

Chapter 1: The Figure Of Fatimah In History And Sunni Tradition

History is our way of giving what we are and what we believe in the present a significance that will endure into the future, by relating it to what has happened in the past.

– Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 114.

1.1. Sources For The History Of Early Islam And Biography Of Fatimah: Theoretical Considerations

Much literature has been produced over the past twenty years on the topic of early Islamic historiography, including its authenticity. The primary sources used in this chapter originated in the third century A.H., about one hundred and fifty to two hundred years following the death of Muhammad in 10/632. These sources relied on a pool of information handed down to the chroniclers from their akhbari (oral historian) predecessors, who were active as early as the second century A.H. These include the likes of Abu Mikhnaf (d. 157/773), Sayf ibn ‘Umar (d. 180/796) and Muhammad ibn ‘Amr al-Waqidi (d. 207/823), all of whom belonged to the Iraqi school of historians who composed monographs covering events of early Islam such as al-Husayn’s death at Karbala’ as reported by the pro-Alid Kufan, Abu Mikhnaf. ¹

It should be noted that there seems to be a tension between the early historians such as Abu Mikhnaf and Sayf ibn ‘Umar as being producers or composers of history or merely relaters of reports they are said to have transmitted from others. Whatever the case may be, the fact remains that they along with their interlocutors in the third century were steeped in an environment of traditionalism, piety and sectarianism which influenced their presentation of events, leading to numerous contradictory reports influenced by various ideological convictions.

By the third century, great compendiums were being produced which presented Islamic history as a unified movement beginning either with the pre-Islamic prophets or Muhammad’s prophethood and

continuing on to the Umayyad and 'Abbasid dynasties. As A.A. al-Duri points out, an important aspect of these third century works is concern with the Muslim "umma" or community. That is to say, by the third century a new cast of scholars, including the great al-Baladhuri (d.279/892), al-Ya'qubi (d.284/897) and al-Tabari (d.310/923), was at work producing histories that were not limited to a specific incident and took the umma as a foundational concept on the basis of which they set out to provide a grand, integrated narrative of Islam and Muslims. This venture included the construction of multiple and often conflicting narratives documenting the life of Muhammad and the political life of their pious forefathers who formed Muhammad's circle of companions (ashab)².

To be more precise, these historians set out to compose a history of the umma while also inheriting the material and methods of the older oral historians, which resulted in preservation of conflicting accounts. On the subject of the documentation of past events, Fred Donner aptly maintains that the universal histories and prosopographies (tabaqat works) of the third century A.H. (9th century C.E.) were partly an exercise in legitimization³. Therefore, when historians such as al-Baladhuri or al-Tabari wrote about the caliphate of Abu Bakr, they were also engaged in legitimizing his rule and authority.

Among the partly undigested material preserved by the third century historians and biographers are controversial reports indicative of a disorderly atmosphere in which Abu Bakr became caliph following the Saqifah meeting and objections of Ali, Zubayr and Abu Sufyan. Whether these events actually occurred in the way they have been presented is not the concern of this study. Their transmission alone is indicative of the creation of a historical record or the historical plausibility of such events occurring for those Muslim historiographers responsible for giving shape to it. This historical record is indicative of a continued negotiation with contradictory and varied accounts prior to a time in which Shiite-Sunni sectarian lines had been fully solidified and the companions had become beyond reproach in Sunni Islam. This record in turn is precisely what later Shiites would use to advance their doctrinal claims and justify the delegitimization of Sunni beliefs regarding the upright behavior of the sahabah.

These early rivalries amongst Prophetic companions would come, in fact, to function as an arché for both communities. An arché, according to Charles H. Long, is a point designated by a religious tradition as its "putative beginnings."⁴ The conflict and questions regarding the qualities of the various personalities and who was right or wrong thus became extremely important for both Sunnites and Shiites. Inevitably, views became homogenised and polarized on both sides. Nevertheless, fourth century (A.H.) Shiite theologians such as al-Shaykh al-Tusi and al-Sayyid al-Murtada were able to mine the early, still heterogeneous sources of Islamic history treated in this chapter to place prominent prophetic companions such as Abu Bakr and Umar in an unfavourable light.

For instance, al-Tusi draws on al-Baladhuri's *Ansab al-ashraf* for his claim that Umar and others participated in a plan to burn the house of Fatimah⁵. While al-Baladhuri, al-Tabari and the reporters they relied on may not have interpreted these events in the same light, the very presence of such accounts allowed an otherwise gnostic and electionist Shi'i doctrine to ground and anchor itself in Islamic

historiography, thus furnishing the Shiite critique of the sahabah with “putative beginnings” based on ‘Sunni’ historical sources. Abdelkader Tayob shows in his analysis of al-Tabari’s chronicle how careful analysis of an event and its presentation in an Islamic historical work can disclose the strategies of the author or compiler. These strategies are often influenced by the scholastic-theological debates of the author’s time. Tayob discusses how in the case of al-Tabari, his Sunnite tendencies led him to neutralize or minimize the blame placed on ‘Aishah for opposing Ali at the Battle of the Camel.⁶

In light of the above, I would again like to underscore that my concern is not to determine whether these voices actually existed in historical reality. Rather, my aim is to analyze the portrayal of a highly contentious and disputed past, the products of Muslim memory as recounted and preserved by the historians.

1.2. Fadak In History And The Test Of A Caliph

The ancient settlement of Fadak, located in a fertile area in the northern Hijaz close to the Jewish settlement of Khaybar, has a complicated history subject to contradictory statements which would become the subject of theological and legal debate in the centuries following the death of Muhammad in 10/632. Historians from the period of Ibn Sa‘d (d.230/845) and perhaps even earlier gave much attention to the history of this rather small piece of land⁷. It is reported that in the year five A.H. (627 C.E.) the Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayzah was expelled from Madina due to their violation of a treaty with Muhammad. Consequently, the Jews of Khaybar formed an alliance to defend themselves against an anticipated onslaught of the Muslims⁸. By the year 7 A.H., the Muslims attacked Khaybar, and after prolonged battle, the fortified town fell to Muhammad’s small army. In the wake of this disturbing news, the Jews of Fadak quickly agreed to conclude an agreement with Muhammad dividing the land and its crops. Al-Baladhuri (d.279/892) in his *Futuh al-buldan* states the following: “...half of Fadak was allocated to the messenger of God (nisf fadak khalisan li-rasulillah).⁹” According to these accounts and others, Fadak unlike Khaybar was obtained by means of a treaty and not warfare; therefore it was not to be treated as ghanimah (war booty) but rather as fay’, (a property acquired without recourse to warfare) and thus was considered to be the Prophet’s personal property¹⁰.

Muslim historians, however, paid little attention to Fadak in the Muhammadan era. It was only after Muhammad’s death that Fadak became a focus of attention, and the source material is mainly concerned with how the first generation of Prophetic companions, including Muhammad’s own family, were to handle his estate. I will demonstrate how various ‘Abbasid-era historians and their informants (ruwat) negotiated the presentation of this contentious and divisive conflict between those who formed Muhammad’s inner circle of confidants and followers.

Muhammad Ibn Sa‘d And His Al-Tabaqat Al -Kubra

The first and chief source to be examined regarding the controversy of Fadak is the extensive

prospographical work of Ibn Sa'd. Ibn Sa'd was born in Basrah in the year 168/784 and sometime during his career, he is said to have moved his intellectual activities to Baghdad where he served as a scribe to the famous Prophetic biographer, al-Waqidi. The fruits of his intellectual endeavours are summed up in his massive historical compendium which includes a biography of the Prophet, the companions and prominent reporters of hadith, in addition to having a separate volume dedicated to the wives, daughters and female companions. It is by far the earliest surviving work of its kind – produced over a century before al-Tabari's (d.310/923) multi-volume history¹¹.

Debate remains as to whether Ibn Sa'd can be classified primarily as an akhbari (historian) or a muhaddith (traditionist or hadith scholar). According to Ahmad Attasi, Ibn Sa'd was recalled by later scholars to be a historian and not a muhaddith, thus placing him in the company of prominent akhbaris such as Hisham al-Kalbi, al-Haytham ibn 'Adiyy, and al-Mada'ini, as well as his own student, the renowned historian and genealogist, al-Baladhuri¹². Ibn Sa'd's sectarian allegiances are clearly proto-Sunnite, as seen in his positive view of the companions of the Prophet and hadith folk such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal¹³. These sectarian tendencies are crucial in allowing us to situate his biographical compendium within the development of Islamic historiography and the spectrum of proto-Sunnite imagination of the formative period of early Islamic history.

Ibn Sa'd concludes his substantial biography (sirah) of Muhammad with the following subheading: "Mention of the estate (mirath) of the Messenger of God and what he left behind (ma tarak)". In this section, Ibn Sa'd presents a number of reports detailing the disputed ownership and rightful dispensation of Fadak in addition to other disputed properties such as Khaybar. The sheer length of this section is indicative of the historical-religious importance of this subject due to the issues that it symbolized in the scholarly circles of Baghdad in which Ibn Sa'd participated.

The first of the traditions indicative of a brewing conflict between Fatimah and Abu Bakr has been attributed to Umm Hani, the sister of Ali, a relative latecomer to Islam but nevertheless someone in a close relationship to the Prophet as his cousin and potential spouse, thus making her a trustworthy source of information and placing her in an ideal position to have witnessed these conversations.¹⁴ The use of specific transmitters alleged to have heard or seen certain contentious events is of great rhetorical value and is indicative of the public nature of such disputes. Umm Hani relates the following: "Fatimah approached Abu Bakr and asked him the following question: "Who shall inherit from you when you die?" Abu Bakr responds: "My son and my progeny!"¹⁵ It can be reasonably assumed that Fatimah is being portrayed as asking a leading question of Abu Bakr, in turn desiring that specific answer so that she could assert her right to inherit from her own father. Although punctuation did not exist in classical Arabic, the editor of the Arabic text has added an exclamation mark, perhaps to indicate the surprise of Abu Bakr at such an obvious question. It becomes clear that Fatimah had come to Abu Bakr with a caustic line of questioning.

Fatimah then responds: "So, how is it that you can inherit from the Prophet instead of us?" Abu Bakr

replies: “O daughter of the Messenger of God, I have not inherited from your father a [single] piece of land, or gold, or silver, or a slave boy, or wealth [money]¹⁶. Fatimah once again counters, exclaiming: “So the portion (sahm) of God [previously possessed by the Prophet] which He [God] has made for us and placed in our possession and those items left to us (safiyatuna), are now in your hand (bi-yadik)?” The report then ends with Abu Bakr quoting the Prophet: “I heard the Messenger of God say: ‘Verily it is a source of food [livelihood] bestowed upon me by God, and when I die, it shall be at the disposal of the Muslims.’”

The above passage and other similar ones yield several lines of inquiry. Firstly, Fatimah began her questioning by comparing her situation with that of Abu Bakr and his heirs with a perceived logic which stipulated that if Abu Bakr’s children could inherit from him, then why should the daughter of Muhammad not inherit from her father? Consequently, with regard to inheritance and its accompanying laws, Fatimah, (as illustrated in the Umm Hani report) saw no distinction between the case of Muhammad as a Prophet and Muhammad as a father. Furthermore, it demonstrates that early Muslim historiography depicted Fatimah as desiring to enjoy the same rights accorded to the children of Abu Bakr; thus by attempting to construct an analogy between Abu Bakr and Muhammad, she was implying that despite Muhammad being a prophet, the laws of inheritance must be universally applied. This comes across more clearly in another report included by Ibn Sa’d in which Fatimah upon being asked to specify her claims to her father’s belongings states the following: “Fadak and Khaybar and his [Muhammad’s] contributions (sadaqatuha) in Madinah – I shall inherit these (arathuha) just as your daughters shall inherit from you when you die¹⁷”

Another possible implication of Fatimah’s argument is a vital theological and legal motif (as per the above statement) dictating that Muhammad and his children are neither above the law nor excluded from the rights accorded to Muslims outlined in the Qur’an and established by Prophetic practice (sunnah). While this seems to be the assumption in Fatimah’s initial inquiry, it was not unusual for Muhammad as lawmaker and Prophet to have been exempted from certain Qur’anic injunctions or customary rules applied to the community. One example can be seen in Qur’an 33:50–52, in which God allows Muhammad to have more than four wives whereas others are limited to four. However, in this case, the exception regarding Muhammad’s license to marry more than four wives emanates from the Qur’an itself, and not from the hadith as in the case of inheritance disputed here.

To be more precise, it is this exception to the Qur’anic norm (allegedly originating from a hadith) which is at the heart of the dispute over Fadak. Therefore the implied logic behind the account presented by Ibn Sa’d is that Fatimah in her dispute with Abu Bakr did not question Muhammad’s authority to exempt himself from certain legal norms; rather, the question is if Abu Bakr can exempt Muhammad from a Qur’anic injunction on the sole basis of his (Abu Bakr’s) transmission of a prophetic hadith. Ironically, while Fatimah retains the honour and privilege of being the Prophet’s daughter, it was this very exceptional relationship which prevented her, according to the sources, from enjoying the same rights to inherit that ‘Aishah, the daughter of Abu Bakr, would enjoy.

The report states that Fatimah rather assumed that the portion of God (sahm Allah) referred to in the Quran was wealth and/or property granted exclusively to the Prophet. Therefore, this personal property was now to be transferred to Fatimah and her household, as made clear by the statement: “ja’alahu lana (He [God] made it for our possession) wa-safiyatuna (the possessions left to us)”¹⁸ These items granted by God to Fatimah are now, in her words, “in the hands” of Abu Bakr (allati bi-yadik), an expression seeming to imply usurpation. The telling or re-telling of Ibn Sa’d, however, reduces this usurpation of the rights of God and the Prophet in the eyes of Fatimah to a misunderstanding. This Ibn Sa’d does by having Abu Bakr introduce another line of reasoning, which is found and in fact highlighted in every report he presents concerning the dispute over Muhammad’s estate except the one attached to Umm Hani as previously mentioned.¹⁹

Prior to presenting the Fadak saga, Ibn Sa’d strategically opens his chapter on the Prophet’s inheritance with three traditions. He quotes one tradition in which Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (d. 124/742), the prominent hadith collector and early legal scholar from the Umayyad period, quotes Abu Bakr as stating: “I heard the messenger of God say: ‘We do not bequeath; whatever we leave is sadaqah (alms destined for the public treasury).’”²⁰

In a nearly identical report, Ibn Sa’d further makes evident his traditional Sunnite-historical position regarding the Prophet’s estate. In this report, he cites two isnads (chains of transmission) on the authority of Muhammad’s wife, ‘Aishah, and numerous prominent companions such as ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, al-Zubayr ibn ‘Awwam, Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas, and ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib, all of whom allegedly said (qalu) : The messenger of God said: “We do not bequeath; we do not leave anything except that it is sadaqah ”. For Ibn Sa’d’s second isnad, Malik ibn ‘Aws ibn Hadathan (d. 92 A.H.) is the sole narrator claiming to have heard this hadith from the aforementioned companions. He was apparently a companion of Muhammad; although there is dispute in the primary sources regarding this. Nevertheless, he is said to have reported numerous traditions from ‘Umar, ‘Abbas, and other Madinan emigrants (muhajirun); thus for Ibn Sa’d the aforementioned relation would put him in an ideal position to transmit this report. Either Ibn Sa’d or one of his many sources then inserted the following interpretive clause: “and he [Muhammad] intended that for himself”²¹

Before venturing into the matn (text of the report), the isnad in this case is of paramount importance in light of the array of authorities cited. Historical value aside, the rhetorical and dogmatic value of an isnad citing the most prominent men of early Islam, who for the Sunnite tradition constitute the inner circle of Muhammad’s trusted and God-fearing companions, cannot be overstated. By citing such an impressive isnad, Ibn Sa’d and/or his source(s) aimed to remove any doubts about the veracity of the claim that Muhammad in fact did not leave behind an inheritance to be claimed by anyone, including his family members, wives or friends. There can be no greater legitimation of an historical account for Sunnite Muslims than the agreement of such prominent personalities, especially on such controversial issues.

In this case, Ibn Sa’d (and/or his sources) even included prominent Hashimites in the isnad such as Ali

and al-‘Abbas to function as authorities verifying a tradition which they themselves (in addition to Fatimah) are said in other reports to have vehemently disputed. Despite this incongruity, traditions guaranteed by prominent ashab have the potential power to quell or nullify charges of usurpation levelled at Abu Bakr. However, this portrait of a sound and religiously legitimate caliphal decree regarding the Prophet’s inheritance is dubious at best. Thus the Fadak saga is replete with layers of conflicting and contested truths.

In spite of this, the accounts of Ibn Sa’d are multi-vocal and to an extent multivalent in their sectarian sentiment. Thus at this juncture, Ibn Sa’d brings in another character. Ja’far, the brother of Ali and intimate companion of Muhammad, states in a report that in addition to Fatimah initiating a claim for her inheritance to Abu Bakr, her great (paternal) uncle al-‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib did so as well.²² The report says that Ali accompanied Fatimah and al-‘Abbas in their audience with Abu Bakr, thereby setting the stage for a conflict between several prominent Hashimites and the non-Hashimite caliph (Abu Bakr).²³

Why did Ibn Sa’d include this report, even though it is much at variance with his general goal of vindicating Abu Bakr? He may have included it, as historians of his kind did, because it was circulating in connection with a controversy involving the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mun, a contemporary of Ibn Sa’d who in the year 210/825 convened a hearing regarding the disputed ownership of Fadak.²⁴

Both ‘Abbasid-era historiographers, al-Baladhuri and al-Ya’qubi, describe in an almost panegyric manner al-Ma’mun’s investigation as being motivated by utter sincerity and a desire to be near to God (taqarruban ila Allah) and the Prophet, not to mention an unadulterated quest for justice (al-‘adl). Therefore in an apparent move of appeasement towards the descendants of Fatimah, al-Ma’mun pronounced Fatimah’s claim to inheritance trustworthy and ruled that it was to be given priority on the grounds that she would have been the ideal individual to be aware of her father’s intentions regarding the utilisation and ownership of Fadak. Having explained his reasons, al-Ma’mun signed a caliphal decree returning Fadak to the descendants of Fatimah, and in doing so, passed an implicit negative judgement on Abu Bakr²⁵. The sources detailing al-Ma’mun’s return of Fadak do not mention the case of al-‘Abbas. However, by legitimating the claim of the descendants of Fatimah, the caliph was also conveniently legitimating the inheritance claim of his ancestor and source of legitimacy for the ‘Abbasid dynasty, namely al-‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib, the uncle of the Prophet. By placing al-‘Abbas in the role of plaintiff, Ibn Sa’d and/or his source make explicit what was implicit in al-Ma’mun’s decree.

According to Ja’far’s report, Fatimah, al-‘Abbas, and Ali were told that there was no inheritance for them to claim as the Prophet did not leave anything behind which did not now belong to the public treasury. In a further bid by Ibn Sa’d to secure legitimacy for Abu Bakr and bolster his caliphal authority, he alleges that after Abu Bakr, as is usually recounted, added the remark “and he intended that for himself”, he exclaimed: “Whatever the Prophet relied on for sustenance [to take care of himself and his dependents] is now upon me [to provide for].”²⁶

Here Abu Bakr asserts his authority by comparing himself to the Prophet, declaring that having ascended to the leadership role, he is now in charge of all of Muhammad's assets and consequently solely responsible ("it is now upon me") for its rightful dispensation exclusively for the welfare of the Muslim community. In another report, Abu Bakr vehemently reiterates his commitment to faithfully upholding the legacy of the Prophet by referring to the "Prophets do not bequeath" hadith and emphasizing that he is not altering the usage and dispensation of any of Muhammad's personal wealth and Madinan investments, that he is not administering Muhammad's assets in any way that Muhammad did not do so himself²⁷. In attributing such passionate commitment to the memory of Muhammad to Abu Bakr, the historical reports are able to defend him against if not absolve him altogether of the charge of dishonouring the prophetic legacy and sunnah. .

The Abu Bakr narratives also seem to be aimed at asserting the patriarchal authority of Abu Bakr over Fatimah. This is expressed in an unambiguous manner in an alternative report cited by Ibn Sa'd in which Fatimah demands her share of her father's estate. However, despite Fatimah's passive-aggressive language, Abu Bakr not only justifies denying her claim by citing the "Prophets do not bequeath" hadith, but also attempts to calm and subdue her in a paternal manner by stating: "Your father, by God, was better than me, and by God you are better than my daughters (anti wallahi khayrun min banati).²⁸" In fact, Abu Bakr in this narrative goes so far as to assure Fatimah (though only after citing Muhammad's injunction, "Prophets do not bequeath") that if she truly recalls her father giving her Fadak, he is ready to accept and trust her statement²⁹.

Reports such as these are an attempt to demonstrate piety and good-natured negotiation on the part of Abu Bakr, as well as to counter claims that Abu Bakr did not trust the testimony of Fatimah and questioned her credibility³⁰. Fatimah's claim is entirely undermined at this point, for her only response to Abu Bakr is that the elderly Umm Ayman informed her that Muhammad had given her Fadak³¹. This reply of Fatimah makes her seem submissive and unaware of the importance of this matter. It is implied that, despite being the daughter of Muhammad, she was not aware of her own father's will and estate but rather needed to be informed by Umm Ayman. Abu Bakr, however, is portrayed as tolerantly entertaining Fatimah's rather feeble claim by once again stating: "If you say you heard him [the Prophet bequeath you Fadak] then it is yours and I shall believe you and accept your statement." Fatimah again responds rather meekly by telling Abu Bakr that she has given him all the information she has.

The motif of a pious yet firm caliphal authority is more evident in this report than in any other included by Ibn Sa'd. Abu Bakr plays the typically male roles of qadi (judge) and leader (imam), while Fatimah is presented as a simple-minded female plaintiff in need of paternal guidance. Fatimah's femaleness becomes a negative factor in her negotiations with the wiser and older Abu Bakr, so that she is spoken to more like a child than fellow companion endowed with knowledge of the Qur'an and awareness of Muhammad's final wishes, even though Muhammad was her own father. Put differently, despite Fatimah being the daughter of Muhammad, her claim to knowledge of her father's final wishes is dismissed by depicting her as a young, emotional, and forgetful female treated lightly though indulgently by a wise

male elder.

The trope of a pious, mild mannered caliph also appears in reports in the work of Ibn Sa'd's student, al-Baladhuri. Here Fatimah is described as pre-empting Abu Bakr's request for a bayyinah (a piece of clear or decisive evidence) by having her husband Ali testify in support of her claim³². Abu Bakr, cast once again in the role of the righteous adjudicator, asks Fatimah to produce an additional witness. It becomes clear that a situation is rapidly unfolding that will undermine and embarrass both Fatimah and Ali. Fatimah brings Umm Ayman as her witness. Abu Bakr then immediately places another obstacle before Fatimah by declaring: "You must surely know, O daughter of the Messenger of God, that it [witness] is not [legally] permissible except with the testimony of two men or one man and two women." Fatimah, according to this report, "then went away."³³

This dramatic telling poses several complications. Firstly, assuming the compilers and/or writers of these reports were learned Muslims, why would they construct reports presenting Fatimah and Ali embarking on this petition knowing full well that the laws of Qur'anic testimony were not in their favour?³⁴ It seems unlikely that they were asserting that Fatimah and Ali had a low level of Qur'anic knowledge and had to be educated by Abu Bakr regarding due legal process. More plausibly, Ibn Sa'd or his sources are implying that Ali and Fatimah assumed that their qarabah (kinship and closeness) to the Prophet would not require them to bring forth the same proofs required of lay Muslims.³⁵ Furthermore, upon Umm Ayman's testimony being rejected, she is politely scolded by Abu Bakr for not following due process despite being aware of the rules. Once again we come across the portrayal of a feeble-minded or "typically feminine" Fatimah in the historical sources.³⁶

I cannot overemphasize the powerful and contentious nature of the gendering of Fatimah in the akhbari circles of the late second and early third century (A.H.). Fatimah is characterized in the Fadak reports as unsure of herself or even intellectually deficient, having to rely on the words of Umm Ayman and others and thus implicitly admitting that she is uninformed or ignorant of the Qur'anic laws of testimony. Furthermore, by having Fatimah rely on Umm Ayman to inform her of her right to Fadak rather than citing words spoken to her directly by the Prophet, the reports give the impression she had minimal political and religious value in the eyes of her father.³⁷

The proto-Shiite histories of al-Mas'udi and al-Ya'qubi record that in addition to Umm Ayman and Ali, Fatimah brought her children (al-Hasan and al-Husayn) as witnesses, only to have their testimony rejected by Abu Bakr as well³⁸. This seems designed to further emphasize the religious devaluation of the Prophet's household. The implications of these historical accusations are of great dogmatic import, further portraying a perception of a brewing political conflict between the Hashimites and Abu Bakr and his supporters in which the Hashimites accuse Abu Bakr of usurpation while he as the caliph of the Prophet (khalifat rasulillah) finds every possible means to undermine their claims and testimony. Unlike most akhbar which give Abu Bakr the last word, Ja'far's report, which is found only in Ibn Sa'd's multivocal prosopography, includes a rebuttal by Ali on behalf of his wife. In the Ja'far report, Ali is made

to cite Qur'an, 27: 16 which states that Solomon inherited (waritha) from David, as well as Qur'an 19:6 in which Zakariah asks God for a son who will inherit from him and the family of Jacob³⁹.

Abu Bakr then responds, rather ineffectively: "It is this way [i.e. as I have said], and you by God know what you know best [i.e. you are aware that the Quranic verses you have cited do not really apply]." Upon Abu Bakr's attempt to end the conversation, Ali continues to push the issue, exclaiming: "This is the book of God speaking (yantiq)". The assembled party, according to the narrative, remained quiet and finally dispersed."⁴⁰ Ibn Sa'd's inclusion of this report is clearly not in tune with his chief sentiments which seem to emphasize that the "Prophets do not bequeath" tradition is authoritative and an appropriate justification for Abu Bakr to deny Fatimah's claim to Fadak.⁴¹

In this case, the issue is the evidentiary value of the instances in the Quran in which the children of prophets (who happened to be prophets themselves) inherited from their fathers.⁴² It becomes apparent that Fatimah's demand for her inheritance as portrayed in Ibn Sa'd's *Tabaqat* is tied up with other doctrinal matters. It is no surprise that this report attributed to Ja'far portrays Ali in a positive manner. Ali is shown drawing upon his Qur'anic knowledge, confident in the belief that revelation must take precedence over hadith. There is an implicit accusation here of hadith forgery by Abu Bakr which would have had vast implications for the evolving doctrine of 'adalat al-sahabah or the irreproachable character of the companions which is of great importance for guaranteeing the integrity of Sunni texts and doctrines. I read the report in this way since the only possible implications are either that the Prophet was mistaken in his telling Abu Bakr that prophets do not bequeath to their families; or Abu Bakr misunderstood the Prophet; or lastly, that Abu Bakr invented the hadith as a justification for disinheriting Muhammad's kin. Ali's logic (as constructed in this report) is that since the Qur'an 'clearly' demonstrates that Prophets do in fact bequeath, then it is impossible for Muhammad to have contradicted the Qur'an and thus the hadith has been falsely attributed to him. The latter is most likely to be what the version of the narrative that includes Ali's rebuttal means to imply.

Here, however, we must ask why a historian such as Ibn Sa'd with his proto-Sunnite commitments would include reports that seem to undermine the nascent belief in 'adalat al-sahabah, which would have given the Shiites of his day justification for their repudiation of Abu Bakr. The answer to this question is unclear since we do not know exactly what the theological personality of Ibn Sa'd was; although his proto-Sunni sentiments are evident in his multi-volume compilation of the biographies of the companions and their traditionist successors. It is conceivable that, in the matter of Fadak at least, the *Tabaqat* had not completely succumbed to the influence of Sunnite apologetics and censorship aimed at elevating Muhammad's companions.⁴³

To conclude, Mahmoud Ayoub and Tayeb El-Hibri have connected the saga of Fadak with the disputed succession to Muhammad. For El-Hibri, it is inconceivable that these dramatic scenes are aimed at a mere financial dispute⁴⁴. Rather, the saga of Fadak is to be understood as a metaphor for the lands of the Muslim polity which Abu Bakr governed. Fatimah's demand for her inheritance was a test and

challenge of Abu Bakr's caliphal authority, and it is for this reason that the crafters of the abundant Fadak reports with their different layers of meaning produced multiple moral and legal justifications for the denial of Fatimah's inheritance. These justifications include Abu Bakr's fervent desire to follow the practice of the Prophet without compromise and his paternal solicitude for the financial security of Muhammad's family during his reign. For Sunnites, this event in its early 'Abbasid literary forms reflects the memory of a leader who strove to maintain the consensus and unity (jama'ah) of the nascent Muslim community and thus wisely countered the precarious claims of a confused woman who had not yet pledged allegiance to the new caliph and refused to do so for the rest of her short life⁴⁵. For the Shiites, the Fadak trope is of paramount importance, functioning, as I have suggested, as an arché by giving "putative beginnings" to very strong anti-establishment sentiments⁴⁶.

1.3. The Meeting At Saqifa And Its Aftermath

Immediately following the death of Muhammad in 623 C.E., the Madinan Helpers (Ansar), that is the native population of the town as opposed to the Emigrants (Muhajirun) from Mecca, gathered at the Saqifat Bani Sa'idah under the leadership of prominent companions and the chief of the Khazraj, Sa'd b. 'Ubadah, to nominate a successor to Muhammad from among themselves. In the aftermath of this meeting, the various muhajirun led by Abu Bakr and Umar decided to approach the Ansar to settle the matter of the succession. Umar at this juncture was informed that the Ansar had already attempted to 'pre-empt' the Muhajirun by selecting a successor of their own. Abu Bakr and Umar proceeded in a hurried manner to confront the Ansar and demand the right of the Quraysh to lead the new Muslim polity.⁴⁷ After some persuasive words from Abu Bakr and insistence by Umar, the Ansar agreed to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr at the Saqifah.

However, one barrier remained to the jama'ah (unity) of the Muslims so ardently desired by Abu Bakr and Umar⁴⁸. This obstacle consisted of a group of Muhajirun, including the likes of Ali and Zubayr, who were not present at the Saqifah but rather gathered in the house of Fatimah and refused to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr⁴⁹. Umar, according to the account, did not tolerate Ali's obstinacy. He proceeded to the house of Fatimah and Ali in a threatening manner with a wick (fatila) in hand⁵⁰. Upon arriving at the door, he was intercepted by Fatimah, who berated him: "O son of al-Khattab, are you going to burn my door down?" Umar is portrayed as responding in a confident manner, saying: "Yes, this is the strongest of what your father has brought (dhalika aqwa fi-ma ja'a bihi abuki)"⁵¹ As a result of the commotion, Ali came out and pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr⁵². Once again, prophetic precedent is introduced to subdue Fatimah's anger and frustration. In this case, Umar defends his actions by invoking the mission of the Prophet, insofar as the fire that he, Umar, was about to light was even stronger and of greater import than the message (I assume regarding hellfire) communicated by Muhammad via the Qur'an. Put differently, Umar is comparing the fire which he is about to light with that of the fire of hell which would engulf Fatimah and Ali and those gathered with him as a result of their refusal to pledge allegiance and prevent dissent (fasad) amongst the Muslims.⁵³

Furthermore, instead of using the term *nabi* (prophet), the reporter intensifies the personal nature of the confrontation by stating: *ja'a bihi abuki* (what your father has brought) instead of *ja'a bihi al-nabi* (what the Prophet has brought).

According to al-Ya'qubi, the confrontation was not limited to threats. Umar is further said to have conspired with Abu Bakr and a group of other like-minded individuals to attack (*hajamu*) the house of Fatimah. According to al-Ya'qubi's account, Ali decided to come out of the house to confront the mob charging at his door. Umar met him in front of the door, wrestling him to the ground, at which point the mob forcefully enters the house (*dakhalu al-dar*). In the midst of all this commotion, Fatimah hurries out, shouting: "By God you will get out, or I will uncover my hair, and I will certainly protest to God.⁵⁴" The inclusion of these rather extraordinary details by al-Ya'qubi should not be surprising in view of his well-known Shi'i sympathies.⁵⁵

Thus pseudo-Ibn Qutaybah in his version of post-Saqifah F-R tensions constructs a report which includes pro-Shiite details of an attack on the home of Fatimah, while also attempting to present the material in a way that does not cast events in terms of good and evil, but rather conflicting modes of early Islamic piety. The version of pseudo-Ibn Qutaybah can be characterized as attempting to affect a compromise between the anti-companion Shiite view and an outright Sunnite-like polemic presentation. In this lengthy account by pseudo-Ibn Qutaybah, it is recounted that after repeated attempts to summon Ali to the 'caliph of the messenger of God' (Abu Bakr), Umar eventually decided to send a mob to the home of Fatimah.⁵⁶ Upon hearing their clamouring voices, she began to shout: "O my father, O the messenger of God, what is this that has befallen us after you at the hands of the son of al-Khattab (Umar) and son of Abi Quhafah (Abu Bakr)." The mob outside the door heard the screams and tears of Fatimah, which prompted them to disperse with their hearts on the verge of breaking and their livers split [i.e. extremely emotional and sorrowful]⁵⁷.

The author of *al-Imamah wa al-siyasah* has taken the literary license to paint a picture of a pious first generation of Muslims placed in a very unfortunate situation, in which they find themselves enemies despite sharing a deep seated reverence and spiritual allegiance to their deceased Prophet. Chase Robinson in his lucid work on Islamic historiography describes the writing of Muslim history as taking place in a thoroughly traditionalist culture in which the past was held as a model of Islamic piety.⁵⁸

Consequently, the motif of mutual sadness, piety and sincerity between Fatimah and her foes tells us more about third and fourth century (A.H.) Sunnite religious-historical apologia than the past.⁵⁹ To be more specific, reports such as this are reflective of a Sunnite apologetic discourse, that is, by depicting the quarrelling companions as stricken with a mutual sense of grief and regret, the Sunnite historian is able to absolve all parties of direct blame. Notwithstanding the tears shed on both sides, pseudo-Ibn Qutaybah continues his rich literary account describing how Ali was eventually pulled out of his home and threatened with death⁶⁰. However, these threats were to no avail and Ali refused to pledge allegiance.

Following this failed attempt to coerce Ali, Umar and Abu Bakr decide to go to Fatimah with the intention of mending the tense situation, recognizing (so the text implies) that they had upset or angered her. After being refused entry by Fatimah, they eventually convince Ali to give them an audience with Fatimah. Once again, this pious attempt in seeming good faith is met with rejection in the most theatrical manner. It is said that when Umar and Abu Bakr finally entered upon Fatimah, she turned her face from them and even neglected to return their greeting of salam (peace). Abu Bakr, depicted here as wise and mild-mannered man, begins to plead with Fatimah, explaining to her that she is more beloved to him than his own daughter, 'Aishah, and that he never intended to withhold her rights to the inheritance of her father. Rather, he says, he was compelled to do so due to his unflinching pious commitment to follow the commands of the Prophet stipulating that whatever is left behind of Muhammad's estate is to go to the public treasury. Once again in a fashion similar to the Fadak reports, we are presented with a paternal and sensitive Abu Bakr who is ceaselessly trying to reason with a young and vengeful Fatimah. The motif of a sensitive and wise Abu Bakr might have helped to lend this otherwise pro-Shiite report a degree of acceptability in Sunnite circles.

However, it seems that nothing could change the heart of Fatimah, for she then goes on to 'emotionally blackmail' Abu Bakr and Umar by demanding that they accept her traditions from the Prophet to be trustworthy⁶¹. She then quotes the Prophet as saying:

Fatimah's satisfaction is my satisfaction, and the anger of Fatimah is my anger; whoever loves Fatimah, loves me, and whoever pleases Fatimah has pleased me, and whoever angers Fatimah has angered me.⁶²

Abu Bakr and Umar duly confirm the veracity of the Prophetic statement. However, the aggrieved Fatimah does not stop at that; she now goes on a tirade, condemning both of them and vowing to complain and testify to God and the Prophet regarding the manner in which they upset her. Abu Bakr then humbly beseeches God to be protected from His anger and the anger of Fatimah. This account seems to give credence to both Shiite and Sunnite views; Abu Bakr and Umar acknowledge the words of the Prophet, and in doing so treat Fatimah with certain degree of reverence. However, Abu Bakr's prayer for protection should not be misconstrued as indicating acquiescence to Fatimah's demands; rather, the narrative aims to demonstrate his humility and sobriety as her wise elder. His supplication for protection rhetorically neutralizes Fatimah's citation of the "Fatimah's satisfaction" hadith.

Thus we see that the narrative has been treated by pseudo-Ibn Qutaybah in a subtle manner to make it more digestible for both proto-Sunnites and proto-Shiites. The account is strategically conditioned by depicting Abu Bakr as speaking wise and conciliatory words, while the crowd is made to express their regret over the unfortunate altercation. Fatimah, on the other hand, is not depicted as being malicious (which would be unacceptable for the daughter of the Prophet), but a slightly stubborn and spoiled woman.

The question remains as to how a Sunnite such as pseudo-Ibn Qutaybah could include a damning

report of this kind and maintain his Sunnite scholarly credentials. Firstly, by demonstrating the obvious grief of Abu Bakr, the author is able to provide an image of a leader who implemented policies not for his own personal interest, but with the intention of serving God and honouring the memory of the Prophet. Thus, the effort of Abu Bakr is commendable despite the opposition he faced from Fatimah and Ali. Secondly, there were at this time degrees of reverence among Sunnis for the companions. Therefore, the Sunnism of pseudo-Ibn Qutaybah would not have been adversely affected by the writing of this kind of history. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, pseudo-Ibn Qutaybah most certainly did not interpret this conflict with Fatimah to indicate the everlasting damnation of Abu Bakr, but rather, a dispute between two sincere believers where the mild mannered Abu Bakr was forced to contend with angry and rancorous Fatimah, and in the midst of this anger she lashed out.⁶³

Sunnites such as pseudo-Ibn Qutaybah by the late third and fourth century A.H. had numerous Prophetic traditions in praise of Abu Bakr and Umar which could not be discredited by a single 'misunderstanding' with Fatimah⁶⁴. Both al-Tabari and al-Mas'udi include a report indicating that Abu Bakr regretted the unfortunate course of events following his election at Saqifah even unto his death. Al-Tabari includes a report on the authority of 'Abd al-RaHman ibn 'Awf in which Abu Bakr makes the following deathbed confession:

Indeed I do not grieve for anything in this world, except for three things which I did that I wish I had left aside, three things I left aside [yet] wished I had done, and three about which I wished I had asked God's messenger. As for the things I wish I had left aside, I wish I had not thrown open the house of Fatimah to reveal something, even though they had locked it with hostile intent.⁶⁵

It is apparent from this report that the conflict between Fatimah and the companions was a subject of immense importance, to the extent that al-Tabari, al-Mas'udi and other historians include it in the very personal and intimate matters surrounding Abu Bakr's last moments. It is evident that in the view of several early 'Abbasid-era historians as well as some muhaddithun (traditionists), the caliphate of Abu Bakr was a period of great test and trial or fitnah (my own words) in which the conflict with Fatimah figured prominently to the extent that it was at the very top of the dying caliph's list of regrets. Despite Sunnite efforts to neutralize the "persecution of Fatimah" incident and fold it into the tradition, it continued to be extremely sensitive. The incident became the subject of extensive sectarian polemics by the Imamiyah on the one hand, and the object of actual censorship in some Sunnite and even Shiite scholarly circles on the other.

For example, al-Sayyid al-Murtada uses the report cited above as a justification from 'Sunnite sources' for his inkar (rejection) of Abu Bakr's moral uprightness⁶⁶. On the Sunnite side, the prominent proto-Sunnite jurist and belletrist Abu 'Ubayd al-Salam (d. 224/837) removes this confession altogether, simply stating: "la uridu dhikraha- I do not wish to mention it."⁶⁷ On the other hand, the Shiite historian al-Mas'udi (d. 345/956) relates the entire confession, but not Abu Bakr's supposed frustration with the opposition he faced from Fatimah and Ali, which is replaced with a statement to the effect that Abu Bakr

went on to recall the issue at length.[68](#)

There is no way to know for certain why al-Mas'udi chose to shorten his account; however, being aware of its sensitive nature and that his history is not an atomistic work consisting of disparate akhbar but a composite piece of literature, he had the liberty to document events on his own terms without being accused of unfaithfully transmitting historical reports. One reason for this ambiguous rendition of events may have been that al-Mas'udi in his function as a historian of the 'Abbasid era would have been attached to the notion of a broader Muslim community, and thus may have had, despite his proto-Shiite sympathies, a catholic outlook which caused him to provide a more appeasing account.

To conclude my analysis of historical material pertaining to the Saqifah, the confrontational demeanour of Umar and to an extent Abu Bakr are justified by their pious and sincere desire to prevent dissension and disunity in the ranks of the Muslims, even if that entailed an attack on the house of Fatimah and Ali. Put differently, for Sunnite historians who chose to document and include this first fitnah of sorts, the ends had to justify the means. It is for this reason that the report describing Abu Bakr's regret over invading the home of Fatimah is followed by a narrative that highlights the unreasonable insistence of Ali, Fatimah and their partisans on withholding the pledge of allegiance and thus stoking dissent in the community.

Conclusion To Chapter One

In this chapter, I have attempted to shed light on the place of Fatimah in early Muslim historiography. I have not treated the primary sources as repositories of historical facts, but as the product of a highly contested Muslim memory. I demonstrate certain literary features and rhetorical tropes by analysing the various texts. Ibn Sa'd's al-Tabaqat al-kubra, the earliest surviving source of Islamic history which deals with the F-R conflict, clearly portrays it as a serious test of Abu Bakr's political and religious wisdom. Although Ibn Sa'd may be described as a proto-Sunnite, the proto-Shiite character of the account is intact, as if sectarian conflict had not yet made nuanced depictions of the personalities very problematic.

The majority of the reports, aside from that of Ja'far, portray Abu Bakr as a wise leader whose only intention was to preserve the memory and sunnah of Muhammad. However, numerous other reports by Ibn Sa'd along with those of his student al-Baladhuri betray their Sunnite commitments in the poor way they reflect upon Fatimah and Ali. The negative portrayal is, necessarily, very subtle and artful, and a careful reading of the texts is required to see its mechanisms and suggestions. One key "mechanism" is a highly gendered treatment of Fatimah as a weak female who seems unsure of her own claims. We will see in the next chapter how femaleness is turned to quite a different purpose by Shiites.

It becomes readily apparent that early Muslim historiographers present the events of Fadak and Saqifah as key turning points in Hashimite-caliphal relations. In the case of Saqifah and its dramatic aftermath, it is clear that the vast majority of second and third century A.H. Muslim historians and belletrists were of the belief that a conflict of some sort unfolded in and around the home of Fatimah and Ali. However,

these historical materials can be used to justify either Shiite rejection of prominent sahabah or Sunnite praise of Abu Bakr as a courageous and steadfast leader who guided the Muslims through a tumultuous time. Contrary to the assertion of Veccia Vaglieri, the preservation of this early 'Abbasid-era memory is indicative of Fatimah's immense political-religious importance in the chaotic succession to Muhammad and turbulent caliphate of Abu Bakr.

1. A.A. al-Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs*, trans. Lawrence Conrad (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 149.

2. Similar to al-Duri, Fred Donner characterizes al-Tabari's history as the manifestation of a master narrative animated by "organic historical explanation" indicative of God's guidance of the Muslim community. See Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998), 130. These ninth and tenth century histories documenting the life of Muhammad and the early caliphate cover primarily political or ummah-related events and actions of the companions such as battles, civil wars, economic policy, and matters of caliphal succession.

3. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 119.

4. See Charles H. Long as cited in Donner, 122.

5. Al-Tusi states the following after mentioning the conflict between Fatimah and Umar and the threat of burning her home: "And it is not for anyone to reject the report regarding that [the burning of her home] because we have demonstrated that this report is transmitted from a Sunnite perspective [a Sunnite chain of transmission and text] by means of al-Baladhuri and others." Talkhis al-shafi ed. al-Sayyid al-Husayn Bahr al-'Ulum (Qum: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyah, 1974), 3: 156.

6. Abdelkader Tayob, "Tabari on The Companions of the Prophet: Moral and Political Contours in Islamic Historical Writing," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119 no.2 (1999), 203-210.

7. See the article of Veccia Vaglieri in *Encyclopedia of Islam*. 2nd Ed. Brill Online, 2012, which takes full account of the primary sources.

8. Ibid.

9. Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-buldan* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hilal, 1988), 39. For a similar, corroborating report see: 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hisham, *al-Sirah al-nabawiyah* (Cairo: Mustafa al-Bani, 1936), 2:353.

10. The description of fay' can be found in Qur'an 59:6.

11. According to al-Tabari, Ibn Sa'd was among the first seven judges and scholars summoned to the court of the caliph al-Ma'mun in 218 /833 to be interrogated as a part of the Mihnah, which is indicative of Ibn Sa'd's prominent scholarly credentials and importance within Islamic intellectual history. See al-Tabari, *al-Tarikh*, 5: 188 as cited in Ahmad Nazir Attasi, "A History of Ibn Sa'd's Biographical Dictionary *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*," unpub. PhD diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 2009, p.65. The Mihnah or trial organized at the behest of al-Ma'mun was in actual fact an inquisition of sorts where various traditionists and theologians were interrogated regarding the nature of the Qur'an as the created or uncreated word of God.

12. See: Attasi, 65-69. Despite his prominence as a transmitter of traditions, he has been sparsely quoted in any of canonical Sunnite hadith works. Rather, it was his akhbari successors, al-Baladhuri and al-Tabari who made use of his traditions in their respective works. Therefore, for the intention of this chapter I will be treating Ibn Sa'd's *Tabaqat* as a work of history. For an extensive discussion see: Ibid, pp.65-77, and Michael Cooperson, "Ibn Sa'd" in *Arabic Literary Culture*, 500-925, ed. Michael Cooperson and Shawkat M. Toorawa (Detroit: Gale, 2005).

<http://go.galegroup.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH...> [1] onto _main&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w last accessed 12 June 2012. Note : This text was only available to me as an electronic resource and therefore I am only able to provide the html for this entry instead of specific page numbers.

13. Note, however, that it was not Ibn Sa'd himself who praised Ahmad ibn Hanbal, but his students, since he predeceased Ahmad. See: Attasi, 68 and also Cooperson,

<http://go.galegroup.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH...> [1] onto _main&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w

14. Debate remains as to whether the Prophet ever married his cousin, Umm Hani, the daughter of Abu Talib and the sister of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. Some reports indicate that the Prophet proposed to her in marriage in Mecca but Abu Talib wed her to

another man, or that the Prophet proposed to her a second time in Madinah. Therefore, the exact nature of the relationship between the two is dubious according to the sources. See: Muhammad b. Sa'd, 8: 120–121. Also see: Nabil 'Abd al-Qadir al-Zayn, al-Nisa' Hawl al-nabi ('Amman: Dar Usamah, 1998), 50–53. The third century A.H. Twelver Shiite traditionist, al-Barqi, in his biographical dictionary describes Umm Hani as *zawjat al-nabi* (wife of the Prophet). See: Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Barqi (d.274 A.H.), *Rijal al-Barqi* (Tehran: Tehran University, 1963), 61.

[15.](#) Ibn Sa'd, 2:240. This report from Umm Hani is also found in: al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-ashraf* ed. Suhayl Zakar and Riyad al-Zirkali (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1994), 1:519, and al-Baladhuri, *Futuh al-buldan*, 40. Also see: Abu Bakr al-Jawhari's (d. 323 A.H.) *Kitab al-saqifah* as preserved by Ibn Abi al-Hadid al-Mu'tazili, *Sharh nahj al-balaghah* ed. al-Shaykh al-Husayn al-A'jami (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'jami lil-Matbu'at, 2004), 16:350.

[16.](#) Ibn Sa'd, 2:240. The Arabic is as follows: "ya bint rasulillah inni wallahi ma warathtu abaki ardan wa-la dhahaban wa-la fiddatan wa-la ghulaman wa la-malan."

[17.](#) Ibn Sa'd, 2: 241.

[18.](#) *Ibid.* The term *safiyah* is the singular of *al-sawafi* which refers to the possessions of an individual which are normally transferred to the eldest son, which in this case is claimed by Fatimah in light of her being the only surviving child after her father's death, or at least the most prominent amongst the surviving daughters.

[19.](#) There is no way to know for certain why the Umm Hani report is the exception in this case. Perhaps Umm Hani has been ascribed pro-Fatimah tendencies which gave shape to her report; however this explanation is tentative at best.

[20.](#) *Ibid.*, 2:239. Micheal Lecker describes al-Zuhri as one of the founders of the Islamic tradition and source of prophetic hadith. There remains a heated debate as to whether much of the material attributed to al-Zuhri in-fact originated from him or has he been used as a convenient connection between first generation of Muslims and the authorities of the late Umayyad and early 'Abbasid periods. These details are significant so to contextualize the usage of al-Zuhri as a figure of prominence and authority (at least in some historical and hadith circles), in Ibn Sa'd's chain of transmission. See: M. Lecker, "al-Zuhri" *Encyclopedia of Islam*. 2nd Ed. Brill Online, 2012. Also see the extensive article dealing with al-Zuhri as a source of early Islamic jurisprudence: Harold Motzki, "the Jurisprudence of Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri A Source Critical Study" in *Analysing Muslim Tradition: Studies in Legal Exegetical and Maghazi Hadith* by Harold Motzki with Nicolet Boekhoff-Van der Vort and Sean W. Anthony (Leiden: Brill Publications, 2010), 1–46.

[21.](#) See: Ibn Sa'd, *ibid.* For a brief biographical sketch of Malik ibn 'Aws see: Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Isti'ab fi ma'rifat al-ashab* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1992), 3: 1346–1347. The interpretive phrase reads: "yuridu bi-dhalika nafsahu" There seems to be uncertainty as to whether this statement was added by Ibn Sa'd himself or is meant to belong to the numerous transmitters of the hadith. However, al-Jawhari (a Sunnite fourth century A.H. historian) has included a report from 'Aishah on the authority of Malik ibn 'Aws quoting the very same hadith followed by the above statement. Thus it could very well be Malik ibn 'Aws ibn Hadathan or others of the transmitters or scribes who added these words. See: Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 16:353.

[22.](#) Ibn Sa'd, 2:241. Al-Tabari and al-Jawhari both include a similar report on the authority of 'Aishah; see 3:207 and al-Jawhari as cited in Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 16:350. Similar to Ali and Fatimah, al-'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib is said to have had strained relations with the first three caliphs; see Andreas Gorke, "al-Abbasb. Abd al-Muttalib" *Encyclopedia of Islam*. 2nd Ed. Brill Online, 2012.

[23.](#) Ibn Sa'd, 2:241.

[24.](#) See: Ahmad ibn Abi Ya'qub Wadih al-Ya'qubi, *Tarikh al-Ya'qubi* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, n.d.), 2:469, and al-Baladhuri, 41. It should be noted that al-Ma'mun was not the first to reopen the matter, but rather his Umayyad predecessor, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz (Umar II) who according to al-Baladhuri re-acquired the entire land of Fadak at great expense from his brothers in the Umayyad clan who happened to be part owners of the property. Upon his purchase of their shares, he returned it to its original owners (the children of Fatimah). It is almost unanimously agreed by historians that Umar II in his brief caliphate attempted to institute a greater degree of religiosity. According to Marshall Hodgson, Umar II had close ties with various "piety minded" groups who desired to implement their understandings of the ethos of the Prophetic tradition and Qur'an. Despite being a Marwanid (known adversaries of the Shiites), 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz was able to put an end to the imprecation of Ali from the pulpits of the empire. His returning Fadak to Fatimah's descendents appears to be one manifestation of this policy of 'pious' appeasement. Further yet, the caliph was able to take this action in spite of being a direct maternal descendent of Umar I, who is depicted in the sources as having an acrimonious relationship with Fatimah in

addition to supporting Abu Bakr's refusal to grant her the land of Fadak. See: Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam* v. 1. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), 268–269. Also see: P.M. Cobb. "Umar (II) b. 'Abd al-'Aziz" *Encyclopedia of Islam*. 2nd Ed. Brill Online, 2012.

[25.](#) According to al-Baladhuri, there were multiple recipients amongst the descendents of Fatimah, two of them being; Muhammad b. Yahya from the family of Fatimah's grandson, 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin, as well as Muhammad ibn Yahya's half-brother, Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah. See: al-Baladhuri, 41. Historians are unsure of al-Ma'mun's precise motives for his various pro-Alid policies. Wilfred Madelung and Van Ess believe al-Ma'mun appointment of the eighth Shi'i Imam, 'Ali ibn Musa al-Rida, to have been motivated by an apocalyptic notion that his (al-Ma'mun's) caliphate would mark the end of the 'Abbasid caliphate; thus he wished, in preparation for that event, to 'righteously' appoint 'Ali ibn Musa as his successor to demonstrate his recognition of the injustice perpetrated on the descendents of Ali and Fatimah. Other historians are of the view that al-Ma'mun's pro-Alid policies were merely meant to appease a growing Alid opposition; thus the appointment of 'Ali ibn Musa in 203 A.H. as heir apparent and return of Fadak in 210 A.H. was a part of an overarching political strategy to maintain his own hold on power. For an in-depth discussion regarding the pro-Alid policies of al-Ma'mun see: Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mun* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26–37.

[26.](#) Ibn Sa'd, 2:240. The Arabic reads: *ma kana al-nabi yu'lu fa-'alayu*.

[27.](#) Ibid. The Arabic reads: *la a'mmalanna fiha bi-ma 'amila fiha rasulallah*.

[28.](#) Ibid. This can also be understood as a concession to the Shiite view that gives precedence to Fatimah over 'Aishah, the daughter of Abu Bakr and wife of Muhammad.

[29.](#) For Sunnite apologists, this statement would be understood to be an attempt at compromise on the part of Abu Bakr, whereas for Shiites, it would be deemed patronizing and insincere.

[30.](#) The tone of the report is emphatic as it has Abu Bakr state: *la-in qulti na'm- if you say yes (to your confirmation of the Prophet designating you as the recipient of the lands of Khaybar, Fadak and his wealth in Madina), la-aqbalanna qawlaki wa-asddaqannaki- I shall surely accept your statement and believe you.."*

[31.](#) The Arabic reads as: *"ja'atni Umm Ayman fa-akhbaratni annahu 'atani fadak"* Umm Ayman was a female servant (khadimah) of Muhammad whom he inherited from his father. She was also the wife of the prominent companion Zayd ibn Harith and mother of Usamah ibn Zayd. See: Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, 4:1965. She is also described as a thoroughly pious and Godfearing woman, see: Ibn Sa'd, 8:181.

[32.](#) See: al-Baladhuri, 40.

[33.](#) Ibid. Fred Donner aptly describes this incident as an instance of legitimating the notion that the testimony of a woman is worth half that of man's. Therefore, in Donner's estimation as well as my own, it is entirely possible that the episode of Fadak was used by al-Baladhuri and/ or the authorities he relied upon to give a concrete context to a legal principle, which even the Prophet's daughter was forced to succumb to. See: Donner, 212.

[34.](#) There remains disagreement amongst scholars of 'Abbasid-era historiography as to what extent later compilers such as Ibn Sa'd, al-Baladhuri, and al-Tabari created their own independent narratives. According to Fred Donner, by the early third century A.H. (9th century C.E.) the conflicting historical records were basically in place, leaving later compilers such as al-Tabari with the task of creatively selecting, editing, and arranging the mass of reports in their possession. See: Donner, 115.

[35.](#) Al-Sayyid al-Murtada has an extensive discussion on this subject in which he insists that the fourteen infallibles, unlike lay Muslims, are not required to produce bayyinah in order to support their claims or settle a dispute. See: al-Sharif al-Murtada, *al-Intisar* (Najaf: al-Maktabah al-Haydariyah, 1971), 237–239.

[36.](#) In another report, Fatimah apparently makes the mistake of bringing two women (Umm Ayman and RabaH, the client of her father) as witnesses only to be told by Abu Bakr that she requires one male in order to make their testimony legally viable. See al-Baladhuri *Ansab al-ashraf*, 1:79. Therefore, Fatimah's femaleness lent her a two-fold deficiency insofar as she is not only depicted as an intellectually weak female, but her testimony on its own as a female is not accepted.

[37.](#) Wilfred Madelung in his work on the early caliphate describes the actions of Abu Bakr (as presented in the historical material) as a "front of meticulously following the practice and precedents set by the Prophet in every respect..."; he goes on to use strong language in describing the actions of Abu Bakr as disinherit and demoting the Prophet's family from

their previously held position of religious purity and reverence. I would concur with Madelung's brief analysis of the sources dealing with Fadak from a literary and historiographical perspective. However, the purpose of this study (unlike that of Madelung) is not to discover a historical probability or truth, but to study the intellectual history of the Fatimah– Rashidun conflict. See: Wilfred Madelung. *The Succession to Muhammad: A study of the early caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 50–51. For a similar literary analysis of the sources, see: Tayeb El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History: The Rashidun Caliphs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 58–61.

[38.](#) See: 'Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawhar* ed. Asad Dagher (Qum : Dar al- Hijrah, 1989), 3 :237. Al-Ya'qub, relates that a group of descendants of al-Hasan and al-Husayn in their effort to retrieve the oasis of Fadak informed al-Ma'mun that (according to them) their grandmother, Fatimah brought forward four witnesses: Ali, al-Hasan, al-Husayn, and lastly, Umm Ayman. See: al-Ya'qubi, 2:469. This report seems rather far-fetched since Ali and Fatimah's two sons would have been children at the time. However, al-Ya'qubi relates that al-Ma'mun upon hearing this testimony summoned the jurists and enquired about the matter. The implications of the above Alid claim is that Abu Bakr not only rejected Fatimah's testimony, but summarily rejected the entire Ahl Al-Bayt (prophetic household), which would only serve to vilify him further in Shiite circles. See: al-Ya'qubi, 2:469.

[39.](#) The report is introduced above on page 21, note, 32. This is the only historical report I have come across in which Ali supports the cause of Fatimah using the Qur'an. As I shall demonstrate in chapter two, the Shiites and a few Sunnite authorities have located some of these Qur'anic arguments in Fatimah's famous speech known as, *Khutbat al-Zahra'*. See: Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 16:354–348.

[40.](#) Ibid.

[41.](#) This narrative can be situated within the development of the hadith tradition as a competing source of knowledge to the Qur'an. I cannot be certain if Ibn Sa'd believed that a hadith could trump a Qur'anic injunction, but it is clear that these debates were certainly occurring in his time, and he and his colleagues must have been aware of them.

[42.](#) This assumes that inheritance refers to material inheritance and not just knowledge.

[43.](#) Tayeb El-Hibri describes the stripping of political responsibility from the companions as a part of a sweeping Sunnite apologetic or, quoting Humphrey's description of Sayf ibn 'Umar's account of the caliphate of Uthman, "Sunday school history." See: Tayeb El-Hibri, 9.

[44.](#) Ibid, 60–61. Also see: Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam* (Oxford: One World, 2003), 21–22. Also see: Madelung, 49–51.

[45.](#) Thus some reports in the works of early 'Abbasid historians and hadith scholars describe Fatimah's reaction to Abu Bakr as "hajarathu", i.e. she abandoned him or renounced his leadership. See: Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani. *FatH al-bari bi-sharH saHiH al-Bukhari* (Riyad: Dar al-Tayyibah, 2005), 7:344, hadith 3093.

[46.](#) One such example of Fadak as a trope for anti-establishment sentiments can be seen in an episode in which the seventh Shi'i Imam, Musa al-Ka'im responds to Harun al-Rashid's offer to return Fadak by stipulating that its boundaries include Samarqand, Armenia, North Africa, and Aden. In other words, Fadak came to represent the lands of virtually the entire Muslim empire, and its loss became a metaphor for the usurpation of the rights of the Imams to the caliphate. See: El-Hibri, 357.

[47.](#) See al-Baladhuri as cited in Madeling, 30.

[48.](#) Umar is said to have justified the hurried and aggressive manner in which he procured the Ansar's allegiance for Abu Bakr in the following way: "By God, we did not find any case stronger than for the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr. We feared that if we left the people without a pledge of allegiance they might after our departure suddenly make a pledge. We would then have had either to follow them in [a choice] with which we were not pleased or not oppose them, and evil (fasad) would have resulted See: Madelung, 31. For the original Arabic, see: al-Tabari, 3:206. Mahmoud Ayoub cites the same passage from al-Tabari, but translates fasad as "dissension", which in this case would be more appropriate than Wilfred Madelung's translation. This is because, in the context of 2nd and 3rd century (A.H.) proto-Sunnite apologetics and polemics, the justification for Umar and Abu Bakr's seemingly impetuous handling of the Ansar was precisely to 'maintain' a consensus of the community, which was the key (in their view) to ensuring the salvation and prosperity of the young Muslim community following Muhammad's death. See: Ayoub, 16.

[49.](#) The report describes Ali as delaying in giving the pledge of allegiance– "qa'ada bay'at abi bakr." See: Al- Baladhuri,

Ansab al-ashraf (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1987), 585–589. The report is transmitted by Abu Nadra who passed away during the reign of the second caliph, Umar and, is described as reliable (thiqah) by al-Baladhuri's teacher, Ibn Sa'd See: Ibn Sa'd, 7: 156. The reliability Abu Nadra as confirmed by an authority such as Ibn Sa'd would have lent the report a degree of credibility for al-Baladhuri and those who considered Ibn Sa'd to be a historical authority on lives of the prophetic companions.

[50.](#) al-Baladhuri, 585–589.

[51.](#) al-Baladhuri, 585–589.

[52.](#) Ibid. Note: According to a similar version found in al-Imamah wa-al-siyasah of pseudo-Ibn Qutaybah, despite the threat to burn down the house, everyone came out to pledge allegiance except Ali. Ali's excuse was that he would not leave the house until he had compiled the Qur'an (ajma'a al-qur'an). See: pseudo-Ibn Qutaybah. al-Imamah wa-al-siyasah (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lami lil-Matbu'at, 2006), 22–24. The attribution of this work to Ibn Qutaybah has been contested by scholars of Islamic historiography. Shakir Mustafa in his extensive work on Muslim historiography asserts that al-Imamah wa al-siyasah has been wrongly attributed to the famous 'Abbasid-era Sunnite historian and theology, Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawari (d. 270A.H./883 C.E.). He maintains that the text contains information regarding the conquest of Spain and other information which the known authorities (mashayikh) of Ibn Qutaybah have not mentioned nor has Ibn Qutaybah mentioned or alluded to in any of his other historical works. Also, the author seems to be a Maliki whereas Ibn Qutaybah was a Hanafi. Furthermore, there is mention of the city of Marakesh, which was not built until the year 454 A.H., nearly two centuries after Ibn Qutaybah's death. There remains debate as to the dating of this work, as Margoliouth was of the view that it is from the third century A.H., while Shakir Mustafa dates it to the mid-fourth century A.H. See: Shakir Mustafa. al-Tarikh wa al-mu'arrikhun (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm lil-Malayin, 1978), 1: 242. The debate surrounding the authorship of al-Imamah wa-al-siyasah is crucial to this discussion for the reason that if an attack on the home of Fatimah is included in the work of a prominent proto-Sunnite scholar such as Ibn Qutaybah, this would lend the report an important degree of credibility in Sunnite circles as well as further polemical value for Shiites wishing to mine Sunnite sources.

[53.](#) My advisor, Lynda Clarke disagrees with my reading of the text.

[54.](#) Al-Ya'qubi, 2: 126. The Arabic reads: "wallahi la-takhrajanna aw la-akshifunna shi'ri la-'ajjinna ila Allah".

[55.](#) See, however, Elton L. Daniel, "al-Ya'qubi and Shi'ism Reconsidered" in 'Abbasid Studies ed. James E. Montgomery (Louvain: Peeters Publishers and Department of Oriental Studies, 2004), 209–231. Elton Daniel argues that although al-Ya'qubi undoubtedly had some Shiite inclinations, Orientalists should not dismiss the entire work as a Shiite history of little academic value, for most of the information contained in his history has been judged to be reliable when compared to other sources. In addition to this, al-Ya'qubi was not known to have worked in Shiite circles. Even if he did so, to what extent could we describe these circles as being Shiite and according to which reliable academic standard can we define and characterize Shi'ism of the early third century A.H.?

[56.](#) The reports tend to alternate between bayt fatimah and bayt 'ali. While both refer to the same home, it can be deduced that the use of bayt fatimah puts emphasis on the role of Fatimah in this conflict.

[57.](#) Pseudo-Ibn Qutaybah, 23.

[58.](#) Chase F. Robinson, Islamic Historiography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 92–93.

[59.](#) Ibid. Some poignant examples of Sunnite apologia can be discerned from al-Waqidi's description of all the sahabah as being Imams (leaders) in addition to al-Bukhari's and Ibn Abi Shayba's fada'il (merits) chapters on the sahabah. Despite the close to seven intra-sahabah conflicts which plagued the early Muslim community, al-Bukhari and other later tradionists were able to mend many otherwise damaged reputations of Prophetic companions by transmitting Prophetic traditions in their praise. It is through this incredible emphasis on fada'il al-sahabah that warring parties are rehabilitated in the eyes of the later Sunnite Muslim community who look to them as beacons of moral and ethical guidance. See: Scott C. Lucas, Constructive Critics, Hadith Literature and the Formation of Sunni Islam (Leiden: Brill Publications, 2004), 255–284. Therefore, the fada'il tradition amongst the Sunnites can be understood to be a form of apologetics designed to counter any appearance of misdeeds on the part of the sahabah.

[60.](#) An interesting conversation takes place between Umar and Ali in which Ali rhetorically asks Umar and those gathered with him: "Will you kill the servant of God and brother of the messenger of God (akh rasulallah)" to which Umar responds: "As for [you] being the servant God, yes [in spite of that we shall kill you]; as for you [claiming to be] the brother of the

messenger of God, no.” In other words, Umar took Ali by surprise in his denial of Ali’s brotherhood with Muhammad. See: Pseudo–Ibn Qutaybah, 23.

[61.](#) I have used the expression, ‘emotional blackmail’ to express what I take to be the intention implied by Fatimah’s leading question, though for Shiites, Fatimah’s questioning is likely to be interpreted as astute and politically expedient, considering the difficult situation she was put in.

[62.](#) Pseudo–Ibn Qutaybah, 23.

[63.](#) The reason for this is that, the text goes on to laud the accomplishments of Abu Bakr’s caliphate while also giving him the epithet of al–siddiq. See: Pseudo–Ibn Qutaybah, 24–28.

[64.](#) Ibn Qutaybah expresses the traditional Sunni position by describing Fatimah’s attitude towards Abu Bakr as the product of a misunderstanding between the two. In this case it was Fatimah who was mistaken in munazara (dispute) with Abu Bakr. See: Ibn Qutaybah al–Dinawari, Ta’wil mukhtalaf al–Hadith (‘Amman: Dar al–Bashir, 2004), 567.

[65.](#) The Arabic is as follows: “wadadtu anni lam akshif bayt fatimah ‘an shay’in, wa–in kanu ghallaquhu ‘ala al– Harb.” The translator of this volume of al–Tabari’s history indicates in a footnote that that there is more to this specific confession of Abu Bakr which seems to be concealed from the reader. The translator does not expand upon what exactly is being concealed, but I would assume that he referring to a conscientious lack of details and censorship on the part of al–Tabari (a Sunnite) regarding Ali’s refusal to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr that led up to the event of “throwing open the house of Fatimah.” See: al–Tabari, The History of al–Tabari: The Challenge to the Empires tr. by Khalid Yahya Blankinship (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 149. For the original Arabic edition see: al–Tabari, 3:430, also see: Abu al–Qasim Sulayman ibn Ahmad al–Tabarani. al–Mu’jam al–kabir (Baghdad: al–Jumhuriyah al–‘Iraqiyah, Wizarat al–Awqaf, 1984), 1:62, and Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, al–‘Iqd al–farid. (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al–Hilal, 1986), 4:93. For a censored version of the report see: Abu ‘Ubayd al–Salam. Kitab al–amwal. (Cairo: Maktabat al–Kulliyat al–Azhariyah, 1986), 193–194. The author of Kitab al–amwal replaces the entire confession regarding the home of Fatimah with: “la uridu dhikraha.” Al–Mas’udi includes a similar report albeit without any chain of transmission since the Muruj al–dhabab is a universal history (akin to Tarikh al–ya’qubi) composed as literature (adab). The account reads as: wadadtu anni lam akun fatashtu bayt fatima wa– dhakara fi dhalika kalamam kathiran– I wish I did not search the house of Fatimah, and he (Abu Bakr) recalled that [event] in many words [at length]. See al–Mas’udi, 2:301.

[66.](#) See al–Sayyid al–Murtada, al–Shafi fi al–imamah ed. al–Sayyid Fadil al–Milani (Tehran: Mu’assasat al–Sadiq, 2005), 59–113.

[67.](#) Abu ‘Ubayd al–Salam, Kitab al–amwal. (Cairo: Maktabat al–Kulliyat al–Azhariyah, 1986), 193–194.

[68.](#) There has been much discussion amongst scholars of Islamic historiography regarding how al– Mas’udi’s history should be approached in light of his alleged Shite sympathies and overall outlook on the writing of history. These concerns have been largely dismissed since al–Mas’udi’s Shiite leanings were mild and a comprehensive reading of his contribution to Islamic history would reveal that his work is not exceedingly sensational in terms of its sectarian rhetoric. For excellent scholarship on the above see: A Azfar Moin. “Partisan Dreams and Prophetic Visions: Shi’i Critique in al–Mas’udi’s History of The ‘Abbasids” Journal of the American Oriental Society 127.4 (2007), 415–427, and Tarif Khalidi, Arabic Historical thought in the classical period (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 131–136.

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