The other two, however, specifically assert that it was the Sabaʾīya who revered this chair. Who are intended here by the Sabaʾīya?

To answer this question, we must first form a clear idea of who had been present near and participated in this bizarre new pageantry. Although the accounts never define the Sabaʾīya \textit{per se}, our sources do provide us with some important circumstantial details, such as insights regarding the make up of the army and the names of persons associated with the pageantry. So what evidence exists is worthy of full consideration.

According to Abū Mikhnaf, the ranks of the army accompanying the chair, although led predominantly by Southern tribesmen, putatively included recruits from the entirety of Kūfa—viz., not \textit{all} the inhabitants as such, and certainly not from Mukhtār’s trenchant opponents among the \textit{ashrāf}, but nonetheless a cross-section of fighting-men recruited from each quarter-division (\textit{rubʿ}) of the city. The commander of each quarter is named: Qays ibn Ṭahfā al-Nahdī.\textsuperscript{64}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{59} For the account, see Ṭabarī, ii, 701–2. On the transmitter, see U. Sezgin, \textit{Abū Mihna}, 201 \textit{et passim}.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ṭabarī, ii, 702–4.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibn Mubārak was a Khurāsānian traditionist later known chiefly as a great warrior and a \textit{faqīh} specializing in holy war (\textit{jihād}) and asceticism (\textit{zuhd}). On his works and their context see, F. Sezgin, \textit{GAS}, i, 95 and M. Bonner, \textit{Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier} (New Haven, 1996), 119 ff. \textit{et passim}.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Ibn Ḥajar, \textit{Tahdhib}, iv, 200.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Ibn Ḥajar, \textit{Tahdhib}, x, 221 f. Ma’bad ibn Khālid al-Jadalī was a respected, albeit minor, traditionist of Kūfa most famous for an interchange between him and ‘Abd al-Malik after the defeat of Muṣʿab ibn al-Zubayr. Although ugly in appearance, he cleverly proved his worth to be superior to a handsome companion through a masterful display of knowledge and learning. See Ṭabarī, ii, 814 ff.; Baladhuri, \textit{Ansāb}, iv, 359 ff.; Aghānī, iii, 90 f.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ṭabarī, ii, 619.
\end{itemize}
being given authority over the division (*rub*') of the Medinans;65 ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥayya al-Asadi66 over Madhhij and Asad; al-Aswad ibn Jarād al-Kindi67 over Kinda and Rabīʿa; and lastly Ḥabīb ibn Munqidh al-Thawrī68 from Hamdān over Tamīm and Hamdān. The contrary tribal poles represented in the four divisions of the army and the city—i.e., the pairing of southern with northern tribes (Kinda with Rabīʿa, etc.)—indicates that Mukhtār mobilized his forces in accordance with Umayyad urban-planning. The army’s organization, therefore, mirrors the structure of the (re-)organization the city’s quarters as undertaken by Ziyād ibn Abīhi in 50–53/670–673. Mukhtār’s army was thus mobilized according to the quarter of the city assigned to each tribe.69 Here Mukhtār was not innovative—to find his innovative measures one must look rather to his conscription of the *mawālī* (on which more will be said below). *Prima facie*, therefore, the divisions of the army offer us no profound insight into the demographic composition of its forces, let alone who the Sabaʿīya were. Individuals within the forces undoubtedly came from a mixture of tribal allegiances. It is nonetheless significant to scrutinize the tribal associations of the leaders of each of the four divisions: three of the four are clearly southern Arabs, and the one northern Arab (i.e., ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥayya, who is identified as such only in Tābari’s account).70 Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar, their collective leader and general, was also himself a chieftain of the Madhhij in Kūfa.71

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65 According to Abū Mikhnaḵf, the quarter of the Medinans housed the people of the highlands around Medina (*ahl al-ʿāliya*) and were composed of a mixture of tribesmen from the Quraysh, Kināna, Azd, Bajīla, Khathʿam, Qaysʿ Aylān and Muzayna (Ṭabarī, II, 1382).

66 ʿAbd Allāh ibn Jundab (with no tribal *nisba* given) according to Balʿadhrū, *Ansāb*, IV, 194.

67 He aided al-Mukhtār in the initial stages of his revolt and appears as a rāwī in Abū Mikhnaḵf’s accounts; he was also a participant in the mission of ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Shurayḥ al-Shibānī (companion of ʿAlī: Ṭabarī, i, 3411; he also reappears during revolt of al-Husayn: Ṭabarī, ii, 253, 257) to Ibn al-Hanafiya (Ṭabarī, ii, 605, 606).

68 Also given authority over lower Bihqūbahd, see Ṭabarī, ii, 635.

69 For the sake of clarity, these four divisions were: a) the men of Medina, b) Madhhij and Asad, c) Kinda and Rabīʿa, and d) Tamīm and Hamdān; cf. H. Djaʿīt, “Yamanites à Kūfa,” 154 f.

70 Ṭabarī’s version of Abū Mikhnaḵf’s text, on which he is dependent for this information, strikes me, however, as being superior in this instance to that of Balʿadhrū’s (see note above).

71 As stated in the encomium of the poet Surāqa ibn Mirdās al-Bāriqi (d. 80/699): “atākum ghulām min ʿarānīni Madhhij” (Ṭabarī, ii, 716.17).
It ought to be recalled that this army led by Ibn al-Ashtar, in effect, amounted to a re-mobilization of many of the troops sent against the advancing forces of 'Ubayd Alläh ibn Ziyäd in Mosul earlier in the month. Mukhtār’s first campaign against 'Ubayd Alläh had been cut short prematurely due to the passing of its lead commander, Yazīd ibn Anas al-Asadī. Prior to his death, Yazīd ibn Anas had become so ill and enfeebled that he required a mule to transport him back to Kūfa.72 Although a staunch supporter of Mukhtār and top-ranking member of his inner-circle from the outset, his death nevertheless roused suspicions of foul-play among the Kūfan ashrāf. His death also further added to the resentment harbored by the ashrāf towards Mukhtār’s leadership and his conscription of their mawālī, and they used the occasion of his death to plot an end to Mukhtār’s control over the city.73 Mukhtār speedily recalled the reinforcements that he had orin-gally sent under the leadership of Ibn al-Ashtar to aid Yazīd ibn Anas against 'Ubayd Alläh back to Kūfa. Aided by Ibn al-Ashtar, Mukhtār re-entrenched his control over Kūfa and crushed the rebellious ashrāf.

In any case, these events considerably protracted the détente between the forces of 'Ubayd Alläh and Mukhtār until the end of Dhū l-Hijja 66/July 686. Unbridled by the ashrāf whom he formerly courted after their defeat at Jabbānat al-Sabī,74 Mukhtār purged the city of those deemed complicit in Umayyad crimes against the ‘Alids and their supporters. The decisive battle between Ibn al-Ashtar and Ibn Ziyäd, therefore, was not to be fought until Muḥarram 67/August 686. Although these events transpired within the course of a single month, Mukhtār considerably reshuffled the forces once he had reunited them under Ibn al-Ashtar’s leadership. When the Saba'īya appeared with their chair for the first time, the predominately Southern leadership of the forces contrasted with the formerly predominately northern leadership of the forces of Yazīd ibn Anas.75 What effect the removal of

72 Tabārī, ii, 645; Balādhuri, Ansāb, iv, 168; Ibn A’tham, Futūh, vi, 142.
73 An account of Abū Mikhnāf has the ashrāf collectively complain (Tabārī, ii, 22), "By God, (Mukhtār) has made himself our commander without our consent. He has drawn our mawālī near, mounted them on horsess, and given them stipends and fed them with our fay. Our slaves [ʿabīdunā] have disobeyed us and with all that attacked our orphans and widows!"
74 Wellhausen, Oppositionsparteien, 77 ff.
75 Under Yazīd ibn Anas, two southern tribesmen, al-Nu’mān ibn ‘Awf ibn Abī Jābir al-Azdī and ‘Āsīm ibn Qays ibn Ḥabīb al-Hamdānī, were over the division of the Medinans and the division of Tamīm and Hamdān, respectively. More prominent, however, were Yazīd ibn Anas’ two sub-commanders who were northern tribesmen:
the *ashrāf* from Kūfa had on the resources of Mukhtār’s army must have been substantial, but it is difficult to gauge it in precise terms. It almost certainly contributed to Mukhtār’s increased reliance on foot-soldiers and *mawālī*, as attested to by contemporary observers such as the Syriac historian John bar Penkāyē. It is also significant that, despite the organizational parallels to the forces of Yazīd ibn Anas, Ibn al-Ashtar’s remobilized force was the only army that Mukhtār sent into battle bearing ‘Ali’s sacred chair.

The origins and subsequent maintenance of the chair offers considerable insight into its significance, despite the fact that the sources offer two contradictory, even somewhat satirical accounts. While the transparently hostile tenor of both does little to inspire much confidence as to their veracity, there nonetheless remains much of value in the accounts if one reads them cautiously.

The first account, narrated by Abū Mikhnaf from unnamed sources, depicts a bullheaded Mukhtār as harrassing the family of Ja’da ibn Hubayra—‘Ali’s nephew through his full sister Umm Hāni’ bint Abī Ṭālib—to whom he repeatedly sends entreaties to hand over the chair of ‘Alī. Ja’da’s family, claiming to be ignorant of such a chair, attempt to convince Mukhtār that no such chair exists, but to no avail. To rid themselves of his constant queries, the exasperated family hands over a non-descript chair, which Mukhtār immediately parades before the Kūfans as authentic. Once the family had handed over the chair, the account claims that “the tribes of Shākir and Shibām and the heads of al-Mukhtār’s associates marched out, having covered it with cloths of silk and brocade.”

In addition to this first account from Abū Mikhnaf, Ma’bad al-Jadalī recounts a narrative that ostensibly records the testimony of Ja’da’s son Ṭufayl ibn Ja’da ibn Hubayra. In this account, rather than Mukhtār seeking the chair from the family of Ja’da, we see an enterprising

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Warqā’ ibn ‘Āzib al-Asadi and Sīr ibn Abī Sīr al-Ḥanafi, commanding the division of Madhhij and Asad and of Rabī’a and Kinda, respectively.

76 Rēš Mellē, 157, in: Alphonse Mignana, ed., *Sources Syriaques* (Leipzig, 1908). Bar Penkāyē’s death date is uncertain, but based on his history Rēš Mellē, he likely died either at end of the 7th century or beginning of the 8th century C.E. Citing Ṭabarī’s statement that “(Ibn al-Ashtar’s) horsemen were few [kānat khayluhu qalīlaَْ]” (11, 709.5), Wellhausen asserted that while Yazid ibn Anas’ contingent was thoroughly equipped with cavalry, “hatte das zweite (Aufgebot) fast gar keine Reiter” (Oppositionsparteien, 84). Wellhausen’s contrast seems, in my view, a bit of an overstatement.

young man from the family constructing a ruse whereby he extorts some profit from the naïveté and/or opportunism of Mukhtar and his movement. In need of money, Tufayl narrates, he approached his neighbor, an oil-merchant (zayyāt), who owned an old chair “covered with a thick layer of filth [rakibahu wasakhun shadidun].” After procuring the chair, Tufayl sells it to Mukhtar for a sum of 12,000 dirhams, claiming that his father Ja’da treated it “as if he believed it contained some vestige of knowledge [ka-annahu yarā fihi atharahun min ‘ilmun].”

Despite the efforts of the various narratives of the event to belie the earnestness of Mukhtar’s motives in introducing the chair to the Kūfans, both accounts of its origins, while contradictory, nevertheless affirm that Mukhtar fervently sought out the relic for the putative holiness of the artifact. Veneration for ‘Alī’s chair necessarily entails and arises from an antecedent veneration for the man himself. That much is clear. What remains less clear, however, is the exact nature of this veneration. We are provided with a clue in Ma’bad al-Jadali’s account that suggests that this veneration takes its cues from a Qur’anic archetype. That this is not a mere topos will later be confirmed by our analysis of A’shā Hamdān’s poem.

Once Mukhtar had introduced the relic to his troupe, he quickly expounded upon its significance with his typical bravado. Ma’bad al-Jadali depicts the scene as follows. Addressing his followers, Mukhtar declared:

> There is nothing of the former nations [al-umam al-khāliya] the like of which is not in this umma. Among the children of Israel there existed the ark [al-tābūt] in which there were the relics [al-baqīya] of what the households of Moses and Aaron had left behind.

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78 Ṭabarī, ii, 703. According to al-Mubarrad in an abbreviated variant on this story, the chair had been purchased from a carpenter (najjār) for a mere two dirhams (Kāmil, iii, 269.–4).

79 Ṭabarī, ii, 703.8–9 (cf. Q. 46:4). Ibn Athīr reads instead “a relic from ‘Alī [athar min ‘alī]” (Kāmil, iv, 213.13), a reading Michael Fishbein rightly rejects as a lectio faciliarī (The History of al-Ṭabarī, vol. xxii: The Victory of the Marwānids, Albany, 1990, 70 n. 272). In the account of al-Mubarrad, however, the word apparently transforms into dhakhira—i.e., a holy relic; al-Mubarrad writes that “(al-Mukhtar) said: ‘This chair is one of the relics [min al-dhakhā’ir] of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ţalīb’” (Kāmil, iii, 269.–6; cf. Tha’ālabī, Thimār al-qulūb, 92.2).

80 Ṭabarī, ii, 703 f.
Pointing to the covered chair, Mukhtār announced, “This before us is like the ark!”—and he ordered for ‘Alī’s chair to be stripped of its covering. At this moment, the mesmerized Sabaʾiya raised their hands, crying, “Allāhu akbar!”

While the extent to which Maʿbad al-Jadaliʾs provides us with an accurate reflection of Mukhtār’s views remains open to question, the essential details likely offer some insight into why the chair was venerated. Maʿbad’s depiction of Mukhtār’s unveiling of the chair evokes a vast array of religious tropes and symbols that, in my view, have been hitherto underappreciated. Most immediately relevant to this context is the qurʾānic motif: Mukhtār’s heralding of the chair’s discovery alludes directly to Q. 2:248, in which the prophet Samuel declares to the Israelites:

> Verily the sign of (Tālūt’s/Saul’s) dominion [mulk] is that the ark, containing your Lord’s presence [sakīna] and the relics [baqīya] of what the households of Moses and Aaron left behind, will come to you borne by angels. In this is a sign if you were believers.

There can be little doubt that the attendants of the chair revered the sacred object for an array of motives, as all symbols can potentially serve as the loci of multivalent interpretations. Mukhtār’s declaration

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81 Sakīna is the Arabic calque of the Hebrew/Aramaic (šrkhīnā/šrkīntā) probably derived from the Syriac sakkīnā (see A. Jeffery, The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān (Baroda, 1938), 173). All of these words have derived their meaning from the accommodating and broad semantic range of their common Semitic root and its biblical use. The notion of s̱ākīnā is not itself biblical, strictly speaking, but it is greatly indebted to the notion of the special divine presence or indwelling sacred objects such as the tabernacle and temple (see M. Görg, “šākān,” TDOT, xiv, 691 ff.). This is especially true since the Shekina was directly associated with the glory (Heb., kābōd) of God said to dwell in the ark of the covenant (see Ex. 40:34 f.). In its qurʾānic usage, Western scholars have often been predisposed to interpret the qurʾānic sakīna in terms of its rabbinic antecedents. This is not without some justification and can be seen in the cross-pollination between the Judaic and Islamic exegetical tradition, which both often describe the sakīna in terms of a visible divine being. It is common for Muslim exegetes to depict the sakīna, for example, as rūh khajūj lahā raʾs, i.e., “a gale wind with a head.” See Firestone, “Shekina,” EQ, iv, 591a on the taʾfṣīr material; on rabbinic depictions, see A. M. Goldberg, Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung von der Schekinhah in der frühen rabinischen Literatur, Studia Judaica 5 (Berlin, 1969), 335 ff. One is often hard-pressed to find sakīna conforming exactly to rabbinic antecedents in all of its qurʾānic loci, however, allowing one to speak of a uniquely qurʾānic sense of the term (see Firestone, art. cit., 590b).

82 It should be noted that, besides being a type of reliquary safeguarding the tokens of Israelite covenant history, the ark of the covenant also acted in ancient Israelite religion as God’s throne, or footstool. As explicitly described in a number of biblical texts, the ark would have been shaped in the form of a throne due to its location below
deserves special attention, however, for it seems to be a further attempt to cement the parallel between the family of Moses and Aaron and the family Muhammad and ‘Ali, of which the tradition Shi’e exegetes would become so fond. Indeed, it was in Mukhtar’s own interest to affirm this connection, because if Mukhtar avers that Muhammad and ‘Ali conform to this Qur’anic archetype, his own position of authority is strengthened. By taking great pains to make the chair a symbolic vestige of the family of ‘Ali and Muhammad and and equate it with the Israelites’ ark of the covenant depicted in Q. 2:248, Mukhtar, as an outsider with no kinship linking him to the Prophet’s household, cast himself into a role not dissimilar from Saul. Militarily the ark guaranteed divine aid and future victory, but its significance goes further as well. Just as possession of the ark imputed to Saul the prestige of divine investiture, Mukhtar’s possession of the chair garners him the same prestige *ex cathedra*. Its two accompanying cherubim, which were said to have stood 10 cubits in height and spanned some 10 cubits due to their outstretched wings. See T. N. D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Saboath: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies*, trans. F. H. Cryer (Lund, 1982), 19–24. The ark’s iconography had been widespread in the ancient Near East, but the fact that Mukhtar’s ark was in fact also a chair/throne is probably a coincidence. Sha’ul Shaked has hypothesized that a Sassanian archetype lies behind the reverence of ‘Ali’s chair in his article “From Iran to Islam: some symbols of royalty,” *JSAI* 7 (1986), 81–83. In my view, a more plausible explanation is that the chair was revered because ‘Ali had sat upon a chair while commanding his armies, a common practice for Arab commanders in the early Islamic period. Thus, the chair represented his presence with Mukhtar’s army just as, say, a *mihārāb* potentially represents the presence of the Prophet with praying believers. For Umayyad examples of *amirs* commanding armies seated on a chair, see H. Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* (London, 2001), 24.

83 See the discussion in Madelung, *Succession*, 11 ff. and Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 495. In the Qur’anic accounts Aaron appears variously as Moses’ aid/wazir (Q. 20:29–32; 25:35), as one deputized to lead (khalīfa?) in his absence (Q. 7:142; cf. the discussion in al-Qāḍī, “The Term Khalīfa,” 399), and as one chosen like Moses to receive from God the path of salvation, a light and a reminder to those who fear God (“wālaqad ātaynā mūsā wa-hārūn al-furqān wa-dāyān wa-dhikr an li-l-muttaqi’n,” Q. 21:48–49).

84 In Baladhuri’s version (Ansāb, IV, 185.9, 186.5), the Saba’iyya seek not only victory (yastansirāna) through the chair but also rain (yastasqūna). Morony (*Iraq after the Muslim Conquests*, 322, 496) makes a great deal out of the fact that one also finds Ḥujr ibn ‘Adi successfully praying for rain without the aid of such a relic. See also H. Lammens, “Ziad ibn Abīhi: Vice-roi of l’Iraq, Lieutenant de Mawia I”,” *RSO* 4 (1911–12), 222 ff. Although prayers for rain were also a common practice of rabbis and holy men in Late Antiquity (see R. Kirschner, “The Vocation of Holiness in Late Antiquity,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 [1984], 117 for examples), Morony overemphasizes the importance of this overlap in Ḥujr’s case—as the Prophet Muhammad established the practice as well according to tradition. Traditionists did not frown on...
Abū Mikhnaf, who excludes these details, nonetheless appears to be conscious of them. In his transmission of al-Fuḍayl ibn Khadijī’s account, we hear Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar voice his trepidation in a prayer to God, comparing the chair to the Israelites’ golden calf, rather than their ark. Fearing that such behavior would rather jeopardize the divine favor thitherto granted to the movement, Ibn al-Ashtar implores, “Oh Lord, do not hold us responsible for what these fools have done in the manner of the children of Israel...when they circled around their calf [allahuma lā tuʿākhidhā bi-mā fāʿala l-sufahā sunnat banī isrāʿīl...idh ʿakafū ʿalā ʿijlihim]!” Ibn al-Ashtar’s prayer clearly acts as a narrative counter-claim undermining the claims of Mukhtār’s pretentious display of his ark/chair as proof of the divine investiture. Despite the objections voiced in this tradition, however, Ibrhāhīm ibn al-Ashtar clearly did not view such a display as tantamount to grounds for severing ties with the movement, but rather seems to have deemed it yet another onus to bear throughout his involvement with the uprising.

Once introduced, the chair was brought out of the mosque where Mukhtār had unveiled it, saddled on a grey mule and flanked on each side by seven men, all of whom were led by the chair’s steward (sādin al-kursī)—a Hamdānid known by Abū Mikhnaf as Ḥawshab

85 Tābarī, ii, 704 (cf. Q. 7:147 ff.). It is noteworthy that the Arabic vocabulary here never directly mentions their circling of the chair as amounting to ʿtawāf (e.g., as around the Kaʿba).


87 Ibn al-Ashtar handled this incident in the same manner as he handled the matter of the dubious letter from Ibn al-Ḥanafiya handed over to him by Mukhtār and Yazid ibn Anas, which Ibn al-Ashtar chose to treat as authentic despite (according to al-Shaʿbī) the doubts he clearly had as to its authenticity. See Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 157 f.; Dinawārī, al-Akhbār al-ṣiwāl, 297 f.; Tābarī, ii, 609 ff.; Ibn Aʿtham, Futūḥ, vi, 94 ff.
al-Yursumī. On this steward, there is a good deal to observe as well. Ḥawshab appears in the service of al-Mukhtār in other contexts, too—most prominently as the designated assassin of the Kūfan sharīf Muhammad ibn al-Ashʿath ibn Qays al-Kindī. At the time Mukhtār charged Ḥawshab with carrying out his murder, Muhammad ibn al-Ashʿath had long been the chieftain of the Banū Kinda, a position that he took over after his father’s death in 71/661. His notoriety—and thus the root of the lethal opposition directed against him from within Mukhtār’s inner circle—arose primarily from his suspected role in the arrest of his fellow tribesman Ḥujr ibn ‘Adī al-Kindī by Ziyād ibn Abīhi. Many accounts even claim that he testified to Ḥujr’s detriment. Muslim historians also attribute to him a key role in the arrests of Muslim ibn ‘Aqīl and Hāni ibn Urwa during their attempts to raise support for al-Ḥusayn in Kūfā leading up to the catastrophe of Karbalāʾ in 61/681. As a target of Mukhtār’s call for the blood of the murderers of al-Ḥusayn, Muhammad ibn al-Ashʿath proved to be more wilely than some of the other Kūfan ashrāf, for he managed to evade Ḥawshab and his men by absconding with his life and seeking refuge with Muṣṭab ibn al-Zubayr in Başra. Not to be bested, Mukhtār ordered Ḥawshab to destroy his house and to use the remaining rubble to reconstruct the house of Ḥujr ibn ‘Adī.

These accounts reveal to us two important details regarding Ḥawshab al-Yursumī: 1) he always appears as a trusted confidant from the inner-circle of Mukhtār’s entourage, and 2) his exertions on behalf of the movement conform to and fulfill Mukhtār’s own orders. Moreover, he represents a wing of the movement possessing convictions and discontents harkening back to the oldest ‘Alid causes. In other words, he

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88 Tabarî, ii, 680, 701, 704 (the text alternatively gives his nisba as al-Bursumî); cf. Baladhuri, Ansâb, iv, 183. Ibn A’tham al-Kūfî gives his name as Ḥawshab ibn Ya’lâ al-Hamdâni (Futûh, iii, 137). Yursum is a sub-clan of Ḥimyar from Hamdân (Baladhuri, Ansâb, iv, 185). The fact that the ark had been borne on the back of a grey mule may be significant. Shiʿi scholars claimed that ʿAli had inherited the Prophet’s grey she-mule (baghla shahbâ; see Kulaynî, Kaflî, i, 238.4), which he sat upon, for example, during the Battle of the Camel. In the above instance, however, the mule is male rather than female. Cf. S. Bashear, “Riding Beasts on Divine Missions: An Examination of the Ass and Camel Traditions,” JSS 37 (1991), 54, 63, and 72.
89 Baladhuri, Ansâb, iv, 183; cf. Tabari, ii, 680.
90 Baladhuri, Ansâb, iv, 254.
92 Baladhuri, Ansâb, iv, 183 f.; Tabari, ii, 680; Ibn A’tham, Futûh, vi, 137 f.
belonged to a faction with old scores to settle even beyond the call to
revenge for the blood of al-Ḥusayn. The martyrdom of Ḥujr and his
companions also carried particular gravity for them. Ḥawshab and the
chair’s admirers did not belong to some fringe entrepreneurs of ‘reli-
giopathic’ innovation that had attached itself to Mukhtār’s movement
while its leader was left unawares. Rather, they belonged to the heart
of the movement, which was motivated by old, long-held grievances.

Particularly striking as well is that Ḥawshab, the steward of the chair,
is deemed a sādin. The term sādin—or, ḥājib—traditionally applies to
the individual deemed the guardian of a pagan Arabian sanctuary and
who, by virtue of his office (usually inherited), acted as the mouthpiece
of the deity whose temple (bayt) he guarded. It was a theurgic office,
and a sādin thus acted as a sort of sedentary kāhin in the service of
deity’s sanctuary. Wellhausen equated the sādin’s function with that
of a priest, and his assertion becomes all the more credible in view
of Mukhtār’s appointment of pseudo-priestly entourage to accom-
pany his new ‘ark’. Unlike the sādins of old, however, Mukhtār’s relic
required offices to be created de novo. Mukhtār was unable to assign
or mobilize the resources of a sacred family to assume its steward-
ship and fulfill its requisite ‘priestly’ duties. He had to experiment.
Ḥawshab’s stewardship of the chair, we are informed, was a position
he had taken over from its former trustee Mūsā ibn Abī Mūsā l-Ash’arī
who, once reproved, repented of any associations with the chair. As
such, the stewardship of the chair must have been a sort of semi-formal
position within the movement, presumably originating with its initial
‘discovery’ in the possession of the family of ‘Ali’s nephew Ja’da ibn
Hubayra.

In his Reste, Wellhausen asserted that the sādins’ sanctuaries were
permanently stationary, which would make Mukhtār’s mobile ark a
bit of a misfit. Wellhausen’s assertion, however, should be rejected.
Mukhtār’s practice of marching his sacred object into battle along with
its sādins and a troupe of diviners (kuhhān) predicting victory and
invoking divine assistance finds precedence in pre-Islamic Arabian practices, too. The account claims that, as the Sabaʾīya marched out of Kūfa, in somewhat typical ṣādin-fashion, Ḥawshab bellowed invocations for God to aid the army in attaining victory. His cries were met with numerous cries of “Amen!” from the chair’s attendants. Lest we have any doubts as to their relationship with the core of Mukhtār’s movement, the account informs us that Mukhtār joined in the pageantry while ecstatically uttering his infamous rhymed prose, or saj:

By the Lord of the successively dispatched winds (cf. Q. 77:1)! We shall surely kill rank after rank! And thousands upon thousands of deviants!

Here al-Mukhtār speaks, as he does elsewhere, in the saj of the pre-Islamic soothsayers (kuhhān; sing. kāhin), and within this saj is a prophecy of victory. In Ṭabarī’s account, al-Mukhtār’s combination of his already controversial penchant for ecstatic utterances with the pageantry of ‘Alī’s chair marks a watershed event. It is here that the zealous excesses of the movement first truly come to the fore. These events amount to the boldest public display of Mukhtār’s tolerance and even endorsement of the dramatic and even bizarre religiosity which so aggrandized his position. Indeed, according to Abū Mikh-naf, an uncle of the poet Aṣḥā Hamdān named Abū Umāma had been so impressed by Mukhtār’s display that he declared, “Today, he has brought us revelation the likes of which has never been heard.”

Mukhtār denounced any attempt to label him a kāhin, yet he remained unabashed in his pursuit of religious claims which courted...

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98 Ṭabarī, n, 701: āmmā wa-rabbi l-mursalāt ‘urf an, la-naqtulanna ba’dā saff “ṣaff”, wa-ba’dā alfi qāsit ān, wa-ba’dā alfi qāsit ān. Ṭabarī’s version is the only one to ascribe the utterance to al-Mukhtār. In Balādhurī’s account, the saying is attributed not to al-Mukhtār but to an anonymous poet “qāla shāʾiruhum” (Ansāb, iv2, 194.9). In Ibn Aʿtham’s version, which excludes any mention of the chair altogether, the utterance transforms altogether into a poem attributed to Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar (Futūḥ, vi, 159 f.).

99 The opponents of al-Mukhtār at Jabbānat al-Sabī appear to have been the first persons to accuse him of being a kāhin (e.g., see Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv2, 170), and later the remnant of his movement would be accused of being followers of kuhhān in the Kitāb al-irjā.

100 Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv2, 186.5: atānā al-yawm bi-wahyān mā samʿa l-nāsu bi-mithlihī; Ṭabarī, n1, 706: qad wudʿa lanā wahyān; etc.
The religious problematic at stake here is, of course, twofold. One the one hand, there is the aspect that undergirds the sacrosanct status of Qur’ānic authority: the esoteric saj of the soothsayers is perennially denigrated as pseudo-Qur’ānic and, thus, at odds with scripture. On the other hand, there is the aspect that plays on fears that the ark represents an idol—a golden calf, if you will—rather than an instrument of divine support and guidance. As Mukhtar ratchets up the religious claims of the revolt, one encounters with increasingly frequency beliefs and practices against which even many of his fawning contemporaries cannot inure their religious scruples. More on this material, which takes us squarely into the arena of the earliest Kufan ghulāt, will be said below. For now, some rather important observations ought to be made.

Mukhtar’s ark hits upon another theme that needs to be emphasized. The original ark of covenant, although mysteriously omitted from biblical lists of temple riches looted during the Babylonians’ destruction of the temple, never reappears in the biblical or parascriptural traditions describing the subsequent reiterations and reconstructions of the Jewish Temple. Apocryphal writings, capitalizing on the ark’s

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101 This does not mean that Mukhtar shied away from other grandiose self-identifications. In one of his rhymed utterances, he reputedly declared, “They call me a deceiver, but I am a sincere speaker of truth; (they call me) a soothsayer, but I am the noble one distinguishing truth from error [fa-sammawni kadhdhabu wa-anā l-sādiq al-maṣdūq wa-kāhin wa-anā l-najīb al-fārūq]” (Baladhuri, Ansāb, iv, 176.6). Mukhtar’s claim to be al-najīb al-fārūq (Goiten’s edition of Baladhuri’s text reads “al-ajīb al-fārūq”, see Ansāb al-Ashrāf, v, ed. S. Goiten [Jerusalem, 1936], 236.3) may have messianic import, insofar as the title “al-fārūq” may be a calque of the Syriac pārūqā, meaning ‘redeemer’ or ‘savior’. The associations of the title with ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb established the meaning of fārūq (in the tradionists’ understanding at least) as one who “distinguishes truth from error [yafrīqu baynu l-ḥaq wa-l-bāṭil.]” See S. Bashear, “The Title ‘Fārūq’ and Its Associations with ‘Umar I,” SI 72 (1990), 47–70; Donner, “La question du messianisme,” 17 ff. This latter sense may be implied in the fact that one can construe Mukhtar as a sort of ‘savior’ acting on behalf of the ahl al-bayt in order to slay their enemies; see Baladhuri, Ansāb, iv, 176.9–11 for saj in which Mukhtar makes claims apparently to this effect.

102 This must be due to the strong affinities between the rhythms and cadence of the soothsayers’ speech and Qur’ānic diction and the claims of both to originate in a supernatural source, necessitating the deeming of the former as being a counterfeit version of the latter. As Wellhausen noted long ago with fitting irony, the Qur’ān actually offers to us the most vivid and authentic example of the ‘kūhānic’ genre of Arabic prose (Reste, 135). On this theme, see Angelika Neuwirth, “Images and Metaphors in the Introductory Sections of the Makkan Sūras,” in: G. R. Hawting and A.-K. A. Shareef, eds., Approaches to the Qur’ān (London, 1993), 3 f.

103 E.g., see 2 Kings 25:13–17; Jer 52:17–23.
mysterious ‘disappearance’, enlarged the biography of the prophet Jeremiah to encompass a story on the eve of the first Temple’s destruction in which God charges him with gathering the ark in order to conceal it inside a cave on the mountain where Moses first cast his eyes upon the Promised Land. Jeremiah, of all his fellow exiles, alone saw the hiding place, which he told his companions would remain concealed until God himself chose to reveal it.\footnote{2 Macc 2:1–8}

The idea of the ark’s retrieval as a sign of the inauguration apocalyptic and/or eschatological events develops as early as Second Temple Judaism,\footnote{Thus, Josephus writes of a Samaritan prophet during Pilate’s procuratorship who rallied his fellow Samaritans to arms near Mt. Gerazim by claiming that he could reveal to them “the sacred vessels which were buried there, where Moses had deposited them”; see L. H. Feldman (trans.), \textit{Josephus Ix: Jewish Antiquities, Books xviii–xx}, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), 61 f. (xviii. 85–7). Some scholars have disputed the historicity of Josephus’ description of the Samaritan revolt, but for our purposes, it is the currency of the idea of the rediscovery of the temple’s vessels that is important. See I. Kalimi and J. D. Purvis, “The Hiding of the Temple Vessels in Jewish and Samaritan Literature,” \textit{Catholic Biblical Quarterly} 56 (1994), 683 f.} and the idea remained a bit of an obsession even in late antique apocalyptica—both among Christians and Jews.\footnote{Nir, \textit{Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch}, 43–77.} Muslim apocalypticists appropriated these traditions at an early date as well and gave expression to hopes of the ark’s recovery in many forms. We encounter one such example in a prophecy transmitted not by the Kūfans, but by a traditionist of Ḥimṣ named Ṣafwān ibn ʿAmr al-Saksākī (d. 155/772), in which it is asserted that the Mahdī:\footnote{Nuʿaym ibn Ḥammād, \textit{Fitan}, 220; cf. Madelung, “The Sufyānī between Tradition and History,” \textit{SI} 63 (1986), 29 ff. As Madelung notes (ibid., 30), the name appearing in the ms of Nuʿaym’s version of the tradition, the \textit{ismād} erroneously gives the Kūfān ʿAbd Allāh ibn Bishr al-Khathāmī as Ṣafwān’s source; one should read instead ʿAbd Allāh ibn Busr al-Ḥimṣī. This is confirmed by a parallel version of Nuʿaym’s text, which Madelung does not adduce, found in Ibn al-ʿAdīm, \textit{Bughayat al-talab}, 1, 519.1.}

\begin{quote}
…will bring forth the Ark of the presence from a cave in Antioch [\textit{yastakhriju tābūt al-sakīna min ghār’ bi-antākiya}], in which are the Torah that God revealed to Moses and the Gospel that God revealed to Jesus. He shall judge the people of the Torah according to their Torah and the people of the Gospel according to their Gospel.
\end{quote}

According to another tradition attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, “The Ark and the staff of Moses are in Lake Tiberius and will emerge prior to the
The frequent pairing of the staff of Moses and the ark—a connection no doubt largely due to the widespread belief that the staff had been placed in the latter for safekeeping—is a textual phenomenon that was neither confined to nor began with the repertoire of the Muslim apocalyptic imaginary.

It is here that one first encounters the profound debt of Mukthār’s movement and his Sabaʾīya to the earlier, and considerably more arcane, messianic credo of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Hamdāndī al-Sabaʾī (i.e., Ibn Sabaʾ). As argued above (see ch. 4), Ibn Sabaʾ professed that ʿAlī would return with a staff (ʿašā)—a staff that in all likelihood is to be identified with the staff of Moses. This is a messianic proclamation, enshrined most presciently in the early attempts to identify ʿAlī with the qurʾānic dābbā, or Beast. In Mukhtār’s revolt, his mahdī, Ibn al-Ḥanafīya, laid claim to a sacred artifact as well: he had recovered the ark—or at least Mukhtār as his wazīr, his aid, had recovered it for him. The ark, then, also plays directly in the raj’a doctrine and clearly draws upon the same inventory of apocalyptic imagery one encounters among the early Sabaʾīya.

The influence of Mukhtār’s revolt and its conception of the mahdī exerted a profound influence on Shiʿī eschatology; in fact, most of its main tenets (particularly doctrines such as the raj’a and the ghayba) can

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108 Cited in Amikam Elad, Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies and Pilgrimage (Leiden, 1995), 111 ff.; Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation,” 212; Cook, Muslim Apocalyptic, 56 and n. 80 thereto. Cf. the Jewish traditions where Elijah, the harbinger of the resurrection of the dead in the Jewish tradition, appears alongside Jeremiah to recover the ark cited in Nir, Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch, 54.

109 Reeves, Trajectories, 188 f.

110 Given the importance accorded the ark of the covenant in Ethiopian Christianity, the preeminence of Mukthār’s ark among the Sabaʾīya potentially revives the specter of Friedländer’s thesis that the historical Ibn Sabaʾ had been a descendent of and influenced by Ethiopian Jewry. This thesis must be completely rejected for reasons discussed in chapter 1; however, it is worth reiterating that the origins of the Ethiopian ark legends post-date this period by centuries. These legends originate in the work known since the 15th century A.D. as the Kebra nāgāst. Although Irfan Shahid has made a unique attempt to date parts of the Kebra nāgāst to the 6th century (as argued in his “The Kebra Nagast in light of Recent Research,” Le Muséon 89 [1976], 13–78), his thesis is untenable. See the critique of S. Munro-Hay, “A Sixth Century Kebra Nagast?” Annales d’Éthiope 17 (2001), 45–58 and the additional literature cited in Paola Marrassini, “Kebra nāgāst,” EAeth, iii, 364 ff. The earliest known reference to Ethiopian claims to possess any sort of ark dates to the 13th century A.D. and appears in the work of Abū Sāliḥ al-Armanī, The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt, trans. B. T. A. Evetts (Oxford, 1895), 287 f. (cited in Munro-Hay, “Ark of the Covenant,” EAeth, i, 340b).
be regarded as finding their earliest expression during the revolt and in the wake of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīya’s death. It is certainly curious that, in light of the ambivalence and at times even the hostility with which the Imāmīs regarded the Kaysāniya, one finds in the early strata of subsequent Imāmī tradition claim that the imāms guarded such relics (the staff of Moses, the Ark, the true Torah and Gospel, etc.) and claimed such objects as part of the imāms’ sacred inheritance (waṣīya).(111)

No doubt the Imāmīs had Mukhtār’s acolytes to thank for that, just as Ibn al-Ḥanafīya would later lend to the twelfth imām his auspicious claim to both the Prophet’s kunya (Abū l-Qāsim) and his forename (Muḥammad). Even Mukhtār’s declaration that Muḥammad’s umma would recapitulate the experience of the former nations (al-umma al-khāliya) while unveiling his ark may be imbued with eschatological significance. Later Shi’ī exegetes would use the same dictum as an argument for the resurrection of the dead (rajʿat al-amwāt) by citing as a proof-text God’s resurrection in Q. 2:243 of unbelievers who fled their homes fearing the arrival the angel of death.(112)

What distinguishes Mukhtār’s conjuring of an ‘Alid ark out of ‘Alī’s supposedly former chair is its ingenious and dramatic fusion of Qur’ānic motifs, jāhilī cultus, and late antique apocalyptica. The newness of this should not be underestimated. As the revolt progressed, many otherwise loyal supporters of Mukhtār’s movement became alienated from their leader’s increasing predisposition to indulge in ever more extravagant and bold religious claims. Rifāʿa ibn Shaddād al-Bajalī al-Fityānī, a prominent figure among the Tawwābūn and once an enthusiastic and staunch supporter of Mukhtār, eventually distanced himself from the movement, saying that he disbelieved al-Mukhtār’s “lies”.(113) The relevance of this rift in the movement for the Sabaʾīya will be explored further below. For now, it suffices to say that the chair achieved its main aims: Mukhtār successfully roused his forces, and thanks no doubt also to Ibn al-Ashtar’s capable command, ‘Ubayd Allāh met not only a crushing defeat at their hands but his own death as well. What further plans Mukhtār had concocted for the chair remain unclear. An

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111 Kulaynī, Kāfī, i, 231, 238 (where the weapons of the Prophet are equated with the ark of the Children of Israel). Cf. Amir-Moezzi, Divine Guide, 93.
112 ʿAyyāshī, Tafsīr, 1, 130; Hasan ibn Sulaymān, Mukhtaṣar, 105 f. In Shiʿī tafsīr, the Qur’ānic Children of Israel are often interpreted as standing in for the Shiʿa; see U. Rubin, “Children of Israel,” EQ, 1, 307a.
113 Balādhurī, Ansāb, iV, 2, 172.
allusion to such plans may come in one of the many versions of the
dialogue between the poet Surāqa ibn Mirdās al-Bārīqi and Mukhtār.
The poet had escaped death at Mukhtār’s hands first by claiming that
he witnessed angels aiding the forces of Mukhtār and then by adding
to this the claim that it was his destiny to be slain by Mukhtār on
another day. Mukhtār asks the poet on which day this shall be, and
Surāqa responds, “The day you place your chair on the door of the city
of Damascus [yawma taḍa’u kursiyaka ‘alā bāb madīnat dimashq].”
Does this indicate, perhaps, that Mukhtār had his eyes on Damascus
after defeating ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād?

The actual usefulness of the chair, however, was short-lived beyond
the battle with ʿUbayd Allāh. Mysteriously, one finds no mention of it
thereafter. According to our earliest authority for the account, Maʿbad
al-Jadali, the chair “was caused to disappear [ghuyyiba].” One can
only speculate as to the chair’s fate; however, the claim of the account
of al-Mubarrad (d. 286/900) that al-Mukhtār ordered it to be placed
“in the midst of the field of battle [fi barākā‘ al-ḥarb]” suggests that
it may have been destroyed in the course of the battle at the Khāzir
River east of Mosul.

Aʿshā Hamdān and the Sabaʿīya

Our most important contemporary witness to this exotic pageantry is the
poet ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Hārith (d. ca. 82–83/701–2),
better known as Aʿshā Hamdān, who describes the chair and its entou-
rage vividly in several lines of poetry. Under Mukhtār’s directives, the
Kūfan rebels murdered at least one of the poet’s cousins during their
campaign to purge the Kūfan ashrāf of all those deemed accomplices in
al-Ḥusayn’s murder. As a result, Aʿshā Hamdān’s opposition to the

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114 Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī, Tabaqāt fuhūl al-shuʿarāʾ, 2 vols., ed. M. M. Shākir (Cairo,
1974), 1, 439; Ibn ʿAsākir, Dimashq, xx, 156 f. (ed. al-ʿAmrawī). In this same account
Surāqa declares to Mukhtār, “By God, you shall not kill me until you tear down
Damascus stone by stone”; cf. the parallel claim attributed to ʿAlī by Ibn Sabaʾ in ʿAbd
al-Jabbār, Tathbīt, ii, 439.

115 ʿAmrī, ii, 704.

116 Mubarrad, Kāmil, iii, 269; Thaʿālabī, Thimār al-qulūb, 92 reads: fi ḥawmat
al-qiṭāl.

117 Aʿshā’s cousin, named ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb ibn ʿAmr in Ṭabarī’s account,
becomes conflated in Balādhūrī’s abbreviated account (both are narrated from Abū
Mikhnaf), with a certain ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr. In Ṭabarī’s longer account, Ibn
revolt was inveterate; but his importance for identifying the Sabaʾiya of Mukhtār’s revolt is inestimable. His verses on the sect are preserved by Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204/819), Jāḥīz (d. 255/868–9), Balādhurī, and Ṭabarī.  

The version of Jāḥīz being the most complete, it is his that I provide:

1. I bear witness against you that you are Sabaʾiya!
   *shahidtu ʿalaykum annakum sabaʾiya*\(^{120}\)
   *I know you well, Oh Enforcers of Polytheism!*
   *inī bi-kum yā shurtāta l-shirki*\(^{121}\)
   *ʿarīfū*

2. I swear your chair is no Shekina,
   *wa-uqsimu mā kursīyukum bi-sakīna*\(^{122}\)
   *even if draperies over it be draped*
   *wa-in kāna qad luffat ʿalayhi l-lafāʿīfū*

3. And even if the ark is clothed in cloth, and even if
   *wa-in lubbīsa t-tābūt futrī*\(^{123}\) *wa-in samat*
   *doves soar around it, among you are enticements*
   *ḥamāṃ ʿawālayhi wa-fīkum zakhārifū*\(^{122}\)

Šalkhab and his brother ‘Abd al-Rahmān were both arrested by Mukhtār, while the narrator of the account, Ḥumayd ibn Muslim, fled seeking refuge in the house of Aʾshā’s cousin. Balādhurī’s version garbles Abū Mikhnaʿ’s account by making ‘Abd Allāh the brother of a certain ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Wahb al-Hamdānī, who Balādhurī states were two cousins of Aʾshā killed by al-Mukhtār. The effect of this conflation of names by Balādhurī is that he oddly assigns Aʾshā’s cousin one of the names of Ibn Sabaʾ (i.e., ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Hamdānī)! Compare Ṭabarī, ii, 669 with Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 181.

\(^{118}\) Ibn al-Kalbī, *Nasab Maʾadd wa-l-Yaman*, ii, 195; Jāḥīz, *K. al-ḥayawān*, ed. A.-S. M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1958), ii, 271 f.; Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 185 f.; Ṭabarī, ii, 704 f. (Ṭabarī’s version is also recorded near the end of the *tarjama* of Aʾshā Hamdān in Ibn Ḥākīm’s *Dimashq*, xxxiv, 486, ed. al-ʿAmrāwī). Also consulted was Aʾshā Hamdān’s *Dīwān*, ed. R. Geyer, GMS n.s. 6 (London, 1928), 334 (poem 31); however, Geyer either poorly comprehended the text or too slavishly reproduced the ms, leaving his version of the poem virtually useless. Nashwān al-Ḥīmyarī (d. 573/1148) also excerpted the poem, see *al-Ḥur al-ʾin*, 184.

\(^{119}\) In my translation, I have adopted with occasional modifications the capable rendition of Fishbein, *The Victory of the Marwānids*, 71 f.

\(^{120}\) Balādhurī’s text reads “*khashabiya*” (*Ansāb*, iv, 185.–2). However, our earliest text, that of Ibn al-Kalbī, confirms the reading of Sabaʾiya (*Maʾadd wa-l-Yaman*, ii, 195; reading “al-Sabaʾiya” instead of the editor’s erroneous rendering “al-Sayyidiya”).

\(^{121}\) Or, “*al-kufr*”; see Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 185.–2. Both versions are a wordplay on the epithet of the armies of al-Mukhtār, which he addressed by the moniker *shurtat Allāh*.

\(^{122}\) On the significances of the doves, see the discussion below. This reading of Jāḥīz is problematic in that it differs considerably from the redaction in Ibn al-Kalbī’s, Balādhurī’s, and Ṭabarī’s texts, which read:
   *And that there is nothing like the ark among us, wa-an laysa ka-t-tābūti fina wa-in saʿat*
   *even if Shibām, Nahd and Khārif march around it*
4. I am a man who has loved the family of Muḥammad, inni mruʾ ahbabtu aļa muḥammad and I followed revelation in books preserved wa-tābaʾtu wahy ʾ dumminathu l-maṣāḥifū

5. [I followed ʿAbd Allāh123 when, one after another, wa-tābaʾtu ʿabda llāhi lammā tatābaʾat gray-haired and noble Quraysh followed him ʿalayhi quraysh ʾ shumṭuhā wa-l-ghatārifū]125

6. Shākir126 circles around it, and touches wa-in shākir ʾ tāfat bihi wa-tamassahat its withered wood, and devises; it avails not bi-aʾwād dhaw̲̲ dəbaret lā tusāʾifū127

7. Because of it, we have yielded our lives to Ibn al-Zubayr wa-dānat bihi li-bni z-zubayri riqābunā no fraud is in (our allegiance), or else our necks would be cut wa-lā ghabna fīhā aw tuḥazza s-sawālīfū

8. I reckon its outcome in favor of the family of Muḥammad, wa-ahsabu ʿaqbāhā li-āli muḥammad when one wronged will prevail, and one fearful gain safety128 fa-yunsaru maẓlum wa-yaʾmanu khāʾifū

9. My Lord will gather a splintered community, wa-yajmaʾu rabbī ummaʾ qad tashattatat between whom wars and ill-will have arisen wa-hājat ḥurūb baynahum wa-ḥasāʾifū

Aʾshāʾs vivid invective stands out as our best witness to Mukthārʾs unveiling of ʿAliʾs alleged chair, because he himself was a contemporary and eyewitness to the events he describes. Despite its importance, however, Aʾshāʾs poem also bears certain interpretive hazards as well.

shibām ʾ hawālayhi wa-nahād wa-khārifū Shibām, Nahd and Khārif are all southern tribes descended from Hamdān; see Caskel, Gamharat an-Nasab, i, 227.20, 231.24, 228.22.

123 I.e., Ibn al-Zubayr.

124 Or, “I gave my allegiance/bāyaʾtu” (see Guidiʾs note in Ṭabari, ii, 205).

125 This line appears only in Ṭabariʾs text; it is omitted from that of al-Jāhiz, as well as the other, shorter versions of Ibn al-Kalbī and Balādhuri. Ṭabariʾs version of the poem also ends here, whereas that of al-Jāhiz continues with four more lines.

126 Also from Hamdān; see Caskel, Gamharat an-Nasab, i, 230.23.

127 Balādhuri includes this line also, placing it directly after line 3 of the version of Jāhiz. A less likely reading appears in some ms of the K. al-hayawān (see ii, 272 n. 1), in which the second hemistich reads “they grasped the lute of David, that has been scratched, and (hence) does not avail [tamassahat/bi-aʾwād dāwūd barat lā tusāʾifū].”

128 Likely an allusion to Muḥammad ibn al-Hanafiya.
As any examination of the variants in its transmissions will show, the textual original of the poem, the *Urgedicht*, is by no means easily recoverable—nor are the surviving textual departures documented by its manifold redactions reducible to insignificant, or merely iterative, differences. The divergences between the versions of Aʿshāʾs invective scattered throughout our sources, therefore, complicate the task of distilling historical data from the poem. I would like to contend that, if one perseveres through these difficulties, however, Aʿshāʾs poem provides us with the most complete insight into just who the Sabaʾīya of al-Mukthār’s revolt were.

Of foremost importance for our study is a variant reading attested in the first verse of Aʿshāʾs invective: Were the targets of his reproach the Sabaʾīya as most versions of the poem suggest, or were the targets of his denunciations, as suggested by Balādhurī’s version, the Khashabīya? One possible explanation could be that the two are one and the same—both, after all, appear frequently as epithets of al-Mukthār’s followers.129 This solution, however, encounters an insurmountable difficulty: whether one takes cues from the *akḥārīs*’ accounts or Aʿshāʾs invective, the attendants of the chair and the participants in its pageantry are all described as Arabian tribesmen. Their rootedness in the Arabian cultural tradition manifests itself in the form which they express and display their veneration of the chair, with *sādin*, *kuhhān*, and the like following in tow. The Khashabīya, by contrast, earned their infamous name as *mawālī* who mercilessly wielded their formidable *kāfirkūbāt* (viz., ‘infidel-bashers’), cudgel-like weapons cruelly fashioned from wood (*khashab*).130 That the ranks of the first Khashabīya were predominately slaves and *mawālī* is most immediately recognizable by their utilization of *ad hoc* wooden weapons.131

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130 *Kāfirkūbāt* is an Arabo-Persian neologism of the time formed by the combination of the Arabic noun *kāfir* (infidel, impious) with the Persian verb *kūbīdan* (to strike, to crush); see M. Chouémi, “Kāfirkūb,” *EF*, iv, 411.
131 The latter point has been definitively argued by P. Crone, “The Significance of Wooden Weapons in al-Mukthār’s Revolt and the ‘Abbāsid Revolution,” in: I. R. Newton, ed., *Studies in Honor of Clifford Edmund Bosworth I: Hunter of the East, Arabic and Islamic Studies* (Leiden, 2000), 174–185. Zakeri’s attempt to identify the *kāfirkūbāt* of the Khashabīya with the mace (Prs. *gurz*) favored by the Sāsānian cavalry men is unlikely, for it was an iron, not a merely wooden, weapon. An overly zealous attempt to see the remnants of Sāsānian military-men characterize Zakeri’s monograph more generally; see his *Sāsānian Soldiers in Early Muslim Society: The Origins of ‘Ayyārān and Futuwwa* (Wiesbaden, 1995), 217 f. and Crone, “Wooden Weapons,” 177. The
However, Aʾshāʾs invective makes clear that the attendants of the chair were Southern Arabs, particularly from the clans of Shibām, Shākir, Nahd, and Khārif according to one verse. Although the names of these clans disappear in some variant redactions of the poem, their presence is further confirmed by at least one other poet who enshrined the events in verse. Al-Mutawakkil al-Laythī (d. after 72/691), for instance, also mentions the presence of the tribe of Shibām:

1. Tell Abū Ishāq (i.e., Mukhtār), if you come upon him, 
   abligh abā ishāqa in jiʾtahu 
   that I refuse to believe in your chair 
   annī bi-kursīyikumu kāfirū
2. Shibām spring around its planks 
   tanzū shibāmun hawla aʾwādihi 
   and Shākir credit it with revelation 
   wa-tahmilu l-wahṣya lahu shākirū
3. Red, their eyes surround it 
   muhmarraʾan aʾyunuhum ḥawlahu 
   like swollen chick-peas 
   ka-annahumna l-ḥimmaṣu al-ḥadīrū

In light of the above, therefore, it seems most probable that the original reading of Aʾshāʾs invective made the Sabaʾiya, rather than the Khasahbiya, as the object of scorn.

That Aʾshā Hamdān regarded the Khashabiyā as mawālī and slaves can be inferred from other poems from his corpus. In an account related by al-Shaʿbī, he speaks of the events following the flight of the Kūfan ashrāf to Başra and describes how, once in Başra, al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays taunted him for having been delivered from “the hands of your slaves.” In al-Shaʿbīʾs retort, he upbraids the Başrans for so quickly forgetting the role of the Kūfans in turning the tide of the Battle of the Camel and recites the following composition of Aʾshā Hamdān in his defense:

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*mawālī* filling out the ranks of Khasabiya, moreover, are not merely Persians but are culled from an array peoples; hence, in the Arabic sources, they are called by many names: al-ʿajam, al-turk, al-daylam, etc. (Ṭabarī, 1, 622.2; cf. al-Qādī, Kaysānīya, 132).

132 Ṭabarī, ii, 705.8–10; cf. the abbreviated in Balādhuri, Ansāb, iv, 185–4.

133 Ṭabarī, ii, 684.11 and 16; cf. Balādhuri, Ansāb, iv, 190 f. (from al-Madāʾinī) and Aghānī’s, vi, 55 (from al-Haytham ibn ʿAdī) where the verse mentioning the Khashabiya has been dropped.
1. Will you boast that you have killed slaves?
\[ a\text{-}fakhurtum\ an\ qataltum\ a\text{'bud} \]
and once defeated people without weapons?
\[ wa\text{-}hazamtum\ marra\text{'}an\ \text{āl }\text{'uzzal} \]

\ldots

2. You killed khashabis for them,\textsuperscript{134}
\[ wa\text{-}qataltum\ khashabiyn\ bi\text{-}him \]
a poor exchange for your people!
\[ badalan\text{'}\ min\ qawmikum\ sharra\ badal \]

As these verses make clear, for A'shā Hamdān, a khashabi is a slave, not a freeborn Arab.

In his poem against the attendents of the chair, A'shā Hamdān addresses the target of his invective not only as Saba'īya but also as shurtat al-shirk (or, in variant, shurtat al-kufr). This is wordplay on Mukhtār's use of the title shurtat Allāh for his troops. A Kūfan mawlā of the Banū 'Ījl named Sālim ibn Abī Ḥafṣa who seems to have participated in Mukhtār's revolt reports that whenever Kūfan traditionist al-Sha'bi saw him he would cry out, “O shurtat Allāh, come down and rise up like the barley grain flies up \[ yā \text{shurtat allāh } qa\text{'}ī wa\text{-}ṭīrī kamā taṭīru ḥabbatu l\text{-}sha\text{'}īrī \].”\textsuperscript{135} According to Balādhorī, al-Sha'bi derided the Khashabīya in a similar fashion.\textsuperscript{136} It is not implausible, therefore, that even with the mention of the Saba'īya as a prominent element among the attendents of the ark, Kūfa's mawālī may have also numbered among the devotees of Mukhtār's ark.

The application of the title shurtat Allāh to Mukhtār's famous regiment of mawālī footsoldiers also attracted the attention of the contemporary Syriac writer John bar Penkāyē who, completing his history, the Rēš Mellē, less than a decade after al-Mukhtār's revolt (likely ca. 74/693), may have even written as an eyewitness to the events he describes. Although he does not mention the chair, Bar Penkāyē does describe in detail the composition of the forces conscripted for Mukhtār's campaign against 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād. Bar Penkāyē describes Ibn al-Ashtar's troops not as the well organized cavalry of the accounts of Abū Mikhnaf discussed above, but rather as a rabble of some 13,000 men marching on foot (mhalkay bargēl), carrying in

\textsuperscript{134} I.e., the armies opposing the Başran forces at the Battle of the Camel.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibn Sa'd, Kitāb al-tabaqāt al-kabīr, 11 vols., ed. 'A. M. 'Umar (Cairo, 2001), viii, 454.ult.; Mizī, Tahdhib, x, 137.–5.
\textsuperscript{136} Balādhuri, Ansāb, iv, 228.8.
their hands either only a blade, spear or even a wooden staff (*saypā ʿaw mōrnīṭā ʿaw ḥūṭrā*). These men, he writes, were “the sons of bondage,” meaning the slaves and *mawālī*; “that were called the *shurṭas [bnay shabyā d-etbnīw shurṭe]*.” If the Khashabiya are indeed the *shurṭat Allāh* as Bar Penkāyē claims, it would seem to undermine the argument that Aʿšaʾs verse originaly reviled the Sabaʾiya, rather than the Khashabiya by name. Our sources, however, frustrate any serious attempt to identify unequivocally the *mawālī* reviled as the Khashabiya with Mukhtarʾs *shurṭat Allāh*.

That the ‘Khashabiya’ were indeed called the *shurṭat Allāh* is beyond dispute; however, that the title was their exclusive domain certainly is not. In fact, *shurṭat Allāh* seems to be a catch-all term of Mukhtarʾs forces, whether Arab or non-Arab. Due to the fact that Abū ʿAmra Kaysān, himself a *mawlā* of ʿUrayna from Bajīla and (most probably) the eventual namesake of the Kaysāniya, often appears in our sources as “the retainer [ṣāhib] of Mukhtarʾs *shurṭa*,” some historians have too hastily imputed to Abū ʿAmra Kaysān the position of head of the *shurṭat Allāh*. The assertion, however, seems to be too imprecise. Our best-informed sources directly contradict this claim asserting that Mukhtarʾs élite forces (*shurṭa*) were headed instead by a southern Arab named ʿAbd Allāh ibn Kāmil al-Shākirī. These accounts inform us that Mukhtar assigned to Abū ʿAmra Kaysān the supervision of his personal guard (*ḥaras*) of *mawālī*, not his *shurṭa*. Mukhtarʾs guard of *mawālī* did not make up a special élite troop called the *shurṭat Allāh*.

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137 Rēš Mellē, 157. Sebastian Brock, misled perhaps by Bar Penkāyēʾs statement that the slaves were thus named due to “their zeal for righteousness/justice [tanānāthōn da-ḥlāp kēnūt],” misinterprets *shurṭe* as a corruption of the Arabic *shurāt* in Q. 4:76; see his “North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John Bar Penkāyēʾs *Rīš Mellē*,” *JSAI* 9 (1987), 66.


139 Ibn Aʾtham, vi, 121.11; Dinawari, *al-Akhbār al-ṭiwal*, 215.

140 Tabari, ii, 634; Baladhuri, *Ansāb*, iv., 165. Although the term *shurṭa* as used in the earlier period has often been glossed by historians as ‘personal body guard’, the frequent appearance of the term alongside and as distinct from the *ḥaras*, or guard, strongly suggests that the *shurṭa* played a role other than that of a personal guard. However, the *shurāt* are nonetheless always attached to individual authorities (always the *shurṭa* of so-and-so, never the *shurṭa* of Kūfa, Baṣra, etc.), from which we may infer that they likely comprise an élite troop commissioned by an individual authority for policing in some fashion or even for the sake of a specific mission or task. See Fred M. Donner, “The *Shurṭa* in Early Ummayad Syria,” in *Proceedings of the 3rd Symposium on the History of Bilād al-Shām in the Umayyad Period*, eds. M. A. Bakhit and R. Schick (Amman, 1989), prt. 2, 257 f.
In garrison cities such as Kūfa, *mawālī* always caused anxiety for the Arabs as a potentially explosive, albeit disorganized, mass of urban plebes, and their rise to prominence during Mukhtār’s revolt directly reflected the core of the ideological program behind his uprising. His magnanimity in giving military pay (‘atā) to both *mawālī* and Arabs, regardless of their background and despite the intense opposition to this practice among the Kūfan *ashrāf*, confirms this. He even delegated some missions to be the special task of the *mawālī* under the command of Abū ‘Amra Kaysān which garnered their participants their own specific rewards for service in the troop. Yet, this enfranchisement of the *mawālī* did have its limitations. The command of Mukhtār’s armies nearly always fell to an Arab, and *mawālī* never commanded Arabs. Usually, it appears that the *mawālī* and Arabs often formed segregated brigades with the former more often said to be at the disposal of the latter. Furthermore, there appears to be no indication that the Arabs were deprived of weaponry or mounts in order to accommodate the *mawālī*. Even the Khashabīya’s mission to liberate Ibn al-Hanafiya from his incarceration at the hands of Ibn al-Zubayr fell under the responsibility of Arab leaders. It is perhaps for this reason that one historian has Ibn al-Zubayr, upon seeing the arrival of Mukhtār’s mixed troop of Arabs and *mawālī* from Kūfa, express his wonder at “these Khashabīya-Saba’īya who have taken advantage of my heedlessness desiring after Ḥusayn as if I myself killed him!”

In any case, the designation *shurt Allāh* does not solely refer to those special *mawālī* forces but, rather, to Mukhtār’s loyal supporters as a whole—whether the Arab regiments or the conscripted *mawālī*. Thus, we read of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar responding to overhearing an anonymous Syiran soldier imprecating his soldiers as “yā shī’at abī turāb” and “yā shī’at al-mukhtār al-kadhdhāb,” by calling out, “O aids

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141 Djaït, “Yamanites à Kūfa,” 168.
142 For the instances of this, see al-Qādī, *Kaysānīya*, 135 ff., n. 1.
143 Ibid., 68 f.
of true religion! O party of truth! O enforcers of God! [yā anšār al-dīn, yā shī’at al-ḥaqq, yā shurṭat allāh].¹⁴⁶ It is highly unlikely that each of these epithets intend different factions or groups.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, it is clearly the entirety of the forces of Mukthār whom the poet Surāqa ibn Mirdās al-Bāriqī (d. 80/699)¹⁴⁸ praises after ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād’s defeat in his verse:¹⁴⁹

May God recompense the shurṭat Allāh with good for yesterday jazā llāhu khayr an shurṭa llāhi innahum
they quenched my thirst for vengeance upon ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād! shafaw min ‘ubaydi llahi amsi ghalīlī

A’shā Hamdān, thus, denounces the entirety of Mukhtār’s army as ‘shurṭat al-shīrk’ in his invective. Furthermore, if one accepts that the third line of Jāhīz’s version was corrupted and influenced by later, polemical historiography (and it likely was),¹⁵⁰ then A’shā Hamdān clearly identifies among the Sabaʿiya four sub-clans of Hamdān who feature most prominently in the chair’s ostentatious pageantry: Shākir, Shibām, Nahd and Khārif. As noted above, a verse composed by al-Mutawakkil al-Laythī confirms the prominence of at least two of these Yamanī clans by describing Shibām as leaping around the chair’s boards

¹⁴⁶ Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 196; Ṭabarī, ii, 710.14.
¹⁴⁷ Cf. Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 202 for Ibn al-Ashtar’s other litany of titles at the battle of al-Madhār: the people of true religion (ahl al-dīn), the helpers of truth (a’wān al-haqq), the aids of the weak (ansār al-ʿālīf), and the party of the Messenger and his family (shī’at al-rasūl wa-ʿalāl al-rasūl ).
¹⁴⁹ Ṭabarī, ii, 716.20. Cf. the usages of shurṭat Allāh in Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 196.5, 202.8, 211.–4, 228.8; Ṭabarī, ii, 618.10, 672.14 (shurṭat allāh wa-shī’at al al-muḥammad), 691.3 (in this passage Shurahb’il ibn Wars al-Hamdānī addresses a mixed troop described on p. 689.8–9 as “3,000 men, most of them mawālī, among whom there were no more than 700 Arab men [thalāthat ālāf aktharuhum al-mawālī laysa fīhim min al-ʿarab illā sabaʿ miʿat rajul”)), 711.18, 713.11, 715.18.
¹⁵⁰ The version of al-Jāhīz clearly alludes to the dubious story of the malāʾika ghīdāb, viz. furious angels, who came in the shape of pigeons (fī suwar al-hamām) promised by Mukhtār as divine harbingers of victory against ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād (Mubarrad, Kāmil, iii, 269; Thaʿalabī, Thīmār al-qulūb, 92; Shahrastānī, Livre des religions, 442). The story clearly Derives from the ubiquitous mention of the unseen, angelic armies associated with the sakīna aiding Muḥammad’s armies (see Q. 9:26, 40 and 48:4), but the sources of these reports about Mukhtār’s army might ultimately harken back to the guile of Surāqa al-Bāriqī who claimed he had seen angels fighting alongside Mukhtār’s forces in order to gain his freedom. See Ṭabarī ii, 664 f. and Balādhurī, Ansāb, iv, 173. However, an intriguing resonance exists between this tradition about ‘furious angels’ of war and the tradition concerning Ibn Sabaʿ’s instigation of talk about ‘the furious army [jaysh al-ghadāb]” mentioned in Nuʾmānī, Ghayba, 212.
alongside Shākir attributing revelation (wahy) to it. The Sabaʾiya seem to be these “sons of Sabaʾ” mentioned by Aʾshā Hamdān—are they, therefore, Sabaʾiya merely in the ethnic sense?

Despite the predominance of Southern tribesmen, it seems very unlikely that Aʾshā Hamdān, himself of a southern Arab of Yamanī descent, would denounce the ‘sons of Sabaʾ’ wholesale. The wording of the first line of his invective is key here: “I bear witness against you that you are Sabaʾiya”—if he is testifying against these men, then certainly being a Sabaʾ transcends a mere ethnic designation. The term ‘Sabaʾiya’ must have a more expansive interpretation, and indeed, one finds hints of this more expansive sense in two akhbār recorded in Ṭabarī’s Taʾrīkh transmitted from Abū Mikhnāf. In the first, a mawlid named Abū Saʿīd al-Šayqal recounts his brief captivity in the custody of the ashrāf in the midst of Mukhtār’s first attempt to expel them from Kūfa. Abū Saʿīd overhears the Kūfan sharīf Shabath ibn Ribʿi revile his fellow captive Sīr ibn Abī Sīr al-Ḥanafī, an Arab of northern descent, declaring, “Damn you! What did you want from following these Sabaʾiya? May God bring you beliefs to disgrace!” Shabath seems to imply here that Sīr al-Ḥanafī, a northern Arab, had joined the ranks and adopted the beliefs (raʾy) of the Sabaʾiya. The second khabar, also transmitted by Abū Mikhnaf, involves the sharīf Shabath ibn Ribʿi once more. Rousing the ashrāf to arms against Mukhtār, Shabath avers that “(Mukhtār) and his Sabaʾiya have publicly disavowed our righteous predecessors.” Shabath’s accusation against Mukhtār and his Sabaʾiya strongly resonates with the ‘Rāfidī’ tendency underlying initial Kūfan resistance to Zubayrid attempts to institute the ‘policies of ʿUmar and ʿUthmān’ mentioned above in favor of the policies of ʿAli, however defined.

Summarizing our findings to this point, then, the following can be ascertained regarding the Sabaʾiya of Mukhtār’s revolt. Although the pageantry of ʿAli’s chair attracts a predominately Yamanī (even Hamdānī) contingent from Kūfa’s denizens, its participants share more than a common genealogy, and it is not merely tribal-chauvenism that unites them. Whether one looks either to the poetry of the period or to the testimonies redacted by the akhbāris, all accounts confirm

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151 Ṭabarī, ii, 705.9; cf. Sezgin, GAS, ii, 322.
152 Ṭabarī, ii, 623: wayhaka mā aradta ilā ittibāʾ hādhahi l-sabaʾiya qabbaha llāhu raʾyaka.
153 Ibid., ii, 651: azhara huwa wa-sabaʾiya yatuhu al-barāʾa minaslāfinā al-ṣaliḥin.
that the chair’s retainers rallied behind shared beliefs. What these beliefs were can be inferred from the basic facts we know about the chair. 1) The chair’s sacerdotal quality derived from the belief that it once belonged to ʿAlī. Reverence for ʿAlī, therefore, underpins much of the adoration given the chair. 2) When these Sabaʾīya marched with the chair into battle, they clearly regarded it as a talisman of divine aid in their military endeavors. 3) More spectacularly, the Sabaʾīya apparently regarded the chair as a relic imbued with theurgic powers. Many of them claimed that divine revelation, or at least prophecies of future events, came through the chair. It is as though the chair itself was an instrument for receiving divine communications.

Such divine communications, of course, did not come by way of a booming voice from the heavens. Rather, they were manifested through kahāna—the ancient divinatory practice of spiritual adepts in the Arabian Peninsula. Despite the protests of Aʿshā Hamdān to the contrary, however, these Sabaʾīya were not representatives of Arabian paganism redivivus either. Their pageantry fused diverse symbols. Albeit paganistic in its cultic form, the chair’s retainers also infused the chair with the symbolism and imagery of late antique apocalypticism and qurʾānic discourse; even the sajʿ of the kuhhān reciting such revelation consciously borrows from qurʾānic diction.

The divination, or kahāna, of the Arabian soothsayers posed several problems for Mukhtār inasmuch as it played into concerns that he claimed for himself some sort of prophetic charism.154 The Qurʾān itself never makes an unequivocal denunciation of kahāna, but the stature of the qurʾānic revelation and its instrument, the Prophet, implicitly precluded any continuance of kahāna. Although Mukhtār often addressed his followers and onlookers in the rhymed prose (sajʿ) associated with the parlance of the kuhhān, it is not always clear that such speech actually amounts to a claim to prophecy. It is true that Mukhtār usually appears as a virtuoso of the sajʿ-style and, thus, also the most prominent practitioner of a type of kahāna during the Kūfan revolt; but his public role in disseminating these utterances foretelling future events remains unclear. One finds examples earlier in Mukhtār’s life that apparently indicate that he did not necessarily regard such sajʿ...
as indicative of practicing *kahāna*, yet others unambiguously portray him as using *saj* to prophesy future events.

The two most notorious examples come from Mukhtār’s prophesies of future victories against ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād and Muṣʿab ibn al-Zubayr. Of these two prophesies, only the former was vindicated, albeit imperfectly, but the latter proved to be an outright falsehood, leading to Mukthār’s infamous invention of the doctrine of *badāʾ*, i.e., that God changes his mind in responses to new circumstances. Closely associated with the *saj*-filled utterances that foretell the future is a somewhat mysterious figure named ʿAbd Allāh ibn Nawf al-Hamdānī. Ibn Nawf often appears as the mouthpiece chosen by Mukhtār to address his followers in the *saj*-laden speech, although at other times he appears to speak on his own accord. One first encounters him ‘prophesying’ at the unveiling of ʿAlī’s chair, and then he appears as the key personality in the middle of the theurgic spectacles associated with the revelation, or *wahy*, attributed to the chair. In Ṭabarī’s account, it is he who later falsely prophesies victory against Muṣʿab at Ḥarūrāʾ just before the final collapse of Mukhtār’s revolt. Ibn Nawf apparently lived long enough to defend his actions and to disavow the responsibility for the content of these prophesies. He claimed that he had recited his prophecies only on the orders of his master, Mukhtār. Yet, Mukthār allegedly disavowed Ibn Nawf, too. Posterity was either keen to denounce Mukhtār as a false-prophet (*kadhdhāb*) or to de-emphasize the extravagance of his revolt to extol his exacting revenge

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155 E.g., see Mukhtār’s ‘*kuhhān*-speech’ uttered while he was in prison prior to declaring the rebellion in Baladhuri, *Ansāb*, iv, 151.

156 Baladhuri transmits an account of al-Shaʿbī, for example, in which a partisan of Mukhtār asks him if he now believed that Mukhtār knows the unseen (*al-ghayb*), since his prophecy of the victory over Ibn Ziyād proved to be true. Shaʿbī denies this noting the Mukhtār claimed Ibn Ziyād would be killed “in Nisibis or near Nisibis, but the event took place at the Khāzir river” (*Ansāb*, iv, 197 f.).


158 Or, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Thawb, as in Baladhuri, *Ansāb*, iv, 212.7.


160 Ṭabarī, ii, 706.ult.

161 For example, a number of accounts claim that the Zubayrids executed Mukhtār’s wife, Umm Thābit bint Samura, for claiming that Mukhtār was a prophet (*nabī*). See Baladhuri, *Ansāb*, iv, 217 f.; Ṭabarī, ii, 743 f. According to other accounts, such as that of Yaʿqūbī, relate an alternative version of her confession wherein she says rather that Mukhtār “was a man fearful of God, unblemished and given to fasting [kāna *taqiyan naqqāy sāwwām*]” (*Ta riḥk*, ii, 264). Cf. also Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, iii, 300 f.; Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī*, ix, 228 f.
against the enemies of the ʿAlids. The truth of the matter probably lies beyond the measure of historical analysis.

Ibn Nawf, however, represents a key facet of Mukhtar’s revolt in that he was, in essence, a Sabaʾī and quite a prominent one at that. He thus serves as a figure whose activities we can trace in order to ascertain the scope of the Sabaʾīya’s influence on Mukhtar’s revolt. His name notably appears among an important cadre of individuals known as Shiʾī ghāliṣ who gathered in homes of two prominent Kūfan women, Hind bint al-Mutakallifa al-Nāʾītīya and Laylā bint Qumāma al-Muzaniyya. It is these individuals and their beliefs that our sources first call ghāliya and ghulūw, respectively. Two prominent figures from Mukhtar’s revolt—Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Jadalī and Yazīd ibn Shurāhil al-Anṣārī—found their beliefs so offensive that they wrote to Ibn al-Ḥanafīya concerning “the ghulūw of these two women.” Ibn al-Ḥanafīya, who otherwise assumed a passive posture towards Mukhtar’s extravagance, swiftly composed a letter in reply addressed “to our partisans” in which he exhorted the Kūfans to “take heed against those who lie against your religion.” The question left unanswered by our sources, however, is what exactly the ghulūw espoused by these individuals and denounced by Ibn al-Ḥanafīya as well as some of Mukhtar’s early supporters was.

If one takes seriously the claim that Ibn Nawf belonged to the entourage of the Sabaʾīya adoring ʿAlī’s chair and, therefore, was himself a Sabaʾī, then the answer to this question is relatively straightforward. There is, of course, a litany of deviances associated with Mukhtar and the Sabaʾīya, yet hardly any of the conventional ones fit with the sorts of beliefs that would necessitate secrecy. What sort of beliefs necessitated the seclusion of this cadre of Shiʾī ‘extremists’ in the homes of Hind al-Nāʾītīya and Laylā al-Muzaniyya? This cadre’s ghulūw could not have been the very public practice of kahāna—or even the belief in badāʾ that was allegedly invented to shore up the shortcomings found in Mukhtar’s (or Ibn Nawf’s) foretelling of future events—for none of these beliefs or practices needed to be secreted away into the private sanctuary of one’s home, especially in Mukhtar’s Kūfa.

As W. al-Qādī has previously argued, the only solution to the meaning of ghulūw in this context is to infer that these ghāliṣ espoused

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162 Ĥabarī, ii, 731 f.
163 Ĥabarī, ii, 732.3: ʿudhharū ʿalā dinikum al-kadhdhābin.
that most archaic of doctrines ascribed to Ibn Saba': the parousia of 'Ali ibn Abī Tālīb.\footnote{The Development of the Term Ghulāt, 297 ff.} And indeed, there is an elegant simplicity to this argument that makes eminently good sense. For not only is this the oldest doctrine attributed to the Saba'īya, it is also the oldest doctrine designated as ghulūw.

It was Wellhausen who first proclaimed the Mukhtārīya and the Saba'īya to be one and the same. In this assertion, he was only partially correct. For in fact, not only were some of the Mukhtār's supporters against the Saba'īya, but the Saba'īya represent a much older current of the landscape of Kūfan Shi'īsm, one that probably has its roots in circles to which the likes of 'Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Hamdānī (the historical Ibn Saba') and Rushayd al-Hajari belonged. The reappearance of the Saba'īya in Mukhtār’s revolt confirms their prior existence as does the symbolism behind his rediscovery of the 'ark of the covenant' in the form of 'Ali's chair. Mukhtār's revolt offers us the first example of where Arabian kahāna intersects and intertwines with early Shi'i cultus and late antique apocalypticism.

The Kitāb al-Irjā’ of Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyah

Mukhtār’s defeat of the Umayyad strongman 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād allowed him to consolidate his hold over the Jazīra and appoint Ibn al-Ashtar as its governor in Mosul. Ibn al-Ashtar in turn appointed several sub-governors to its various hinterlands. According to one source, the short-lived Kūfan city-state administrated under Mukhtār’s leadership profited from its political fortunes for nearly 18 months.\footnote{Dīnawarī, Akhbār, 306.} Yet, the success Mukhtār and his supporters achieved proved ephemeral. Shortly after Mukhtār’s victory over the Syrians, Muṣ'ab ibn al-Zubayr dispatched a formidable army from Baṣra that was considerably strengthened by the Kūfan ashrāf whom Mukhtār had scorned and hunted like animals. Entering the Sabakha of Kūfa, the Zubayrids marched against the city and began the siege that would cast Mukhtār into the abyss. These events caused many to abandon Mukhtār’s cause, and Mukhtār’s fragile alliance quickly vanished as Ibn al-Ashtar remained in Mosul, apparently to tacitly refuse to aid his beleaugured leader. Certainly the fact that many Kūfans began to regard Mukhtār’s movement as veering...
to pathological extremes did not help his movement in its last days. On 14 Ramadān 67/3 April 687, Mukhtār fell under the sword after withstanding the Zubayrids’ four month long siege alongside some 8,000 of his remaining followers.\(^{166}\)

Mukhtār’s movement, however, did not die with him in Kūfa. Despite the Zubayrids’ relentless efforts to efface all vestiges of Mukhtār’s movement from their sphere of influence, Mukhtār’s prior successes in the Jazīra facilitated the escape of some loyal survivors. Those who avoided the Zubayrid purges of Kūfa established a small statelet in the Jazīra. Ibn al-Ashtar in Mosul threw in his lot with the Zubayrids, but those less willing to shirk former loyalties gathered in Nisibis. Arab historians invariably describe those who persevered in the Nisibine period as Khashabīya, a moniker indicative of their servile origins. The majority of those who fled Kūfa appear to have been mawālī. Many of them understandably resisted the idea of foregoing their newly-gained freedom only to likely face the reprisals of their former masters who, after being humiliated by their slaves, would probably be keener on exacting revenge than on reconciling and showing clemency. For a time, Nisibis served as an ideal location for the remnant of the revolt insofar as it remained on the periphery of the orbit of Arab control until the collapse of Sufyānid rule. Even throughout the second civil war, Muslim influence over the city’s inhabitants was often more negotiated than imposed.\(^{167}\)

Not much has reached us regarding the beliefs and hopes of Mukhtār’s followers during the Nisibis period. There can be little doubt that the sect the heresiographers call the Kaysānīya began to coalesce as a movement during this period. Despite the setbacks suffered in the political arena, the movement does not seem to have dispensed with either their reverence for Ibn al-Ḥanafīya as mahdī or their apocalyptic beliefs. None of the akhbārīs take pains to note this, but we know of this anecdotally. The Kūfan qurʾān-reader ʿĀsim ibn Abī l-Najūd (d. ca. 127–8/744–6), himself a Persian mawlā, reports encountering a man who brought him to a circle of non-Arabs led by an elderly man who declared to his audience, “I bear witness that Alī ibn Abī Tālib, al-Hasan, al-Husayn and al-Mukhtār will be resurrected before

\(^{166}\) Ṭabarī, ii, 749.

\(^{167}\) Chase Robinson, Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia (Cambridge, 2000), 50 ff.
the Day of Judgment and will fill the earth with justice as it is filled with injustice.”\(^{168}\) Mukhtār, it seems, entered into the company of the panorama of the righteous dead destined to return to this world.

Although the akhbāris dwell on the extravagances of Mukhtār’s revolt writ large, the apocalyptic hopes of his movement receive considerably more subdued treatment, except where they discuss the curiosities of Mukhtār’s position vis-à-vis his mahdī, Ibn al-Ḥanafīya. Apocalyptic imagery and slogans pervade the accounts nonetheless. Notably, such apocalypticism manifests itself in its most vivid displays whenever the Sabaʿiya (or ghulāt) enter the stage of the revolt. While the beliefs of these Sabaʿiya never receive systematic treatment, the common strand uniting them is an apocalyptic eschatology, in which the leaders of Banū Hāshim (living or dead) act as central players. The last source we shall analyze in this chapter, the Kitāb al-irjāʾ of al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥanafīya, treats this apocalyptic aspect of the revolt and the role of the Sabaʿiya therein more explicitly and directly than any other known source.

It is in this text, ostensibly written in the aftermath of al-Mukhtār’s revolt and after the dust had settled from the second civil war, that our most substantial Umayyad-era polemic against the Sabaʿiya appears. The polemic appearing in the so-called Kitāb al-irjāʾ (hereafter, KI) denounces the Sabaʿiya and their beliefs as the fount of numerous ills afflicting the Prophet’s religion. The beliefs KI mentions explicitly are: 1) loyalty of the Sabaʿiya to `Alī and his household to the exclusion of the Prophet’s Companions, 2) a belief that the Prophet had hidden nine-tenths of the Qur’ān and that the Sabaʿiya had access to said hidden parts, and 3) an expectation of a great reversal (dawla) through a resurrection of the dead (baʿth) before the Day of Judgment. It is these three accusations that shall primarily concern us in what follows. However, it must be stated at the outset that the authenticity and date of KI has been subjected to an extraordinary amount of scholarly scrutiny by the standards of the field of Islamic history. While it is not exactly the purpose of our study to settle these questions definitively, it is inevitable that our discussion shall address them as our analysis progresses.

\(^{168}\) Dhahabī, Taʾrikh, viii, 139 f.; the Arabic text here is written to mimic the ‘ajami accent of the elderly man, reading “أشهد أنِّي بن أبي تالب وابن المهسن والسبئار يُبْعَونَ قَبْلُ يوم القيامة.”
The biography of al-Ḥasan, or rather what little we know of it, offers an interesting case study vis-à-vis the Sabaʿīya. His biography is also controversial, and efforts to piece it together are necessarily imperfect given the limited and patchy data that has survived. One must begin with the obvious fact of his being the son of Mukhtār’s mahdī, Ibn al-Ḥanafīya. This fact explains at least al-Ḥasan’s more than passing interest in the remnants of Mukhtār’s movement, although it does not necessarily explain the hostility found in KI towards them. The question, then, is what lies behind the polemic contained in KI. If the authenticity of al-Ḥasan’s authorship of KI is to be regarded as sound, then the vicissitudes of his personal biography must necessarily inform our reading of the text.

Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīya fathered numerous children who amounted to little worthy of note in the eyes of medieval historians. However, two of his offspring, al-Ḥasan and his brother Abū Hāshim, occupy quite prominent places, albeit for two distinctly different reasons. Abū Hāshim ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīya (d. before 86/705) would eventually become the namesake of the Hāshimīya-Shīʿa, who traced the imāmate from his father through him. Since Abū Hāshim was bereft of male children, the imāmate did not pass to any of his offspring. The ῤAbbāsid house asserted that the childless Abū Hāshim in ca. 98/716–7 bequeathed the legacy of his imāmate to the leader of the ῤAbbāsids, Muḥammad ibn ῤAli ibn ῤAbd Allāh ibn al-῾Abbās. The veracity of this account is impossible to verify, but its prominence in and importance to early ῤAbbāsid propaganda is beyond doubt.169 Other Shīʿa leaders, such as ῤAbd Allāh ibn Muʿāwiya, laid claim to this legacy of Abū Hāshim as well.170 Yet, his prominence and continued salience for many Shīʿa of the Umayyad period is beyond doubt; it was Abū Hāshim who our sources claim replaced his father as the figurehead of Kaysānīya after his father’s death.171 The extent to which Abū Hāshim welcomed such reverence is unclear, but he seems to have embraced this role more heartily than his father. According to some accounts, Abū Hāshim reputedly maintained some of the most hard-boiled partisans of Mukhtār in his employ,172 and

169 E.g., see Akhbār al-῾Abbās, 173 ff. and Balādhuri, Ansāb, iii, 80 f.
171 See al-Qādī, Kaysānīya, 196 ff.
172 Akhbār al-῾Abbās, 174, 180 f.
according to others, he “used to collect the ḥadīth of the Sabaʾīya [kāna yajmaʿu ḥadītha l-sabaʾīya]”.173

Whereas Abū Hāshim remained ensconced in the ‘Alid camp, al-Ḥasan’s path seems to have taken a direction directly to the inverse of his brother. Abandoning the cause of ‘Alid loyalism, al-Ḥasan made his mark as the author, if the ascription is correct, of two of the earliest extant examples of Islamic theology, one in favor of ʾirjāʾ against the Sabaʾīya of his day and the other against the Qadarīya.

Al-Ḥasan’s polemic against the Sabaʾīya appears in the closing of this letter on ʾirjāʾ. If we accept al-Ḥasan’s authorship of the text, KI appears to have been written as a manifesto of sorts: in it he inveighs on behalf of a ‘postponing’ (ʾirjāʾ) of judgment upon “the first participants in the schism [ahl al-furqa al-uwal]” of the umma and rails against the beliefs of those who foist their religion upon the household of the Banū Hāshim. If authentic, the position he espouses potentially marks the first public declaration of the school of thought later claimed by the Murjīʿa, i.e., ‘those who postpone judgment’ concerning the participants in the first civil war. KI demarcates an alternative to the fractitious politics arising from the disputes between the ‘Uthmānī and ‘Alawī factions over the relative merits of ‘Uthmān and ‘Ali. In this way, KI acts as a public declaration of this seachange in al-Ḥasan’s outlook and perhaps even as a peace-offering towards the ascendant Marwānid faction led by the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 65–86/685–705). Al-Ḥasan, we are told, conscripted the services of his mawlā, ‘Abd al-Wāhid ibn Ayman, to disseminate and recite KI in Kūfa, as well as other locations; therefore, its message was likely intended to be propagated widely. Most vividly though, KI puts forward an ardent denunciation of the most strident partisans of the schismatic, activist faction of ‘Alid loyalism in Kūfa, whom he calls the Sabaʾīya (and notably not the Kaysānīya). The document was certainly written after the Marwānids’ sweeping defeat of both the Khashabīya in Nisibis and the Zubayrīds in Ṭirāq in 72/691. In denouncing the Sabaʾīya, his polemic

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173 Yaʿqūb ibn Sufyān al-Fasawi, al-Maʿrifa wa-l-taʾrikh, 3 vols., ed. A. D. al-ʿUmari (Baghdad, 1974), ii, 744 f.; Dhahabi, Taʾrikh, vi, 406; Ibn ʿAsākir, Dimashq, xxxii, 273 (ed. Ṭamrawi). Cf. the parallel texts in Ibn ʿAsākir, Dimashq, xxxii, 273.12 where one reads “kāna yattabiʿu ḥadītha l-sabaʾīya” and another reads “kāna yattabiʿu l-sabaʾīya” (ibid., 271.ult.). Presumably, these are the writings he passes on to Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās in the accounts of his waṣiyya to the ʿAbbāsid line; cf. Akhbār al-ʿAbbās, 184 ff. Baladhuri, Ansāb, iii, 80.
addresses what van Ess calls “the daemonizing view of history” that Mukhtār’s surviving followers represent just as much as the sectarians themselves. The document may be all the more remarkable if, as one akhbarī claims, al-Ḥasan had at one time aspired to some form of leadership over the holdout of Khashabīya in Nisibis—a misadventure abruptly cut short by his capture and imprisonment by the Zubayrids. KI, therefore, would be not merely the polemic of a hostile outsider, but rather a former insider later estranged—in short, the product of a conversion experience.

This account of KI, which assumes al-Ḥasan’s authorship of the document, finds its most stalwart proponent in van Ess, who also published the critical edition of the text. Madelung, al-Qādī, Rotter and Agha have concurred with this account in its fundamental details; yet there exists a certain fragility inherent in this account that must be treated. Brentjes, the first to express doubts over the authenticity of KI, pointed to the flawed transmission history of the document, suspecting the reliability of ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Ayman’s transmission of the letter. Over a decade after Brentjes expressed her doubts, Cook considerably expanded the critique of the document’s transmission history and enlarged the debate to include issues centering on both the coherence of the biographical sketch traditionally imputed to al-Ḥasan and KI’s relationship to other, early dogmatic treatises. More recently Crone has revisited the issue of KI’s authenticity, recapitulating many of Cook’s previous arguments while also adding her own significant contributions in light of an extensive study of the Sīra attributed to the Ibāḍī scholar Sālim ibn Dhakwān. The protests voiced against the

175 The fullest treatment of al-Ḥasan’s biography appears in J. van Ess, Anfänge muslimischer Theologie: Zwei antiqadaritische Traktate aus dem ersten Jahrhundert der Hijra, BTS 14 (Beirut, 1977), 1–12; cf. his more recent verdict in idem, TG, i, 178.
180 Crone and Zimmermann, Sālim ibn Dhakwān, ch. 7.
authenticity of KI, particularly by Cook and Crone, articulate issues that question the soundness of the evidentiary basis upon which van Ess based his initial account of KI and the biography its author. Their objections, therefore, raise essential question for interpreting the historical significance of KI’s Saba’īya-polemic.

All of the objections voiced against van Ess’ thesis fall neatly into two categories: one historical and the other intertextual. The former tend to relate to the plausibility of al-Ḥasan’s authorship of the text given the evidentiary basis from which his biography has been reconstructed, and the latter relate to the actual text of the KI itself.

Of the two types of arguments raised against the authenticity of KI, al-Ḥasan’s biography provides the best starting point. The picture of al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīya as a leader of the remnant of Mukthār’s movement that fled from Kūfa rests solely on a rather laconic report from a Kūfan akhbārī named ʿAwāna ibn al-Ḥakam (d. 147/764–5 or 158/774–5). He briefly states:\footnote{181 Dhahābī, Taʿrikh, vi, 334.}

After the murder of al-Mukthār, (al-Ḥasan) travelled to Nisibis with a band [nafar] of the Khashabiya. They made him their leader over them [raʾasīhu ʿalayhim]. Muslim ibn al-Asīr, who was from the Zubayrid faction, marched against them, defeated them, and took al-Ḥasan captive. Al-Ḥasan was then sent to Ibn al-Zubayr, and he imprisoned him in Mecca. It is said that he escaped from the prison and went to his father in Minā.

ʿAwāna’s account contains a number of difficulties. For example, the (apparently minor) Mosuli commander of the Zubayrid forces the text names, Muslim ibn al-Asīr, is otherwise unknown and perhaps fictional. The imprisonment of al-Ḥasan in Mecca also seems at first glance to be an anachronistic confusion with his father’s more famous imprisonment by Ibn al-Zubayr in 65/684–5.\footnote{182 Masʿūdī seems to confirm ʿAwāna’s chronology with his interpretation of several verse from the Kaysānī poet Kuthayyir ʿAzza in Murūj, iii, 274 f. (§1941), which Masʿūdī regards as referring to al-Ḥasan’s imprisonment by Ibn al-Zubayr. The sources on Ibn al-Ḥanafīya’s imprisonment are extremely confused and contradictory, but ʿAwāna’s account seems to imply that al-Ḥasan’s imprisonment was an entirely different event than that of his father’s. This is attested by a testimony attributed to al-Ḥasan himself and related on the authority of the Meccan scholar ʿAmr ibn Dīnār (d. 125/742) which relates his imprisonment by Ibn al-Zubayr after his father, Ibn al-Ḥanafīya had already been freed; see Muḥammad b. Iḥšāq al-Fākhihi, Akhbār Makka fi qadim al-dahr wa-hadithih, ed. ‘A. ‘A. Duḥaysh (Beirut: Dār Khdiḥ, 1994), iii, 340 f. ʿAmr ibn Dīnār, of course, personally knew al-Ḥasan quite well; see Fasawī, Taʿrikh, i, 543 f. and Ibn...} Yet, these are minor
blemishes when compared with the final difficulty. Most problematic for Ṭawāna’s account, van Ess’ detractors argue, is the fact that it portrays al-Ḥasan as a partisan of the Ḥashabīs, not a Muḥriʾī. The claim that al-Ḥasan had been a leader among this remnant of the Ḥashabīya in Nisibis runs directly contrary to the more famous image of al-Ḥasan as a Muḥriʾī. Cook, thus, dismissed the account as “an anti-Muḥriʾite fabrication designed to embarrass the Muḥriʾa by casting disrepute on one of their leading authorities.”

If Ṭawāna’s account falls, then so does the backstory of Ḥasan’s conversion that gives the authenticity of KI an aura of veracity. If not a pulpit manifesto, the attribution of KI to al-Ḥasan makes much less sense given his biography as a pioneering proponent of irjāʾ. Without Ṭawāna’s account, it is difficult to imagine a denizen of the Hijāz taking interest in the burgeoning theological debates of Kūfah—let alone assuming the vanguard of such debates. If al-Ḥasan did indeed compose KI, his motives are very unlikely to have been purely theological rather than personal in doing so, for KI contains a great deal of posturing but rather little in way of theologizing or expounding on irjāʾ properly speaking.

Besides Ṭawāna’s account, no other source recounts al-Ḥasan’s misadventure with the Ḥashabīya. Rather, our other sources testify unanimously to the presence in Nisibis of a leader by another name, Abū Qārib Yazīd ibn Abī Ṣakhr. An account of Haytham ibn Ṭādhī (d. ca. 206–9/821–4) names Yazīd ibn Abī Ṣakhr as the leader of the Ḥashabīya in Nisibis and relates the Zubayrids’ unsuccessful attempts to either defeat him in battle and or to assassinate him. Haytham then provides a poem attributed to Aḥṣā Hamdān that similarly rails against al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra for his inability to defeat Abū Qārib’s slave-army in pitched battle at Bājarmā. The Syriac historian Bar Penkāyē, a contemporary witness, also knows this leader—whom he calls Abuqarab—and informs his readers that Abuqarab assumed

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Abī Khaythama, Taʾrīkh, ii, 221. Ṭamr’s report was unknown to either Cook or Crone. I have elsewhere treated in detail the issue of al-Ḥasan’s imprisonment and concluded in favor of the authenticity of Ṭawāna’s account; see “Ibn al-Zubayr’s Meccan Prison and Imprisonment of Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya: an historical inquiry,” to be published in a forthcoming Festschrift in honor of Wadad al-Qādī edited by J. A. C. Brown and Wen-Chin Ouyang.

183 Dogma, 78.

184 Crone and Zimmermann, Sālim ibn Dhakwān, 258 f.

185 Aghānī3, v, 50 f.
control in Nisibis after the ‘šurtê’ deposed their previous commander, the brother of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar, and installed Abuqarab as “a commander from among themselves.” Bar Penkāyē implies that Abuqarab himself was a mawlā, or one of “those captives” as he calls them, rather than Arab; he states that the šurtê “preferred to have someone from their own ranks as commander—Abraham and his brother belonged to the Tayyāyē (i.e., the Arabs)—so they rose up against him and slew him and all his associates.” Cook rejected ‘Awāna’s account as irreconcilable with the two accounts of Bar Penkāyē and Haytham, and Crone followed suit.

Yet, their treatment of the sources here is overly cavalier. Haytham and ‘Awāna, for example, discuss two entirely different events and have very little to say about Nisibis outside each of their akhbār. One need not find an irreconcilable contradiction between these two akhbār. Rotter, for example, has reasonably suggested that all the accounts are true: Abū Qārib is clearly a military leader on the order of Ibn al-Ashtar, so it is not improbable that al-Ḥasan’s leadership fell under a different rubric—e.g., as a sort of ersatz religious leader along the lines of Mukhtār. Crone dismisses Rotter’s interpretation as a mere ‘harmonization’, but it at least can boast the merit of having incorporated all the data, whereas hers cannot. ‘Awāna’s account is also vague—it is not clear if the group (nafar) of Khashabīya who made al-Ḥasan their leader (raʾīs) when they encountered the Zubayrid sortie constituted a small faction or the entirety of the Nisibine resistance.

Outside the Arabic sources, one finds that Bar Penkāyē’s account, although prescient in many respects, by no means constitutes a perfect record of events. His knowledge of names is quite imperfect. While he knows of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar and Mukhtār, he shows no sign of being cognizant of the importance of the movement’s distant, Hijāzī figurehead, Muḥamamd ibn al-Ḥanafiya. One would, therefore, hardly

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186 Rēš Mellē, 158.
187 Cook, Dogma, 78; Crone and Zimmerman, Sālim ibn Dhakwān, 259 f.
188 Rotter, Bürgerkrieg, 251.
189 Crone and Zimmermann, Sālim ibn Dhakwān, 260 and n. 49.
190 He calls the leader of the Umayyad forces who fight against Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar by the name ‘Abd al-Rahmān bar Zāyāt (Rēš Mellē, 156.1)—an apparent conflation of name of ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād with the name of governor of Nisibis appointed by Ibn al-Ashtar, his half-brother ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn ‘Abd Allāh (see Ṭabarī, ii, 716.11–12)
expect him to know of Ibn al-Hanafiya’s son al-Hasan. Bar Penkayē’s assertion that Abū Qārīb was non-Arab is also erroneous. Ibn al-Kalbī contradicts Bar Penkayē’s claim and records a full Arab genealogy (nasab) for Abū Qārīb, categorizing him as an Arab of the Banū Kalb and naming him as “one of the ashrāf of the Jazīra.” Abū Qārīb was, then, perhaps among those 2,000 cavalrymen from Mukhtār’s supporters who gathered in Nisibis after the latter’s death and, given how well equipped they were, likely included a number of Arab tribesmen. The dichotomy between ‘Awāna’s, Haytham’s and Bar Penkayē’s accounts as first posed by Cook, therefore, is a false one. What we have on our hands are not a handful of contradictory accounts, but rather a series of tiles belonging to a single mosaic whose complete picture remains incomplete, but by no means incoherent.

Much more problematic for the argument on the side of the authenticity of KI has been, in my view, the intertextual problems presented by KI. While certainly not all of KI concerns itself with polemic, the most important section for our the concerns, ‘the Sabaʾīya-polemic’, finds two starkly parallel texts in two Ibāḍī sources: the first from a sermon delivered by the Ibāḍī rebel Abū Ḥamza al-Mukhtār ibn ‘Awf (d. 130/748) and the second in the so-called ‘second letter of Ibn Ibāḍ’ (hereafter, IB2).

Based on the prior work of Cook, Crone has documented these parallels in an admirably erudite and readable fashion, supplementing Cook’s original intertextual observations with a broader survey of Ibāḍī writings only more recently made accessible. The key question posed

191 Nasab Maʿadd, ii, 352.10–11; cf. al-Bakrī, Muʿjam mā istaʿjam, ed. M. al-Saqqā (Cairo, 1945–51), i, 220, s.v. “Bājarmā”.
192 See Masʿūdī, Murāj, iii, 307 (§2004) where one should read “رُشَد الحشمي” rather than the reading of Pellat’s edition “رُشَد الحشمي”.
193 For its versions, see Jāhiz, Bayān, ii, 124; Balādhuri, Ansāb, vii, 628 (ed. al-ʿAzm); Aghānī, xxiii, 243; Ibn Abī l-Hadīd, Sharh, v, 93. For an analysis of its contents and transmission history, see Dähne, Reden der Araber, 102 ff., 213 ff.; for an English translation, see Crone and Hinds, God’s Caliph, 129–132.
194 The letter remains unpublished as of yet, although Madelung is currently preparing a critical edition of this and other Ibāḍī texts for publication. IB2 has apparently only been preserved in the 18th-century history of Oman known as Kashf al-ghumma al-jāmiʿ li-akhbār al-umma attributed to Sirhān ibn Saʿīd al-Izkawī (for more on this work, see Crone and Zimmermann, Sālim ibn Dhakwān, 338 f.). References to this work are from the London MS, British Library, Or. 8076, fols. 206b–212a. See also Cook’s transcription and translation of the relevant passage from IB2 in Dogma, 9 f.
195 Crone and Zimmermann, Sālim ibn Dhakwān, 251 ff.
by Cook, and later Crone, is why KI has in common so many affinities with Ibāḍī texts in particular. As Cook first noted, given the parallels between KI, IB2, and Abū Ḥamza’s sermon, “the authors . . . must include at least one plagiarist among their number.”  

To solve the conundrum, the simplest course of action is to date the respective texts and then to postulate a genealogical relation between the texts based upon this dating. If KI is the earliest, then the only question remaining is how the text came to inspire so many Ibāḍī imitators. Cook and Crone both conclude that the plagiarist must have been the author of the KI, whom they identify as an anonymous Murjiʿī of late Umayyad Kūfa eager to imbue the doctrine of irjāʾ with a Ḥijāzī pedigree. This judgment largely relies on Cook’s dating of IB2 as considerably earlier than KI. “[B]ut for its doctrine,” Cook argues, “we should have little hesitation in classifying the K. al-irjāʾ as an Ibāḍī, not Murjiʿī text.”

Yet, is the KI really an Ibāḍī tract in Murjiʿī garb? The weakness in Cook’s argument lies in his tendentious granting to IB2 chronological priority to the detriment of KI. Yet, to best address this question, we need to at last examine the text of KI’s Sabaʿīya polemic itself. The pertinent passages read (KI, §§7–8):

> Among those whom we oppose are wishful-thinking Sabaʿīya [sabaʿīya mutamanniya] who have thrown the Book of God behind their back [zaharū bi-kitāb allāh] and proclaimed falsehoods against the Banū...
Umayya—and even against God.\(^{200}\) They disassociate from the people with neither their eyes open (to the truth) nor with a developed grasp of Islām—cursing the disobedience of those who practice it while practicing it themselves if they gain victory by it \(\textit{idhā zafrū rū bihā}\).\(^{201}\) They see the schism (resulting from their disobedience) while not knowing a way out of it.

They have taken a household from the Arabs as \(\textit{imām}\),\(^{202}\) and they have foisted their religion upon them \(\textit{qalladūhum dīnahum}\), clinging to that which they love and disassociating from that which they hate. (But, they are merely) violators of the Qurān and the followers of soothsayers \(\textit{jiṣāfūm li-l-qurān wa-atbā'īm li-l-kuḥfān}\)—hoping for a 'reversal' \(\textit{dawla'tūn li-l-qurān wa-atbā'īn li-l-kuhhān}\) in a resurrection to be before the Hour (of Judgment), or before the coming of the Hour \(\textit{takūnu fī bā'thī nakūnu qablā l-sā'a aw qabla aqīmā l-sā'a}\). They have altered \(\textit{harrafū}\) the book of God, have succumbed to corruption in matters that God has decreed \(\textit{wa-irtashaw fī l-hūm}\),\(^{204}\) and have "spread corruption on the earth, and God does not love the corrupting" (Q. 5:64). They have opened doors that God has closed and closed doors that God has opened.

\(^{200}\) Rejecting the emendation suggested first by Cook (\textit{Dogma}, 42 f.) and then Crone (\textit{Sālim}, 237), who argue that the text should read "\(\textit{al-firya 'alā nabī llāh wa-}
\textit{'alā llāh}\)
rather than "\(\textit{al-firya 'alā bānī umayya...}\)" etc. As van Ess notes (\textit{TG}, v, 12), it would be highly unusual (and even unprecedented) to find a text that so uncannily modifies such highly formulaic invocations by placing God’s name after to the Prophet’s (i.e., rather than \(\textit{'alā allāh wa-}
\textit{'alā rasūlihi}\), or a similar common variant).

\(^{201}\) Adopting the suggested emendation of van Ess (\textit{TG}, v, 9 n. 29), although I have translated the phrase somewhat differently.

\(^{202}\) In Arabic: \(\textit{ittakhadhū ahla bayt in min al-}
\textit{'arab imām an}\). This phrase is strongly reminiscent of a saying elsewhere attributed to Muhammad ibn al-Ḥanafīya: "Two households from the Arabs have the people taken as peers to the neglect of God \(\textit{ahlu baytayni min al-}
\textit{'arab yattakhidhuhumā l-nās andād an min dūn allāh}\): ourselves and those sons of our uncles (meaning the Banū Umayya)." See Ibn Sa’d, vii, 96 (ed. ‘A. M. ‘Umar); Dhabahī, \textit{Tārikh}, vi, 192.


\(^{204}\) I.e., \(\textit{hūkām allāh}\). The text here finds at least two parallels. In an oration of Abū Mūsā l-Āsh’ārī given during the arbitration at Șīfīn, he states, “I would not be bribed concerning the decree of God \(\textit{mā kuntu la-artashi fi hūkām allāh}\)” (Tabāri, 1, 3356; cited in Cook, \textit{Dogma}, 167 n. 46). It also occurs in a text ascribed to Jesus (!) by a monk (\textit{rāhib}) who reads it aloud to ‘Ali only to then realize that it contains a prophesy regarding “the successor of the seal of the prophets \(\textit{wasī khātam al-anbiyā’i},\)’ who stand before him. In Jesus’ description of this \(\textit{wasī},\) as read aloud by the monk, this \(\textit{wasī} \) will judge with truth and not incorruptible in matters that God has decreed \(\textit{yaqūdi bi-l-haqā wa-lā yartashi fi l-hūkām}\). See Ibn A’tham al-Kūfī, al-\textit{Futūh}, ed. ‘Ali Shiri (Beriut, 1991), ii, 558.9
One of the contentions of these Sabaʾīya that has reached us is that they say, “We are guided to a revelation and hidden knowledge from which the people have been led astray”—claiming that the Prophet of God concealed nine-tenths of the Qurʾān. If the Prophet of God was concealing something of what God revealed, then he would have concealed the affair of Zayd’s wife.205

KI’s Sabaʾīya-polemic offers a rather vivid depiction of the recipients of its scorn. KI’s Sabaʾīya adhere not only to a defining set of core beliefs but also possess a political program. The letter’s accusations are extensive given the confines of its laconic prose.

Three key strands can be identified. Most prominent and apparently relevant for the issue of irjāʾ is that KI accuses the Sabaʾīya of being schismatics. They are schismatics inasmuch as their unwarranted, and even unwelcome, reverence for “a household from the Arabs as imām (i.e., the Banū Hāshim)” acts as a basis for their opposition to the Umayyad régime and leads them to the even more incendiary position of disavowing Abū Bakr and ʿUmar (cf. KI, §5). In doing so, they not only defame the Banū Umayya, but God as well. The second strand of polemic presents the misdeeds of the Sabaʾīya towards the Qurʾān. KI claims that they simultaneously mistreat the Qurʾān by boasting that they have been guided to its concealed portions and abandon the Qurʾān by preferring the rantings of kuhhān. This final accusation, according to the author of KI, is tantamount to tahrid—the perversion of Scripture undertaken by the qurʾānic Jews and Christians.206 Finally, and most tantalizing for our purposes, KI denounces the Sabaʾīya’s hopes of an immanent dawla, a twist of fate if you will, coinciding with a resurrection207

It was Cook’s contention that “the actual content of the anti-Sabaʾite polemic is so historically vague that it cannot…do much to

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205 The text here refers to Muḥammad’s marriage of Zaynab bint Ḥajsh, the wife of his once adopted son Zayd ibn Ḥāritha. In the wake of the revelation of Q. 23:37–8, both Muḥammad’s adoption of Zayd ibn al-Ḥāritha as his son and Zayd’s marriage to Zaynab had to be dissolved in order to facilitate Muḥammad’s marriage to Zaynab. See C. E. Bosworth, “Zaynab bint Ḥajsh,” EF, xi, 484 f. D. S. Powers says surprisingly little concerning this early attestation to the story of Zayd in KI in his recent study Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet (Philadelphia, 2009), 207.


207 That the word resurrection, or baʿth, remains indefinite in the text is significant and indicative of a special sort of resurrection of the dead, not the general one initiating the eschaton in which all souls are judged before God.
date the epistle.” Yet, KI contains a depiction of the Sabaʾiya far less generic than Cook gives credit. As noted first by van Ess, that the Sabaʾiya follow kuhhān strikes right at the heart of crisis caused by Mukhtār’s revolt among the Kūfān Shīʾa—even the more obscure notion the Sabaʾiya “irtashaw fī l-hukm” (a statement absent from the KI’s parallel texts), seems to fit Mukhtār’s administration in Kūfa best. Cook objects that other Shīʾa revolts, such as those of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muʿāwiya and Abū Muslim, established judgeships as well. He also asserts that KI’s assertion that the Sabaʾiya followed kuhhān should be regarded as empty rhetoric, a cliché polemic used against the Shīʾa as attested to by IB2, for example. It is not, however, the individual polemics analyzed in isolation but their net effect that provides insight into their historical context. Cook’s objections strike me more as obfuscations than an actual case for alternative contexts where KI might plausibly fit. The unique arrangement of KI’s Sabaʾiya-polemic in fact reflects an immediately recognizable constellation of events and beliefs. The apocalypticism combined with the claim to special revelation denounced by KI, for instance, are both strongly reminiscent of the interpretations given to ʿAlī’s chair. The contents of KI, in short, fit the events and interests emerging during and after the revolt of Mukhtār like no other.

Before arguing this point further, the intertextual nature of KI must be addressed. If KI, in fact, borrows heavily from an Ibāḍī text, or even texts, then this leads one to a natural question. What exactly is Ibāḍī about these polemics? Certainly one finds nothing in terms of dogma that would lead on to classify the text as Ibāḍī. Exempting the hostility to the Shīʾa, not even a shadow of a Khārijī perspective appears that would suggest such a connection. Therefore, one is forced to confine the evidence in the overlaps one finds between the diction of KI and Ibāḍī texts. In that regard, it would be problematic and tendentious to point the parallels between KI and its two closely related Ibāḍī texts, IB2 and the sermon of Abū Ḥamza as definitive evidence against the letter’s authenticity, since the chronological priority of either of these two over KI must be substantiated, not simply assumed. The evidence must be broader and should reflect Ibāḍī writings more generally speaking.

208 Dogma, 69.
209 “Das Kitāb,” 32 ff.
210 Dogma, 86 f.
In this regard, Crone has adduced the most compelling and thought-provoking collection of evidence. Although heavily dependent on Cook’s previous treatment, Crone makes the more comprehensive case since she buttresses Cook’s original argument with a considerably wider reading of Ibāḍī materials. In examining the intertextual parallels between KI and the Ibāḍī materials, Crone adduces a total of eight specific incidents of intertextual parallels between KI’s Sabaʾiya-polemic and the anti-Shīʿa-polemic in IB2 and Abū Ḥamza’s sermon. Of these eight, she provides three instances where one finds further parallels in other Ibāḍī sources outside IB2 and Abū Ḥamza’s sermon that seem to suggest that they originally derive from an Ibāḍī milieu rather than the historical al-Ḥasan. While such examples seem persuasive at first glance, their importance fades under further scrutiny.

The first of these three parallel is the claim that the Sabaʾiya have thrown God’s book behind their backs. Although one finds echoes of this notion in Ibāḍī texts, as Crone herself notes, it originally derives from qurʾānic, and even early Kūfan, diction. Crone also cites KI’s assertion that the Sabaʾiya “tell lies against . . . God,” characterizing the accusation as “extremely common in Ibāḍī sources”—yet this too finds numerous parallels among the traditionists as well, particularly in Kūfa. There seems to be no real justification for labeling it quintessentially Ibāḍī. Lastly, Crone cites Ibāḍī parallels to KI’s accusation that the Sabaʾiya see schism but know of no way out (al-makhraj minhā), but the diction of this example, too, represents a Kūfan, not a uniquely Ibāḍī, milieu. According to a tradition attributed to the Shīʿī muhaddith, al-Ḥārith al-Aʿwar, when ‘Alī heard the Prophet speak of a future fitna, he inquired, “Oh Messenger of God, what is the way out of it [mā l-makhraj minhā yā rasūl allāh]?” The Prophet replied, “The Book of God…” The qurʾānic remedy to fitna described in al-Ḥārith al-Aʿwar’s tradition, it must be said, meshes nicely with KI’s

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211 As in the report cited by Crone in which ‘Alī accuses the two arbitrators at Ṣīffin of wrongdoing by declaring that they “nabadhā hukma l-qurʾān warā a zuhūrihim” (Ṭabarî, i, 3368.11–12). The qurʾānic valence of the diction, see n. 199 above.
212 Crone and Zimmermann, Sālim ibn Dhakwān, 253.
213 See Conc., v, 138b f.
214 Tirmidhî, Sunan, k. faḍāʾil al-qurʾān, ii, 732 (no. 3153); cf. Mızâz, Tahdhib, xxxiv, 267 f. There is a distinctively Ḫūṭmānī version of this tradition as well, in which the Prophet’s command concering the escape (makhraj) from fitna is to “stay loyal to the trustworthy one (i.e., Ḫūṭmān) and his companions [‘alaykum bi-l-amīn wa-asḥābīhi’]; see Ibn ‘Asâkir, Ḫūṭmān, 264 f. and cf. ibid., 286 f. and Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, ii, 345.
polemic against the Sabaʾiyya’s fast-and-loose attitude towards Qurʾānic revelation.

The evidence for asserting the dependence of KI on an Ibāḍī Vorlage, therefore, proves to be rather thin and unconvincing. To continue to argue for an Ibāḍī background for KI leads one to questions that seem to have no good answers. Why would one, for example, find a bevy of Kūfī materials appearing in a document ostensibly dependent on the writings of a sectarian group whose ideological center was located in Baṣra? One might object that, if one accepts the hypothesis that IB2 and the sermon of Abū Ḥamza likely draw heavily from KI for their polemic against the Shiʿa, rather than vice versa, then the question arises as to how KI came to exert influence upon Ibāḍī texts. Textually speaking, it is notable that these two Ibāḍī texts bear evidence of having updated KI’s polemic. One finds the evidence for this in the tendency of the Ibāḍī texts to decontextualize certain passages in KI by exchanging KI’s multiple references to the Sabaʾiyya for the Shiʿa at large. Also dropped from IB2 and Abū Ḥamza’s sermon are the accusations that the Sabaʾiyya lie against the Banū Umayya and that they accept bribes concerning (God’s) hukm. These alterations represent an interest in adapting the narrower polemic of KI for the sake of expanding it for wider usage. This is just the sort of modification one would expect if KI had been appropriated and employed in texts of later provenance.

Most of the so-called Ibāḍī parallels adduced by Crone prove to be either Qurʾānic, Kūfī, or the product of the intertextual relationship between KI and its two Ibāḍī parallel texts. KI’s influence on the two Ibāḍī texts is intriguing, but by no means farfetched. A potential answer for how KI came to influence Ibāḍī writings can be found in an anecdote of the Meccan, Murjīʾi traditionist and companion of al-Ḥasan ibn Muhammad ibn al-Ḥanāfīya ʿAmr ibn Dīnār (d. 125/742). ʿAmr claimed that he read (qaraʾtuʿalā) al-Ḥasan’s epistle to Abū l-Shaʿthāʾ Jābir ibn Zayd al-Azdī, the earliest and most influential Baṣran leaders claimed by the Ibāḍiyya. According to ʿAmr, Jābir reacted to his reading of the epistle by declaring, “There is nothing that I approve of which he disapproves, and nothing that I disapprove of which he approves.”

Cook dismisses this anecdote as ahistorical, noting rightly that it places

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Jābir in the awkward position of being a propagandist of the Murjiʿa. However, due to the fact that ʿAmr aims to exonerate Jābir ibn Zayd of Khārijī sympathies, his depiction of Jābir’s openness towards KI might be an exaggeration rather than an outright falsehood. In any case, the acceptance of Jābir ibn Zayd as an authority by both Ibādīs and traditionists alike points to fact that, as van Ess has noted, he couldn’t have been a “pure Ibādī.” If Jābir ibn Zayd did give any tacit approval of KI’s contents, then Jābir indeed may have been the conduit transmitting KI into Ibādī circles—perhaps mostly due to its staunch denunciation of the Sabaʾiya.

Lastly, it should be emphasized that IB2 itself can hardly belong to the same Umayyad milieu in which KI finds itself at odds with the Sabaʾiya. Unlike most early Umayyad epistles, which nearly universally omit any discussion of prophetic hadith (KI included), IB2 contains an extensive treatment of the māriqa-tradition used against the Khārijites and attempts to disabuse its readers of applying it to the Ibādīya. IB2 is, as Madelung has cogently argued in a recent article, most likely the product of the early ʿAbbāsid era, certainly dating no earlier than the mid-2nd/8th century. There is no evidence that would militate against Madelung’s thesis and lead one to favor an earlier date.

216 Cook, Dogma, 74 f.
217 TG, 11, 190.
218 The focus of our study has necessitated that we leave aside any discussion of the parallels between KI and the Sīra of Sālim ibn Dhakwān (see Crone and Zimmermann, op. cit., 251 f.). However, one cannot help but wonder if such parallels in Sālim’s Sīra derive from Jābir’s influence, too. That Jābir represented a source of religious authority to Sālim is clearly attested to in the Ibādī compilation of Jābir’s Jawābāt, which includes a responsum from Jābir addressed to Sālim. Jābir’s Jawābāt remain unpublished. For a description of the mss and their contents, see A. K. Ennami, “A Description of New Ibādī Manuscripts in North Africa,” JSS 15 (1970), 63 ff.; J. van Ess, “Untersuchungen zu einigen ibādītischen Handschriften,” ZDMG 126 (1976), 25 ff. and idem, “Nachträge,” ZDMG 127 (1977), 1 ff.; Ersilia Francesca, “Early Ibādī Jurisprudence: Sources and Case Law,” JSAI 30 (2005), 237 ff.
219 See Cook’s astute comments on this feature of text in Dogma, 56 f.
220 Izkawi’s Kashf al-ghumma, in fact, in reproducing the text of IB2 makes no attribution to Ibn Ibād explicit, but rather appendages the text of this second letter to the first letter attributed to Ibn Ibād without an introduction to its contents. As Cook notes, the second letter represents “a severe case of epistolary erosion” in that the letter possesses “no prae scriptio (f. 207a.1), no greetings of any kind, no mission topos, and no epistolary ending (f. 212a.6)” (Dogma, 53). As such, the document evidently contains no internal evidence that would aid us in determining its original author. The first individual to attribute the letter to Ibn Ibād appears, therefore, not to have been an Ibādī author but rather Sachau, who too hastily grouped the two epistles together under Ibn Ibād’s name. In an interesting turn, Madelung has argued in a
KI, if not actually authentic, certainly amounts to artful verisimilitude. KI stands as an exceptional specimen of Umayyad polemic that, despite its ‘sectarian’ origin, enjoyed broad popularity outside the confines of the proponents of *irjā*, most likely due to its unrelenting denunciation of the Sabaʿiya. Early Kūfan traditions about Ibn Sabaʾ seem to have drawn upon the KI as well, claiming that Ibn Sabaʾ inordinately preferred ʿAlī over Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, that he believed ʿAlī to have access to secret portions of the Qurʾān, and finally that he lied against God. This history of the text’s popularity goes great lengths as well to explain its complex textual history.

Its value for understanding the Sabaʿiya, however, is inestimable. KI offers the most lucid description the Sabaʿiya’s beliefs, and what one finds in it is an uncanny confirmation for the early tradition on the persona of Ibn Sabaʾ. In effect, KI informs us that the Sabaʿiya espoused an apocalyptic eschatology that placed the Banū Hāshim in the middle of the dramatic denouement of human history in the same manner that Ibn Sabaʾ revered ʿAlī as a redeemer whose destiny was to usher in an era of eschatological justice. Mukhtār’s Sabaʿiya believed that their world stood on the precipice of a great reversal, a reversal that would be accompanied by the resurrection of the dead.

Who were the dead to be resurrected mentioned in KI? Cook rightly noted that the political consummation and resurrection of the dead expected by the Sabaʿiya in KI implies that they awaited a redeemer currently dead. Yet, he was troubled by the fact that Mukhtār’s *mahdī* Muhammad ibn al-Ḥanafiya still lived, if ‘van Ess’ dating of the letter

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221 Indeed, it is for this reason that both Shiʿī akhbārī ʿAlī al-Nawfalī (cited in Ibn Abī l-Ḥadid, *Sharḥ*, viii, 95) and the Sunnī scholar Dhahabī (*Taʾrikh*, vi, 334) excerpt the text, despite harboring beliefs unamenable towards *irjā*.


stands. But, this is no anachronism. As noted above, the resurrection of the righteous dead would accomplish their redemption and banish injustice from the human realm. It is no stretch to infer that these Sabāʾīya, like their eponym, looked to ʿAlī’s resurrection, and perhaps even his sons and the fallen heroes of the Shīʿite past, to accomplish their apocalyptic triumph.

The Disappearance of the Sabāʾīya

Writing three centuries after Mukhtār’s revolt, ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī claimed that it was the ghulāt and the Sabāʾīya who fooled Mukhtār into fancying himself a prophet by declaring him to be “the supreme authority of this age [ḥujjat ḥādhā l-zamān].” Although couched in hostile rhetoric, his observation has a modicum of merit to recommend it. I have attempted to argue above that beliefs similar to the apocalyptic beliefs attributed to Ibn Sabaʾ attained a pervasive influence on, and even animating role in, the revolt of Mukhtār, particularly at the moment when the pageantry and practices of the Kūfan ghulāt assumed public prominence. It is difficult, however, to trace an unbroken line of Sabāʾīya from ʿAlī’s death to Mukhtār’s revolt. While the ʿUthmānī denunciations of Ḥujr and his associates as Sabāʾīya are tantalizing, any identification of them as Sabāʾīya must remain tenuous given the nature of the evidence.

Medieval historians and heresiographs mention only three individuals as disciples of Ibn Sabaʾ. One is ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿabra al-Hamdānī, an obscure though celebrated member of Mukhtār’s army reputed to have slain Rabīʾa ibn al-Mukhāriq al-Ghanawī in the battle against ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād at al-Khāzir. 228 No other information about him survives. Even more obscure is the virtually unknown companion of Ibn Sabaʾ named Abū l-Kardūs. 229 All that can be known of this figure is what one can infer form his name. 230 Given the fact that his

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226 *Farq*, 34.
227 *Ibn Abī l-Hadīd*, *Sharh*, v, 6.11.
228 *Balādhuri*, *Ansāb*, iv, 164; cf. Ṭabarī, 1, 646 (where his name is ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, ʿIqd, ii, 409.14).
name resembles that of a *mawla*, he may have been among Mukhtār’s *mawāli* as well. His name means ‘father of the squadron’, so ‘Abū Kardūs’ could be a *nomme de guerre* of yet another celebrated combatant from Mukhtār’s forces.

Most famous of all Ibn Sabaʾ’s alleged associate, however, is ʿAbd Allāh (b. ‘Amr) ibn Ḥarb (var. al-Ḥārith) al-Kindi, the eponymous founder of Ḥarbiya, an offshoot of the Kaysāniya. In fact, little is known of his biography. In Ṭabarī’s account of the *ghulāt* during Mukhtār’s revolt, one encounters a certain Abū l-Ḥārith al-Kindi gathering alongside Ibn Nawf in the houses of Laylā al-Muzanīya and Hind al-Nāʿīṭiya. Abū l-Ḥārith al-Kindi may be in fact the same figure who the heresiographs allege had been among the disciples of the doctrine of Ibn Sabaʾ, insofar as his name is easily corruptible to Ibn Ḥarb (or al-Ḥārith) al-Kindi, given the vagaries of Arabic script.

After Mukhtār’s revolt, however, one finds no mention of the Sabaʾiya as an integral, definable group. The experiences of attempting to actualize the claims of their apocalyptic eschatology and the numbers of diverse persons whom the movement attracted likely proved too transformative. The Sabaʾiya, in essence, transformed into the Mukhtāriya. They, in turn, quickly transformed into the Kaysāniya and its offshoots. Despite the divisions that arose among the various Kaysāni-Shīʿi sectarians, Mukhtār’s numerous epigones and the adherents of these sects nonetheless endorsed the basic apocalyptic notions of the Sabaʾiya, albeit with significant modifications as time progressed. This makes the influence of the Sabaʾiya no less indelible.

The example the Ḥarbiya is instructive. Although the heresiographers regard their leader as a disciple of Ibn Sabaʾ, Ibn Ḥarb in fact meddled with doctrines that the early Sabaʾiya would probably find foreign. He taught doctrines such as the divinity of the *imāms*, whom he claimed were successively indwelt by the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-qudus*), and the transmigration (*tanāsukh*) of the accursed, unrepentant souls who, having fallen from heavenly realms, exist now as mere shadows (*azilla*). Influenced profoundly by the Kaysāniya, Ibn Ḥarb recognized

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231 WKAS, i, 122.
233 The heresiographers call him by a number of names: ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥarb, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥaras and ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥārith are common. His name was ‘Abd Allāh ibn ʿAmr ibn Ḥarb al-Kindi, according to Saʿd al-Qummī (*Maqālāt*, 21.9, 26–4) and Abū l-Qāsim al-Kabī (quoted in ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, xx, 178.6). The first to suggest this connection was al-Qādī, *Kaysāniya*, 120 f.
Ibn al-Ḥanafiya as mahdi and imām, but given later developments, he did not seem to have a particularly enduring emotional attachment to Mukhtār’s mahdi. Ibn al-Ḥanafiya died in 81/700, after which Ibn Ḥarb attached himself to Abū Ḥāshim, Ibn al-Ḥanafiya’s son. After the death of the latter, Ibn Ḥarb led his followers to the independent state established in Kūfa by the Hāshimid rebel ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mu’āwiya and his Janāḥiya in 127/744. When the Abū Muslim killed the latter in Herat in 131/148–9, Ibn Ḥarb awaited his master ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mu’āwiya, rather than Ibn al-Ḥanafiya, to return as the mahdi from his concealment (ghayba) in a mountain near Isfahān. If the heresiographers are to be believed, Ibn Ḥarb even showed enough panache to finally arrogate the imāmate to himself as well.234

Thus, the Sabaʾiya became but a memory. Usage of their name persisted, but really only as a rhetorical device or an item of antiquarian interest. One sees this, for example, after the ʿAbbāsid revolution in the victory speech attributed to the first ʿAbbāsid caliph, Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ (r. 132–6/750–54). In Ṭabarī’s version, al-Saffāḥ complains that, “The erring Sabaʾiya claim that others besides us [i.e., the Banū l-ʿAbbās] are more deserving of leadership, governance and the caliphate.”235 At first glance, the oration seems to suggest that a contingent of Sabaʾiya rejected early ʿAbbāsid claims to usher in a new, legitimate dawla after ousting the Umayyads. Yet, this reading of the oration is highly unlikely. Many versions of Abū l-ʿAbbās’ sermon survive,236 but only few preserve the passage mentioning the Sabaʾiya. Other than Ṭabarī’s recension, the fullest version of the sermon appears in Baladhuri’s Ansāb. Baladhuri, however, preserves an interesting variant in this passage mentioning the Sabaʾiya. In his version it is not only the Sabaʾiya who deny the ʿAbbāsids’ right to caliphate but also “the ignorant Marwānīya [al-marwānīya al-juḥḥāl].”237 His attack, therefore, is two-pronged, one against Umayyad loyalists and one against Shīʿī dissidents. The Sabaʾiya to whom Abū l-ʿAbbās’ sermon ostensibly refers are really just Shīʿī opponents contesting ʿAbbāsid ascendence, not followers of a messianism akin to that espoused by

234 Ps.-Nāshi’, Uṣūl, 36 ff.
235 Ṭabarī, iii, 29.ult: za amat al-sabaʾiya al-dullāl anna ghayra anna ghayranā ahaqqu bi-l-riʿāsa wa-l-siyāsa wa-l-khilāfa minnā.
236 On these, see Dähne, Reden der Araber, 108 ff.
237 Baladhuri, Ansāb, iii, 142.6.
Ibn Saba’. Abū l-‘Abbās’ denunciation simply takes aim at Shī‘ī and Umayyad counter-claims that question ‘Abbāsid legitimacy.238

We see the appellation Saba‘īya used as a similar device during the reign of the ‘Abbāsid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75). In the days following the death of the ‘Alid rebel Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Abd Allāh on 25 Dhū l-Qa‘da 145/14 February 763, al-Manṣūr ordered the governor of Kūfā, the ‘Abbāsid prince ʿĪsā ibn Mūsā, to parade the rebel’s decapitated head around the city. After this macabre spectacle, al-Manṣūr delivered the following oration in which he denounced Kūfā’s inhabitants:239

O denizens of Kūfā! God damn you all and any land in which you dwell! I am amazed at the Banū Umayya and their patience with you! How is it that they did not kill all of your fighting men and drag away your offspring as captives and destroy your homes! You Saba‘īya! You Khashabīya! One person says that angels have come. Another says that Gabriel has come, saying, “Charge, Ḥayzūm!”240 Then you rallied behind the people of this household and hailed obedience to them as a good deed, but then you corrupted them and caused them to become resentful. But praise be to God who afflicts you with misfortune! By God you denizens of this vile heap of earth, if I remain with you, I shall surely bring you low.

The Kūfans here are not the same millenarians that marched from Kūfā with Mukthār while bearing ʿAlī’s chair aloft. This impassioned invective clearly invokes the appellations Khashabīya and Saba‘īya to denigrate the Kūfans. In other words, al-Manṣūr’s rhetorical flourishes are mostly insulting and hardly descriptive. The Saba‘īya here are merely a ghost of the past—a phantom memory that al-Manṣūr wields to excoriate his contemporary foes.

238 Dähne, Reden der Araber, 117.
239 Baladhurī, Ansāb, iii, 269.
240 An angelic steed whose name is akin to ‘firebrand’ and is likely related to the Persian hézum; see F. Meier, “Aussprachefragen des älteren neupersich,” Oriens 27 (1981), 86.
CONCLUSION

So, did Ibn Sabaʾ exist or not? I have frequently encountered this query in casual conversation with specialists and non-specialist alike ever since beginning this project. And in all honesty, my answer has more than once wavered between denial and affirmation. So far, I have avoided addressing this question directly, though I hazard to guess that the astute reader will have been able to surmise my answer before now. My answer is: Yes, he probably did indeed exist.

Yet, this answer, like many scholarly conclusions, demands several caveats, for it invites an array of misunderstandings. I do not mean to say that every historical account of Ibn Sabaʾ, or even most of them, carry any truth or even something approaching that elusive and inscrutable object Islamicists often call 'a historical kernel'. Sayf’s Ibn Sabaʾ certainly did not exist, nor likely even any of the many versions of Ibn Sabaʾ described in the Muslim heresiographical literature. However, I do think that it is very likely that the figure mentioned in the most archaic versions of the rajʿa-archetype did exist. Hence, after ‘Alī’s death, a minor Yamani commander in ‘Alī’s army named ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Hamdānī al-Sabaʾī—perhaps even also known as Ibn Sabaʾ and/or Ibn al-Sawdāʾ—received the news of ‘Alī’s death from the blade of Ibn Muljam with profound and utter incredulity. I would even go so far as to assert that this man regarded ‘Alī’s death, in a sense, as impossible news—an event that necessitated divine intervention, a reversal of history if you will. ‘Alī’s destined victory over the Syrians had not yet been realized, and from the perspective of this radical devotee of ‘Alī and his cause, providence would not let this stand.

Did this Ibn Sabaʾ found a sect or start a movement? The answer here must be in the negative. Ibn Sabaʾ is, unlike Sayf’s scheming provocateur Ibn al-Sawdāʾ, much more of an anecdotally iconic representative of all those individuals who nurtured a hope that ‘Alī’s victory still loomed over the horizon, despite his death and even despite the ‘perfidious’ compromise of al-Hasan ibn ‘Alī’s peace with Muʿāwiya ibn Abi Sufyān. The Sabaʾīya of the Umayyad period were much more likely to have been called the Sabaʾīya—not because Ibn Sabaʾ masterminded the downfall of ‘Uthmān or the creation of the early ghulāt—but because this group adhered to a belief that ‘Alī would
return from the dead in the manner most famously articulated by Ibn Sabaʾ at Madāʾīn. Ibn Sabaʾ, in this sense, is more like a mascot of an apocalyptic sentiment circulating among the forlorn partisans of ‘Alī rather than the founder of a movement or sectarian trend.

In the course of researching this study, I have also often been asked if the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition exhibits an intrinsically anti-Semitic scandalization of early Shiʿism—an anti-Semitism avant la lettre. The answer is again much more complicated than a simple yes or no. It is undeniable that in modern times the story has been used with such ends in mind, particularly in modern Salafī polemics against Shiʿism. This type of rhetoric has become all the more heightened in the recent context of the meteoric rise of Shiʿism’s importance for the geo-politics of the Middle East, but the alleged Jewishness of Ibn Sabaʾ and many of the doctrines attributed to him had an altogether different significance in the medieval context of ‘Abbāsid inter-sectarian polemical literature.

Thus, within the late antique and medieval contexts of the legend’s origin and evolution, accusations such as those found in the lore of the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition were widespread against members of all faith communities. Jews were often deemed bad guys to be mistrusted, but often not any more or less so than Christians, Magians, Manichaens, etc. For instance, the traditionalist opponents of another of early Islam’s sectarian movements, the Qadariyya—i.e., ‘the proponents of (human-kind’s) free-will (qadar)’—alleged that Qadari teachings had been introduced by a certain Maʿbad al-Juhanī as a Christianizing contagion. Only this time, the original malefactor was embodied by Maʿbad’s Christian teacher Sūsan. Similarly, the crucifixion of the prominent government official and Syrian Qadari Ghaylān al-Dimashqī by the Umayyad caliph Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik engendered a spectrum of legendary materials of a similar coloring, attributing Ghaylān’s deviations to his Coptic ancestry and portraying him as a figure soiled by an extremely dubious, personal religious history.

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2 E.g., see Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi famous rant against the Persians in Friedländer, “Heterodoxies (I),” 35 f.
4 Idem, Anfänge, 228 ff. Usually this appears in the accusations of a link between him and a false prophet known as al-Ḥārith ibn Saʿīd; on whom, see my, “The Prophecy
Muslim scholars were not the only individuals to engage in such myth-making either. The Nestorian author of the Syriac *Apocalypse of Sergius Bahirā*, for instance, went so far as to portray Muḥammad as the student of an Arabian, Christian ascetic who later fell under the perverting influence of the Jew Ka‘b al-Aḥbār. A version of the story appears in Jewish polemical writings, too. Byzantine iconophile historians frequently blamed both Byzantine and Muslim iconoclast policies on the invidious influence of Jews and Muslim converts in both realms. Jewish, Rabbinite scholars even employed this trope, too, and blamed the origins of the Karaite sectarians on the influence of a Muslim *faqīh* (commonly identified with Abū Ḥanīfa) on the alleged founder of the non-Rabbanite sect, ‘Anan. Not all of these legends derived from the paranoia of bemused sectarians either. Syriac historians record a number of instances in which Christian interlopers and charlatans interfere with and defraud the Jews of Syria and Northern Mesopotamia.

Yet, there are a number of accounts in the Ibn Saba’ tradition that do assign to Ibn Saba’ a profoundly misanthropic temperament and that regard this disposition as somehow arising from his ‘Jewishness’

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8 See Gil, *Palestine*, 778.
as such. In accounts of this type, Ibn Sabaʾ outwardly converts to Islam but remains a crypto-Jew who transforms himself into the mastermind of a sinister plot to literally infiltrate and destroy Arab-Muslim community from within. Accounts such as these undeniably exhibit an anti-Semitism akin to the form that pervaded the Greco-Roman world since Antiquity, and it is perhaps no surprise, therefore, that these feature most prominently in those modern accounts of Ibn Sabaʾ’s origination of Shiʿism that are the most unabashedly anti-Semitic.

The profoundest lesson of Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾiya, however, lies elsewhere, at least with regard to the history of the origins of Shiʿism. While Ibn Sabaʾ certainly did not mastermind the formation of a sect hell-bent on leading Muslims into perdition, the historical individual behind the lore probably did represent the sectarian, tendentious reverence for ‘Alī that one finds expressed in the raj’a archetype. This reverence very likely did not encompass a belief in ‘Alī’s divinity. What it did encompass, however, was an apocalyptic view of ‘Alī as some sort of messianic figure—perhaps even one of many such figures, as was common in late antique apocalyptic thought, and perhaps merely a forerunner type figure akin to Elijah. ‘Alī’s destiny was divinely given and, therefore, would not be thwarted by even his assassination. Glimmers and vestiges of this belief appear throughout the early Umayyad period but later explode onto the stage of history in full force by the time of the revolt of al-Mukhtar. This strongly suggests that this type of belief remained a salient feature of early Shiʿism, particularly in Kūfa, throughout the Sufyānid period and even into the early Marwānid period of the Umayyad dynasty. Historically, therefore, Ibn Sabaʾ ought to be regarded not as the founder of a sect but merely as one individual among many whose loyalty and devotion to ‘Alī remained undiminished by his death and who hoped for the miracle of his victorious return.

It is true that we cannot neither ascertain nor gauge the full extent to which this belief pervaded the early partisans of ‘Alī. Yet, most of the evidence indicates that it was moderately widespread, at the very least. We know very well, for example, that large numbers of ‘Alī’s partisans refused to be cowed into al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī’s acquiescence to the Umayyad dominance achieved by Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān or

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to toady and grovel before the Umayyad governors whom Muʿāwiya subsequently dispatched to Iraq. Their defiance resulted in the earliest series of Shiʿī martyrdoms, among whom persons regarded as ‘Sabaʿīs’ such as Ḥujr ibn Ṭadi al-Kindi, Mitham al-Tammār and Rushayd al-Hajari feature quite prominently. It is in the milieu of such hardened pro-ʿAlid partisans that sentiments and yearnings for ʿAlī’s leadership crystallized into an idea that went far beyond mere nostalgia and burgeoned into an apocalyptic hope in ʿAlī’s return, finding voice even in the arcane Qurʾānic discourse on the apocalyptic ‘Beast of the Earth’ (Ar. ḍābbā min al-ard). After his return, ʿAlī would usher in a victorious eschaton merely delayed—not prevented—by the blade of his Khārijī assassin. This is the belief of the historical Ibn Sabaʾ and his ilk at its most rudimentary form, and it is this belief (i.e., the rajʿa) that in fact never truly disappeared. History did not efface its memory and influence from Shiʿī religious belief; it caused the belief to morph, expand, and evolve in the protean pool of Shiʿī apocalyptic beliefs that influenced the panorama of Shiʿite trends that emerged out the Umayyad period.11

Most importantly, then, the insight to be gained from Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʿīya is that modern scholarship ought to banish for good that stubborn old canard that Shiʿism began, in the words of Bernard Lewis, “as a purely political movement.”12 Rather, Shiʿism from the outset merits to be painted vibrantly with the hues of the religious beliefs that saturated the era—above all those beliefs that had as their object of devotion a faith in ʿAlī to lead his followers to their salvific destiny: a world purged of injustice and inequity. That is, to find the fount of early Shiʿī belief, one must look to the well-spring of late antique apocalypticism from whose waters the early Muslims imbibed frequently and ardently.

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12 B. Lewis, The Origins of Ismāʿīlism: A Study of the Historical Background of the Fatimid Caliphate (Cambridge, 1940), 23. Halm was even so bold as to claim that “there was no religious aspect to Shiʿism prior to 680” in his Shiʿa Islam: From Religion to Revolution, trans. A. Brown (Princeton, 1997), 16 (cited in Crone, God’s Rule, 21).
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