3. Tracing The Fairytale: Explicit Athar Naming Ibn Al-Sawda

According to Sunni *'ulama*, 'Abd Allah b. Saba was "well-known" as *Ibn al-Sawda* – the son of the black woman. Imam Ibn al-Athir (d. 630 H), for instance, submits:

> وكان عبد الله بن سبأ المعروف بابن السوداء

He was 'Abd Allah b. Saba, *well-known* as *Ibn al-Sawda*.[1]

The only existing testimony concerning the colour of his mother, however, is the *mawdu'* (fabricated) report of Yazid al-Faq'asi. Therefore, there really is absolutely **NO** evidence that 'Abd Allah b. Saba had a black mother. As a result, there is no basis for naming him *Ibn al-Sawda* or for suggesting that he could be called that.

Secondly, there is equally no reliable proof that the contemporaries of 'Abd Allah b. Saba ever called him *Ibn al-Sawda*. Rather, his own existence at all is not even established through *any* authentic chain in the Sunni books! Logic demands that whichever Sunni wants to claim that 'Abd Allah b. Saba was *Ibn al-Sawda*, or that he was well-known as that, must do the following:

1. Provide at least a single authentic, explicit Sunni report proving the existence of a man called 'Abd Allah b. Saba.

2. Provide at least a single authentic, explicit Sunni *riwayah* showing that the man named 'Abd Allah b. Saba was addressed as *Ibn al-Sawda* by his contemporaries.

The truth is – no Sunni has *ever* been able to do either of the above, and no Sunni will be able to do so till the Day of *al-Qiyamah*. Therefore, as things stand, there is no valid Sunni evidence that a man named 'Abd Allah b. Saba *ever* existed, or that such a man was *ever* called *Ibn al-Sawda* by those who

knew him. With this background fact, we are good to proceed to some Sunni reports on the unknown son of the black woman!

Narration One

Imam Ibn Asakir (d. 571 H) helps us with the first of them:

> قال ونا سيف عن أبي حارثة وأبي عثمان قالا لما قدم ابن السوداء مصر عجمهم واستخلاهم واستخلوه وعرض لهم بالكفر فأبعدوه وعرض لهم بالشقاق فأطمعوه فبدأ فطعن على عمرو بن العاص وقال ما باله أكثركم عطاء ورزقا ألا ننصب رجلا من قريش يسوي بيننا فاستحلوا ذلك منه وقالوا كيف نطيق ذلك مع عمرو وهو رجل العرب قال تستعفون منه ثم يعمل عملنا ويظهر الائتمار بالمعروف والطعن فلا يرده علينا أحد

Sayf – Abu Harithah and Abu ‘Uthman:

When ***Ibn al-Sawda*** arrived in Egypt, he tested them. He was delighted with them and they were delighted with him. He presented *kufr* (disbelief) to them, and they distanced themselves from it. He then suggested sedition to them and they gave him hope. Then he began and slandered ‘Amr b. al-As, saying, “Why is his pension and salary the largest among you?” Will a man from Quraysh not be put forward to settle the matter between us?” They were pleased with that from him, and said, “How can we achieve this with ‘Amr when he is the man of the Arabs?” He said, “Seek his dismissal! Then we will play our role and begin to publicly command the good and to defame. At that time, no one will hold us back.”[2]

In this chain again is Sayf b. ‘Umar. We will only remind ourselves of the words of ‘Allamah al-Albani (d. 1420 H) concerning him:

> قلت: وفي هذا نظر، فإن أكثر الطرق المشار إليها مدارها على سيف بن عمر والواقدي وهما كذابان

I say: There is an error in this, for most of the indicated chains, their pivot is **Sayf b. ‘Umar and al-Waqidi, and they both were LIARS**.[3]

As such, the *sanad* is *mawdu’* and the *riwayah* is thereby a fabrication.

Ibn Asakir apparently assumes that the “Ibn al-Sawda” in the report was ‘Abd Allah b. Saba – which is why he has placed the *riwayah* under his biography of the latter. However, there is no valid proof that ‘Abd Allah b. Saba had a black mother, to begin with! Even Ibn Asakir makes no attempt to provide any, either! Meanwhile, decency and common sense dictate that whosoever seeks to rely upon the above report to prove the existence of ‘Abd Allah b. Saba – as Ibn Asakir did – must first do the following:

1. Bring convincing, solid proof that there was a man – at that period in time – named ‘Abd Allah b. Saba

who had a black mother.

2. Supply reliable evidence that the black mother of this man was well-known among the people, and was widely recognized as "*the* black woman".

3. Provide an authentically transmitted eye-witness testimony which establishes that the man – 'Abd Allah b. Saba – was also known as *Ibn al-Sawda*.

We are absolutely certain that no creature can fulfil any of the above conditions till the Hour! As such, we believe that anyone who claims that *Ibn al-Sawda* in the fabricated *riwayah* was 'Abd Allah b. Saba (whoever that was) – apparently with no valid evidence at all – is a bigot who only plays dirty games with the truth. Undoubtedly, there is zero evidence to establish that 'Abd Allah b. Saba was *ever* referred to or known as *Ibn al-Sawda* by any of his contemporaries. Therefore, it is clearly impossible to connect the above tale of Sayf to him. So, the report is completely useless and irrelevant, since it is strictly about a hopelessly unidentifiable character.

Narration Two

With the collapse of the first *riwayah*, Imam Ibn Asakir takes us to another:

> قرأنا على أبي عبد الله يحيى بن الحسن عن أبي الحسين بن الآبنوسي أنا أحمد بن عبيد بن الفضل وعن أبي نعيم محمد بن عبد الواحد بن عبد العزيز أنا علي بن محمد بن خزفة قالا نا محمد بن الحسن نا ابن أبي خيثمة نا محمد بن عباد نا سفيان عن عمار الدهني قال سمعت أبا الطفيل يقول رأيت المسيب بن نجبة أتى به ملببة يعني ابن السوداء وعلي على المنبر فقال علي ما شأنه فقال يكذب على الله وعلى رسوله

Abu 'Abd Allah Yahya b. al-Hasan – Abu al-Husayn b. al-Abnusi – Ahmad b. 'Ubayd b. al-Fadhl and Abu Na'im Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahid b. 'Abd al-'Aziz – 'Ali b. Muhammad b. Khazafah and Muhammad b. al-Hasan – Ibn Abi Khaythamah – Muhammad b. 'Abbad – Sufyan – Ammar al-Duhni – Abu al-Tufayl:

I saw al-Musayyab b. Najabah, bringing him – **that was *Ibn al-Sawda*** – while 'Ali was on the pulpit. So, 'Ali said, "What is his problem?" He replied, "He lies upon Allah and upon His Messenger."[4]

This report suffers from the same fatal defect as the first. We do not know who this *Ibn al-Sawda* was, and there is no reliable Sunni *riwayah* to connect him to 'Abd Allah b. Saba. Meanwhile, even if we assumed, for the sake of argument, that he was Ibn Saba, the *athar* still does not prove any of the primary Sunni claims about him. For instance, it does not prove that he was negative towards Abu Bakr and 'Umar, or that he believed in the succession or *'isma* (sinlessness) of Amir al-Muminin 'Ali, *'alaihi al-salam*. It also says nothing about 'Abd Allah b. Saba's alleged belief in *al-raj'ah* or his claimed participation in the bloody overthrow of 'Uthman b. 'Affan. It is therefore basically an utterly valueless

report, as long as Ibn Saba is concerned.

Narration Three

Imam Ibn Abi Khaythamah (d. 279 H) reports:

> حدثنا محمد بن عباد المكي قال نا سفيان قال نا عبد الجبار بن عباس الهمداني عن سلمة عن حجية بن عدي الكندي :رأيت عليا على المنبر وهو يقول من يعذرني من هذا الحميت الأسود الذي يكذب على الله يعني ابن السوداء

Muhammad b. ‘Abbad – Sufyan – ‘Abd al-Jabbar b. ‘Abbas al-Hamdani – Salamah – **Hujayyah b. ‘Adi al-Kindi**:

I saw ‘Ali upon the pulpit and he was saying, “Who will excuse me of this evil black container, who tells lies upon Allah?” **He meant *Ibn al-Sawda***.[5]

Imam Ibn Asakir has also transmitted the same *riwayah*:

> أنبأنا أبو عبد الله محمد بن أحمد بن إبراهيم بن الخطاب أنا أبو القاسم علي بن محمد بن علي الفارسي ح وأخبرنا أبو محمد عبد الرحمن بن أبي الحسن بن إبراهيم الداراني أنا سهل بن بشر أنا أبو الحسن علي بن منير بن أحمد بن منير الخلال قالا أنا القاضي أبو الطاهر محمد بن أحمد بن عبد الله الذهلي نا أبو أحمد بن عبدوس نا محمد بن عباد نا سفيان نا عبد الجبار بن العباس الهمداني عن سلمة بن كهيل عن حجية بن عدي الكندي قال رأيت عليا كرم الله وجهه وهو على المنبر وهو يقول من يعذرني من هذا الحميت الأسود الذي يكذب على الله ورسوله يعني ابن السوداء

Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Ibrahim b. al-Khattab – Abu al-Qasim ‘Ali b. Muhammad b. ‘Ali al-Farisi; AND Abu Muhammad ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Abi al-Hasan b. Ibrahim al-Darani – Sahl b. Bishr – Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali b. Munir b. Ahmad b. Munir al-Khalal – al-Qadhi Abu al-Tahir Muhammad b. Ahmad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Dhuhli – Abu Ahmad b. ‘Abdus – Muhammad b. ‘Abbad – Sufyan – ‘Abd al-Jabbar b. al-‘Abbas al-Hamdani – Salamah b. Kuhayl – **Hujayyah b. ‘Adi al-Kindi**:

I saw ‘Ali, *karamallah wajhah*, while he was upon the pulpit and he was saying, “Who will excuse me of this evil black container, who tells lies upon Allah and His Messenger?” **He meant *Ibn al-Sawda***.[6]

This *riwayah* is inconsequential as well. First, the phrase “He meant *Ibn al-Sawda*” is an interpolation (*idraj*) of one of the narrators. But, who was it? It could have been anyone from Muhammad b. ‘Abbad to Hujayyah. There is no explicit proof to establish that the interpolation came from Hujayyah, the eye-witness, and not from any of the sub-narrators. As such, there is no sufficient basis to rely upon it in identifying whoever ‘Ali allegedly called an “evil black container”. Moreover, even if we assumed, for the sake of argument, that it was Hujayyah who made the identification, then the report would still be of zero

value. The only thing it would have done in such a case is to show that Amir al-Muminin once called one *Ibn al-Sawda* a "black container" – nothing more, nothing less. Meanwhile, the exact identity of this *Ibn al-Sawda* remains unknown through any reliable Sunni report. Therefore, the report would still be redundant and unusable.

Narration Four

This is the fourth "evidence" of Imam Ibn Asakir, allegedly about 'Abd Allah b. Saba:

> أخبرنا أبو بكر أحمد بن المظفر بن الحسين بن سوسن التمار في كتابه وأخبرني أبو طاهر محمد بن محمد بن عبد الله السنجي بمرو عنه أنا أبو علي بن شاذان نا أبو بكر محمد بن جعفر بن محمد الآدمي نا أحمد بن موسى الشطوي نا أحمد بن عبد الله بن يونس نا أبو الأحوص عن مغيرة عن سباط قال بلغ عليا أن ابن السوداء ينتقص أبا بكر وعمر فدعا به ودعا بالسيف أو قال فهم بقتله فكلم فيه فقال لا يساكني ببلد أنا فيه قال فسيره إلى المدائن

Abu Bakr Ahmad b. al-Muzaffar b. al-Husayn b. Susan al-Tamar – Abu Tahir Muhammad b. Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah al-Sinji – Abu 'Ali b. Shadhan – **Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Ja'far b. Muhammad al-Adami** – Ahmad b. Musa al-Shatawi – Ahmad b. 'Abd Allah b. Yunus – Abu al-Ahwas – Mughirah – **Sabat**:

It reached 'Ali that *Ibn al-Sawda* was reviling Abu Bakr and 'Umar. So, he sent for him and called for the sword, or he decided to kill him. But, he was persuaded against it. Then he said, "He cannot live with me in the same town". So, he banished him to al-Madain.[7]

This report is very *dha'if*.

Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 463 H) has done a *tarjamah* for Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Ja'far b. Muhammad al-Adami but has mentioned no *tawthiq* for him whatsoever concerning his narrations. None exists in any other Sunni book either. By contrast, al-Baghdadi has actually recorded this under the said *tarjamah*:

> قال محمد بن أبي الفوارس سنة ثمان وأربعين وثلاثمائة فيها مات محمد بن جعفر الادمي وكان قد خلط فيما حدث

Muhammad b. Abi al-Fawaris said: "In the year 348 H, Muhammad b. Ja'far died, **and he used to mix things up in what he narrated**."[8]

This makes him *dha'if* as a narrator.

Besides, the main narrator of the report too, Sabat, is completely unknown in the Sunni books of *rijal*. No mention of him whatsoever is made. So, he is perfectly *majhul*.

But, Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 H) thinks it is not over yet:

> فروى أبو الأحوص عن مغيرة عن شباك عن إبراهيم قال: بلغ علي بن أبي طالب أن عبد الله بن السوداء ينتقص أبا بكر وعمر فهم بقتله فقيل له: تقتل رجلا يدعو إلى حبكم أهل البيت؟ فقال: "لا يساكنني في دار أبدا".

> وفي رواية عن شباك قال: بلغ عليا أن ابن السوداء يبغض أبا بكر وعمر قال: فدعاه ودعا بالسيف أو قال: فهم بقتله فكلم فيه فقال: "لا يساكنني ببلد أنا فيه" فنفاه إلى المدائن وهذا محفوظ عن أبي الأحوص وقد رواه النجاد وابن بطة واللالكائي وغيرهم

> ومراسيل إبراهيم جياد لا يظهر علي رضي الله عنه أنه يريد قتل رجل إلا وقتله حلال عنده ويشبه والله أعلم أن يكون إنما تركه خوف الفتنه بقتله

Abu al-Ahwas narrated from Mughirah **from Shibak from Ibrahim** that he said, "It reached 'Ali b. Abi Talib that 'Abd Allah b. al-Sawda was reviling Abu Bakr and 'Umar. Then he decided to kill him. But it was said to him, 'Will you kill a man who calls towards love of you, Ahl al-Bayt?' Then he said, 'He can never again stay with me in the same house.'"

In another report from Shibak, he said: "It reached 'Ali that *Ibn al-Sawda* hated Abu Bakr and 'Umar. Then he sent for him and called for the sword, or he decided to kill him. But he was dissuaded from it. As a result, he said, 'He can not stay in the same town with me.' So, he banished him to al-Madain." **This is accurately preserved (*mahfuz*) from Abu al-Ahwas**, and al-Najad, Ibn Battah, al-Lalikai and others have recorded it.

And the *marasil* (i.e. disconnected narrations) of Ibrahim are good (*jiyyad*).[9]

The pretensions of Ibn Taymiyyah nonetheless, both reports are unreliable! Imam Ibn Hibban (d. 354 H) tells us why:

> إبراهيم النخعي وهو إبراهيم بن يزيد بن عمرو بن الأسود أبو عمران كان مولده سنة خمسين ومات سنة خمس أو ست وتسعين

Ibrahim al-Nakha'i: he was Ibrahim b. Yazid b. 'Amr b. al-Aswad, Abu 'Imran. **He was born in 50 H** and died in 95 or 96 H.[10]

It is unanimously agreed upon within the *Ummah* that Amir al-Muminin 'Ali b. Abi Talib was martyred in 40 H, some 10 years before this Ibrahim was born! That means he was narrating as an eye-witness what occurred long before his birth! Yet, Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah – who apparently admits that the report

of Ibrahim is *mursal* (disconnected) – wants us to believe it was a "good" testimony. What happened to his common sense?

It gets worse with the *riwayah* of Shibak – which our Shaykh has graded as "correctly preserved". He too was not an eye-witness, and had only gotten his story – as he personally indicated – from Ibrahim! In fact, even though Imam 'Ali belonged to the first *tabaqah* (i.e. generation of narrators), Shibak only fell in the sixth – a fact which throws him far, far away from the time of the alleged incident! Yet, al-Hafiz (d. 852 H) has some further damaging information about him:

شباك ... الضبي الكوفي الأعمى ثقة له ذكر في صحيح مسلم وكان يدلس من السادسة.

Shibak ... al-Dhabi al-Kufi, the Blind: *Thiqah* (trustworthy). He is mentioned in *Sahih Muslim*. **He used to do *tadlis*. He was from the sixth (*tabaqat*).**[11]

The bottom-line of all this is obvious. Both Shibak and Ibrahim were completely cut off from the time of Amir al-Muminin. So, neither of them could have validly narrated about events which occurred during his *khilafah*. Secondly, in the chain of Ibrahim is Shibak, a *mudalis*, who has narrated from the former in an *'an-'an* manner. This is another, independent evidence of the unreliability of the chain of Ibrahim! So, both reports quoted by Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah are not just *dha'if* – they are *very* weak (*dha'if jiddan*) But, what have we got our Shaykh stating about them instead?! This is how some people behave when they become desperate about their fallacies.

Even then, these reports only show that one *Ibn al-Sawda* hated and reviled Abu Bakr and 'Umar during the *khilafah* of Imam 'Ali. It nowhere identifies him as Ibn Saba. Also, it does not confirm the Sunni claims that 'Abd Allah b. Saba believed in *al-raj'ah*, or in the *wisayah* or *'isma* of 'Ali, nor does it establish his guilty in the murder of 'Uthman.

1. Ibn al-Athir, Abu al-Hasan 'Izz al-Din 'Ali b. Abi al-Karam Muhammad b. Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim b. 'Abd al-Wahid, al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh (Beirut: Dar Sadir; 1385 H), vol. 3, pp. 144-145
2. Abu al-Qasim 'Ali b. al-Hasan b. Habat Allah b. 'Abd Allah, Ibn Asakir al-Shafi'i, Tarikh Madinah Dimashq (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr; 1415 H) [annotator: 'Ali Shiri], vol. 29, p. 6
3. Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Nasir al-Din b. al-Hajj Nuh b. Tajati b. Adam al-Ashqudri al-Albani, Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Sahihah wa Shayhun min Fiqhihah wa Fawaidihah (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'arif li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'; 1st edition, 1415 H), vol. 3, pp. 101-102, # 1110
4. Abu al-Qasim 'Ali b. al-Hasan b. Habat Allah b. 'Abd Allah, Ibn Asakir al-Shafi'i, Tarikh Madinah Dimashq (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr; 1415 H) [annotator: 'Ali Shiri], vol. 29, p. 7
5. Abu Bakr Ahmad b. Abi Khaythamah Zuhayr b. Harb, Tarikh Ibn Abi Khaythamah (al-Faruq al-Hadithiyyah li al-Taba'ah wa al-Nashr; 1st edition, 1424 H), vol. 3, p. 177, # 4359
6. Abu al-Qasim 'Ali b. al-Hasan b. Habat Allah b. 'Abd Allah, Ibn Asakir al-Shafi'i, Tarikh Madinah Dimashq (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr; 1415 H) [annotator: 'Ali Shiri], vol. 29, p. 8
7. Ibid, vol. 29, p. 9
8. Abu Bakr Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, Tarikh Baghdad (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah), vol. 2, p. 149, # 565
9. Taqiy al-Din Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Halim b. 'Abd al-Salam b. 'Abd Allah b. Abi al-Qasim b. Muhammad b.

Taymiyyah al-Harrani al-Hanbali al-Dimashqi, al-Sarim al-Maslul ‘ala Shatim al-Rasul (Saudi Arabia: al-Haras al-Watani al-Sa’udi) [annotator: Muhammad Muhy al-Din ‘Abd al-Hamid], p. 584

10. Abu Hatim Muhammad b. Hibban b. Ahmad al-Tamimi al-Busti, Mashahir ‘Ulama al-Amsar (Dar al-Wafa li al-Taba’at wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi’; 1st edition, 1411 H) [annotator: Marzuq ‘Ali Ibrahim], p. 163, # 748

11. Ahmad b. ‘Ali b. Hajar al-‘Asqalani, Taqrib al-Tahdhib (Beirut: Dar al-Maktabah al-‘Ilmiyyah; 2nd edition, 1415 H) [annotator: Mustafa ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Ata], vol. 1, pp. 410-411, # 2742
