

**THE CONCEPT OF THE COLLECTIVE ʾADĀLA OF THE
PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S COMPANIONS**

Amr Ali Osman

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
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To my grandmother

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Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet Muḥammad's Companions as presented in the Sunnī sources. According to this concept, all the Companions are considered trustworthy transmitters and this is the guarantee of the preservation of the whole religion of Islam. From our examination of the early and medieval Sunnī sources, it is concluded that the root of the concept goes back to the early Murji'ī attitude towards the Companions, an attitude taken according to their definition of faith and the position of the grave sinner. Not only did the concept develop out of this, but it also rested on the same epistemological ground of Murji'ism; that is, certitude is the only valid basis of any attitude towards people and events. In order to block any attempt to question the *original 'adāla* of the Companions, the Sunnī scholars argued that it was confirmed by the Qur'ān and the Sunna. The accounts of the early schisms do not provide *certain* knowledge and thus cannot annul the original and certain *'adāla* of the Companions. This agrees with an established rule in Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism that everyone is *'adl* until proven otherwise (expressed in some Sunnī schools of law as the rule of *istiṣḥāb*). From all this, it is concluded that the Sunnī sources implicitly make a distinction between the *'adāla* and the *ta'dīl* of the Companions: whereas *'adāla* is the original state that is further confirmed by the Qur'ān and the Sunna, *ta'dīl* is the sound attitude that Muslims should take according to the rule of *istiṣḥāb* and, to a lesser extent, according to the view that the Companions were exercising *ijtihād*. This means that belief in the original *'adāla* of the Companions is the actual Sunnī doctrine. *Ta'dīl*, which is the main object of *ijmā'* in this issue, is an attitude based mainly on the ground of lack of certitude.

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Introduction

In spite of the fact that the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet Muḥammad's Companions (*aṣḥāb* or *ṣaḥābat al-nabī*) has assumed a great deal of importance in Sunnī Islam, it has not taken its proper attention from either modern Muslim scholars or in Western scholarship. Not only do we lack any study that thoroughly examines the concept and analyzes its foundations and usages, but we also have nothing about the hidden, or better, the *real* meaning of the concept in view of the Sunnī writings on it. This study is an attempt, therefore, to uncover the way this concept has been constructed.

Importance of the Concept

The concept of collective *ta'dīl* was established in early Islam as an article of faith. This is not surprising in view of the fact that the concept has been represented as the guarantee of the uncorrupted transmission of the whole religion. Like any other dogma, the Sunnī scholars have argued that the concept has always existed in Islam since the time of the Prophet and they have had no difficulty adducing evidence from the Qur'ān, the Sunna, and *ijmā'* to argue for this contention. The concept is also used in Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism as a tool, mostly one with a legitimizing role for the authenticity of the extant Ḥadīth corpus and for certain kinds of Prophetic traditions. The presentation and discussion of the concept in this context is not without difficulties. The Sunnī views differed on many aspects of the concept, not the least of which is the very definition of companionship (*ṣuḥba*), and, as a result, the number of Companions. In addition to what we have said so far about the importance that the concept has come to assume in Sunnī Islam,

the concept was used as a tool in Sunnī historiography to authorize or exclude certain accounts. It is no surprise then to find in a Sunnī historiographical work, or even in a creed, a summary of the way a Sunnī Muslim *should* perceive the events in which the early generation of Muslims were involved, and what to take for granted and what to reject at face value.

Modern Studies on the Concept

Towards the middle of the 20th century, a fierce debate erupted in Egypt when an Egyptian scholar, Maḥmūd Abū Rayya, published a work in which he questioned many of the taken-for-granted beliefs about the Prophetic Sunna. One of those beliefs was the concept of the collective '*adāla* of the Prophet's Companions. In his *Aḍwā' 'Alā al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*¹ and *Shaykh al-Maḍīra: Abū Hurayra al-Dūsī*², Abū Rayya casts harsh criticism on Abū Hurayra, the Companion whose narrations of Prophetic traditions greatly outnumber those of any other Companion (more than 5000 traditions). The religious circles in Egypt condemned the book and associated it with the growing movement that attempts to undermine the Prophetic Sunna and thus threatens Islam at large. In addition to the many responses that the publication of Abū Rayya's works instigated, at least five books were exclusively devoted to defending Abū Hurayra in particular.³ In all these, of course, the issue of the '*adāla* of the Companions was

¹ Maḥmūd Abū Rayya. *Aḍwā' 'alā al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*. Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1994

² Maḥmūd Abū Rayya. *Shaykh al-Maḍīra: Abū Hurayra al-Dūsī*. Al-Qāhira, n. p., 1965

³ See, for instance, 'Abd al-Mū'min Ṣalāḥ al-'Alī. *Diḡā' 'an Abī Hurayra*. Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Shurūq, 1973; Muḥammad 'Ajjāj al-Khaṭīb. *Abū Hurayra: Rāwiyat al-Islām*. Al-Qāhira: Maktabat Wahba, 1982; 'Abd al-Razzāq Ḥamza. *Zulumāt Abī Rayya*. Al-Qāhira: al-Maṭba'a al-Salafiyya, 1959; Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Ḥawwā'. *Abū Hurayra: Al-Ṣaḥābī al-Muṣtarā'alayh*. Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Sha'b, 1998; 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn. *Abū Hurayra*. n.p., n.d. For a complete discussion of the debate that Abū Rayya's book evoked, see G. H. A. Juynboll's *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt*. Leiden: Brill, 1969

addressed. What is noticeable, however, is that modern Sunnī writings about the concept do nothing more than copy what earlier sources and authorities said, and thus they hardly contribute to any scientific investigation of the concept. This should not be surprising for two main reasons. First of all, the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions has come to be considered a fundamental doctrine in Sunnī Islam. Such doctrines are not invented nor do they develop, believers in any faith would argue. Moreover, this doctrine is rooted in the Qur'ān and the Sunna of the Prophet; therefore, challenging it is a challenge to the Qur'ān and the Sunna. Finding this correlation between these two points is sufficient to block any real investigation. Second, the whole debate over the *'adāla* of the Companions was from the outset linked to what the orthodox scholars have seen as the attempt to undermine the Prophetic Sunna. Therefore, the whole debate over this point was prone to failure because it turned to attacks and counter-attacks and the concern was to defeat and defame the opponent rather than to candidly review the concept itself.⁴ For all this, the basic questions that might be raised concerning this concept, therefore, remain unanswered in modern Muslim scholarship.

The situation in Western scholarship is not much better. More than half a century ago, J. Schacht tried to draw the attention to the "important gaps" in the picture of Islamic theology that was based upon the then extant primary sources and the elaborations on them at his time. He then suggested that "to fill these lacunae, it is necessary either to discover new sources, or to draw new information from the sources already known."⁵ Unexplainably, Schacht's call, as far as the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet's

⁴ For a brief summary of one of these debates, see *ibid.*, chapter 6, pp. 55-61

⁵ J. Schacht. "New Sources for the History of Muḥammadan Theology." *Studia Islamica*, vol. I (1953), p. 4

Companions is concerned, went unheeded. Only two Western scholars have attempted to contribute to the study of the concept. Both studies, however, fail to provide a systematic view of the history of the concept and a deep appreciation of the significant items of information on it scattered in the Sunnī works. This may be due to the fact that such contributions were not sincerely devoted to the study of the concept *per se*, and it seems that their authors, discussing the concept in passing, only tried to fit the concept in a context that they had constructed for other purposes. This does not mean, however, that their contributions are superfluous or not useful. On the contrary, both accounts have contributed to the views presented here, if not in active and positive terms, at least in drawing the attention to the weaknesses of the methods they employed in studying the concept and of the accounts they put forward to explain it.

Aim of the Study

To put it in Schacht's terms, we can say that this study aims at filling, at least partly, one of the lacunae in Islamic studies. By confining itself solely to the study of the concept, this study tries to avoid the weaknesses of other attempts and to build upon their strengths. We are concerned here with answering specific questions about the concept. Put more realistically, we are concerned with answering questions that the extant primary sources might be able to answer.

Wondering about the definition of the concept, we might ask what did the early Sunnī scholars really *mean* when they argued that all the Prophet's Companions were 'udūl? Did the 'adāla here resemble the 'adāla of other transmitters of Prophetic Ḥadīth? In view of the fact that sometimes we find

the Sunnī sources discussing the *'adāla* of the Companions and at other times their *ta'dīl*, it does not seem pedantic to ask whether this was a genuine and conscious distinction they made. Moreover, did they have any idea in mind when they made such a distinction? But who is to be considered a Companion in the first place? Was there a unanimous agreement on a definition of companionship (*ṣuḥba*)? If not, how did the Sunnī sources, if ever, tackle this? We might also ask about the incentives that might have instigated the Sunnī scholars to introduce the concept. Did this have anything to do with earlier discussions about the involvement of some of the prominent Companions in the early schisms (*fitan*)? Why were the Sunnīs very keen to argue that all the Companions were *'udūl*, while it was not unpalatable for other sects to abuse some or most of the Companions? We can also ask questions about the grounds on which the Sunnī scholars argued for the concept. How much was the Qur'ān helpful in this respect? How often was it employed and what kind of verses were used? How did the Sunnī scholars deal with the verses that might contradict the view of the Companions they wanted to construct and put forward? What role did the Prophetic Ḥadīth play in the argument about the concept? How consistent, if at all, was this concept with other beliefs the Sunnīs held either about credal issues or about the criteria of eligibility for Ḥadīth transmission? These are the kinds of questions that this study seeks to answer.

Division of the Study

This study starts with a brief introduction to *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl*, one of the sciences of Ḥadīth under the rubric of which the concept of *'adāla* is

mostly discussed. Following that, an overview of what could be collected about the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions from the primary sources at our disposal will be given. The earliest works that have survived are consulted and works as late as the 10th/17th C. are also checked. The analysis of those sources, apart from disclosing to us what is behind the concept, has referred us back to early Islamic history. It has referred us to the schisms in which the Companions took part, and which determined the way later Muslim sects looked to them.

It seemed to me likely from the outset that the origin of the concept of collective *ta'dīl* was to be sought in one of two contexts: the context of the early sectarian milieu and the context of Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism. The first context had to do with the conflicting views of early Muslim sects on the early events of the Muslim community, and consequently on the Companions who were involved in those events. My assumption was that earlier generations of Muslims would naturally look back to the times of the Prophet and his Companions, if not initially as a source of guidance and legitimization, at least out of mere curiosity. After the death of the Prophet, events did not follow in a smooth way. Disagreements among the members of the early Muslim community arose on the first day of the Prophet's death. Shortly after that, a civil war erupted in Arabia which had been almost subdued by the Prophet. The third successor of the Prophet, 'Uthmān Ibn 'Affān, was assassinated by groups of Muslims from different places of the ever-growing Muslim empire, and the legitimacy of the leadership of the fourth successor, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (from the Sunnī point of view), seems to have been questioned and even unacknowledged by many Muslims, amongst whom were some prominent "Companions." Two battles—the Battle of the

Camel in 36/656 and the Battle of Şifḫīn in 38/658—were fought and thousands of Muslims were killed. The seeds of schism grew and Muslims were grouped in mutually exclusive sects. The state, established by the triumphant party and its allies in the schisms, was not a neutral party in that sectarian milieu. In addition to the military coercion it exercised, theological legitimation for the Umayyad Caliphate was needed and different Caliphs had different techniques for achieving that. Reference to the early events, of which the Umayyad Caliphate itself was a result, was thus inevitable. Whether ‘Uthmān ruled justly or highhandedly and whether he was justly or wrongly killed; whether the early community (the Companions, to be precise) sinned when they denied ‘Alī his alleged right to the leadership of the community and whether he was really supposed to be the legitimate successor of the Prophet; whether he knew the murderers of ‘Uthmān or not, and whether he was justified in accepting the arbitration at Şifḫīn or not, were all questions that the early Muslim community must have had to answer. And most early Muslims did have opinions. We could then argue that the views on the Companions and the positions that the various groups of early Muslims adopted towards the early events were the main ground on which different early Muslim sects were established. This assumption was not erroneous but it was unfounded at the time. This study will show that the concept of the collective *ta’dīl* of the Prophet’s Companions not only developed on the basis of earlier opinions that the proto-Sunnīs had, but also used many of the tools and relied on the same grounds as “proto-Sunnism.”⁶

The second context suggested at the beginning of our research was the context of Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism and the disagreements of the early Muslim

⁶ By “proto-Sunnism” I generally mean the early version of what has become later to be known as Sunnī Islam.

jurists and schools of law over the authenticity and usage of the Prophetic Ḥadīth and the assessment of the different kinds of chains of transmission. This context, however, fails to provide answers for many of the questions about the origin of the concept and how it has been developed. This context, as this study hopes to show, could only have played a role in the development of the concept, but it cannot account for its introduction. This study seeks to demonstrate that by a close reading of the early and medieval Muslim discussions and presentations of the concept, it can be argued that the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet Muḥammad's Companions is not in fact a *belief* in their *'adāla* rather than a *position* or an *attitude* they adopted towards them. This is what is really meant by *ta'dīl*. That position was consistent with the earlier position the Sunnīs took concerning the status of the Companions, a position which was in turn consistent with other beliefs they maintained. That position is very reminiscent of the position of the Murji'a, from whom the Sunnī scholars probably adopted the epistemological ground on which their attitude towards the Companions and the concept of collective *ta'dīl* were built. Tools and ideas taken from Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism were used and applied to put the concept in its final shape.

From this brief discussion, it should be clear now that this study makes a distinction between two phases in the development of the concept of collective *ta'dīl*, the earlier of which paved the way to the later. However, and perhaps paradoxically, the study starts with the second phase; i.e., the later in chronological order. This, nevertheless, should not be surprising given that the bulk of the sources that are of direct relevance to the study of the concept of collective *ta'dīl* belong to the second phase. We only went back to the early events when the sources instructed us to do so. In the

conclusion, the whole picture that the study has drawn will be constructed, but finally in order.

This study is therefore divided as follows. In the first three chapters, the concept of collective *ta'dīl* is to be studied and analyzed as represented in the Sunnī works on or pertaining to the concept. Chapter one gives a summary of the kinds of Muslim sources used in this study in addition to a presentation and a critique of the Western contributions to the study of the concept. In chapter two, a linguistic definition of *'adāla* and *ta'dīl* is offered in addition to their technical use in *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl*. In chapter three, a detailed examination of the content of the Sunnī sources will see what can be inferred from them. Chapter four goes back in history to the early schisms and the early Muslim views on them. Since the main hypothesis is that the proto-Sunnī stance was based on Murji'ī ideas, it was to the early Murji'ī primary sources that we had to resort. Putting the concept in its appropriate wider theological context made it necessary to draw the link between the concept and other "Sunnī-Murji'ī" beliefs. A general conclusion at the end of the study will rearrange the ideas put forward in the earlier chapters to provide a consistent view of how the concept might have come into existence.

The system of transliteration used in this study is generally that of the new edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (hereafter *EI²*).⁷ The only exceptions are q for k, and j for dj. Conversion from the Hijrī calendar to the Christian calendar is made according to G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville *The Muslim and Christian Calendars*.⁸ Throughout the study the Hijrī and Western dates are given respectively separated by a slash. Qur'ānic verses

⁷ *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition. Leiden: Brill, 1954-2002

⁸ Freeman-Grenville. *The Muslim and Christian Calendars*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963

are translated from Arabic to English according to Mohammad Marmaduke Picktall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*⁹ with some changes when thought necessary for a better revealing of the meaning of the Qur'ānic text quoted.

⁹ Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. New York: New American Library, n.d.

Chapter One

A Review of the Sources

Information about and discussion of the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet Muḥammad's Companions are scattered in a wide variety of early and medieval Muslim sources. The concept has been established as an article of faith in Sunnī Islam and thus it exists in many Sunnī creeds. In creeds, doctrines are usually stated but not necessarily argued for; in heresiographical works, however, dogmas and beliefs of other sects are refuted and the heresiographer's own creed is always explicitly or implicitly defended and justified. It should not be surprising to find Prophetic traditions that deal with the Companions in the major canonical compilations. Although those compilations only provide traditions or anecdotes about the Companions, some of them have shown a good deal of significance in the study of the origin and development of the concept of collective *ta'dīl*. The concept of collective *ta'dīl* has also come to play a very important role in Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism, which only points to the importance of the concept in Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism and should not be taken as an evidence for a link between the development of Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism and the origin of the concept. Therefore, almost all works on the Ḥadīth sciences (*'ulūm al-ḥadīth*) address with varying length and depth the concept of collective *ta'dīl*. The same applies to the biographical lexica, the authors of some of which, especially those devoted solely to the biographies of the Companions, also referred to the concept mostly in the introductions of their works. In some of the works on the sources of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) the concept is also addressed and discussed as part of the theorizing about the role of the Prophetic Ḥadīth or Sunna as a source of Islamic law. The concept is also discussed, as much as employed as a tool of either endorsing or rejecting

certain historical accounts, in many Sunnī historiographical works, especially with reference to the events that took place in the early Muslim community. In view of this wide range of sources, the following review has no claim to comprehensiveness or exhaustiveness: it is only a list of the works that were consulted to see how they, if ever, contribute to the development of the concept. For many reasons, however, some of them proved to be useless for our purpose. Therefore, only those works that are thought to present a contribution to the concept in the subsequent stages of its presentation by the Sunnī scholars will be analyzed. It should be noted that the following sources will be analyzed in chapter three in their chronological order rather than thematically.

Among the earliest creeds we have is Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭahāwī’s (d. 321/933) *al-‘Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya*.¹ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/936), the famous Mu‘tazilī convert to Sunnism, compiled *al-Ibāna ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyāna* to present and argue for his new creed.² The celebrated 8th/14th C. Sunnī scholar Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1327) has *al-‘Aqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya*.³

As for the heresiographical works, we have Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī’s *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa-Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*; ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī’s (d. 429/1037) *al-Farq Bayna al-Firaq wa-Bayān al-Firqa al-Nājiya Minhum*⁴; ‘Alī ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī’s (d. 456/1064) *al-Fiṣal fī al-Ahwā’ wa-’l-Milal wa-’l-Niḥal*⁵; and Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad al-Shahrastānī’s (d. 548/1153) *al-Milal wa-’l-Niḥal*⁶. The famous Mu‘tazilī scholar Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1011) also compiled

¹ *EF*², vol. X, pp. 101-02. s.v. “al-Ṭahāwī.”

² *EF*², vol. I, pp. 694-95. s.v. “al-Ash‘arī, Abū ‘l-Ḥasan.”

³ *EF*², vol. III, pp. 951-55. s.v. “Ibn Taymiyya.”

⁴ *EF*², vol. I, p. 909. s.v. “al-Baghdādī, ‘Abdu ‘l-Ḳāhir.”

⁵ *EF*², vol. III, pp. 790-99. s.v. “Ibn Ḥazm.”

⁶ *EF*², vol. IX, pp. 214-6. s.v. “al-Shahrastānī.”

al-Tamhīd fī al-Radd 'alā al-Mu'aṭṭila wa-'l-Rāfiḍa wa-'l-Jahmiyya which can be classified as either a creed or a heresiographical work.⁷ Unfortunately, the way these works are structured makes it almost impossible to benefit from them. The authors of these works give their opinions on the Companions only when they comment on certain stories or anecdotes. Incorporating their contributions, if any, would expand this study beyond its allowed length.

As far as traditions, Prophetic and non-Prophetic, are concerned, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) wrote *Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥāba*, a fairly big work where he collected all the Prophetic and non-Prophetic traditions in his age that praise the Companions.⁸ In the two most famous Sunnī compilations, the two *Ṣaḥīḥs* of Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870)⁹ and Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī (d. 261/875)¹⁰, we have chapters that list traditions and anecdotes about the Companions. Related to this group of works is Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī's (d. 276/890) *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth fī al-Radd 'alā A'dā' al-Ḥadīth* where he seeks to efface the contradictions between some seemingly contradictory Prophetic traditions.¹¹

According to the Muslim sources, the first to compile a work on the sciences of Ḥadīth was Abū Muḥammad al-Rāmhurmuzī (d. c. 360/971) in the fourth century of the Hijra.¹² After his *al-Muḥaddith al-Fāṣil bayna al-Rāwī wa-'l-Sāmi'*, al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī (d. 405/1014), the well-known traditionist and Ḥadīth scholar, wrote his *Ma'rifaṭ 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*.¹³ The fifth century of the Hijra witnessed the work of the

⁷ *EF*, vol. I, pp. 958-59. s.v. "al-Bāḳillānī."

⁸ *EF*, vol. I, pp. 272-77. s.v. "Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal."

⁹ *EF*, vol. I, pp. 1296-97. s.v. "al-Bukhārī."

¹⁰ *EF*, vol. VII, pp. 691-92. s.v. "Muslim ibn al-Ḥadīdjādī."

¹¹ *EF*, vol. III, pp. 844-47. s.v. "Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī."

¹² *EF*, vol. VIII, pp. 420-21. s.v. "al-Rāmhurmuzī."

¹³ *EF*, vol. III, pp. 82-83. s.v. "al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī."

celebrated Ḥadīth scholar and historian known as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071).¹⁴ His *al-Kifāya fī 'Ilm al-Riwāya* is considered the earliest comprehensive work on the subject. In the seventh century, a more comprehensive work on the subject was written by the Egyptian Ḥadīth scholar Taqī al-Dīn Abū 'Amr, widely known as Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245).¹⁵ His work—*'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, which is widely known as *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ*—is regarded as the most comprehensive of all and the few works that were compiled thereafter are only considered commentaries on it as we will see later. The most important of those commentaries is Ibn Kathīr's (d. 774/1343) *Ikhtisār 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*.¹⁶ Finally, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/ 1497) wrote his *Fath al-Mughīth bi-Sharḥ alfiyyat al-Ḥadīth*.¹⁷ *Tadrīb al-Rāwī* was the work on Ḥadīth Sciences of the prolific 9th-10th/15th C. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).¹⁸ Fortunately, most of these works are at our disposal and are indispensable for this study.

Another important source of information on the subject is the biographical lexica, amongst the earliest of which at our disposal is Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī's (d. 327/939) *Taqdimat al-Ma'ārif*, which is the introduction to his general biographical dictionary *al-Jarḥ wa-'l-Ta'dīl*.¹⁹ After that, many works that were devoted solely to the biographies of the Companions were compiled and naturally they give a brief reference to the concept of collective *ta'dīl* in their introductions. According to *EI*² Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Sulaymān al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 297/909) was the first one to compile a work on the role of the Companions as Ḥadīth transmitters. No manuscript of this work is listed in Fuad Sezgin's

¹⁴ *EI*², vol. IV, pp. 1111-12. s.v. "al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī."

¹⁵ *EI*², vol. III, p. 927. s.v. "Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ."

¹⁶ *EI*², vol. III, pp. 817-18. s.v. "Ibn Kathīr."

¹⁷ *EI*², vol. VIII, pp. 881-82. s.v. "al-Sakhāwī."

¹⁸ *EI*², vol. IX, pp. 913-16. s.v. "al-Suyūṭī."

Geschichte Des Arabischen Schrifttums (GAS), we are told. The earliest work at our disposal that has the *ṣaḥāba* in its title is Muḥammad ibn Ḥibbān's (d. 354/965) *Tārīkh al-Ṣaḥāba Al-ladhīna Ruwiya 'Anhum al-Akḥbār*. In the fifth century of the Hijra, Abū 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1071) compiled his *al-Istī'āb fī Ma'rifat al-Aṣḥāb*. Two centuries then lapsed before 'Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233) compiled his *Usd al-Ghāba fī Ma'rifat al-Ṣaḥāba*. The last biographical lexicon that has been compiled was Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's (d. 852/1449) *al-Iṣāba fī Tamyīz al-Ṣaḥāba*.²⁰

Many works on *uṣūl al-fiqh* have survived. The earliest is the *Risāla* of the celebrated Sunnī scholar Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820). We also have *al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām* by Sayf al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233).²¹ Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī has a work bearing the same title as al-Āmidī's. Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī, known as Imām al-Ḥaramayn (d. 478/1085), wrote *al-Burhān*²² and his famous disciple Muḥammad Al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) wrote *al-Mustaṣfā fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh* in addition to his famous *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* where he addresses a wide range of issues.²³ Jamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Ḥājjib (d. 646/1248) also wrote his *Muntahā al-Wuṣūl wa-'l-Amal fī 'Ilmay al-Uṣūl wa-'l-Jadal*.²⁴

A review of Western scholarship on the concept

As it was noted before, Western scholarship is inexplicably reticent about the Sunnī concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet Muḥammad's Companions. In some works it is absent where it would have a great deal

¹⁹ *EF*², vol. II, p. 462. s.v. "al-Djarḥ wa 'l-Ta'dīl."

²⁰ *EF*², vol. VII, p. 517. s.v. "Ridjāl."

²¹ *EF*², vol. I, p. 434. s.v. "al-Āmidī."

²² *EF*², vol. II, pp. 605-06. s.v. "al-Djuwaynī."

²³ *EF*², vol. II, pp. 1038-42. s.v. "al-Ghazālī."

of relevance. Michael Cook's *Early Islamic Dogma* is an example.²⁵ At our disposal is a Ph.D. dissertation which addresses the attitude of the Shi'ī Muslims towards the Companions.²⁶ No similar work is devoted to the study of the Sunnī attitude. As we have mentioned before, only two western scholars have endeavored to account for the emergence of the concept. Below is a presentation of their contribution followed by a critique of the ideas they put forward.

The first work is G. H. Juynboll's *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth*.²⁷ What follows is an attempt to reconstruct an argument based on the somewhat scattered ideas Juynboll gives on this issue (which he discusses in about 10 pages). Juynboll tries to associate the appearance of the concept with the attempts of the traditionists²⁸ to curb the process of Ḥadīth fabrication at the end of the second century "with the general awareness that mendacity in Ḥadīth transmission had grown to dangerous proportions."²⁸ Those traditionists had to have a say on, among other things, the deteriorating reputation of Abū Hurayra, the Companion whose name is associated with alleged Prophetic traditions more than any other Companion, and who, according to Juynboll, "had to suffer the heaviest attacks."²⁹ This was not restricted to Abū Hurayra, Juynboll states, as "the Companions have, from the very beginning, been exposed to disparaging remarks."³⁰ The ground was paved for that since the Companions got involved very early in schisms and mutual cursing

²⁴ *EF*, vol. III, p. 781. s.v. "Ibn al-Ḥādīb."

²⁵ M. Cook. *Early Muslim Dogma*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978

²⁶ E. Kohlberg. *The Attitude of Shi'ī Muslims to the Companions*. Oxford: Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1973

²⁷ G. H. A. Juynboll. *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance, and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 199

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 201

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 201

became widespread. "This political cursing became in due course something which was also associated with lack of reliability in Ḥadīth transmission," Juynboll contends.³¹ This atmosphere made it possible for Abū 'Awāna al-Waḍḍāḥ ibn 'Abd Allāh (d. 176/792) to compile a work entitled *Ma'āyib Aṣḥāb Rasūl Allāh*.³² "But gradually," Juynboll points out, "all the Companions were exonerated and this resulted in the doctrine of the collective *ta'dīl* which was formulated in its definitive form sometime towards the end of the third/ninth century."³³ He also adds, relying on a single passage in Ibn Ḥibbān's *Kitāb al-Majrūhīn*, that Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890) was responsible for the introduction of the adage of collective *ta'dīl* and that his son "promoted this opinion by incorporating it in the introduction of his *Taqdima*."³⁴ This adage, Juynboll argues, legitimized the *tadlīs* of the Companions (i.e. when a Companion does not identify exactly whether he has heard a tradition from the Prophet or from a source which he does not name) on the ground that all the Companions were '*udūl*. It had also another use in that it justified a tradition with a chain of transmission in which the Companion is missing on the ground that an unknown Companion was just as reliable as one mentioned by name thanks to the adage of collective *ta'dīl*.³⁵

Yet Juynboll does not account for the "gradual" process of exonerating the Companions, nor does he explain why it was vital for the Muslims to exonerate the Companions. Even when he mentions how the adage was made use of, he does not explicitly state that it had been introduced for those particular purposes. Yet in spite of the ambiguity of Juynboll's treatment of the subject, what is certain is that he links the

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 201

³² *Ibid.*, p. 201

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 201

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 194

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 201

subject with the emergence of (Sunnī) Ḥadīth criticism and suggests that the development of the concept may have been associated with the efforts of the *rijāl* critics to exonerate Abū Hurayra in particular.³⁶

The second Western work that has shown interest in the subject is Eerik Dickinson's *The Development of Early Sunnite Ḥadīth Criticism: The Taqdimā of Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī*.³⁷ Here Dickinson makes it explicit that the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions was part of the general development of Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism. Two attitudes towards the Prophetic Ḥadīth developed in early Islam. The first was that of those who were very strict in accepting the authenticity of Ḥadīth and were very close to rejecting the Ḥadīth altogether, without actually stating that, as Dickinson points out. These are referred to as *ahl al-ra'y* or *ahl al-kalām*.³⁸ The second attitude was much more lenient towards and dependent on the Prophetic Ḥadīth but it split in its own turn into two opposing factions. The first faction sought to "thread their way through the contradictory ḥadīth by rational means." To this faction belongs al-Shāfi'ī, his disciple al-Muzanī, Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī, and al-Ṭabarī, all of whom compiled works that ventured to efface apparent contradictions in the contents of some Prophetic traditions while maintaining their authenticity.³⁹ The second was that of the Ḥadīth critics to whom Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī belonged.⁴⁰ Dickinson argues that in the *Taqdimā*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim was very much concerned with legitimizing his methodology of Ḥadīth criticism by projecting it back to earlier authorities.⁴¹ According to Dickinson, that methodology involved three

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 192

³⁷ E. Dickinson. *The development of Early Sunnite Ḥadīth Criticism: The Taqdimā of Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī*. Leiden: Brill, 2001

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4. By that time, we can infer, the authority of Ḥadīth was difficult to challenge.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-10

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-8

sets of evidences: testimonial, biographical, and documentary. The last set is what interests us here for it is in this context that Dickinson tries to account for the emergence of the concept.

Dickinson explains that Ḥadīth critics were faced by three types of chains of transmission. In the first one the lines of transmission did not converge, and here a tradition was evaluated by collating different narrations of the tradition in addition to the evaluation of the transmitters on intrinsic as well as extrinsic grounds.⁴² The second case is when the lines of transmission converged on a single transmitter which, for the critics, suggested a likely case of forgery because it meant that only one student narrated a traditions from his teacher, which is not likely and in most cases led to the rejection of the tradition.⁴³ The third case is when the lines of transmission converged on a gap and here the critics were confronted with all sorts of interrupted chains of transmission. Dickinson gives a detailed study on how the Ḥadīth critics used to deal with that problem. The focus was mainly on the chain of transmission itself hoping that they could discover a defect in it or, if not, declare it sound. In this respect they used many techniques such as evaluating the cohesiveness of the chains of transmission, examining the extrinsic information they had about the transmitters, using the death dates at their disposal to evaluate the chains of transmission, and scrutinizing the wording of the chain of transmission to see how each transmitter narrated from his source.⁴⁴

One of the cases that caused a serious problem to the Ḥadīth critics was when the chain of transmission read: "X narrated *from* Y." The problem here is that the word "from" (*an*) does not necessarily prove that X heard the tradition directly from Y, a case which Dickinson calls

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 83-104

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 106-18

“audition.” “From” allows for the possibility that there was an intermediary between X and Y. This intermediary, being a *majhūl* (unknown), can very easily be unreliable. Two attitudes developed in respect to this point. The first was that of Muslim, the author of the famous *Ṣaḥīḥ*, who argued that contemporaneity was sufficient to legitimize a chain of transmission that contains “from.” Muslim rejected the stipulation that in order to legitimize a chain of transmission, it must contain unequivocal statement that the transmitters met with each other. According to Dickinson, Muslim thought that this restriction was “at once too lax and too strict.” Too lax because it “does not guarantee that any particular transmission is unmediated” on the ground that the fact that X met Y does not necessarily suggest that all X’s transmissions from Y are unmediated. And too strict because it would eventually lead to the rejection of many traditions, some of which are “universally reckoned authentic.” A famous case of this is when a Successor (*tābi*) transmits *from* a Companion.⁴⁵ Dickinson says that the Ḥadīth critics, who were keen to “introduce greater rigor into Ḥadīth criticism” to legitimize their methodology, rejected Muslim’s objections regarding “from.” While his first objection, that the stipulation was too lax, “fell on deaf ears” as Dickinson puts it,⁴⁶ his second was dealt with by the introduction of “the new dogma which decreed that all of the earliest Muslims were to be considered reliable for the purpose of Ḥadīth transmission.”⁴⁷ Dickinson then quotes a passage from Ibn Ḥibbān’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* where he argues that since all the Companions are declared by God to be “above weakness attaching to them” there is no harm in accepting a tradition from a Companion in which he does not make it clear that he heard it from the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-21

Prophet.⁴⁸ Dickinson also argues that “the introduction of the dogma of the collective reliability of the earliest Muslims . . . seemingly must be ascribed to Ibn Abī Ḥātim”⁴⁹ on the ground that it is here that the “earliest explicit formulations” are to be found.⁵⁰ This new dogma “allowed the term ‘from’ to be more strictly interpreted, but rendered the matter virtually meaningless by neutralizing its effect in sphere (*sic.*) where it would have been the greatest, namely in the transmission of the earliest Muslims,” he concludes.⁵¹

There is no doubt that Dickinson’s contribution to the study of the concept of collective *ta’dīl* of the Prophet’s Companions is a major step in understanding the origin and development of the concept. However, it is not adequate. Dickinson’s theory cannot explain the fact that the concept appears in al-Ṭaḥāwī’s creed in a way that is far from being developed (al-Ṭaḥāwī died in 341/952 and Ibn Abī Ḥātim died in 327/938). This suggests that Ibn Abī Ḥātim may have been responsible for the elaboration of the concept and how it is to be used in Ḥadīth criticism. But to say that he was responsible for its introduction would necessitate that al-Ṭaḥāwī discusses it in a way similar to that of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, which is not the case [we also need to know why al-Ṭaḥāwī was prepared to incorporate the concept into his creed]. This means that al-Ṭaḥāwī knew about the concept from another source. Moreover, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, according to Dickinson, talks about the accreditation of “early Muslims” which is quite different from believing that all the Companions are *‘udūl*. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, we would guess, does not try to argue that all

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 124

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 121

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124

the individual Successors are also *'udūl*.⁵² Explaining the emergence of a dogma by the mere ascription of it to a single scholar who wanted to solve a certain difficulty is not an easy argument to defend. If we can say that Juynboll was much more successful and more logical in his attempt to seek the root of the dogma within the context of early schisms, Dickinson was much more successful in putting the concept in a likely later context, but failed to account for its early development. Dickinson himself, in a statement contradictory to his own work, says that "it is difficult to trace the origin of this doctrine [of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions]."⁵³ Berg, in his review of Dickinson's book, is justified when he says that "more could have been said about [the accreditation of early generations of Muslims]."⁵⁴

In general, both theories on the origin and development of the concept are insufficient, perhaps because, it seems to be, that these two authors discuss the concept in passing. Both of them reach conclusions about the concept but fail to develop a systematic way to study it. This study is an attempt to present a different argument based upon a more systematic study.

⁵² Actually, Dickinson does say that "Ibn Abī Ḥātim seems to place the next generation of Muslims, the Followers, on the same plane as the Companions" (p. 122). If this were to be taken at face value, Dickinson would then need to explain why the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Successors was not established as an article of belief in Sunnī Islam.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 121

⁵⁴ *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. XLIII: 4 (2002), pp. 135-6

Chapter Two

Linguistic Meaning and Technical Usage of 'Adāla and Ta'dīl.

The lexica consulted here¹ make a distinction between a number of meanings derived from the root 'adala, three of which concern us most in this study. These are 'adala, 'adula, and 'addala. According to Ibn Manzūr's *Lisān al-'Arab*, "'adala" means "to pass a fair verdict (*al-hukm bi-l-ḥaqq*)"²; and Lane defines it as "to act equitably, justly, or rightly."³ 'Adl, ma'dala and ma'dila, the verbal nouns, are thus the opposite of injustice (*ḍidd al-jawr*).⁴ The adjective of 'adl in this sense can be either 'ādil (pl. 'udūl); or 'adl (pl. 'udūl) which, being identical with the verbal noun itself, is supposed to give more effect because it reveals that the one described as such is so just that he can be accredited with the verbal noun itself.⁵ The root in this sense, it can be said, is basically related to one who is entitled to make decisions or judgements, mostly a ruler or a judge.

'Adula, on the other hand, means "to become 'adl," and the verbal nouns are 'adāla, ma'dila, ma'dala, and 'udūla.⁶ What these verbal nouns specifically mean here, the lexica do not tell us. The 'adl (pl. 'udūl), in this sense, is the one whose testimony is accepted on the basis of his 'adāla (or, as Ibn Manzūr puts it, "*raġul 'adl: riḍan wa-maġna'un fī-l-*

¹ These lexica are *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* of Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Fayrūzabādī (vol. IV, p. 13); *Al-Šiḥāḥ* of Ismā'īl ibn Ḥammād al-Jawharī (vol. V, pp. 1760-1); *Lisān al-'Arab* of Abū al-Faḍl Jamāl al-Dīn ibn Manzūr (vol. II, p. 430); *Qaṭr al-Muḥīṭ* of Buṭrus al-Bustānī (vol. II, p. 1315); *Mukhtār al-Šiḥāḥ* of Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr 'Abd al-Qādir al-Rāzī (pp. 442-3); *Asās al-Balāgha* of Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd Al-Zamakhsharī (vol. II, pp. 68-9); and *An Arabic-English Lexicon* of E. W. Lane (Book I, pp. 1972-5).

² Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. II, p. 430

³ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, p. 1972

⁴ Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. II, p. 430

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 430

⁶ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, p. 1974

shahāda)”.⁷ Another meaning for ‘*adl* put by Ibn Manẓūr is “he who has not shown what makes him liable to suspicion (*alladhī lam tazhar minhu rība*).”⁸ This last definition will be important in our discussion of the technical use of this term. So, whereas the first meaning of the root is related mainly to the process of *passing a (fair) judgment*, the second one has to do with the process of *giving a (candid) testimony*.

Closely related to this meaning is the verb ‘*addala*, which means to “ascribe purity to” (*zakkā*).⁹ *Ta’dīl*, the verbal noun of ‘*addala*, is the process of accrediting someone with ‘*adāla*; or, in other words, declaring one to be ‘*adl* as defined in the preceding paragraph. Those who accredit other people with ‘*adāla* are called ‘*adala* and ‘*udala*.¹⁰ In this study, ‘*addala* will be translated as “to bestow ‘*adāla* on,” and *ta’dīl* as “the bestowal of ‘*adāla* on.” The opposite of ‘*addala* is *jaraḥa* or *jarraḥa*, which will be translated hereafter as “to disparage.”

As defined linguistically, the meanings of the root ‘*adala* we have dealt with now clearly involves a process of legitimization. The first meaning legitimizes a verdict by basing it, or asserting it to be based, on justice and impartiality. The second and the third legitimize someone’s testimony by declaring his ‘*adāla*. Once someone’s ‘*adāla* is established, his testimony is legitimized correspondingly.

As used technically, this root constitutes one of the two pillars of ‘*ilm al-jarḥ wa-’l-ta’dīl* (the science of the disparagement of or [lit. and] the bestowal of ‘*adāla* on [the transmitters of Prophetic Ḥadīth]).¹¹ The task of this science, which is a core branch of ‘*ulūm al-ḥadīth*, is to establish the theoretical bases according to which the scholars of ‘*ilm al-*

⁷ Ibn Manẓūr. *Lisān al-‘Arab*, vol. II, p. 430

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 431

⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 430

¹⁰ Lane. *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, p. 1974

rijāl (the science of the study of [the biographies of] men [who transmit Prophetic Ḥadīth]) assess the transmitters of Prophetic traditions (*ruwāt al-ḥadīth*). In other words, it is the task of *'ilm al-rijāl* to apply the theoretical criteria of *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl* to all the transmitters of Prophetic traditions. It was the scholars of *'ilm al-rijāl* who compiled the voluminous biographical dictionaries starting from the 2nd/9th C. These two sciences—*'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl* and *'ilm al-rijāl*—constitute the backbone of Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism for they provide the legitimation of Sunnī Ḥadīth literature. By *legitimizing* the transmitters of the Prophetic traditions (i.e. by declaring their *'adāla*), they provide the *legitimation* of the Sunnī Ḥadīth literature at large.

The science of *al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl*:

The criteria for assessing the reliability and capability of the transmitters of the Prophet's traditions are discussed in a wide variety of sources, the most important of which are the works on Ḥadīth sciences. In the following brief description of some of the basic rules of *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl*, we will depend primarily on al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's *al-Kifāya fī 'Ilm al-Riwāya*¹² and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's *Muqaddima*¹³. These two works have been established as the most influential works on *'ulūm al-ḥadīth* in Sunnī Islam and they are the ones most often cited in the secondary sources on different branches of *'ulūm al-ḥadīth*. The prominent 9th/15th C. Sunnī scholar, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, for instance, approvingly cites an earlier opinion that all the works compiled after *al-Kifāya* are

¹¹ The lexica do not refer to this technical usage of the root *'adala* and their authors thus escape having to have a say on the complexities that the technical usage introduces.

¹² Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. *Al-Kifāya fī 'Ilm al-Riwāya*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1988

¹³ Taqī al-Dīn ibn 'Amr ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ*. (Ed. 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān.). Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Ma'ārif. 1989

dependent on al-Khaṭīb's work.¹⁴ A modern Sunnī scholar argues that Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ was the Sunnī scholar who put the rules of *'ulūm al-Ḥadīth* in order. Most of the works that have been written after Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, he adds, were either elaborations on or abridgments of his *Muqaddima*. He has come to this conclusion by enumerating more than 15 works whose authors admitted their debt to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ.¹⁵ Both works give fairly detailed studies of all aspects of *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl*. More important, these two works give different views on some points that are directly relevant to our subject. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, whose discussion of the subject is very disorganized, tends to give all the different and conflicting opinions on every point, and his own opinion remains obscure in many cases. On the other hand, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, whose work is much more organized, is very selective and his selections are mostly those accepted by most Sunnī scholars who came after him. One point should be clear from the outset: the following is not an exhaustive analysis of *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl*. This subject is very wide in the scope of the ideas it deals with and in its ramifications. Therefore, only those points that are thought to be relevant to our discussions on the main subject of this study will be briefly addressed.

Two criteria were stipulated by the scholars of *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl* according to which they passed judgment on the capability and reliability of the transmitters of the Prophetic traditions. These are respectively the *ḍabṭ* and the *'adāla* of the transmitters.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Nukhbat al-Fikar fī Muṣṭalah Ahl al-Athar* (Ed. by Abū Mālik Kamāl Sālim as *Nuzhat al-Nazar Sharḥ Nukhbat al-Fikar fī Muṣṭalah Ahl al-Athar*.) Al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-'Ilm, n.d., p. 21

¹⁵ Al-Rashīd, 'Imād al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Naẓariyyat Naqd al-Rijāl wa-Makānatuhā fī Daw' al-Baḥth al-'Ilmī: Dirāsa Ta'ṣīliyya Taḥbīṭiyya fī 'Ilm al-Jarḥ wa-'l-Ta'dīl*, Dimashq: Dār al-Shihāb, 1999, pp. 330-1

¹⁶ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kifāya*, pp. 34, 53; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, p. 288

The concept of *dabt* as used technically in *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl* refers mainly to the mental capacity of a transmitter and the accuracy and precision of what he narrates. A transmitter of Prophetic Ḥadīth must be aware of what he narrates and from whom he receives the narrations. He must have a good memory that does not fail him when he cites his narrations. In addition, he must be fully aware of the meanings of the traditions he narrates to avoid changing those meanings if he does not narrate them verbatim.¹⁷ The narrations of a transmitter who is known to be careless in either learning or transmitting the traditions (*samā' 'l-ḥadīth wa-ismā'uh*) are to be deemed weak or even discarded.¹⁸ The *dabt* of a transmitter can be attested by, *inter alia*, the agreement of his narrations with those of other scholars who are well-known for their *dabt*.¹⁹ To summarize, this criterion seeks to ensure that a transmitter of the Prophetic Ḥadīth does not suffer from any physical or mental ailment that might affect the precision of what he narrates.

The second criterion of *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl* is *'adāla*. This concept is never very clearly defined, but what the sources do make clear is that a transmitter must possess this quality if his narrations are to be accepted. The *'adāla* of a transmitter can be established by one of two ways. The first is the testimony of others, who normally must be *'udūl* themselves. The second is common knowledge (*istifāda*)—that is when someone's *'adāla* is so well known to the scholarly community that he does not need to be declared *'adl* by any individual scholar.²⁰ There is a disagreement, however, on the number of people required to attest to the *'adāla* of a transmitter. Some scholars required the testimony of two

¹⁷ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kifāya*, p. 23; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, p. 288

¹⁸ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kifāya*, pp. 143-4, 147-8; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, p. 306

¹⁹ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kifāya*, pp. 13-4; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, p. 290

²⁰ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kifāya*, pp. 86-8; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, pp. 288-9

people on the ground that only the testimony of two people is admissible in court. Other scholars, however, argued for the acceptance of the testimony of just one person making an analogy with the acceptance of solitary traditions (*akhbār al-āḥād*). *A fortiori*, they concluded, the testimony of a single person in establishing the 'adāla of a transmitter should be accepted. Al-Khaṭīb is more inclined to the first opinion which requires two persons but says that the second opinion can also be accepted if only one *mu'addil* exists.²¹ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ prefers the second opinion and considers it "more sound."²²

This seems to raise a problem. That is, if by 'adāla one understands the characteristic which legitimizes someone's testimony or narrations; and by *ta'dīl* the process of legitimizing someone on the basis of such characteristic, the question then is: who bestows 'adāla on the 'udala—those who accredit people with 'adāla? We said before that it is assumed that the 'udala themselves are 'udūl. If we are to attest the 'adāla of the 'udala and the 'adāla of those who bestow 'adāla on the 'udala, we will fall into the trap of infinite regression. The impracticality of this procedure was indeed acknowledged in the judicial system. The author of the article "'Adl" in *EI*², E. Tyan, says that when the "tazkiya" [synonymous with *ta'dīl*] procedure was applied in court, the dilemma that "the witnesses of the instrument [i.e., the process of *tazkiya*] could always themselves be challenged on the ground of lack of 'adāla" had to be dealt with. "This difficulty was overcome," Tyan says, "by the use of a preliminary *tazkiya*; the judge recognizes once and for all the 'adāla of a certain number of persons, who thus become in principle irreproachable witnesses,"²³ This question is worth posing here because we will

²¹ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. *Al-Kifāya*, pp. 96-7

²² Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, p. 293

²³ *EI*², vol. I, p. 209

need to know how the Sunnī scholars dealt with it as far as the *'adāla* of the Companions is concerned.

Another disagreement among the scholars of *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl*, which both Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ address, is: on what basis can the *'adāla* of a transmitter be established? The two scholars take two different routes as regards this question and their disagreement is substantial. The points at stake here are: what does a transmitter need to show in order to have his *'adāla* acknowledged by the *nuqqād*;²⁴ and, consequently, what does a *nāqid* need to see and witness to bestow *'adāla* on a transmitter?

Al-Khaṭīb Al-Baghdādī argues that *'adāla* requires more than a mere declaration of someone's belief in Islam. It requires an active fulfillment of the requirements of Islam. Therefore, a *nāqid* who bestows *'adāla* on a transmitter has to verify and testify that the transmitter "does not do this and that and does so and so."²⁵ His argument goes as follows. In a chapter entitled "the refutation of those who claimed that *'adāla* is the declaration of Islam and abstention from declared *fisq*," al-Khaṭīb argues that the *'adāla* is "something additional to Islam (*shay' zā'id 'alā 'l-islām*)." He strives to reinterpret the traditions that those people, named here as *ahl al-'irāq*, employ to back their position that the mere confession of Islam is enough to establish one's *'adāla*. What al-Khaṭīb means by "Islam" here is the mere repetition of the confessions of Islam (that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God). He states, accordingly, that *'adāla* is only attested by the examination of deeds or conduct and the scrutinizing of positions (*bi-ikhtibār al-af'āl wa-tatabu' al-aḥwāl*). Therefore, one's testimony that

²⁴ "*Nuqqād*" is the plural of *nāqid*. A *nāqid* is the one who evaluates people (originally it meant the expert who used to test the genuineness of coins). In other words, he is the one who either bestows *'adāla* on or disparages transmitters. This is the term that will be used hereafter.

another is *'adl* is accepted only if one *knows* the other and *witnesses* his good acts. A *nāqid*, therefore, should not be satisfied with what everybody knows about a transmitter. He should seek to ascertain that what a transmitter does in front of people conforms to what he does out of their sight. From this we can understand that al-Khaṭīb held that a person's religious and moral behavior affects his *'adāla* either negatively or positively.

Some of the definitions of *'adāla* that al-Khaṭīb cites, however, apparently contradict his view on this point. For instance, he gives a considerable number of quotations that associate *'adāla* with a person's acts. However, "acts" here are to be understood in the negative sense; i.e. acts that must not be done rather than those that must. He cites a Prophetic tradition in which the Prophet stipulates the criteria of *'adāla*. According to this tradition, the *'adl* is the one who when dealing with people does not wrong them; when narrating [Prophetic traditions?] to them (*idhā ḥaddathahum*), does not tell lies to them, and when making promises to them, does not break his promise. This, the Prophet adds, is the one whose *'adāla* has been manifested.²⁶ However, this tradition, as it stands, shows that *'adāla* is acquired by abstention from certain acts rather than by doing certain acts. In other words, it defines *'adāla* in the negative sense by putting the emphasis on what one has to *avoid* in order to have his *'adāla* attested. Another saying that al-Khaṭīb quotes is that the *'adl* is one "who has not shown that which makes him liable to suspicion."²⁷ This saying, the reader will recall, is also used by Ibn Manẓūr in his definition of the *'adl*. This definition also suggests that in

²⁵ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kifāya*, p. 100

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 78

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78

order for someone to have his *'adāla* acknowledged, he has to *avoid* doing what might cast doubt on his *'adāla*.

From this it should not be understood, however, that al-Khaṭīb was of the opinion that only the *'adāla* of those people who are sinless can be accepted. On the contrary, al-Khaṭīb gives his complete support for the view of some earlier authorities that a person whose good acts and obedience to God outweigh and exceed his wrongdoings and disobedience is to be considered *'adl*. Al-Khaṭīb adds that if the rulers and scholars were to acknowledge only the *'adāla* of a Muslim who is completely free from sin, they would accept the *'adāla* of no one, as God has made it known that even the prophets and apostles committed sins. However, the criteria should not be so lax as to allow the testimony of a *fāsiq* (evildoer) or a *kāfir* (disbeliever).²⁸

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, on the other hand, states that *ta'dīl* is to be accepted without questioning the reason for it. The rationale is that the reasons for it are too many to be counted. A *nāqid* required to give the reasons for his bestowal of *'adāla* on a transmitter would have to attest that that transmitter does not do this or that act of the acts which lead to disparagement.²⁹ From this we can understand that a *nāqid* needs only to verify that a transmitter avoids what might vitiate his *'adāla*. He, the *nāqid*, does not need to know whether the transmitter he evaluates does what is normally required of Muslims as far as the religious duties are concerned. In other words, if the *'adāla* is to be established, it can only be done in a negative way; i.e. by the negation of the causes of *jarḥ*. This means that whereas a scholar who disparages a transmitter has to produce his evidence, he does not have to do so if he bestows *'adāla* on him.³⁰

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-81

²⁹ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, p. 290

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 290

From Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, we can understand then that *'adāla* is the normal case of everybody and that *jarḥ* is the exception which alters someone's original *'adāla* as a result of committing what is forbidden by religion. We will see later that this idea was one of the bases upon which the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* was based.

That a scholar has to produce his evidence when disparaging another is explained by the fact that people differ regarding what constitutes a sufficient cause for *jarḥ* and what does not. After giving instances in which al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the two celebrated 3rd/10th C. Sunnī traditionists, accepted the narrations of some transmitters whom other scholars deemed unreliable, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ concludes that the theories of the scholars of *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl* are ambiguous and conflicting (*madhāhibu 'l-nuqqādi li-'l-rijāli ghāmiḍatun mukhtalifa*).³¹ This point is of utmost importance for our study because here it is made plain that the criteria of *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl* are far from being objective; and that disagreement among the scholars on this is not only to be expected, but also tolerable.³² But what if two *nāqids* give two differing judgments on someone's *'adāla*? Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ here reiterates al-Khaṭīb's argument that if *tajrīḥ* and *ta'dīl* are simultaneously ascribed to someone, *tajrīḥ* is to have the priority on the ground that the *jāriḥ* must have known what the *mu'addil* was ignorant of as far as the reliability of the transmitter is concerned.³³ Again, this point is very important for our purpose and we will see later that the Sunnī scholars did not, or could not, apply it to their theory of *'adālat al-ṣaḥāba*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 291

³² In the article on "'Adl" in *Et*² the author says that al-Māwardī understood *'adāla* to be "a state of moral and religious perfection." For Ibn Rushd, it meant "not committing major sins, and also avoiding minor ones." The former defines the term in a positive sense while the latter's statement defines it negatively. Ibn Rushd argues, in agreement with Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, that "agreement has never been reached on a definition of the term."

³³ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, p. 294

The gap between the two views is hardly bridgeable. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī suggests that a *nāqid* must seek actively to demonstrate that the one on whom he bestows *'adāla* does not commit what might make him liable to *jarḥ* and, equally importantly, does what is required of a good Muslim. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, however, does not put the same emphasis on the second point and is satisfied to say that if the *nāqid* does not see what constitutes a reasonable cause for *jarḥ*, he can attest to the *'adāla* of a transmitter without further examination. Put differently, while the two scholars associate judging someone's *'adāla* with knowledge, al-Khaṭīb argues that knowledge is as much needed for bestowing *'adāla* as it is for disparaging. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, on the other hand, argues that knowledge is only needed for disparagement. As will be seen, it is Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's opinion that has come to triumph as far as the concept of collective *ta'dīl* is concerned.

Two points can be concluded from this discussion: the *'adāla* as discussed by the Sunnī sources used here is conceived of as a variable and approximate term. It is variable in its definition and in respect to its relation to the overall acts of a person. It is approximate in the sense that it cannot be based on certainty. The *'adl*, we can conclude, is the one whose known wrong acts do not constitute a sufficient cause for *jarḥ*. If his wrongdoings that people know of do not constitute a sufficient cause for *jarḥ*, he is to retain his original *'adāla*.

In chapter four, two definitions of *īmān* (faith) will be discussed. The disagreement between the Ḥanbalī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and the Shāfi'ī Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ on the two last points reflects their respective understandings of *īmān* and its relation to acts. It is one of the contentions of this study that Sunnī ideas about the *'adāla* of the Companions were

very much dependent on their definition of *īmān* and their arguments about the *īmān* of the Companions.

In his discussion on the criteria of '*adāla*, al-Khaṭīb raises the issue of the relation between innovation (*bid'a*) and '*adāla*. In many of the statements which he seems to cite approvingly, '*adāla* is associated with the uprightness of one's doctrine (*madhhab*).³⁴ In contrast to this, al-Khaṭīb argues that earlier scholars accepted the narrations of "*ahl al-ahwā' wa-l-bida'*" (people of whims and innovations) such as the Khawārij, Mu'tazila, Murji'a, and Shī'a.³⁵ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ also discusses this point in a rather clumsy way.³⁶ Three points can be identified in this context. The first is whether the innovation is or is not tantamount to unbelief (*kufr*). Secondly and closely related to the first point is whether the innovator (*mubtadi'*) is an interpreter (*muta'awwil*) or not; i.e., whether he, being sincere in his approach, bases his innovation on an erroneous interpretation of the religious texts or deliberately upholds a view that he knows to be inconsistent with religion. The third point is whether the innovator makes his position worse by actively seeking to spread his innovation. It is implied that the innovator whose innovation is tantamount to unbelief cannot be regarded as '*adl*. Some scholars argued that innovation, whether or not it results from a sincere interpretation, deprives its upholder of his '*adāla* and his narrations are to be discarded accordingly. Others argued that he retains his '*adāla* if he does not justify lying in support of his doctrine, whether he be a preacher of his innovation (*dā'iya ilā bid'atihi*) or not.

Two important points are at stake here concerning the relation between '*adāla* on the one hand and orthodoxy and innovation on the

³⁴ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kifāya*, p. 80

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-5

³⁶ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, pp. 298-300

other. The first is the relation between *'adāla* and two kinds of innovation: that innovation which results from sincere interpretation or *ijtihād*, and that which does not. The second point has to do with the innovation that is accompanied by active preaching, and that which does not involve action. As for the first point, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī says that a group of earlier scholars argued against the acceptance of the *'adāla* of the *muta'awwilūn* because they are either *kuffār* or *fussāq*.³⁷ According to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, most scholars accept the narrations of an innovator, and by implication his *'adāla*, if he does not call people to embrace his innovation. This is the convention of the prominent scholars of Ḥadīth, he claims.³⁸

Both scholars discuss the possibility of a transmitter regaining his *'adāla* after having lost it for ascribing false statements to someone else. Here the distinction is made between putting false statements into the mouths of common people (*al-kadhib fī ḥadīth al-nās*), and deliberately putting them into the mouth of the Prophet (*al-kadhibu muta'ammidan fī ḥadīth rasūl Allāh*). Whereas the forger in the first instance can regain his *'adāla* by repentance, in the second case his *'adāla* can never be reestablished.³⁹

As a tool of Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism, *ḍabṭ* is no less important than *'adāla*. On the contrary, both are of equal importance and are given almost the same space in the works on Ḥadīth sciences. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī argues that knowledge of the *ḍabṭ* of transmitters can only be attained by specialists (*al-khāṣṣa*) while knowledge of *'adāla* can be attained by lay people (*al-'amma*) (which contradicts some of the views he put forward about the role of the *nuqqād*). The distinction between the

³⁷ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. *Al-Kifāya*, p. 120

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 300-301

two criteria of *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl* should be clear, however. Whereas possessing *'adāla* denotes that the transmitter cannot be thought of as deliberately putting a false statement into the mouth of someone else, the Prophet in this case; possessing *ḍabṭ* denotes that the transmitter enjoys the mental and physical qualities which make him not liable, or not likely, to *err* in transmission. In other words, *ḍabṭ* is concerned with the ability of a person to transmit and narrate accurately, and *'adāla* with his reliability. There is a further difference between the two. While the absence *'adāla* cannot be tolerated in a transmitter, the scholars of *al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl* are much more lenient concerning the latter criterion in their assessment of the narrations involved. That is, if a transmitter of Prophetic traditions is found to be lacking *'adāla*, all traditions with chains of transmission in which he appears are to be suspected, if not discarded, unless they are supported by similar traditions. However, if a transmitter is known to have suffered from mental lapses or deficiencies such as recurrent forgetfulness or confusing traditions and accounts, to mention but a few, this only lowers or degrades the soundness of the traditions narrated through him. On this basis, the scholars of *al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl* classified people according to their efficiency into different ranks. In fact they also classified people according to their *'adāla*, and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ gives an account of such classification.⁴⁰ However, the classification here is not based on the *degree* of the *'adāla* of transmitters; it is based on the degree of *trust* that scholars have in the *'adāla* of the transmitters.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 309-11

Conclusion:

The concept of *'adāla* as discussed so far clearly involves a process of legitimization. The transmitters are first legitimized by the *'udala* and it is the *'adāla* of the transmitters that legitimizes their narrations. The process takes into account the histories of individual transmitters.

The preceding examination of some aspects of *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl* has nevertheless revealed some problems. The first has to do with the *'adāla* of the *'udala*. In a perfect world, we should have *'udala* whose *'adāla* is certain. We will see if the Sunnī scholars could produce such *'udala*. The second problem is the disagreement on the *'adāla* of a single transmitter and the disagreement on what constitutes a sufficient cause of *jarḥ*. It is generally held that *ta'dīl* does not have to be explained or justified. *'Adāla*, we can infer, is the normal case of anyone and they are⁷ to retain it until they have committed what might deprive them of it. Moreover, that different people may have different criteria on what constitutes *jarḥ* is acknowledged. This creates room for disagreement on the *'adāla* of any transmitter. In the following chapter we will see how these points are related to our investigation of the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet Muḥammad's Companions.

Chapter Three

A Chronological Analysis of the Sources.

This chapter investigates the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet Muḥammad's Companions as discussed by the Sunnī sources. It aims to trace any development that the concept might have gone through since it started to appear in the Sunnī sources until it took the shape we know today.

To the best of my knowledge and on the basis of the available primary and secondary sources, no 2nd/8th C. work of any kind referred to the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions or to the Companions as a privileged group in Islam. In the 3rd/9th C., a work devoted to the virtues of the Companions (*faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba*) appears. This is the title of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's (d. 241/855) work¹ which he opens with a list of Prophetic traditions that prohibit the abuse and vilification of the "Companions." In one of those traditions, the Prophet warns those who vilify the Companions that they are liable to God's curse and punishments ("Upon him who insults my Companions is the curse of God and the Angels and all people. God will accept from him neither an excuse nor a ransom" (*man sabba aṣḥābī fa-'alayhi la'natu 'llāhi wa-malā'ikatihī wa-'l-nāsi ajma'in, lā yaqbalu 'llāhu minhā ṣarfan wa-lā 'adlan*).² In a second tradition, the Prophet associates love of him and of God with love of the Companions ("[fear?] Allāh, [fear] Allāh with respect to my Companions. Do not make them a subject of abuse after my death. He who loves them, does so out of his love of me. And he who hates them, does so out of his hate for me. And he who hurts them, hurts

¹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. *Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥāba*. (Ed. Waṣī-Allāh ibn Muḥammad 'Abbās.) Al-Dammām: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1999

me. And he who hurts me, hurts God. And he who hurts God, then God is about to punish him” (*allāha allāha fī aṣḥābī. lā tattakhidhūhum gharaḍan min ba’dī. Fa-man aḥabbahum fa-bi-hubbī aḥabbahum, wa-man abghaḍahum fa-bi-bughḍī abghaḍahum, wa-man ādhāhum fa-qad ādhānī, wa-man ādhānī fa-qad ādhā ’llāha, wa-man ādhā ’llāha fa-yūshiku an ya’kudhahu*). In a third tradition, the Prophet explains why the Companions are not to be a subject of abuse: “Do not insult my Companions, for if one of you spent [by way of charity] what is equal to [mount] Uḥud in gold, he would not equal their measure or [even] half of it” (*lā tasubbū aṣḥābī, fa-law anna aḥadakum anfaqa mithla uḥudin dhahaban mā balagha mudda aḥadīhim wa-lā naṣīfah*). We should note however that no traditions unequivocally charging those who insult the Companions with unbelief are given. Only one tradition that praises the Companions is given (“My Companions are like the salt in food. Can food be good without salt?” (*inna mathala aṣḥābī ka-mathali ’l-malḥi fī ’l-ṭa’āmi, wa-hal yaṣluḥu ’l-ṭa’āmu illā bi-’l-malḥi?*)). After mentioning the traditions that are taken to refer the “Companions” as a group, Ibn Ḥanbal mentions traditions that refer to certain individual contemporaries of the Prophet, starting with the merits of the four rightly-guided Caliphs. No definition of companionship (*ṣuḥba*) is given. No Qur’ānic verses are used and the root *’adala* does not appear at all.

Ibn ‘Abbās is quoted here as saying: “Do not insult the Companions of Muḥammad for God has enjoined asking [him] for forgiveness for them while he knew that they would fight [each other] (*lā tasubbū aṣḥāba muḥammadin fa-inna ’llāha ’azza wa-jalla qad amara*

² *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 56-69

bi-'l-istighfāri lahum wa-huwa ya'lamu annahum sayaqtatilūna)."³ From this it can be inferred that the fact that some Companions fought each other was used by some people to justify abuse and vilification of the Companions. In sum, the first work that deals with the "Companions" is primarily concerned with prohibiting the vilification of the Companions and the reason suggested for that vilification is the schisms in which the Companions were involved.

Al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/875) devoted chapters in their canonical compilations to the "virtues of the Companions (*manāqib al-ṣaḥāba*)." In *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*⁴, al-Bukhārī mentions two Prophetic traditions with different versions. The two traditions supposedly venerate the "Companions." In the first one, the Prophet is reported to have said: "You will raid and it will be said [to you]: 'did any of you see the Apostle?' They will say: 'yes,' and it will be victorious for you" (*taghzūna fa-yuqālu: hal fī-kum man ra'ā rasūla 'llāhi? Fa-yaqūlūna na'am, fa-yuftaḥu lakum.*) In the second one, the Prophet says that "the best of people are those of my age, then those who follow them (in time), then those who follow them" (*khayru 'l-qurūni qarnī thumma 'ldhīna yalūnahum thumma 'ldhīna yalūnahum.*)⁵ No definition of companionship is given. Al-Bukhārī also mentions traditions and accounts that refer to certain "Companions" in particular.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 70. According to the text we have, the last word in this tradition can be read either "*sayaqtulūna* (they will kill)" or "*sayuqtalūna* (they will be killed)." The editor of Ibn Ḥanbal's book left this word unvoveled, probably intentionally. Neither reading does really seem to fit what the quotation seems to seek to establish. Therefore, it can be suggested that there was a textual corruption in the manuscript of the work and that the original word was "*sayaqtatilūna* (they will fight each other), or "*sayataqātālūna* (they will fight)."

⁴ Muḥammad Ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī. *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. Al-Qāhira: Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Ḥalabī. 1377 H. (1957 A.D.).

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. V, pp. 2-3

In his *Ṣaḥīḥ*⁶ Muslim mentions the same two traditions that al-Bukhari gives.⁷ Other traditions that allude to those who fought in the Battles of Badr and Uḥud, and those who gave the pledge to the Prophet in al-Ḥudaybiyya (*Bay‘at al-Riḍwān*) are also given. Muslim has also a section on “The prohibition of insulting the Companions of the Prophet,” in which he gives the same tradition used by Ibn Ḥanbal, where the Prophet prohibits the abuse of his Companions because no one would equal their merits.⁸ No definition of companionship is given here either, and the root *‘adala* does not appear.

Ibn ‘Abbās appears here too. In *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* in a section on “the virtues of Mu‘āwiya,” al-Bukhārī gives a single but revealing anecdote. According to this, Mu‘āwiya was seen by one of Ibn ‘Abbās’s clients making a mistake in the evening prayers. Ibn ‘Abbās’s client conveys the incident to his patron who says: “leave him: he had companionship with the Prophet (*da‘hu, fa-innahu ṣaḥība rasūla ‘llāhi*; lit. he accompanied the Prophet).”⁹ It is obvious that this saying seeks to establish a special status for Mu‘āwiya as a Companion by excusing him for any mistake that he might have made. If the authenticity of this anecdote is to be acknowledged, it gives two possibilities. The first is that Ibn ‘Abbās’s client did not know that Mu‘āwiya was a Companion. The other possibility is that Ibn ‘Abbās’s client did not know that being a Companion confers a special status. In both cases, this anecdote does more harm than good to the final Sunnī version of the collective *ta‘dīl*. Both possibilities show that some of the ideas of that version were not universally known to the early generations of Muslims.

⁶ Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj al-Qushayrī. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Mashhad al-Ḥusaynī, n.d.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 183-6

⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 188

⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. V, p. 35

Also in the 3rd/9th C., Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī (d. 276/890) compiled his *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*.¹⁰ Here he mentions a tradition that the “*rawāfiḍ*” (an early Shi‘ī sect) use to charge all except six of the Prophet’s Companions with *kufṛ* (unbelief). According to this tradition, the Prophet tells his Companions that some of them will, on Doomsday, seek his basin [to drink from it] and will be kept away from him (*layaridanna ‘alayya ‘l-ḥawḍa aqwāmum thumma layukhtalajunna dūnī*). The Prophet will then appeal to God on behalf of his Companions and God will tell him that he, the Prophet, does not know what they did after his death. They kept turning back on their heels after he left them (*fa-aqūlu yā rabb: uṣayḥābī uṣayḥābī, fayuqālu lī, innaka lā tadrī mā aḥdathū ba’dak. Innahum lam yazālū murtaddīna ‘alā a’qābihim mundhu fāraqtahum*).¹¹ To this Ibn Qutayba replies that by a careful reading and understanding of the tradition, which he seems to accept as genuine, it can be understood that the tradition refers to only a few of the Prophet’s Companions. If the Prophet had been alluding to all of them, he would have spoken directly to his Companions and would not have used the third person speech. In addition to this, the Prophet uses the diminutive form of the word *aṣḥābī* which constitutes additional evidence that the Prophet did not mean all of his Companions.¹² Ibn Qutayba points out here that it was well known that some of the Prophet’s companions in his wars were hypocrites and doubters, and he also gives examples of those who apostatised after the death of the Prophet, pointing out that God Himself talked about the hypocrites in the Qur’ān. Those are the ones who are kept away from the Prophet, he explains. Nevertheless,

¹⁰ Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī. *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth fī al-Radd ‘alā A’dā’ al-Ḥadīth*. Al-Qāhira, Maktabat al-Mutanabbī, n.d.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 157

he says, the Qur'ān also talked about God's satisfaction with people who witnessed some events with the Prophet. God would not be pleased with people who go astray upon the Prophet's death, he adds.¹³

It is significant that Ibn Qutayba does not question the authenticity of the tradition but seeks to interpret it in a way that would restrict its reference to a few of the Prophet's Companions. Moreover, he does not argue that those to whom the Prophet refers were not among his Companions, which means that Ibn Qutayba had no problem with accepting that some of the Prophet's Companions were not only not *'udūl*, but were also hypocrites and unbelievers. In this context he mentions a Qur'ānic verse that alludes to the hypocrites. Nowhere later do we see any reference to this kind of verse.

The first work in the 4th/10th C. to talk about the Companions is al-Ash'arī's (d. 324/935) creed *al-Ibāna 'an Uṣūl al-Diyāna*¹⁴. Giving a list of the articles of faith, al-Ash'arī states: "and we are devoted to the love of the ancestors whom God chose to accompany his Prophet and we praise them in the way God praised them and we affiliate with all of them (*wa-nadīnu bi-ḥubbi 'l-salafī 'lladhīna ikhtārahumu 'llāhu ta'ālā li-ṣuḥḥbati nabīyyihi wa-nuthnī 'alayhim bimā athnā 'llāhu 'alayhim wa-natawallāhum ajma'īn*)." Al-Ash'arī then declares his acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the first four Caliphs and the wrongfulness of killing 'Uthmān. He also declares his acknowledgment that the Prophet testified that ten Companions were destined for paradise. He concludes this part by saying: "and we affiliate with all the Companions of the Apostle of

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 158-59

¹⁴ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī. *Al-Ibāna 'an Uṣūl al-Diyāna*. (Ed. 'Abbās Ṣabbāgh.) Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Nafā'is, n.d.

God, and we keep silent on what took place among them (*wa-natawallā sā'ira aṣḥābi rasūli 'llāhi wa-nakuffu 'ammā shajara baynahum*).¹⁵

No definition of companionship is given by Al-Ash'arī, nor is there any reference to *'adāla* or *ta'dīl*. As a creed, *al-Ibāna* presents its article of faith in the form of dogmas and does not quote either Qur'ānic verses or Prophetic traditions. What the relevant article of al-Ash'arī's creed tries to establish as a sound attitude towards the Companions is: first, having love for them; second, affiliating with "all" of them; and third, abstaining from discussing what took place among them; i.e., the schisms they were involved in. The transition from the 3rd/9th C. to the 4th/10th centuries is clear here. In the 3rd/9th century the main concern was to prohibit abusing the Companions; the 4th/10th century sought to establish love for and affiliation with them.

In his *Taqdimat al-Ma'rifa*¹⁶, Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938) begins by representing the rules of *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl*. He classifies the transmitters of Prophetic traditions into different ranks according to their reliability and accuracy.¹⁷ He then refers to the "Companions" and starts his very brief discussion of their status as Ḥadīth transmitters by enumerating their merits. The "Companions" were the ones who witnessed the revelation and had knowledge of its exegesis and interpretation. They were also chosen by God to accompany the Prophet and to support him and his message. Thus, they were made exemplary models for the subsequent Muslims because they were the ones who saw the Prophet, knew from him what God enjoined and forbade, and knew the interpretation of the Book, Ibn Abī Ḥātim concludes. God, therefore,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9

¹⁶ Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī. *Taqdimat al-Ma'rifa li-Kitāb al-Jarḥ wa-'l-Ta'dīl*. Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyya, 1952

venerated all of them by ruling out the possibility¹⁸ of any doubt, lying, mistaking, or innuendo from their side (The Arabic text reads: “*fa-naḥā ‘anhumu ‘l-shakka wa-‘l-kadhiba wa-‘l-ghalaṭa wa-‘l-rībata wa-‘l-ghamz.*”)”¹⁹ He also called them “*‘udūlu ‘l-umma.*”²⁰ Ibn Abī Ḥātim refers to a single Qur’ānic verse in this context: “Thus We have appointed you a middle nation (*ummatan waṣaṭan*) that ye may be witnesses against mankind (*li-takūnū shuhadā’a ‘alā ‘l-nās*), and that the messenger may be a witness against you” (II, 143).²¹ Ibn Abī Ḥātim points out that the Prophet explained that “*waṣaṭan*” in this verse means “*‘adlan,*” a point for which he gives no reference and on which we will comment below. What should draw our attention here is that the Companions are seen as not only *‘udūl* according to the technical meaning of the term (refer to chapter two), but were also considered unsusceptible to error in transmission.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s account is the first where a meaning of the root “*adala*” appears. Although no definition of companionship is attempted here, the account seems to seek to establish one point: that the “Companions” are irreproachable transmitters of the Prophetic Ḥadīth. This is done by establishing the legitimacy of the Companions on the basis of their many virtues, and by the unequivocal declaration that the Companions are not only reliable transmitters, but also free from committing mistakes in transmission. (This last point, the ruling out of the possibility that the Companions were liable to error, is never to appear

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 6-7. For a comprehensive analysis of Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s contribution to Ḥadīth criticism, see E. Dickinson’s *The Development of Early Sunnite Ḥadīth Criticism: The Taqdimat of Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī*. Leiden: Brill, 2001

¹⁸ “*naḥā ‘anhum.*” Juynboll translated this as “immunized them against” (Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, p. 195) which, besides being a wrong usage of the English verb, gives a different sense of the sentence.

¹⁹ Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Taqdimat al-Ma’ārif*, vol. I, p. 7

²⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 7

²¹ Roman letters between parentheses refer to the number of Qur’ānic *suras* (chapters), Arabic numerals to the numbers of *āyās* (verses).

again in the subsequent sources. However, in view of the fact that the belief in the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions was taken as the guarantee of the genuineness of the Qur'ān and the Sunna; i.e., as the guarantee of the preservation of the whole religion, there is every reason to suggest that it was always assumed in the subsequent writings about the concept of collective *ta'dīl*.) The only basis of this perception of the Companions as Ḥadīth transmitters is the Qur'ānic verse quoted above and no mention of *ijmā'* is found here. What we should also note in this account is that the first employment of the root “*adāla*” as far as the Companions are concerned was in association with the transmission of Prophetic Ḥadīth.

A word must be said here about two Qur'ānic verses that have come to play a significant role in the formulation of the concept of collective *ta'dīl*. These are: “Thus We have appointed you a middle nation (*ummatan wasaṭan*), that ye may be witnesses against mankind (*li-takunū shuhadā'a 'alā 'l-nāsi*), and that the messenger may be a witness against you” (II, 143); and “Ye are the best community (*kuntum khayra ummatin*) that hath been raised up for mankind” (III, 110). (Hereafter, the first verse will be referred to as the “*ummatan wasaṭan*” verse and the second as the “*khayra ummatin*” verse.)

The Qur'ānic verses that the Sunnī sources adduce to buttress the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions are of two kinds: general ones that do not explicitly refer to a particular person or group, and verses with specific references. The two verses quoted above are of the first kind, probably the only ones of the first kind, and are the most commonly cited ones. “*Ummatan wasaṭan*” in Qur'ān II 143, and “*khayra ummatin*” in Qur'ān III 110, are key words that the Sunnī scholars employ to prove that the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions is

rooted in the Qur'ān. The word “*umma*” in the two verses are taken by the Sunnī sources to refer to the Companions in particular, as we have seen in Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s account and as we will see *passim* in this chapter. The word “*wasāṭan*” in the first verse is also taken to refer to the ‘*adāla*’ of the Companions: it is interpreted to mean “‘*adlan*” as the root is used technically. In many accounts, the authors claim that these interpretations of the two verses are “agreed upon” by the *mufasssirūn*. Below are our findings after checking some exegeses (*tafasīr*).

When we check the earliest exegeses at our disposal—i.e. those of Mujāhid ibn Jabr²² (d. 104/722), Muqātil ibn Sulaymān²³ (d. 150/767), and Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī²⁴ (d. 310/923),²⁵ we find no reference to the concept of collective *ta’dīl* in the context of the “*umatan wasāṭan*” verse. In the exegeses of Mujāhid, Sufyān, and al-Ṭabarī, however, the word “*wasāṭan*” is interpreted to mean “‘*udūlan*.”²⁶ (Actually, al-Ṭabarī himself only mentions this interpretation as one of the interpretations of the verse. However, he takes the word to refer to the middle point between two extremes: the exaggerated monasticism of the Christians and the exaggerated dereliction of the Jews.²⁷)

But regardless of how this word is understood and interpreted by the Qur’ān exegetes, the significance of what the authors of these exegeses take the word “*umma*” in the two verses to mean is more evident. It is a striking fact that in all the early Qur’ān exegeses there is an inclination *not* to acknowledge the restricted interpretation of the word

²² *Tafsīr Mujāhid ibn Jabr*. (Ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Salām Abū al-Nīl.) Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1998

²³ *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*. (Ed. ‘Abd Allāh Shihāta.) Al-Qāhira: Mu’assasat al-Ḥalabī, n.d.

²⁴ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. *Jāmi’ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*. Al-Qāhira: Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Ḥalabī, 1954

²⁵ The debates over the authenticity or otherwise of some of these exegeses are beyond the scope of this paper.

²⁶ *Tafsīr Mujāhid ibn Jabr*, pp. 25, 38; *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. II, p. 7

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7

“*umma*” in these two verses. The “*umma*” in these verses is not taken to refer to the Prophet’s Companions in particular. Rather, it is taken to refer to all the subsequent generations of the Islamic *umma* since its inception until the Day of Resurrection. The Companions are not given a privileged status in this respect.²⁸ Moreover, in the interpretation of the “*khayra ummatin*” verse, the continuity of their [whoever the verse refers to] being “unconditionally best” for ever is not granted. In one of the manuscripts of Mujāhid’s *tafsīr*, being “best” is made dependent upon the condition of “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil.”²⁹ The same opinion is ascribed to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb in al-Ṭabarī’s exegeses.³⁰ In other words, the idea is not put in categorical terms.

It might be expected that these verses would be interpreted differently in later Sunnī exegeses, when the concept of collective *ta’dīl* had matured and been established as an article of faith in Sunnī Islam. Surprisingly enough, this is not the case. We do not find even a faint trace of the concept of collective *ta’dīl* in the interpretations of these two general verses. In Ibn Kathīr’s exegesis³¹, a prestigious and authoritative late Sunnī exegesis, no reference is ever made to the concept of collective *ta’dīl*. The verses are still explained in general terms as in the early exegeses. Ibn Kathīr explains the “*ummatan wasaṭan*” verse in light of the preceding verse in sura II which changes the direction of the Qibla for the Muslims. Ibn Kathīr explains that *wasāṭan* here means “the best” and that God simply says that he has changed the Qibla for the Muslims to make them the best of people. The interpretation of *wasāṭan* to mean

²⁸ In his *Tafsīr*, vol. III, p. 43, al-Ṭabarī, however, gives one interpretation according to which the reference in the “*ummatan-wasaṭan*” verse is to the *Muhājirūn* in particular. Even this interpretation is inconsistent with the Sunnī understanding that extends the reference to include all the Companions.

²⁹ *Tafsīr Mujāhid*, p. 257

³⁰ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, vol. III, p. 44

³¹ Abū al-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl ibn Kathīr al-Qurashī. *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*. Al-Qāhira: Dār Ihya’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya. 1950

'*adlan* is also given with the same prophetic tradition.³² As for the "*khayra ummatin*" verse, Ibn Kathīr rejects the restriction of the reference in the verse to the *Muhājirūn* and argues that the reference is general to the Islamic umma (*al-umma al-muḥammadiyya*).³³

The absence of any reference to the concept of collective *ta'dīl* in a late Sunnī exegesis like Ibn Kathīr's, especially in the context of these two verses is significant. Even if it could be argued that the concept was still in its beginnings when a relatively late "early" scholar like al-Ṭabarī compiled his exegesis, this cannot be the case with a work as late as Ibn Kathīr's. Accounting for this is beyond the scope of this paper. It could be tentatively suggested, however, that the exegetes might have found that this concept would vitiate one of their foremost goals: to prove the generality and applicability of the Qur'ānic texts to all people, everywhere, and at all times. Now we can go back to our sources.

A third 4th/11th C. work is Abū Ja'far al-Ṭahāwī's (d. 341/952) *al-'Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya*.³⁴ A mention of the "Companions," who are never defined, is given here in a brief passage which reads: "and we love the Companions of the Apostle of God, and we do not exceed in loving one of them, and we do not dissociate from any of them. We hate him who hates them, and who mentions them without goodness. We do not mention them except with goodness. Loving them is belief and faith and acting well (towards them), and hating them is unbelief and hypocrisy and acting wrongfully (towards them) (*wa-nuḥibbu aṣḥāba rasūli 'llāhi wa-lā nufriṭu fī ḥubbi aḥadin minhum, wa-lā natabarra'u min aḥadin minhum, wa-nubghidū man yubghiduhum, wa-bi-ghayri 'l-khayri*

³² *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 190

³³ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 391

³⁴ Ibn Abī al-'Izz al-Dimashqī. 'Alī ibn 'Alī. *Sharḥ al-'Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya*. (Eds. 'Abd Allāh al-Turkī and Shu'ayb Arnā'ūt). Bayrūt: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1997.

yadhkuruhum, wa-lā nadhkuruhum illā bi-khayrin, wa-ḥubbuhum dīnun wa-īmānun wa-iḥsānun, wa-bughḍuhum kufrun wa-nifāqun wa-ṭughyānun).”³⁵

This creed obviously seeks to define the proper attitude to the Companions as a middle way between, on the one hand, execrating and dissociating from them, which is associated here with unbelief and hypocrisy, and, on the other hand, loving them excessively. The implied reference to the Khawārij and Shī‘a is also very obvious. The sound attitude as defined by al-Ṭaḥāwī is to speak only of their [the Companions’] good deeds, which implies that one would find what one needed should one decide to speak otherwise. For the first time, a link between attitudes towards the Companions on the one hand, and faith and unbelief on the other, is made explicit.

In the opening of his *Tārīkh al-Ṣaḥāba alladhīna Ruwiya ‘anhum al-Akḥbār*³⁶, Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/952), after quoting the Prophetic tradition in which the Prophet allegedly says that the best of ages was his, comments that “the best of this *umma* are the Companions of the Apostle of God who accompanied him and supported him, and sacrificed their lives and money for the sake of attaining God’s pleasure, that is to say, the *Muhājirūn* and the *Anṣār*, and those others who believed in him and believed him [*the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār*] (*khayru hādhihi ‘l-ummati aṣḥābu rasūli ‘llāhi alladhīna ṣaḥībūhu wa-naṣarūhu wa-badhalū anfusahum wa-amwālahum ibtighā’a marḍāti ‘llāhi mina ‘l-muhājirīna wa-‘l-anṣāri wa-man āmana bihi wa-ṣaddaqahu min ghayrihim*).”³⁷ In his *Kitāb al-Majrūḥīn min al-Muḥaddithīn wa-‘l-Ḍu‘afā’ wa-‘l-*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

³⁶ Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī. *Tārīkh al-Ṣaḥāba alladhīna Ruwiya ‘Anhum al-Akḥbār*. (Ed. Būrān al-Dannāwī.) Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya: 1988.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23

*Matrūkīn*³⁸, Ibn Ḥibbān argues that “those who witnessed the revelation and accompanied the Apostle, abusing them is not [religiously] legal, and disparaging them is against faith, and degrading one of them is very hypocrisy; as they are the best people after the Prophet (*wa-ammā man shahida 'l-tanzīla wa-ṣaḥība 'l-rasūla, fa-'l-thalbu lahum ḡhayru ḥalālin, wa-'l-qadhū fihim ḡiddu 'l-īmāni, wa-'l-tanqīsu li-aḥadhim nafsu 'l-nifāqi, li-annahum khayru 'l-nāsi qarnan ba'da rasūli 'llāh*”).” He moves on to say that the fact that the Prophet trusted them with what had been revealed to him by God, should be sufficient for not disparaging them, because the Prophet would not have done so and would not have asked them to transmit from him, unless he had considered them reliable and acceptable as witnesses (*ṣādiqūna jā'izū 'l-shahāda*).³⁹ After that he mentions an anecdote according to which 'Umar, the second Caliph, prohibited and punished some Companions for excessively narrating from the Prophet. Ibn Ḥibbān argues that 'Umar was not suspecting the Companions. In order to deter people from carelessly narrating about the Prophet, 'Umar, in fact, wanted to make it clear for other people who were not equal to the Companions in reliability that narrating from the Prophet was a serious matter, Ibn Ḥibbān explains.⁴⁰

Ibn Ḥibbān's works belong again to the works concerned with the transmission of the Prophetic Ḥadīth. Again the legitimacy of the Companions as Ḥadīth transmitters is being established here, yet this is done now by counting mainly on a Prophetic tradition and the good deeds of the “Companions” during the lifetime of the Prophet. Reference to the *sīra* of the Prophet is also made and Ibn Ḥibbān strives to prove that the

³⁸ Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī. *Kitāb al-Majrūḥīn min al-Muḥaddīthīn wa-'l-Ḍu'afā' wa-'l-Matrūkīn*. (Ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Zāyid.) Ḥalab, Dār al-Wā'ī, 1980

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-8

Prophet considered the Companions *'udūl*. He also strives to prove that 'Umar, by prohibiting the Companions from frequently narrating from the Prophet was not in fact casting doubt on their *'adāla*. Associating the veneration of the Companions with faith, and vilifying them with unbelief, is also reiterated here.

Towards the end of the 4th/10th C. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Dārquṭnī (d. 385/996) compiled a work entitled *Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥāba wa-Manāqibuhum wa-Qawl Ba'dihim fī Ba'd*⁴¹ (i.e. *The Merits of the Companions and their Virtues and Their Sayings about Each Other*). What has survived of this work, according to the editor of the book, is only a small fragment of the original, which seems to have been of considerable length (the fragment that we have is supposed to be chapter 11 of al-Dārquṭnī's original work).⁴² This extant part of the work starts with a number of sayings ascribed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālīb—the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law and the fourth Caliph—in which he praises both Abū Bakr and 'Umar. In one of those sayings, 'Alī, when asked about a garment he used to wear very often, replies that it was given to him by his brother and intimate friend 'Umar (the Arabic reads: "*akhī wa-ṣadīqī wa-ṣafīyyī*—and in other accounts *wa-khalīlī*—'Umar.")⁴³ The second part talks about the sayings of 'Alī's descendants about Abū Bakr and 'Umar. To many Shī'ī Imams are ascribed statements that praise and venerate the first two Caliphs.⁴⁴

Al-Dārquṭnī's work, as the title itself reveals, seeks to prove that the Companions maintained high opinions of each other. The focus of the part we have is on Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Alī. The book obviously responds to Shī'ī accounts of 'Alī's alleged insinuations against the first

⁴¹ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Dārquṭnī. *Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥāba wa-Manāqibuhum*. Al-Madīna: Maktabat al-Ghurabā' al-Athariyya, 1998

⁴² Al-Rabbāh, Muḥammad ibn Khalīfa in the "Introduction" to Al-Dārquṭnī's *Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥāba wa-Manāqibuhum*. p. 6

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 38

two Caliphs and it should be understood against the background of the Shī'ī claim that Abū Bakr and 'Umar usurped 'Alī's right to succeed the Prophet.

In the two earliest works on the Ḥadīth sciences—those of al-Rāmḥurmuzī (d. 360/971) (*Al-Muḥaddith al-Fāṣil bayna al-Rāwī wa-'l-Wā'ī*⁴⁵), and al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī (d. 405/1014) (*Ma'rifat 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*⁴⁶)—no reference to the concept of the collective 'adāla of the Companions is given. Al-Rāmḥurmuzī only mentions the "Companions" to note that some of them were known by their father's or grandfather's names.⁴⁷ Al-Ḥākim, however, mentions the *marātib* (ranks) of the Companions. According to him, the Companions are classified into 12 ranks, the first of which comprises the early converts, whereas the last consists of the children who saw the Prophet on the day of the conquest of Mecca and during the Farewell Pilgrimage.⁴⁸

The fact that the two earliest works on the Ḥadīth sciences that have reached us do not mention the 'adāla of the Companions, which had already been mentioned by Ibn Abī Ḥātim, is significant. It suggests that the link between attitudes towards the Companions and the 'adāla of Ḥadīth transmitters was not yet well established and generally recognized. Al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī's account, however, can be taken as the first attempt to address the problem of the definition of companionship. The 12th rank of Companions that he mentions suggests that he thought that companionship could be established by the mere *ru'ya* (sight) of the Prophet. This means that the first appearance of

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-96

⁴⁵ Al-Ḥasan ibn 'Abd al-Rahmān Rāmḥurmuzī. *Al-Muḥaddith al-Fāṣil bayna al-Rāwī wa-'l-Wā'ī*. (Ed. Muḥammad 'Ajjāj al-Khatīb.) Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Fikr, 1984

⁴⁶ Al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī. *Ma'rifat 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*. (Ed. Al-Sayyid Mu'azzam Ḥusayn.) Al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Mutanabbī, n.d.

⁴⁷ *Al-Muḥaddith al-Fāṣil*, pp. 180-1

⁴⁸ *Ma'rifat 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 22-24.

'*adula* was in a work on Ḥadīth tradition, and the first attempt to define a Companion (preferring a definition that would incorporate thousands of people under the term) was also made by a Ḥadīth scholar.

Sunnī scholarship on the Companions in the first four centuries of Islam can thus be summarized as follows: a keen interest to prohibit the vilification of the Companions (who are never explicitly identified) followed by a more positive attitude towards them by enjoining love of and affiliation with them. Hatred towards and dissociation from the Companions were seen as tantamount to unbelief. Abstaining from discussing the schisms they got involved in was also recommended. '*Adula* appears once in a work on Ḥadīth sciences and is used to refer to the '*adāla* of the Companions as established by God and the Prophet, or by the Qur'ān and Sunna. The link between the '*adāla* of the Companions and their role as Ḥadīth transmitters is also made clear. No reference to '*ijmā'* is made.

In the 5th/11th we have an abundance of works that talk about the Companions. The first of these is 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī's (d. 429-1037) heresiographical work *Al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*⁴⁹ in which he also states his creed. He says in a chapter entitled "our saying about the righteous ancestors of the *umma*" that "the *ahl al-sunna* have agreed⁵⁰ on the *faith* (*īmān*) of the *Muhājirūn* and the *Anṣār*, in opposition to the claim of the *Rāfiḍa* that the Companions reverted to unbelief (*kafarat*) when they declined from giving the *bay'a* to 'Alī, and [in opposition to] the saying of the *Kāmiliyya* (a *khārijī* sub-sect) to the effect of charging 'Alī with unbelief when he abstained from fighting them [the

⁴⁹ 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī. *Al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*. (Ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn). Al-Qāhira: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, n.d.

⁵⁰ The Arabic reads "*ittafaqū*." Later he says that there is "*ittifāq*" among the Sunnīs, which we translate hereafter as agreement. "*Ijmā'*" and "*ajma'a*" are not used here at all.

Companions].”⁵¹ He then adds that agreement was also achieved on the point that those who apostatized after the death of the Prophet were not of the *Muhājirūn*—a term which only refers to those who migrated before the conquest of Mecca, he explains—or the *Anṣār*. Agreement was also achieved that those who witnessed [the battles of] Badr and Uḥud and Bay‘at al-Riḍwān in al-Ḥudaybiyya are in paradise.⁵² The *ahl al-sunna* have also agreed, he adds, to charge with unbelief anyone who accuses any of the ten Companions whom the Prophet had promised paradise (*wa-qālū bi-takfīri kulli man akfara wāḥidan mina 'l-'asharati 'lladhīna shahida lahumu 'l-nabiyyu bi-'l-janna*).⁵³ In a following chapter entitled “On God’s protection of the *ahl al-sunna* from charging each other with unbelief,” he says that God has restrained the *ahl al-sunna* from speaking ill of the ancestors of the *umma* or disparaging them (*wa-qad ‘aṣima ‘llāhu ahla 'l-sunnati min an yaqūlū fī aslāfi hādhihi 'l-ummati munkaran, aw yaṭ‘anū fihim ṭa‘nan*). They, consequently, do not say anything but good about the *Muhājirūn*, the *Anṣār*, the people of Badr, Uḥud, Bay‘at al-Riḍwān, to all of whom the Prophet testified paradise, and his wives, Companions, children and grandsons.⁵⁴

‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī’s work is the first to refer to an “agreement” by the *ahl al-sunna* as regards the Companions. The agreement is first on the “faith (*īmān*)” of certain groups of the Prophet’s contemporaries, and the second is on charging anyone who vilifies the groups of the Prophet’s contemporaries to which he alludes with unbelief. The first point of agreement suggests that the wide definition of companionship introduced by al-Ḥākim was not yet widely known or

⁵¹ ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*, p. 359

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 359

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 360

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 361-2

accepted. The contemporaries of the Prophet who are given a special status in this account are only those who witnessed certain events with him, not all who had the chance to see him. ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī seems indeed unaware of the attempt to give all the contemporaries of the Prophet a special status. Unlike al-Ḥākim, who classified those contemporaries in ranks but seems to have granted all of them the title of companionship, al-Baghdādī seems to strive to clear the histories of certain groups of contemporaries in particular. For example, an attempt to make a clear distinction between the *Muhājirūn* and those who apostatized upon the Prophet’s death is made by restricting the definition of *Hijra* (the *Muhājirūn* are only those who migrated *before* the Conquest of Mecca; the definition which found a tradition to support it⁵⁵). *Ahl al-sunna*, we are told, are protected by the grace of God from speaking evil of those people.

The second 5th/11th C. work is Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s (d. 463/1071) *al-Isṭī‘āb fī Ma‘rifat al-Aṣḥāb*⁵⁶. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr introduces his biographical dictionary with a discussion of the importance of the Prophetic Sunna and its role in understanding the Book of God.⁵⁷ One of the ways by which the Muslims know about the Sunna of the Prophet, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr explains, is to know the biographies of those who narrated it from the Prophet; i.e., the Companions. “The *‘adāla* of all of them has been confirmed by God’s and the Prophet’s praising of them (*thabatāt ‘adālatu jamī‘ihim bi-ṭhanā’i ‘llāhi ‘azza wa-jalla ‘alayhim wa-ṭhanā’i*

⁵⁵ The traditions is: “There is no migration after the Conquest [of Mecca], but [only] *jihād* and intention (*lā hijrata ba‘da ‘l-fatḥi wa-lākin jihādun wa-niyya*)”. For a discussion on a possible purpose that this traditions was supposed to establish, see M. Cook’s *Early Muslim Dogma*, p. 100, where he argues that “the concern of the tradition, in short, is to absolve the Meccans of the stigma of living in the city that the prophet had left.” By emphasizing that the term “*Muhājirūn*” only applies to those who migrated before the Conquest of Mecca, al-Baghdādī seeks to exonerate the *Muhājirūn* of any possible abandonment of Islam after the death of the Prophet.

⁵⁶ Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr. *Al-Isṭī‘āb fī Ma‘rifat al-Aṣḥāb*. (Ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bajawī.) Al-Qāhira: Maktabat Nahḍat Miṣr, 1958.

rasūlihi 'alayhi 'l-salām),” he states.⁵⁸ Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr also states that the Companions are “the best generation” and the “best community that has been raised up for mankind” in a reference to a Prophet tradition and a Qur’ānic verse (the *khayra ummatin* verse).⁵⁹

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr does not directly address the issue of the definition of companionship, but he seems reluctant to put all the contemporaries of the Prophet on an equal footing. He says, after quoting a Qur’ānic verse that praises “those who are with him [i.e., Muḥammad]” (Qur’ān: XLVIII, 29), “this is the sign of those who hastened to believe him and believe in him, and who backed and supported him, and who (stuck to him) and accompanied him. This does not apply to all who saw him or to all who believed in him (*‘fa-hādhihi ṣifatu man bādara ilā taṣḍīqihi wa-’l-īmāni bihi wa-āzarahu wa-naṣarahu (wa-laṣīqa bihi) wa-ṣaḥibahu, wa-laysa kadhālika jamī’u man ra’āhu wa-lā jamī’u man āmana bi-hi*”).⁶⁰ Some Qur’ānic verses and Prophetic traditions are then presented, most of which refer to specific groups of the Prophet’s contemporaries in specific situations (e.g. those who took part in the Battles of Badr and Uḥud and the Bay‘at al-Riḍwān in al-Ḥudaybiyya). A verse of no specific reference is also adduced and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr quotes earlier interpretations that give either restricted or unrestricted meanings to it.⁶¹ A keen and a rather lengthy interest is shown here in identifying the numbers of the Prophet’s Companions in each event. At the end of his account, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr says that the Muslims have no

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 1

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 2

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 1

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 2

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 11

need to scrutinize the Companions as transmitters because of the *ijmā'* of “*ahli 'l-ḥaqqi mina 'l-muslimīn*” that all of them are “*'udūl.*”⁶²

The fact that Ibn 'Abd al-Barr starts his biographical dictionary, the first work in the second half of the 5th/11th C, with a discussion of the importance of the Prophet's Sunna, and links this to the study of the biographies of the Companions, suggests that by his time interest in the Companions as Ḥadīth transmitters was well-established. The link is also made here between the Sunna and the Qur'ān. Like 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, he shows a special interest in certain groups of the Prophet's contemporaries.

In accordance with his reluctance to put all the Companions of the Prophet on equal footing, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr quotes some earlier authorities to argue *against* the wide or the unconditional interpretation of the “*ummataṅ wasaṭan* verse.” Ibn 'Abbās is quoted as saying that the verse refers to the *Muhājirūn* in particular. The *Tafsīr* of Mujāhid, which makes the verse conditional as we seen before, is also cited.⁶³ This may be taken to mean that Ibn 'Abd al-Barr was against the widening of the definition of companionship to include all the contemporaries of the Prophet. In Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, we encounter for the first time an *ijmā'* that is linked with the root '*adāla*. The *ijmā'* of *ahl al-ḥaqq* here is on the '*adāla* of the Companions.⁶⁴

The third 5th/10th C. work is *al-Kifāya fī 'Ilm al-Riwāya*⁶⁵ of al-Khaṭīb Al-Baghdādī who discusses the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions at some length. He argues that all the transmitters in a chain of transmission are to be scrutinized except the Companions, who

⁶² *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 19

⁶³ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 11

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 19

⁶⁵ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. *Al-Kifāya fī 'Ilm al-Riwāya*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1988

have been declared *'udūl* by God and his Apostle. Like Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, he refers to many Qur'ānic verses and Prophetic traditions. In two of these traditions the issue of disagreement among the Companions (*ikhtilāf al-ṣaḥāba*) is addressed. In the first tradition, the Prophet is reported to have said: "I have asked my Lord about what my Companions [will] have disagreed on after my death, and God has revealed to me: 'O Muhammad. Your Companions for me are like the stars in the sky, some of which are brighter than the others. Whosoever takes something of their disagreements is guided in my sight'" (*sa'altu rabbī fī-mā ikhtalafa fī-hi aṣḥābī min ba'dī, fa-awḥa 'llāhu ilayya: yā muḥammad, inna aṣḥābaka 'indī bi-manzilati 'l-nujūmi fī-'l-samā'i, ba'ḍihā aḍwa'u min ba'ḍin. fa-man akhadha bi-shay'in mim mā hum 'alayhi min ikhtilāfihim, fa-huwa 'indī 'alā hudā.*) The second tradition reads: "Whatever you are given in the Book of God, you should do it, and none of you has any excuse for leaving it; if it is not in the Book of God, then from a valid sunna of mine; if there is no valid sunna of mine, then [follow] what my Companions have said. Verily! My Companions are like the stars in the sky. Whichever of them you follow, you will be guided. Their differences are mercy for you" (*mahmā 'ūtītum min kitābi llāhi fa-'l-'amalu bihi lā 'udhra li-aḥadikum fī tarkihi, fa-in lam yakun fī kitābi 'llāhi fa-sunnatun minnī māḍiyatun; fa-in lam takun sunnatun minnī māḍiyatun, fa-mā qāla aṣḥābī. inna aṣḥābī bi-manzilati 'l-nujūmi fī-'l-samā'i, fa-ayyuhā akhadhtum bi-hi ihtadaytum, wa-ikhtilāfu aṣḥābī lakum raḥmatun.*)

In a third tradition, the Prophet prophesies that among posterity will be people who speak ill of his Companions and he orders his *umma* to shun them or to have nothing to do with them. This tradition has it that "God has chosen me [the Prophet] and has chosen my Companions and has made them my relatives by marriage and my supporters. Towards the

end of time will come a sect of people who speak ill of them. Do not marry them, or give them your daughters in marriage. Do not pray with them, or pray over them [when they die]. Upon them the curse has fallen” (*inna ’llāha ikhtāranī wa-ikhtāra aṣḥābī fa-ja’alahum aṣḥārī wa-ja’alahum anṣārī. wa-innahu sayajī’u fī ākhiri ’l-zamāni qawmun yantaqīṣūnahum. Alā fa-lā tunākiḥūhum, alā fa-lā tunkīḥū ilayhim. Alā fa-lā tuṣallū ma’ahum, alā fa-lā tuṣallū ’alayhim. ’alayhim ḥallati ’l-la’natu*). Al-Khaṭīb concludes this chapter by quoting Abū Zur’a [al-Rāzī]—who was, it is worth noting here, Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s closest friend and intellectual companion—who argued that he who speaks ill of any of the Prophet’s Companions is a *zindīq*, because the Companions are those who transmitted the Qur’ān and Sunna to us. “They [only] want to disparage our witnesses in order to vitiate the Book and the Sunna. They are to be disparaged and considered *zanādiqa* (*wa-innama yurīdūna an yujarriḥū shuhūdanā li-yubṭilū ’l-kitāba wa-’l-sunnata wa-’l-jarḥu bihim awlā wa-hum zanādiqa*),” Abū Zur’a explains.⁶⁶

As for the definition of companionship, al-Khaṭīb presents differing views that either restrict the definition of companionship or widen it. Al-Khaṭīb’s own attitude is ambivalent: he quotes earlier authorities who gave quite differing definitions of the term. On the one hand, he adduces a linguistic analysis to the effect that companionship (*ṣuḥba*) refers to the case when someone accompanies another, be it for a long or a short time. On the other hand, he says that it is the habit of the *umma* not to use *ṣuḥba* except when referring to a long or frequent companionship. This is how it should be used, he (“*wa-ma’a dhālika fa-qad taqarrara li-’l-ummati ’urfun fī annahum lā yasta’milūna hādhihi ’l-*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49

tasmiyata illā fī-mān kathurat ṣuḥbatuhu."⁶⁷ "However," he adds, "the transmission of an honest and reliable man from him [the Prophet] is acceptable and acted on, even if his [the honest and reliable man's] companionship was not long, and even if he heard no more than a tradition from him (*"wa-ma'a hādha fa-inna khabara 'l-thiqati 'l-amīni 'anhu maqbūlun wa-ma'mūlun bihi, wa-in lam taṭul ṣuḥbatuhu, wa-lā sami'a minhu illā ḥadīthan wāḥidan.*")⁶⁸ The last point al-Khaṭīb addresses is how the companionship of a Companion is to be recognized. He says that the first way is the concurrence of reports to that effect (*taẓāhur al-akhbār bi-dhālik*). The second and the third is the testimony of a reliable person that he is a Companion, or the testimony of another Companion that he is such.⁶⁹

Before quoting the fierce attack of Abū Zur'a on those who used to disparage the Companions, al-Khaṭīb says that some innovators (*ahl al-bida'*) have argued that the condition of the Companions (*ḥāl al-ṣaḥāba*) was satisfactory until they engaged in war and mutual shedding of blood. Those events, they argued, led to their losing their *'adāla*. Therefore, the innovators add, the transmitters from amongst them must be scrutinized to distinguish those who remained *'udūl* from those who did not. To this al-Khaṭīb responds that no one among the righteous scholars says anything about those events that cannot be reinterpreted or understood as a matter of *ijtihād*, like the disagreements among the jurists to which their *ijtihād* in problematic matters leads them (*"wa-laysa fī ahli 'l-dīni wa-'l-mutaḥaqqiqīna bi-'l-'ilmi man yaṣrif ilayhim khabaran mā lā yaḥtamilu naw'an mina 'l-ta'wīli wa-ḍarban mina 'l-ijtihādi fa-hum bi-mathābati 'l-mukhtalifīna mina 'l-fuqāha'i 'l-mujtahidīna fī ta'wīli 'l-aḥkāmi li-*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52

ishkāli 'l-amri wa-iltibāsih). Al-Khaṭīb then adds that the condition of the Companions should remain satisfactory as it was originally, because nothing has been proven that calls to change that (“*wa-yajibu an yakūnū ‘alā ‘l-aṣli ‘l-ladhī qaddamnāhu min ḥāli ‘l-‘adālati wa-‘l-riḍā, idh lam yathbut mā yuzīlu dhālika ‘anhum.*”).⁷⁰

Like Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s, Al-Khaṭīb Al-Baghdādī’s own stance on the issue of the definition of companionship is ambiguous, although it represents the first genuine attempt to define the term. Al-Khaṭīb, we can safely say, was the first scholar who presented all the possible definitions of companionship with the weaknesses of each definition. Taken together, his and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s accounts suggest that until the 5th/11th C. no universal definition of companionship was agreed upon by the Sunnī scholars. In complete opposition to Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, al-Khaṭīb argues that although the reference in the “*ummataṅ wasaṭan*” verse is general, it is intended to be restricted [to the Companions] (“*wa-hādhā ‘l-lafzu wa-in kāna ‘āmmaṅ fa-‘l-murādu bi-hi l-khāṣṣ.*”) Put differently, both scholars are against the widening of the reference in the verse: but while Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr seems to be opposing the widening of the reference to include all the contemporaries of the Prophet (from which we can infer that he held that not all people who saw the Prophet are to be considered his Companions), al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī seems to be opposing the widening of the reference to include all the subsequent generations of Muslims.

The issue of the *‘adāla* of the Companions is also linked here with the preservation of the whole religion, not only the Sunna, as suggested by al-Khaṭīb’s quotation of Abu Zur‘a’s statement. Moreover, for the first time we have traditions that refer to the disagreements among the

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49

Companions. What is interesting about these traditions is their assertion that those disagreements constitute “mercy” to the *umma*, and that all the conflicting views and deeds of the Companions are valid and equally worthy of imitation. To the cursing of the first four centuries, exclusion and even a clear charge of unbelief are added here to the condemnation of those who vilify and abuse the Companions.

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s refutation of the argument of the innovators is worth commenting on here. What we can understand from this passage is that al-Khaṭīb does not rule out the possibility that the Companions could have done something that might lead to their losing their *‘adāla*. He simply argues that nothing of that sort was *proven*. What we know about them, he adds, can be either reinterpreted or explained as *ijtihād*. Therefore, he concludes, we must stick to their *original ‘adāla*.

The last point to observe is: starting from al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, we notice an interest in determining how the companionship of a person is to be established. Common knowledge (*istifāda*) is the first criterion. The testimony of a person that he is a Companion, or the testimony of a well-known Companion that a certain other person is a Companion, are the second and the third criteria. Ibn Kathīr adds to these narrating from the Prophet while being contemporaneous with him as we will see. In other words, anyone who narrates directly from the Prophet is considered a Companion if he is one of the contemporaries of the Prophet (contemporaneity is meant to exclude the Successors (*tābi‘ūn*) who narrated from the Prophet without mentioning the Companions from whom they got their narrations). Interest in this point may be due to a desire to account for the growing number of the Companions. The Sunnī scholars wanted to warn against considering common knowledge or the concurrence of reports the only criterion by which the companionship of

a person is known. However, no attempt is made to determine the number of Companions whose companionship was acknowledged by each method. Apart from common knowledge, which could hardly extend to more than a dozen or hundreds of people who were known to have actually lived in the same place with the Prophet, we do not know exactly how many people claimed to have been Companions. Eerik Dickinson points out that it might have been common for people to claim companionship, given the fact that this conferred upon them a number of benefits.⁷¹

The third 5th/11th C. Sunnī work that addresses the concept of collective *ta'dīl* is al-Juwaynī's (d. 478/1085) *Al-Burhān fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*⁷². Al-Juwaynī, who does not address the question of the definition of companionship, starts his presentation of the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions with some Qur'ānic verses from which he understands that the Companions were declared *'udūl* by the Qur'ān. The "*khayra ummatin*" verse is used here with the claim that the *mufasssirūn* had agreed (*ittafaqa al-mufasssirūn*) that it referred to the Companions of the Prophet.⁷³ Like Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Juwaynī does not provide any reference for this claim. He endeavors to refute the argument of those who, counting on the history of the Companions, reject the concept, and those *fuqahā'* who used to make insinuations and allegations against some of the famous Companions of the Prophet (such as 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar and Abū Hurayra). To this end, al-Juwaynī refers to the biography of the Prophet who, al-Juwaynī points out, used to count on his Companions to transmit his narrations and used to ask them about things

⁷¹ E. Dickinson. *The Development of Early Sunnite Ḥadīth Criticism: The Taqdīma of Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī*. Leiden: Brill, 2001, p. 123

⁷² Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī. *Al-Burhān fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. (Ed. 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Dīb.) Qatar: Kulliyat al-Sharī'a, 1399 H. (1979 A.D.).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, vol.II, p. 626

he did not know; i.e., he had confidence in them.⁷⁴ He also argues that the Prophet was aware of the existence of some hypocrites and that he named them to his Companion Ḥudhayfa ibn al-Yamān. Al-Juwaynī does not explain how this last point contributes to his argument for the *ta'dīl* of the Companions by the Prophet, but he takes these last two points as decisive evidence that the Prophet, by word and deed, attested to the *'adāla* of his Companions.⁷⁵ He then moves on to refute the allegations about Abū Hurayra, arguing that the fact that 'Umar, who knew that Abū Hurayra used to narrate a lot from the Prophet, appointed him governor constitutes a proof that Abū Hurayra was considered a righteous man. As for Ibn 'Umar, al-Juwaynī is satisfied by saying that he was declared pure by Gabriel (*zakkāhu jibrīlu*) who said to the Apostle: "What a good man 'Abd Allāh is (*ni'ma 'l-rajul 'abdu 'llah!*)!"⁷⁶

Al-Juwaynī then discusses in a form of catechism the arguments of those who use the history of the Companions to disparage them. He says that they might argue that the Apostle's praise of the Companions does not necessarily entail their immunity (*'iṣma*) in the future and that some of them committed many lapses (*aḥdatha ba'duhum hanāt*) and many grave sins (*wa-iqtaḥamu mūbiqāt*), the slightest of which suffices to deny them *'adāla*. To this, al-Juwaynī replies that if this argument were to be lent credence, the door would be opened wide to disparage all the Companions of the Prophet; and this is very serious and dangerous, he explains.⁷⁷ He then argues that whenever someone disparages a Companion whom he does not like, and is faced by a disparaging remark about the Companion he likes, he resorts to interpreting the deeds of the Companion with whom he affiliates in good faith (*"fa-sayantahīdu 'l-*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 628

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 628

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 628

ṭā'inu li-ḥamli mā 'urīḍa bi-hi 'alā maḥāmil fī 'l-jawāzi wa-taḥsīni 'l-zann."'). This will lead, al-Juwaynī adds, to a number of contradictory opinions, none of which is necessarily better than the others. If reconciling them is not possible, al-Juwaynī argues, all of them should fall together and the Companions are to retain their original *'adāla* attested to by God and the Prophet.⁷⁸

This last point will be of great importance for our understanding of the concept. Equally important is the second question in which the imagined opponent argues that since immunity is restricted only to him who was sent [by God] (i.e., the Prophet), and since the condition of the Companions oscillated [between good and evil], then this requires that we refrain from bestowing *'adāla* on them because oscillation is inconsistent with a definite verdict (*"ghāyatukum ḥamlukum mā nuqila min hannātihim 'alā wujūhin mumkinatin fī 'l-jawāzi, wa-lastum qāti'īna bi-hā, bal wāfaqtum 'alā annahu lā yajibu 'iṣmatu ghayri 'l-mursali 'alayhi 'l-salām, fa-idhā taraddadat aḥwāluhum fa-l-yaqtaḍi taradduduhā [wuqūfan] 'alā ta'dīlihim, fa-inna 'l-taradduda yunāqīḍu 'l-ḥukma 'l-bāṭta.*"')⁷⁹ Before responding to this, al-Juwaynī points out that this argument, being based on mere satisfaction with the suspension of judgment, constitutes a retraction from the explicit disparagement of the Companions initially proposed by the opponent, which adds further evidence for its invalidation.⁸⁰ To refute the last point, however, al-Juwaynī says that the *ijmā'* is enough to invalidate it. "The *umma* has a consensus," he explains, "that refusal to bestow *'adāla* on all the Companions of the Prophet is unacceptable (*fa-inna 'l-ummata*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 629

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 630

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 630

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 631

mujmi'atun 'alā annahu lā yasūghu 'l-imtinā'u 'an ta'dīl jamī'i aṣḥābi rasūli 'llāhi.)"⁸¹ In addition to this, al-Juwaynī says that this point would require abstention from bestowing *'adāla* on all those who contributed to the schisms and abstention from transmitting from any of them. This, again, contradicts "the creed of the *umma* and the consensus of the scholars (*wa-hādha bāṭilun min dīni 'l-ummati wa-ijmā'i 'l-ulamā'i*)," al-Juwaynī states.⁸² The role of *ijmā'* is made very clear here and what this *ijmā'* determines—that refusing to bestow *'adāla* on all the Companions is impermissible—is significant. Al-Juwaynī concludes that God has *allowed* that *ijmā'* because the Companions were the transmitters of the *sharī'a*, and if their transmissions were questioned or rejected, the *sharī'a* would not extend to subsequent ages upon the Prophet's death.⁸³

Al-Juwaynī's account suggests a mind that is more argumentative than literalist, and this argumentativeness of his mind may enable us with to understand what the Sunnī scholars really meant by the concept of *'adālat al-ṣaḥāba*. The main focus of al-Juwaynī is obviously on the schisms in which the Companions took part. After adducing evidence from the Qur'ān and the biography of the Prophet (*sīra*) to assert that the Companions were considered *'udūl* during the lifetime of the Prophet, he turns to the opponent who challenges the concept. A close reading of the debate makes it clear that the debate is about the status of the Companions *after* the Prophet's death. That the Companions might have done what the opponent is saying is not rejected here at first. What al-Juwaynī is arguing is that since we cannot be *certain* of what happened, we have to *suspend judgment* on their *'adāla* after the Prophet's death and stick to their *original 'adāla*. The opponent's view is that doubt about

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 631

⁸² *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 631

⁸³ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 632

what took place should make us abstain from bestowing '*adāla* on them rather than applying *ta'dīl*. This is refuted on the ground that we have certainty about their original '*adāla*, on the one hand, and, on the other, that we have an *ijmā'* that has sanctioned this [al-Juwaynī's position]. The *ijmā'* here is on "the impermissibility of abstaining from bestowing '*adāla* on the Companions." That *ijmā'*, al-Juwaynī adds, was facilitated by God because of the hazardous consequences for religion that not trusting the Companions would certainly lead to.

The 5th/11th C., we can conclude, gives a rather different presentation of the issue of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions. First of all, by establishing a link between the '*adāla* of the Companions and trust in, not only the Sunna, but also the Qur'ān (i.e. the whole religion), the concept has begun to assume a serious position in Sunnī scholarship, although no fixed definition of companionship seems to have been settled yet. Second, a growing concern about what happened among the Companions in the decades following the Prophet's death is also very evident. Contrary to the general attitude of the first five Hijrī centuries, of preferring not to discuss what happened, the scholars of the 5th/11th C. sought to broach the subject, to reinterpret those events, and to have their say on them. The strategies used were either to adduce Prophetic traditions that refer to the disagreements among the Companions and legitimize them, or to argue that accounts of those events which cannot be interpreted as a matter of *ijtihād* are not accurate and, therefore, should not be taken to challenge the original '*adāla* of the Companions which is rooted in the Qur'ān. Nothing was proven, so to speak, that called for reviewing the original '*adāla* of the Companions.

Now to the 7th/13th C. when ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233) compiled his *Usd al-Ghāba fī Ma‘rifat al-Ṣaḥāba*⁸⁴, which he introduces by pointing out the need for his work: since the testimony of an unknown person (*majhūl*) is unacceptable, and this rule applies to the Companions as he makes clear, it is vital to know the names of the Companions and their biographies. Knowing the Companions, he points out, is vital because they are the transmitters of the Prophetic traditions which, together with the Qur’ān, represent the pillars of dispensation (*al-sharī‘a*). Since many compilers before him had differed on a number of issues related to the Companions, such as their names and their number, it was important to compile a work that gives a thorough account of the Companions of the Prophet.⁸⁵

Ibn al-Athīr then gives a number of definitions of Companionship.⁸⁶ His own position is not very clear. However, and despite some evidence to the contrary, the fact that he starts his discussion with definitions that restrict the term to the few people who actually resided in the same place as the Prophet for some time, can be taken to mean that he was in favour of this kind of restricted definition. Ibn al-Athīr does not argue for the belief that all the Companions were *‘udūl*, which he sees as too well known to be repeated.⁸⁷

To our disappointment, Ibn al-Athīr’s account, which we expected to be much more thorough in view of his dictionary’s reputation as the most comprehensive work on the biographies of the Companions, does not tell us much about the “Companions” as a group with a special status in Sunnī Islam. Neither does it endorse what we have concluded about the 5th/11th C., nor does it contribute to the development of the concept.

⁸⁴ ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr. *Usd al-Ghāba fī Ma‘rifat al-Ṣaḥāba*. Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Sha‘b, 1970

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 9-10

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 18-9

At almost the same time, al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233) compiled his *al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām*⁸⁸ where he adduces much linguistic evidence to support a wide definition of companionship (i.e. a definition that would encompass all those who saw the Prophet). This, he adds, is the belief of all scholars.⁸⁹ He also argues that the majority of scholars have agreed on the 'adāla of the Companions. He mentions the opinion of other scholars, some of whom argued that the Companions remained 'udūl until they engaged in disagreement and schisms and thus they are to have their 'adāla scrutinized. Other scholars said that all those who fought against 'Alī, the legitimate ruler in their view, are *fussāq* (evildoers) and their narrations and testimony are to be discarded accordingly. To other scholars is ascribed the opinion that the narrations and testimony of both parties—i.e. 'Alī's party and other parties—are to be discarded because one party of them was *fāsiq*, but we are in no position to identify which. Other scholars, however, argued that since the original state (*aṣl*) of the Companions is 'adāla, and we can only have doubt about the *fisq* of either side, we should accept their narration.⁹⁰ These last two opinions are identical with the opinions laid down by al-Juwaynī and his opponent: while al-Juwaynī's opponent argues that our doubt about the Companions maintaining their 'adāla should prevent us from accepting them as transmitters and witnesses, al-Juwaynī argues that our certainty of the original 'adāla of the Companions cannot be overruled by doubt about their *fisq*

Al-Āmidī himself accepts and defends the opinion which he ascribes to the majority of scholars. Here he relies on the "*ummatan wasaṭan*" and "*khayra ummatin*" verses and on the tradition in which the

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 10

⁸⁸ Sayf al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan al-Āmidī. *Al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr, 1997

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 255

Prophet says that God has chosen him and his Companions, and made them his supporters and relatives by marriage. "God's choice cannot be for one who is not 'adl," he says. The service that the Companions gave for the victory of Islam, he continues, affirms their 'adāla.⁹¹ It is the duty of all Muslims, therefore, to see the schisms in the best possible way. Both parties were acting according to their *ijtihād* and thought that what they were doing was for the best of Islam and the Muslims, he explains.⁹²

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245), gives us in his *Muqaddima*⁹³, a lengthy and well organized account of the Companions. He starts his discussion of the collective 'adāla of the Prophet's Companions by presenting a disagreement among the scholars about the definition of companionship. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ distinguishes between two main attitudes concerning this point: that of the traditionists and Ḥadīth scholars (*ahl al-ḥadīth*), and that of the scholars of the principles of jurisprudence (*al-uṣūliyyūn*). For *ahl al-ḥadīth* (the traditionists), any Muslim who saw the Prophet is considered a Companion and he is to be treated accordingly. The *uṣūliyyūn* (the scholars of the principles of jurisprudence) on the other hand argued that since the word "companionship" refers, linguistically speaking, to a relationship that lasts for some time, then a Companion of the Prophet is one who sat with the Prophet several times and received knowledge from him.⁹⁴ The well-know successor (*tābi'*) Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib held that only those who lived with the Prophet for a year or two, or fought in one or two of the Prophet's battles, were his Companions. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ refutes this opinion on the ground that, if authorized, it would lead to the exclusion of some well-known

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 254

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 254

⁹² *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 255

⁹³ Taqī al-Dīn ibn 'Amr ibn 'Uthmān ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ*. (Ed. 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Rahmān.) Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1989

Companions.⁹⁵ He does not, however, comment on the story that when Anas ibn Mālik, a Companion himself, was asked whether there were Companions still living, he replied that only some people who had seen the Prophet were still living, but none of his Companions was there anymore.⁹⁶

The companionship of a person with the Prophet can be acknowledged by four ways, says Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. The first and the second are *al-tawātur* (unquestionable knowledge) and *al-istifāḍa* (common knowledge), the former being based on a larger number of people than the latter. The third is the testimony of one of the Companions. The fourth is the testimony of the person himself that he is a Companion. This is acceptable from him only after his *'adāla* has been attested, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ adds.⁹⁷

All the Companions, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ states, share a common merit: their *'adāla* is not to be questioned. In his opinion this was a settled point since their *'adāla* is secured by the Qur'ān, the Sunna, and the *ijmā'* of those members of the *umma* whose *ijma'* is to be considered (*bi-ijmā' i man yu'taddu bi-hi fī 'l-ijmā' i mina 'l-umma*). Three Quranic verses and one tradition are adduced to substantiate this conviction. As for the *ijmā'*, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ says that the "*umma*" has a consensus on declaring all the Companions—even those who took part in the schisms (*fitan*), *'udūl*. He says that God has evidently facilitated and allowed for this *ijmā'* to take place because the Companions are the transmitters of dispensation (*al-sharī'a*).⁹⁸ This means that in addition to the testimony of the Qur'ān and the Sunna to the collective *'adāla* of the Companions, the concept was in

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 486-7

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 487

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 489

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 490-91

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 490-91

the interest of the whole *umma* because it is the guarantee that religion was properly transmitted.

In the 7th/13th C. the definition of companionship seems to have been settled. The definition adopted by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ is the one adopted by almost all later scholars. Companionship can be established by the mere sight of the Prophet (*ru'ya*). Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, however, is very clear in distinguishing between the views of those who defined companionship differently. The questions that we could ask here are: Why was it in the interest of the Ḥadīth scholars and traditionists to widen the definition of companionship so that as many people as possible were included in it? And why was it in the interest of the jurists to tighten the definition of companionship and thus restrict the number of Companions? In addition, why did the Ḥadīth scholars win the day? The answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this dissertation and need a separate study.

What is also worth our attention in Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's account is his reference to the subject of *ijmā'*. He says that the *umma* has *ijmā'* on "the *ta'dīl* of the Companions," including those who took part in the schisms because they think the best of them (*iḥsānan li-'l-ẓanni bihim*) and take account of their previous deeds. This is perfectly consistent with the ideas we put forward above in our conclusion on the 5th/11th C. The earlier century's introduction of the idea that there was some sort of divine intervention to allow the *ijmā'* in order to preserve the religion is also reiterated here.

Another work of the 7th/13th C. is *Muntahā al-Wuṣūl wa-'l-Amal fī 'Ilmay al-Uṣūl wa-'l-Jadal*⁹⁹, a work on *uṣūl al-fiqh* by Ibn 'Amr 'Uthmān ibn 'Umar (d. 646/1248), widely known as Ibn al-Ḥāḥib. In this

⁹⁹ Jamāl al-Dīn ibn 'Amr 'Uthmān (Ibn al-Ḥāḥib). *Muntahā al-Wuṣūl wa-'l-Amal fī 'Ilmay al-Uṣūl wa-'l-Jadal*. (Ed. Muḥammad al-Ḥalabī.) Al-Qāhira: Maṭba'at al-Ṣaḥāba, 1326 H. (1908 A.D.)

account, a Companion is any contemporary of the Prophet who saw him. Two Quranic verses and one *ḥadīth* are used to support the belief that all of the Companions were *'udūl*. As for the schisms in which the Companions took part after the death of the Prophet, they are to be seen as *ijtihād*, the legitimacy of which has been established by the consensus of the *umma* (*wa-amma 'l-fitan, fa-'l-wājib an tuḥmala 'alā ijtiḥādihim fa-lā ishkāla ba'da dhālika li-'l-ijmā'i 'alā wujūb 'l-'amal bi-'l-ijtiḥād*).¹⁰⁰ In other words, Ibn al-Ḥājjib justifies the early schisms by the right to exercise *ijtiḥād*, and the role of *ijmā'* here is to legitimize and authorize the use of *ijtiḥād*. Ibn al-Ḥājjib's account confirms what we have concluded about Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's work. The definition of companionship is the same and his attitude towards the schisms is also consistent with Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's.

In the 8th/14th C. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) compiled his *al-'Aqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya*,¹⁰¹ where he enumerates the articles of faith of *ahl al-sunna wa-'l-jamā'a*. According to Ibn Taymiyya, one of the principles of *ahl al-sunna wa-'l-jamā'a* is the good attitude of their hearts and tongues in respect of the Companions of the Prophet ("*wa-min uṣūli ahli 'l-sunnati wa-'l-jamā'ati salāmatu qulūbihim wa-alsinatihim li-aṣḥābi rasūli 'llāh*"). *Ahl al-sunna*, Ibn Taymiyya adds, accept what the Book, the Sunna, and the *ijmā'* have established as to the merits and ranks of the Companions.¹⁰² In a following passage he says that *ahl al-sunna* dissociate themselves from the way of the *Rāfiḍa* who execrate the Companions and vilify them ("*wa-yatabarra'ūna min ṭarīqati 'l-rawāfiḍi 'lladhīna yubghidūna 'l-ṣaḥābata wa-yasubbūnahum*").¹⁰³ Moreover,

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58

¹⁰¹ Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya. *Al-'Aqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya*. (Ed. Muṣṭafā Amīn 'Aṭā-Allāh.) Al-Iskandariyya: Dār al-Baṣīra, 2002

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 279

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 332

they abstain from discussing what took place among the Companions. They maintain that narrations about the misdeeds of the Companions are either lies or distortions. As for any misdeeds the authenticity of which is proven, *ahl al-sunna* maintain that the Companions are excused because they were *mujtahidūn*, whether the outcome of their *ijtihād* was correct or not (“*wa-yumsikūna ‘ammā shajara bayna ‘l- ṣaḥābati, wa-yaqūlūna inna hādhihi ‘l-āthāra ‘l-marwiyyata fī masāwīhim minhā mā huwa kadhibun, wa-minhā mā qad zīda fī-hī wa-naqas wa-ghuyyira ‘an wajhihi, wa-‘l-ṣaḥīḥu minhu hum fī-hi ma‘dhūrūna immā mujtahidūna muṣībūna wa-immā mujtahidūna mukhti ‘ūna.*”) This does not mean, Ibn Taymiyya makes clear, that *ahl al-sunna* believe that each one of the Companions was immune from sin, whether minor or mortal. It is very possible that they committed all kinds of sins. Nevertheless, their past good deeds and their merits necessitate excusing them, if they had indeed committed sins. Moreover, *ahl al-sunna* believes that any of them who had committed a sin must have repented, or been forgiven on account of either his past good deeds or the intercession of the Prophet, especially since they were *mujtahidūn*.¹⁰⁴

A concern to justify the schisms in which the Companions were involved is thus very clear in Ibn Taymiyya’s work. Despite his statement that *ahl al-sunna* [should] abstain from discussing what took place among the Companions, he offers a succinct apology for those events arguing that reports of them were either lies or distortions, or that they were the outcome of *ijtihād*. In case of *ijtihād*, all the parties would be rewarded. As we can see now, the same ideas are being repeated and later works offer hardly any novelty as far as our concept is concerned.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 356

In his *Ikhtisār 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*,¹⁰⁵ Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372) opens his chapter on the Companions by defining a Companion as one “who saw the Prophet while being a Muslim, even if he did not accompany him for long, and narrated nothing from him (“*wa-'l-ṣaḥābiyyu [huwa] man ra'ā rasūla 'llāhi fī ḥāli islāmi 'l-rāwī, wa-in lam taṭul suḥbatuhu lahu wa-in lam yarwi 'anhu shay'an*).”¹⁰⁶ He adds that this is the opinion of the majority of early and late scholars.¹⁰⁷ He also quotes an early scholar, whom he does not name, as saying “a day that Mu'āwiya witnessed with the Apostle of God is better than 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz and his family “*la-yawmun shahidahu mu'āwiyatu ma'a rasūli 'llāhi khayrun min 'umara ibni 'abdi 'l-'azīzi wa-ahli baytih*).”¹⁰⁸ He does not adduce evidence to support the concept and is satisfied with referring to the praise of God and his Apostle for the Companions in the Qur'ān and the Sunna. Addressing what took place among the Companions after the death of the Prophet, Ibn Kathīr states that some events—such as the Day of the Camel—took place “unintentionally” (*'an ḡhayr qaṣd*), while others—such as the Day of *Ṣiffīn*—were out of *ijtihād*. *Ijtihād* is liable to be either sound or faulty, he adds. Those who erred are excused and rewarded, and those who were on the right side are rewarded twice, he adds. “Alī and his companions were nearer to rightness than Mu'āwiya and his companions, may God be pleased with all of them,” he concludes.¹⁰⁹

Ibn Kathīr then moves on to refute the stances of other Islamic sects concerning the Companions. He ridicules the opinion of the Mu'tazila who argued that the Companions were *'udūl* save those who

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Kathīr. *Ikhtisār 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*. (Ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir as *Al-Bā'ith al-Ḥathūth Sharḥ Ikhtisār 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*.) Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Fikr, 2000

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 127

fought against ‘Alī. He mentions a tradition that has the Prophet saying that his grandson—al-Ḥasan—was a master whom God would use to reconcile two great groups of Muslims (referring to al-Ḥasan’s abdication and the alleged subsequent reconciliation between the partisans of ‘Alī and those of Mu‘āwiya).¹¹⁰ He also ridicules the Shī‘ī belief that all the Companions became *kuffār* after the death of the Prophet except for 17 of them. Ibn Kathīr argues that this opinion is too vicious and prejudiced to be worthy of being refuted, citing the Companions’ merits and good deeds to further invalidate it.¹¹¹

Ibn Kathīr then goes on to enumerate the different ranks of the Companions starting with the first four Caliphs in the order of their accession to power. He also quotes some early scholars on the number of the Companions, who, according to al-Shāfi‘ī, numbered about 60,000 and according to Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī 114,000 when the Prophet passed away. The issue of how the companionship of a person is to be known is also addressed and Ibn Kathīr says that there are four ways to attest that. The first and second are *tawātur* and *istifāda*. The third is the testimony of another Companion. The companionship of a person can also be known if he narrates from the Prophet while having been contemporaneous with him. There is a disagreement, however, on whether a contemporary of the Prophet, who is already known to be *‘adl*, and says “I am a Companion” is to be granted companionship. Ibn Kathīr quotes the opinion of a scholar that that person, albeit trustworthy, gives a legal verdict (*ḥukm shar‘ī*) here, and it is possible that he makes an error

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 128

in this.¹¹² By “*ḥukm shar‘ī*” this scholar probably means the definition of companionship. These points will be commented on later.

Ibn Kathīr does not add much to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s account. The wide definition of companionship is adopted, and an attempt to account for the number of Companions is given accordingly (now they are as many as 114,000).

In the 9th/15th C. Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1448) compiled his voluminous biographical dictionary, *al-Iṣāba fī Tamyīz al-Ṣaḥāba*¹¹³, which is entirely devoted to the Companions. Ibn Ḥajar opens this work by linking the study of the biographies of the Companions with the preservation of the Prophetic Sunna.¹¹⁴ His definition of companionship is similar to that of Ibn Kathīr, but he adds a detailed refutation of other definitions and a discussion of the different views regarding the possibility of the *jinn* and the Angles being counted among the Companions.¹¹⁵ The various ways by which a person acquires the title of a Companion of the Prophet are also the same. Ibn Ḥajar, however, is much more aware of the dilemma which someone’s testimony that he is a Companion creates. He says that the ‘*adāla*’ of a person who claims to be a Companion must be attested first before the acceptance of his claim, because if his ‘*adāla*’ is not known and his claim is accepted, the general ‘*adāla*’ of the Companions will extend to him, when he may not in fact be ‘*adl*’. In other words, he would be like one who says: “I am ‘*adl*’” which is unacceptable for establishing ‘*adāla*’.¹¹⁶

Ibn Ḥajar then asserts that *ahl al-sunna* have agreed that all the companions are ‘*udūl*’. Here he quotes from al-Baghdādī’s *al-Kifāya* the

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 133

¹¹³ Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥajar al-‘Aṣqalānī. *Al-Iṣāba fī Tamyīz al-Ṣaḥāba*. Al-Qāhira, n.p. 1910

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 2

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 7-8

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 8

Qur'ānic verses and the Prophetic traditions that are taken to vindicate the concept, adding to them more traditions. In one of these, the Companions are put in a rank just after the prophets and messengers of God ("Verily, Allāh has preferred my Companions to the two dependents (men and *jinn*) save the Prophets and the Apostles" (*inna 'llāha ikhtāra aṣḥābī 'alā 'l-thaqalayni siwā 'l-nabiyyīna wa- 'l-mursalīn.*)¹¹⁷

Ibn Ḥajar also quotes a scholar—one al-Mazīrī—who argued that "when we [the scholars] argued that the Companions are *'udūl* we do not mean everyone who saw him [the Prophet] for a day or visited him for a short time, or met with him for a certain purpose and left; we mean, however, those who were close to him, who supported and backed him, and who followed the light that had been revealed to him."¹¹⁸ Ibn Ḥajar does his best to refute this idea and argues against the interpretations that restrict the Qur'ānic verses he quotes to certain groups of Companions.¹¹⁹ He also tries to prove that the concept was well-known in early Islam by mentioning an anecdote in which 'Umar abstains from punishing a man when he knew that he had "companionship" with the Prophet.¹²⁰

To this century belongs also the Ḥadīth scholar Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1496) who compiled a commentary on Zayn al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-'Irāqī's (d. 806/1403) *Alfiyyat al-Ḥadīth*. In *Fatḥ al-Mughīth*¹²¹, al-Sakhāwī defines a Companion as one who saw the Prophet.¹²² He then states that there is a consensus among *ahl al-sunna* that all of the Prophet's Companions, those who plunged into the civil war included, were *'udūl*. This stance is based on thinking of them

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 12

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 10-11

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 8-10

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 10

¹²¹ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī. *Fatḥ al-Mughīth bi-Sharḥ Alfiyyat al-Ḥadīth*. (Ed. Riḍwān Jāmi' Riḍwān.) Makka: Maktabat Nizār, 1999

¹²² *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 77

in good faith and on the basis of their many merits in Islam (*wujūban li-ḥusni 'l-ẓanni bihim wa-naẓaran limā tamahhada lahum mina 'l-ma'āthir min imtithāli awāmirihi ba'dahu ṣallā 'llāhu 'alayhi wa-sallam*).¹²³ Al-'Irāqī is cited here to quote approvingly a certain Ibn al-Anbārī, whom he does not identify, where the latter explains the position and logic of *ahl al-sunna* on this point. On this view, the 'adāla of the Companions does not entail their infallibility ('iṣma) and the impossibility of their committing a disobedience. It means, as Ibn al-Anbārī points out, only that their narrations are to be accepted without putting their 'adāla to the test. Verifying their 'adāla would be necessary, he adds, only if it were proven that any of them had committed what would vitiate his 'adāla. This, thank God, has not been proven, he says. Therefore, we continue to accept their condition during the time of the Prophet until the contrary is proven (*fa-naḥnu 'alā istiṣḥābi mā kānū 'alayhi fī zamāni rasūli 'llāhi ḥattā yathbuta khilāfuhu*). No "serious attention is due to what historians have mentioned about the Companions because [generally speaking] it is not true, and what is true can be reinterpreted, he explains.¹²⁴

The prolific scholar of the 10th/16th C., Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) wrote a commentary on the *Taqrīb* of Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawāwī (d. 676/1277). In *Tadrīb al-Rāwī fī Sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawāwī*¹²⁵, al-Suyūṭī reiterates the widest definition of companionship, considering all those who saw the Prophet as his Companions.¹²⁶ Two verses are employed to vindicate the belief in their collective 'adāla. Al-Suyūṭī then mentions various opinions on the 'adāla of the Companions. According

¹²³ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 93-4

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 101

¹²⁵ Jalāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl al-Suyūṭī. *Tadrīb al-Rāwī fī Sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawāwī*. (Ed. Riḍwān Jāmi' Riḍwān.) Makka: Maktabat Nizār, 1997

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 842

to one opinion, attributed here to the Mu'tazila, all the Companions are 'udūl except those who fought against 'Alī. On another view, all those who fought against each other lost their 'adāla as a result. Al-Suyūṭī rejects these views on the basis of good faith and considering their deeds after the death of the Prophet as *ijtihād* for which all of them are rewarded (*iḥsānan li-l-ḡanni bihim wa-ḥamlan lahum fī dhālika 'alā 'l-ijtihādi 'l-ma'jūri fīhi kullun minhum*).¹²⁷

In light of the forgoing discussion of the sources it is possible to construct the mature Sunnī discourse on the issue of collective *ta'dīl* as follows. The Companions are all those people who saw the Prophet even if they could not speak to him. Knowing who those people are is crucial because it was they who transmitted the *sharī'a* (taken in the wider, non-technical sense) to the subsequent generations of Muslims. Their 'adāla is established by the Qur'ān and Sunna. There is an *ijmā'* among posterity on either the impermissibility of abstaining from bestowing 'adāla on the Companions (*al-imtinā' 'an al-ta'dīl*), or the duty to bestow the 'adāla (*wujūb al-ta'dīl*). This attitude derives its legitimacy from the certainty that the Companions were declared 'udūl by God and the Prophet, and the uncertainty whether the subsequent events in which they participated constitute a sufficient reason for reviewing their original 'adāla. On this last point, the proper attitudes towards those events are either to refrain from discussing them, or thinking the best of the participants in them and in light of their original 'adāla (by arguing that they were either lies or distortions, or the outcome of *ijtihād*). That attitude towards the Companions, the Muslim scholars maintain, has been facilitated by God because of the seriousness of the issue to the whole religion.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, vol III, p. 846

Resorting to the Qur'ān and Sunna to vindicate the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions is not surprising. Almost all early sects of Islam argued that the Qur'ān was the source of all their conflicting legal and theological beliefs. Therefore, most of them used the Qur'ān as a justification for their dogmas. However, since it was always possible to find at least one Qur'ānic verse to count on to vindicate a belief, the fabrication of Prophetic traditions was almost unavoidable. Indeed, this phenomenon is admitted by most Sunnī scholars and it was this fact that inspired them to develop many methods of Ḥadīth criticism and verification in the hope that this might halt or at least curb the proliferation of fabricated traditions.

The doctrine of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet's Companions was no exception. The Sunnī scholars counted on a number of Qur'ānic verses and many Prophetic traditions to vindicate it. Some of those verses and traditions are of general reference and those are the ones we mainly referred to in our discussion of the sources. There are however a number of verses with specific reference. These refer to specific groups of the Prophet's contemporaries. One verse, for instance, refers to "those who are with" the Prophet (XLVIII, 29). Another refers to those "of the believers" who "follow" the Prophet (VIII, 64). Some verses make explicit reference to the *Muhājirūn* and/or the *Anṣār* (IX, 100; LIX, 8-10; LVI, 10-12). One verse refers to those who gave the pledge to the Prophet in *al-Ḥudaybiyya* (ILVIII, 18). The same can be said about the Prophetic traditions, some of which allude to certain Companions who participated in significant events of the Prophet's time. While this last group of verses and traditions may seem insignificant in the context of arguing for the concept of the "collective" *'adāla* of (all) the Companions, their use by the Sunnī scholars must have had certain motives. Later, we will see that

the Sunnī scholars were keen to prove that the Qur'ān attests to the original *'adāla* of those Companions who were accused by other sects of losing it when they participated in the schisms. In view of the fact that most Companions who participated in the schisms after the death of the Prophet were among those referred to by these Qur'ānic verses, it can be argued that the use of these verses, even if arbitrary, is not pointless. The wider the definition of companionship became, the greater was the need for verses with no specific reference.

Conclusion

What we can conclude from this chapter is that the root of the Sunnī attitude towards the Companions, finalized in their concept of their collective *tadīl*, is to be found in the differing views on the Companions resulting from their involvement in the early schisms. That the early Muslims were disturbed by what took place among the Companions and had to shape views concerning those events, is natural. It is only likely that some of them would not shrink from openly insulting and cursing some or all of the participants, while others either abstained from judging them on the basis of those events or sought to excuse the events and the contributors thereto.

That the earliest traditions on the Companions are mainly concerned with the prohibition of insulting the Companions suggests that the Sunnī attitude towards the Companions was initially shaped out of opposition to that vilification. This meshes well with Juynboll's ideas in this respect. The issue of *'adāla* in the earliest Sunnī writings on the Companions is almost absent, and the main focus is on the merits of the Companions, which also suggests that the concept was not initially

introduced to serve some goal in Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism, as Dickinson has argued. This may have been only a later use of the concept. ✓

A distinction between the case of the Companions before and after the death of the Prophet can be inferred from a close scrutiny of the Sunnī sources. The Sunnīs accept it as a dogma that the *'adāla* of the Companions during the Prophet's life was proven by God and the Prophet. Basing the *'adāla* of Companions on the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth may have been done consciously to solve the problem we raised when discussing *'adāla* as a tool in *'ilm al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl*; i.e. who bestows *'adāla* on the *'udala*? By basing the *'adāla* on the Qur'an and the Sunna, the Sunnī scholars freed themselves from arguing for the eligibility and capability of those who bestowed the *'adāla* on the Companions. What the Sunnī scholars were striving to prove was that the Companions remained *'udūl* after the death of the Prophet and did not commit what might have made them liable to *jarḥ*. This explains the fact that the Sunnī sources talk about both the *'adāla* as well as the *ta'dīl* of the Companions; the former being rooted in the Qur'ān and the Sunna, while the latter is based mainly on the *ijmā'*.

The Sunnī sources were, it seems safe to suggest now, more concerned to argue for the *ta'dīl* of the Companions than for their *'adāla*, simply because the former will necessarily lead to the latter. Al-Juwaynī's discussion of this point is very revealing. It suggests that since it is hardly possible to make a strong case against the Companions given the lack of strong evidence, either for or against, the sound attitude is to abstain from disparaging them. The same logic was reiterated by Al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī in *al-Kifāya* and by Ibn al-Anbārī in *Fathḥ al-Mughīth*. This argument contradicts the widely-accepted rule in Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism that if the *jarḥ* and the *ta'dīl* happen to be ascribed

simultaneously to someone, the former is be privileged—the point which al-Juwaynī's imagined opponent was in fact making. Nevertheless, this argument is well in agreement with another rule in Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism, and in some schools of law, that everyone is 'adl until proven otherwise. This is similar to the legal rule of *al-istiṣhāb*, found in some Sunnī schools of law, notably the Mālikī school. This rule was unequivocally employed by Ibn al-Anbārī in his discussion of the Companions. If we apply this rule to our case the result would be that anybody retains his 'adāla until proven otherwise. Al-Juwaynī counts on this last point, in addition to the *ijmā'* on the "prohibition to refuse to bestow 'adāla on all the Companions" in order to refute the opponent. The *ijmā'* was needed to sanction this attitude, i.e. the *ta'dīl*, which is to be understood here as not actively bestowing 'adāla, but as abstaining from *jarḥ*.

But it seems that the Sunnī scholars wanted to find a solution for the contradiction referred to above—the acceptance of *ta'dīl* while *jarḥ* is to be privileged according to their theory of *al-jarḥ wa-'l-ta'dīl*. It is also held in Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism that one who disparages another has to produce evidence. That evidence may well be argued not to constitute a sufficient case for disparagement.¹²⁸ This may explain the tendency of the Sunnī scholars starting from the 5th/11th C. to abandon the passive attitude of earlier scholars—who were of the view that it was better to refrain from discussing the early schisms—and seek actively to argue that what is narrated about the schisms was, for many reasons, not enough to alter the original state of affairs. What the Sunnī scholars wanted to establish, in other words, is that the narrations about those events gives rise to at most doubt, and definitely not to certainty. Doubt, it is also generally held

¹²⁸ See chapter two.

in Sunnī jurisprudence, does not outweigh, and consequently cannot rule out, certainty. The *'adāla* of the Companions which the Sunnīs believe in is thus the product of the process of *ta'dīl*, and not primarily the *'adāla* which, as they claim, is established by the Qur'ān.

This should not be taken to conflict with the fact that some works, some as early as the early 5th/11th C., state that there was an *ijmā'* on the *'adāla*. This can be explained as follows. First of all, *'adāla* is a corollary of *ta'dīl*. This does not mean that both are identical, as we have shown before, but it does allow their interchangeable use. If our understanding of Sunnī scholarship on the subject stands, then we can argue that it was not illegitimate for the Sunnī scholars to say that there was an *ijmā'* on the *'adāla* of the Companions, which the *ta'dīl* has maintained. Secondly, the Sunnī scholars may be arguing that there was an *ijmā'* on the *'adāla* of the Companions *before* their participation in the schisms because this was what the Qur'ānic verses were taken to attest to. Thirdly, we should not forget what that attitude was originally all about. The early Sunnī scholars, who were already engaging in bitter polemics against other sects, were very keen to prove that the *'adāla* of the Companions was inherent in them. Arguing that the Companions were *'udūl* only because the *umma* have decided not to disparage them for the mere lack of evidence was a concession that was unlikely to be made in the midst of the battle. After the triumph of *ahl al-sunna* in the late 4th/10th C., it was possible and even necessary to put the concept in subtler terms, and the inconsistencies had to be dealt with. The aim then was to purify the history of the Companions and clear their names after the Prophet's death. Hence the interest in their biographies.

If this understanding of the beginning of the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions is accepted, it can be argued that the

collective *ta'dīl*, or *'adāla*, of the Companions was not in fact a *belief* that the early Sunnīs held as much as an *attitude* they adopted towards the Companions. The Sunnī scholars did not rule out the possibility that the Companions could have done what would make them liable to *jarḥ*, as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Anbārī made clear; they ruled out, however, the idea that this had certainly happened. The Sunnīs believe that the *original 'adāla* of the Companions during the lifetime of the Prophet was confirmed by the Qur'ān. *Ta'dīl* is the attitude the Sunnīs adopted towards the Companions and it is this that most Sunnī scholars were seeking to prove and which, if proven, would reestablish the *'adāla* of the Companions on a new, unchallenged basis.

This attitude is reminiscent of the Murji'a, who were named after their stance concerning the early schisms. It may be surmised then, that the Sunnī concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions was based on the attitude taken by the Murji'a. The Sunnīs may have found it safer for the unity of the *Umma* to adopt the thesis of the Murji'a. This surmise will next be verified by studying early Murji'i and Murji'i-related works, and the works ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfa who was accused of holding the views of the Murji'a yet came to be considered eventually the founder of the largest school of law in Sunnī Islam. To the Murji'a we shall now turn.

Chapter Four

The Background of the Concept

That Murji'ism and Sunnism have many things in common is not a new idea.¹ The basic tenet of the Murji'ī creed, or at least the tenet presented as such by those who have written about the Murji'a—the tenet pertaining to the definition of faith (*īmān*)—has indeed been adopted in Sunnī Islam and has become a fundamental article of the Sunnī creed. Work (*'amal*) has been excluded by the Sunnīs as a constituent part of faith.² This issue, however, is closely connected with other theological points, about which Sunnism and Murji'ism have much in common. It is hardly surprising then to know that some prominent Sunnī scholars were accused by their opponents not only of holding Murji'ī views, but also of belonging to the Murji'a. Notable in this respect is Abū Ḥanīfa ibn al-Nu'mān (d. 150/767), the scholar after whose name the largest Sunnī school of law is named. Al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935), the eponym the largest school of theology in Sunnī Islam—al-Ash'ariyya—and his followers were also accused of Murji'ism by the Ḥanbalīs, as we will see later in this chapter.

Chapter three has tried to show how ideas in Sunnī Ḥadīth criticism could have contributed to the development of the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet Muḥammad's Companions. This chapter will try to trace the roots of the Sunnī attitude towards the Companions. It was also suggested in chapter three that the Sunnī representation of the

¹ For this, see the article "Murjī'a" in *EI²* by W. Madelung, vol. VII, pp. 605-07; and M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973, pp. 119-143, especially p. 128 where Watt explicitly says that ". . . as opponents of the divisive tendencies of both Shī'ites and Khārijites all these early Murjī'ites were forerunners of the Sunnites, and deserve to be honoured as such."

concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions is reminiscent of what is generally known about the Murji'ī attitude towards the Companions. This chapter seeks to put this proposition to the test. This will be done by examining the alleged Murji'ī sources that we have on the one hand, and by putting the concept of collective *ta'dīl* in the context of the larger Sunnī creed on the other. It will be argued that the Sunnī concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions meshes very well in the general Sunnī context and is consistent with other beliefs that the early Sunnīs held. These beliefs are the definition of *īmān* and its relation to work, the position of the grave sinner, and the attitude towards the authorities. In all these, as this study hopes to show, the Sunnī views show a great deal of similarity, which could hardly be a matter of coincidence, with the Murji'ī views suggested by the extant Murji'ī sources. Again, this is not a new idea.³ This chapter, however, seeks to show how relevant these ideas are to the early Sunnī attitude towards the Companions and how this might have contributed to the development of the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Companions. This will require a brief discussion of how the Sunnī scholars dealt with the fact that many of their ideas were of Murji'ī origin.

A Review of the Sources on the Murji'a:

As with other early Islamic sects that have failed to survive, most of our knowledge about the Murji'a comes from Sunnī sources, notably the heresiographical works. We are fortunate, however, to have other early sources, allegedly Murji'ī or Murji'ī-related ones, on which we can count.

² This is not to say that all Sunnī scholars maintained the same definition of faith, or had the same perception on the relation between work and faith. A brief discussion of their differences on this point will be given later in this chapter.

We have an epistle ascribed to Al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyya, grandson of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, that bears the title *Kitāb al-Irjā’* and has been thoroughly commented on by J. van Ess and M. Cook. This is taken by some scholars as the earliest Murji’ī primary source that has managed to survive. Also at our disposal is a refutation by an early Ibādī scholar of the arguments put forward in this epistle. This is the so-called *Sīrat Sālim ibn Dhakwān* published and translated by M. Cook in his *Early Muslim Dogma*. We also have three creeds ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfa, translated and published by A. J. Wensinck in his *The Muslim Creed*. To the same scholar is ascribed an epistle in which he defends himself against accusations of *irjā’*, in addition to a work in which he answers questions put forward by a disciple of his. In this and the other works, views are given on the schisms that the Companions were involved in, and on what attitude to take towards the events and the Companions involved. In what follows, we will introduce these sources with a brief discussion of the different views on their authenticity, followed by an analysis of their contents.

According to Van Ess, the *Kitāb al-Irjā’* is “das erste (Buch) zu diesem Thema und scheint damit den Beginn der Murgī’a zu markieren.”⁴ It is ascribed to al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyya (d. c. 100/719). Parts of the original work were quoted by al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) in his history *Tārīkh al-Islām* and by Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449) in his biographical dictionary *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*. A complete version of the text is given in Ibn Abī ‘Umar al-‘Adanī’s *Kitāb al-Īmān*.⁵ Van Ess

³ For a similar argument see J. Schacht “New sources for the History of Muḥammadan Theology.” *Studia Islamica*, vol. I (1953), p. 38

⁴ Van Ess, J. “Das *Kitāb Al-Irjā’* Des Ḥasan B. Muḥammad B. al-Ḥanafīyya.” *Arabica*, vol. XXI (1974), pp. 20-52

⁵ Van Ess, J. “The Beginning of Islamic Theology,” in John Emery Murdoch and Edith Dudley Sylla (Eds.) *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1975, p. 93

argues for the authenticity of this epistle and suggests that it might have been compiled when al-Ḥasan and his father concluded a sort of rapprochement with the Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān in the early 70s H. (late 7th C. A.D.).⁶ This would mean that the epistle was written c. 75/694. M. Cook, however, taking a rather skeptical approach to the authenticity of most epistles supposedly written in the late first or early second centuries of Islam, takes a Murji’ī attitude himself as far as this epistle is concerned, on the ground that its content “does not provide any really strong arguments for or against an early dating.”⁷ Elsewhere, he speculates that the epistle might have been compiled in the second half of the second century as an attempt to “rehabilitate what could be rehabilitated of the Murji’ite heritage.”⁸ Cook also suggests that Iraq—Kūfa in particular—might have been the site of early Murji’ism.⁹ Commenting on Cook’s views on this work, however, W. Madelung argues that there are no “cogent reasons” to reject either al-Ḥasan’s authorship of the work or its authenticity.¹⁰

The second epistle, known as *Sīrat Sālim*, is that of the Ibādī scholar Sālim ibn Dhakwān. In this work, the author takes the offence against some alleged Murji’ī views. If authentic, this epistle also dates to the first half of the 70s H.¹¹ For many reasons, M. Cook casts grave doubt on the authenticity of this epistle, speculating that it might have been the product of “the strong tensions between activism and quietism within the

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-7

⁷ M. Cook. *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source Critical Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 88

⁸ M. Cook. “Activism and Quietism in Early Islam: The Case of the Early Murji’a,” in Alexander Qudsi and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (Eds.). *Islam and Power*. London, Croom Helm, 1981, p. 20

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-8

¹⁰ W. Madelung. “Murjī’a” in *ET*², vol. VII, p. 605

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16

Ibādī community of the later Umayyad period.”¹² In other words, Cook, who establishes a link between the authenticity of the *Kitāb al-Irjā'* and the *Sirat Sālim*, argues that both epistles were compiled around the middle of the second century of the Hijra (third quarter of the 8th C. A.D.). But if both works “stand or fall together” as Cook argues,¹³ and in view of the fact that Cook’s doubts about the authenticity of *Kitāb al-Irjā'* have failed to convince many scholars, then both works will be treated here as authentic.

To Abū Ḥanīfa ibn al-Nu‘mān (d. 150/767) are ascribed five extant works in which a reference to the “Companions” is made. At least three of these appear to be authentic. These are *al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ*, *al-Risāla ilā ‘Uthmān al-Battī*, and *Kitāb al-‘Ālim wa-’l-Muta’allim*. Two other works have had their authenticity questioned. These are *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* and *Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfa*.¹⁴

Wensinck refers to *al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ* as *al-Fiqh al-Akbar I* and to *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* as *al-Fiqh al-Akbar II*. The texts of *al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ* and *al-Fiqh al-Akbar I* are not completely identical: the latter contains one more article. However, because the difference is minimal, the Sunnī scholars have tended not to distinguish between them. Wensinck, on the other hand, did not ignore that difference, but he argued for the authenticity of *al-Fiqh al-Akbar I* in view of the text of *al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ*—whose authenticity he held.¹⁵

¹² Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, p. 102

¹³ Cook, “Activism and Quietism,” p. 16

¹⁴ Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu‘mān. *Al-‘Ālim wa-’l-Muta’allim, Al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ, Al-Fiqh al-Akbar, Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā ‘Uthmān al-Battī, Al-Waṣīyya* (Ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī). Al-Qāhira: Al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li-’l-Turāth. 2001

¹⁵ A. J. Wensinck. *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932, pp. 122-3

The *Risāla ilā 'Uthmān al-Battī* is a letter allegedly sent by Abū Ḥanīfa to the Baṣran scholar 'Uthmān al-Battī (d. c. 143/760) who had sent him an inquiry about his beliefs and about his alleged Murji'ī inclinations. This epistle, whose authenticity, to the best of my knowledge, has not been questioned,¹⁶ refers much more obviously to the events in which the Companions were involved. It is here where Abū Ḥanīfa gives a clear explanation of his ideas on those events and how they should be perceived by Muslims.

Equally important is *Kitāb al-'Ālim wa-'l-Muta'allim*; the 'ālim (scholar) being Abū Ḥanīfa and the *muta'allim* (student or disciple) being Abū Muqātil al-Samarqandī, one of Abū Ḥanīfa's disciples. In a form of dialogue where the student asks and the tutor answers, Abū Ḥanīfa explains his views on a range of issues raised by his student. It is also clear here how ideas were interconnected in the early discussions. J. Schacht acknowledges the authenticity of this epistle, except that he argues that it, like *Al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ*, originated in the circle of Abū Ḥanīfa's disciples rather than with Abū Ḥanīfa himself. He ascribes it to Abū Muqātil al-Samarqandī, the supposed student in this circle.¹⁷

The fourth work is the so-called *Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfa*, which is put in the form of a creed allegedly narrated by Ḥammād ibn Abī Ḥanīfa from his father. Unlike *al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ*, Wensinck challenges the authenticity of this work on the ground that we have no idea about how it was preserved and transmitted.¹⁸ The work, in Wensinck's view,

¹⁶ Actually, it is held by Schacht to be "the only authentic document by Abū Ḥanīfa which we possess," "Abū Ḥanīfa," *EF*², vol. I, p. 123.

¹⁷ Schacht, "Abū Ḥanīfa," *EF*², vol. I p. 123. For a detailed analysis of this epistle, see: J. Schacht "Early Murci'ite Treatise." *Oriens*, vol. XVII, no. 2 (1964), p. 100, where he argues that Abū Muqātil himself, the *muta'allim* in this epistle, is "the real author of the treatise and not merely as its first transmitter."

¹⁸ Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p. 185. Schacht holds the same opinion concerning the authenticity of this work, "Abū Ḥanīfa," *EF*², vol. I, p. 124

represents a higher degree of theological sophistication than *al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ*, but both are primitive in comparison with later well-known creeds.¹⁹ The main purpose of the work, he points out, is not to present the articles of faith of Islam, but to refute ideas held by certain sectarian deviations.²⁰ About the dating of this work, Wensinck argues that it might have originated in the interval between Abū Ḥanīfa and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal; i.e., the second half of the second century H. (late 8th C. or early 9th C. A.D.). He came to this conclusion by comparing some articles in *al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ* with known views of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal.²¹

The fifth work is *Al-Fiqh al-Akbar* which, Wensinck argues, represents "the embodiment of the final position of the community in relation to Mu'tazilism."²² For many reasons, Wensinck argues that this work as it stands shows many similarities to the ideas historically ascribed to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935).²³ On this basis Wensinck argues that the real author of the work must have been connected with al-Ash'arī (to whom Wensinck seems to have wished to ascribe the work had sufficient evidence existed).²⁴ Schacht also argues that *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, like *Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfa*, have no connection whatsoever with Abū Ḥanīfa.²⁵

In conclusion, we have seven works to deal with, two of which belong at the earliest to the last quarter of the first century H., and at the latest to the first half of the second century. If the latter, then we can say that we have five works compiled in the first half of the second century

¹⁹ Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p. 185

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 187

²² *Ibid.*, p. 246

²³ Schacht, "Abī Ḥanīfa," *EL*², vol. I, p. 124.

²⁴ Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p. 247

²⁵ Schacht, "Abī Ḥanīfa," *EL*², vol. I, p. 124.

(all the works we have mentioned except the last two ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfa). In either case, we are relying on works that are of relatively early origin. One work seems to have originated in the late second or early third century. One work might be as late as the early fourth century. The following is an analysis of the parts of these that are relevant to our study in these works.

An examination of the sources:

***Kitāb al-Irjā'* and *Sīrat Sālim*:**

Kitāb al-Irjā' of al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyya opens with a brief history of the Prophet's career, how he revolutionized the lives of his people, and how his mission achieved success.²⁶ One cause of that success, al-Ḥasan points out, was God's election of people who sacrificed their lives and money for the triumph of the new religion. Among those people were some who abandoned their homes and their families and migrated, and some who sheltered [the former] and supported the Prophet and his Message.²⁷ The reference here is obviously to the *Muhājirūn* and the *Anṣār*. The term *ṣahāba* is not used and no reference to any Qur'ānic verse is given. What this shows, however, is that in the earliest Murji'ī text at our disposal, there is a clear appreciation of certain groups of the Prophet's contemporaries and an attestation of their role in the success of the Prophet's mission.

One part of *Kitāb al-Irjā'* is of particular importance for our study. The following is Van Ess's English translation:

²⁶ Cook, in *Early Muslim Dogma*, p. 7, calls this opening the "mission topos," characteristic of many early epistles. For J. Givony, the "mission topos" in this epistle in particular has a specific function. It aims at "emphasizing his [i.e. al-Ḥasan's] pious beliefs and values . . . to safeguard himself from accusations of infidelity;" *The Murji'a and the Theological School of Abū Ḥanīfa*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1977, p. 19

²⁷ J. Van Ess. "Das *Kitāb al-Irjā'*," pp. 21-22

“if someone wants to ask us [i.e. the Murji’a] about our position and our opinion, we are people whose master is God, whose religion is Islam, whose guide is the Quran, and whose prophet is Muhammad Among the chiefs of our community (*a’immatinā*) we approve of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, we approve their being obeyed, and we condemn their being opposed. We are enemies of their enemies. (but) we reserve our judgment (*nurjī*) about those among them (i.e., the chiefs of the community) who first participated in the schism (of the community: *ahl al-furqa al-uwal*). We make every effort to remain loyal to Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, because the community did not engage in fighting or dissension with respect to them nor did they doubt about anything concerning them. “Reservation” is only due concerning those who are blamed by the people, whereas we were not present (in order to build up a judgment of our own)”²⁸

What we have here is an unequivocal statement about the different attitudes of the Murji’a—affiliation and dissociation—and the logic behind each. They associate themselves with the first two Caliphs because, they maintain, the *umma* did not argue about them and had no doubt about their affairs (*wa-lam tashukk fī amrihim*). As for subsequent rulers, presumably ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī, they reserve their judgment because people differ on them and they [the Murji’a] did not witness them.

²⁸ J. Van Ess, “The Beginning of Islamic Theology,” p. 94

In M. Cook's view, the content of this passage and a similar passage in *Sīrat Sālim* indicate that the Murji'a held that "since we were not there, and hear only conflicting testimony, we cannot judge who was right and who was wrong."²⁹ The epistemological ground for this, Cook argues, is the belief that one can legitimately pass a judgment if and only if one of two stipulations is fulfilled. The first stipulation is autopsy; i.e. the direct witnessing of the events in question and the people involved in them. The second is unanimity; i.e., when there is a "consensus" (the debate over what this term really means should not detain us here) with respect to the events and the people involved. One does not have to have both in order to be able to pass judgment, Cook adds, and the Murji'a did take positions regarding events and peoples on the basis of only one stipulation (associating themselves with the first two Caliphs, for instance, is a position taken on the basis of only one stipulation—unanimity). Without both, however, one must refrain from holding or defending any opinion.³⁰

However, a very significant point is made clear in this passage which can be taken to constitute the real epistemological ground of the Murji'ī stance; that is, incertitude or doubt (*shakk*). This passage makes it unequivocally clear that with the existence of doubt, or lack of certitude, no judgment can be justifiably passed. Incertitude is established by controversy or disagreement on people and events and the [physical] absence from those events. In other words unanimity, or the lack of autopsy when there is no agreement, are only criteria for the lack of certitude. Therefore, if the main question that the Murji'a were striving

²⁹ Cook, "Activism and Quietism," p. 16

³⁰ Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, p. 28

with all the time is “to judge or not to judge” as Cook puts it,³¹ then we can say that the Murji’a decided that the answer should be: “when in doubt, do not.”

It is on this ground of uncertainty that the Sunnī scholars argued that the Companions who participated in the schisms maintained their *original ‘adāla*. That original *‘adāla*, which was further confirmed by the Qur’ān and the Sunna, cannot be nullified on the basis of unproven or uncertain information. Apparently, however, the Murji’ī and the Sunnī stances seem to be different: the former abstain from judgment while the latter acknowledge and bestow *‘adāla*. However, this should not be taken to constitute a fundamental difference between the Murji’ī and the Sunnī positions on this point. The Sunnīs, as might be clear now, only took the argument one step further. Acting in accordance with their belief that everyone is *‘adl* until proven otherwise, they only argued that since we cannot pass judgment on the schisms and the Companions involved in them for lack of certitude, we have to adhere to the (well-attested) original *‘adāla*. This step was based on grounds provided by the development of *‘ilm al-jarḥ wa-’l-ta’dīl*, which the Murji’a, of course, did not have. It now seems safe to surmise that had the Murji’a survived as a theologico-legal school, they might have come to the same conclusion.

Kitāb al-Irjā’ continues with an attack on the Saba’īs—an early group of extremist Shī’īs for “lying about Banū Umayya and about God.” Cook, who strives to prove that the Murji’a, contrary to what is commonly held about them, were in fact revolutionaries,³² argues that

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6

³² Cook, “Activism and Quietism,” pp. 20-21, where he defends his hypothesis by arguing that “whether one takes the early Murji’a to be activists or quietists, one is left with something to explain away.” “My contention,” he explains, “is that the activist assumption leaves us with less to explain

“Banū Umayya” here (which may be taken to suggest that the author was a supporter of the Umayyads) might be a textual corruption resulting from a misreading by someone “who believed, as modern scholars have tended to, that the Murji’a followed the religion of their kings.”³³ It is beyond the scope of this study to argue for ^{or} against this thesis. It is however important that we say something about it because, as we shall show, the attitude of the Murji’a (and the Sunnīs as we will discuss later) towards the authorities is consistent with their overall theological conviction. Other scholars have endeavored to provide an explanation for the accounts that apparently contradict the thesis that the Murji’a were quietists.³⁴ The following is a contribution, albeit brief, to this.

In the passage quoted above the author says “among the chiefs of our community (*a’immatinā*) we approve of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar.” By implication he also acknowledges that the rulers of the Muslim community other than Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, about whom there was no doubt as he argues, were also seen by him and by the members of the sect to which he belongs as legitimate rulers of the Islamic state (*a’imma*, plural of *imām*, which linguistically means “exemplary figure”).³⁵ This is consistent with what is known about the Murji’a and their relations with the authorities and what the author himself says here about the Umayyad

away than the quietist.” See also Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, pp. 33-34 especially p. 36. It is my argument here, however, that it is Cook’s thesis that leave us with most to explain away.

³³ Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, p. 43

³⁴ For example, Givony argues that the *mawālī* who participated in the revolt of Ibn al-Ash’ath against the Umayyads had suffered from the brutal treatment they experienced at the hand of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf. Therefore, “they could hardly avoid taking sides when the rising came;” Givony, *The Murji’a and the Theological School of Abū Ḥanīfa*, p. 64. This does not mean that all the *mawālī* took part in the revolt. However, “those who refrained from doing so were totally ignored and the militant faction of the sect came to the fore; hence, the rebellious, militant reputation of the Murji’a,” he adds; p. 74

³⁵ This is not to say, of course, that *imām* and *a’imma* cannot be used in a pejorative sense. Actually, they do appear in reference to unjust rulers. In *Sīrat Sālim*, for instance, the author refers to the Umayyads as “*a’immat al-jawr*.” It is very unlikely, however, to find this sense suffixed by a pronominal ending; e.g. “*a’immatunā a’immatu ’l-kufr*.” Above it is suggested that the use of the pronominal ending in reference to the Umayyads reveals a sort of affiliation to them.

Caliphs. The word “*a’immatinā*” is also repeated in the concluding paragraph of this epistle. Here the author says: “This is our stance and our opinion . . . and we remind our people of it and anyone who asks us [about it] from amongst our rulers; [who may use it] to deem the shedding of our blood lawful, or to expose their lives to us (*fa-hādhā amrunā wa-ra’yunā . . . wa-nudhakkiru bi-hi qawmanā wa-man sa’alanā min a’immatinā fa-yastahillū ba’dahu dimā’anā aw yu’arriḍū dimā’ahum lanā*.)”³⁶ This passage can be taken to support either view of the debate over the attitude of the Murji’a towards the authorities. The author’s saying that the (Umayyad) authorities might use the argument he presents in the epistle to shed his and his sect’s blood may be referring to the refusal of the Murji’a to curse ‘Alī (a refusal which is of course consistent with their general beliefs).³⁷ The second part, in which the author says that the same argument can be used to legitimize the shedding of the rulers’ blood, apparently supports the thesis that the Murji’a were not quietists (and also challenges Van Ess’s suggestion that the epistle was written as a sign of gratitude to an Umayyad Caliph). It can be inferred, however, that the author says only that if the Murji’a were intimidated to make them give up their ideas, or denied their rights (here by the authorities), they would fight for them. Thābit Quṭna (d. 110/728), a Murji’ī poet, says in one of his poems that the Murji’a fight for “self-defense.”³⁸ If we apply this here, the second part of the above statement might be a corollary of the first part. The author might simply be saying that if the Umayyads take the views put forward in this epistle as a justification to shed the blood of the Murji’a, they will expose their own

³⁶ Van Ess, “*Das Kitāb al-Irḡā’*,” pp. 24-25

³⁷ Madelung, “Murjī’a,” *ET*, vol. VII, p. 606

³⁸ Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 124.

lives to the Murji'a as a matter of "self-defense." A second possible cause for revolting against the Umayyads might be that the Umayyads denied new converts their full rights as Muslims and refused to waive the taxes which they continued to impose on them "on the pretext that they still ignored, or failed to fulfill, some of their most basic duties under Islam."³⁹ A further elaboration on this last point will be given in the discussion of the definition of *īmān*. For the moment, however, the previous discussion suggests that the Murji'a might have been quietists in their normal attitude towards the authorities, but were ready to fight if they had to. Being quietist does not necessarily entail being unwilling to fight in all circumstances, neither does it mean complete harmony with the authorities. In other words, it can still be maintained that in the case of the Murji'a, peaceful coexistence with the authorities was the norm while revolt was the exception. This is to be contrasted, for example, with the case of the Khawārij, for whom fighting seems to have been the norm. The whole debate might in fact be on the definition of quietism and on what we would expect from a quietist sect.

In complete harmony with the attitude presented in the *Kitāb al-Irjā'* is the opening passage of that part of *Sīrat Sālim* where the author discusses Murji'ī ideas.⁴⁰ This part opens with what the author of the work describes as the basis of Murji'ī views on the early Muslims. According to this, the Murji'a held that Muslims should only pass judgment on what they witness and suspend their judgment on what they do not know ("then others, who had no forebears in whose footsteps they followed or authorities on whose rectitude they modeled themselves, propounded the doctrine of suspended judgment (*irjā'*). They said: 'We

³⁹ Madelung, "Murjī'a," *EF*, vol. VII, p. 606

are prepared to testify with regard to what we have seen and been present at of the most recent schism (*furqa*); but we defer judgment on what we did not witness (*mā ghāba 'annā* of the first schism'.") What the author of *Sīrat Sālim* tries to show in the rest of this part is that Murji'ī views are utterly contradictory and inconsistent. He proceeds in a style of refutation typical of the Mu'tazila, showing how inconsistent any point the Murji'a make is with other ideas they also held. For instance, the aforementioned Murji'ī argument would lead to the infidelity of 'Alī, Ṭalḥa, and al-Zubayr on the one hand, and the people of Kūfa and Baṣra on the other: the former allowed themselves to call people to something they [people] had not witnessed, and the latter acted on the ground of something they had not witnessed [the murder of 'Uthmān]. The Murji'a are equally inconsistent in their beliefs, Sālim adds, when they call their children to dissociate from Mu'āwiya, whose deeds their children did not witness.⁴¹

On mentioning Mu'āwiya, the author moves to refute the Murji'a on their position concerning him. They argue that "*ahl al-furqati 'l-ūlā (or al-uwal)*" whom they were talking about (and whom they affiliate with or suspend judgment on) were the Companions of the Prophet (*innā ahla 'l-furqati 'l-ūlā aṣḥābu rasūli 'llahi*).⁴² This can be taken to indicate two things. The first is that the Companions should be given a preferential treatment, or, at least, judgment on them needs a higher than usual degree of certitude. This is consistent with the role ascribed to the Companions in *Kitāb al-Irjā'*. The second is that they [the Murji'a, as Sālim claims] did not consider Mu'āwiya a Companion. But Mu'āwiya, Sālim responds, was one of the secretaries of the Prophet and was

⁴⁰ In our discussion of this work, we will rely on Cook's translation and the Arabic text which he publishes in *Early Muslim Dogma* (Arabic text: pp. 159-63; translation: pp. 23-26)

⁴¹ *Sīrat Sālim*, in Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, p. 160

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 160

admired by ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb who appointed him governor; and he was not the only one about whom the *umma* differed. People also held different opinions about Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, Sālim adds.⁴³ What the author is trying to get at here is: to be consistent, the Murji’a ought either to associate with all those who took part in the schisms, or to accept openly the fact that many other participants, on whom they keep silent, went astray as well and condemn them accordingly. This alleged Murji’ī attitude about Mu‘āwiya is in disagreement with their attitude towards the authorities. We are not told here, however, why the Murji’a might have adopted this attitude towards the first Umayyad Caliph. Below a conclusion about the content of this epistle might answer this question.

The next step in *Sīrat Sālim* is to ridicule the Murji’ī belief that the rulers of the day are believing Muslims from whom, however, God has made dissociation licit and for whom he has forbidden asking him for forgiveness. The author also endeavors to show that the first part of this proposition is inconsistent with the second part. The rulers, in other words, are either Muslim believers and in this case association with them and praying for them is incumbent upon Muslims; or people for whom God has forbidden asking for forgiveness, in which they are not believers and they are to be dealt with accordingly. The discussion below of the definition of *īmān* will help to clarify this point. The same technique is used to refute other theses on the position of the rulers. Another thesis, supposedly also held by the Murji’a, considers the rulers “erroneous believers (*mū’minūn ḍullāl*; lit. believers who have gone astray).” The author refutes this thesis on the ground that one can either be a believer (*mū’min*) or an unbeliever (*kāfir*). Qur’ānic evidence is adduced to

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 161

ridicule the combination the Murji'a allegedly made between error (*ḍalāl*) and faith (*īmān*).

As might be clear now, this work refutes ideas that are not expressed in *Kitāb al-Irjā'*, which severs any necessary relation between the two epistles as Cook suggests. This may also explain what Sālim says about the views of the Murji'a on Mu'āwiya. It may be that he ascribed these views to a group which he arbitrarily classified under the rubric of the Murji'a. We will see later that the term "Murji'a" as a pejorative and polemical term is very loose. It is also possible that this use of the term Murji'a is perhaps a reference to another sect which he was refuting before the Murji'a in the same epistle. Moreover, this epistle also shows that its author has the same inconsistencies that he uses to refute the Murji'a. For instance, Sālim states that he and his sect "affiliate to Muslims who lived before our time and whom we have not seen, on the strength of the testimony of the Muslims; and we dissociate from those of the *imāms* of error who lived before our time and whom we have not seen, and their associates, on the strength of the testimony of the Muslims."⁴⁴ This is inconsistent with the fact he mentioned earlier in the epistle that views differed regarding not only those who participated in the schisms, but also those who did not take part such as the first two Caliphs [who were not alive at the time of the schisms]. If, however, he accepted only the testimony of people who held the same beliefs as his, then he can be easily refuted on the ground that the Murji'a also only trusted people who shared their own views.

This leads us to the question of testimony, which is explicitly raised here and which seems to demarcate a fundamental difference

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26

between the author of this epistle and the addressees. The author says that the Murji'a do not accept the testimony of those who argued against the participants in the schisms (according to what we know about the Khawārij, he may be referring here to 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Mu'āwiya, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, al-Mughīra ibn Shu'ba, and others, all of whom the Khawārij considered unbelievers). While the author does the same by rejecting the Shī'ī testimony against the first two Caliphs, he summons the Murji'a to "believe the believers" who testify against the perpetrators of the *fitna*, and against the rulers of the day "who do not judge in accordance with what God has revealed."⁴⁵ This last point further weakens the thesis that the Murji'a were hostile to the authorities. But why would the Murji'a reject the testimony of those who testified against the participants in the schisms? This is what Abū Ḥanīfa may be able to explain in one of his works below.

Abū Ḥanīfa's works:

In the first work ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfa—*Al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ*, there is an article that says: "We disavow none of the Companions of the Apostle of God; nor do we adhere to any of them exclusively."⁴⁶ The next article reads: "We leave the question of 'Uthmān and 'Alī to Allāh, who knows the secrets and hidden things." According to Wensinck, the first article is directed mainly against the Shī'īs who elevated the rank of some Companions while openly cursing others. As it stands, this article does not represent an actively positive position towards the Companions. If we do not dissociate from the Companions it does not necessarily mean that

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163

⁴⁶ Generally but not always, we will rely in this section on Wensinck's translation in his *The Muslim Creed*, pp. 103-04.

we associate with them. This is consistent with the second article where we find an abstention from judging what had taken place among the Companions. The commentator on this creed, probably Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983), explains that “the author [i.e. Abū Ḥanīfa] does not express his doubts concerning this question; but he chooses the safest way, that is, of restraining our tongue from this *fitna*, just as Allāh has made us restrain our swords from it.”⁴⁷ What the commentator means here is that Abū Ḥanīfa was of the same opinion as the Sunnīs of his [the commentator’s] age, when the mere desisting from dissociating from the Companions was ceasing to be the sound attitude of a good Muslim. What the commentator does not explain, however, is why he and the colleagues of his age do not refrain from discussing what happened. This is consistent, nevertheless, with the chronology of the development of the Sunnī attitude on this point. They came to discuss and explain the schisms mainly in the 5th/11th C.

What should detain us in this creed, however, is the article which asserts that the “difference of opinion in the community is a token of divine mercy.” As we saw in chapter three, this idea, which found its way into some Prophetic traditions, was one of the bases for the Sunnīs’ argument concerning the Companions. It has a direct link with the issue of *ijtihād*, which was used to justify the schisms in which the Companions were involved. It is not clear, however, whether by the difference of opinion in this article is meant differences on legal matters, or differences in general. Nevertheless, the link that is established here between the differences and God is significant. We also saw in chapter

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109

three that differences between the Companions were acknowledged in a Prophetic tradition where God Himself validates those differences.

In *al-Risāla ilā 'Uthmān al-Battī*⁴⁸, Abū Ḥanīfa, who is supposed to be defending himself here against accusations of showing “Murji’ī tendencies,” gives a watertight explanation for the position he maintains with respect to the early schisms and the people involved in them. He starts by informing the addressee of what he [Abū Ḥanīfa] understands to be the charge against him. “You wrote to me saying that you have been informed that I am one of the Murji’a and that I say: ‘an erroneous believer (*mū’min ḍāll*; lit. a believer who has gone astray).”⁴⁹ This, the reader will remember, is one of the theses⁴⁸ that the Ibādī Sālim refutes in his *Sīra*, which suggests that this opinion was ascribed to some “Murji’ī” groups. Abū Ḥanīfa starts by making clear the distinction between work and belief: neither has a direct relation to the other. One may have a strong belief in something, yet be in error with respect to some things pertaining to that belief. In other words, Abū Ḥanīfa argues that there must be a difference between one who is in error because he does not have knowledge of God and his Apostle, and another who does believe in God and his Apostle but does not excel in the deeds or acts required by that belief. The Qur’ān is also used here to prove that God himself used the word “*ḍalāl* (error)” in reference to some believers and in contexts where “*ḍalāl*” cannot be taken to mean “*kufr*.” Between “error” and

⁴⁸ Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu’mān, *Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā 'Uthmān al-Battī*, in Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu’mān. *Al-‘Ālim wa-’l- Muta’allim, al-Fiḥ al-Absaṭ, al-Fiḥ al-Akbar, Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā 'Uthmān al-Battī, Al-Waṣīyya*. (Ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī). Al-Qāhira: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li-’l-Turāth, 2001.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71

“belief,” in other words, there is no necessary aversion, Abū Ḥanīfa argues.⁵⁰

Now let us turn to the participants in the schisms, about whom the whole discussion may be about. Abū Ḥanīfa points out that starting from ‘Umar, the Caliph was called “*amīr al-mū‘minīn* (commander of the faithful)” and argues that this makes it clear that they understood *īmān* to be different from work. If work, which was unlikely to be observed by everybody in the Muslim community, were a real determinant of *īmān*, the Caliph would not be the commander of everybody in his community. Moreover, ‘Alī did not desist from calling the Syrians against whom he fought, believers. The question is, Abū Ḥanīfa wonders: did ‘Alī fight them while considering them at the same time to be rightly guided (*muhtadūn*)? Now the main question that Abū Ḥanīfa poses to ‘Uthmān al-Battī is: “the Companions of the Apostle of God fought each other, both sides could not have been on the right path together [in view of the last point made with respect to ‘Alī and the Syrians]; how would you then call the aggressor side? (*wa-qad iqtatala aṣḥābu rasūli ‘llāhi wa-lam takuni ‘l-fi‘atāni muhtadiyatayni jamī‘an, fa-mā ismu ‘l-bāghiyati ‘indaka?*).” Before anticipating and replying to the different possible answers to this, Abū Ḥanīfa makes it clear that he cannot think of a sin that is greater than the shedding of blood, especially if this blood was that of the Prophet’s Companions. It is safe now (in light of what we said in the discussion of the last two works) to say that the early epistles ascribe a special status to the Companions. Abū Ḥanīfa then says that if ‘Uthmān al-Battī argues that the two sides were either both on the right path (*muhtadūn*) or both in error (*dāllūn*), he [al-Battī] is an innovator (*fa-in*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73

za'amta annahumā muhtadiyatāni jamī'an ibtada'ta, wa-in za'amta annahumā ḡāllatāni jamī'an ibtada'ta). If al-Battī argues, however, that only one side could have been on the right path, then Abū Ḥanīfa asks him: "What would the other [side] be?" Abū Ḥanīfa then says that "God knows better;" or, "only God knows (*Allāhu a'lam*)" is the sound answer to this question (*wa-in qulta inna aḡadahumā muhtadin, famā 'l-ākharu? Fa-in qulta 'llāhu a'lamu, aṣabta*).⁵¹

Now this passage as it stands poses a problem. We would expect "only God knows" to be the answer to the question: who was right and who was wrong? But the answer here seems to refer to the description of the participants in the schism; i.e. given that one side must have been right, how would we describe the other side? The answer here, to be consistent with Abū Ḥanīfa's preceding argument for the possibility of being a "mū'min" and a "ḡāll" at the same time, should have been: "the other side are ḡāllūn." That "only God knows" should have been the answer to "who was right and who was wrong" is further supported by an unequivocal statement made by Abū Ḥanīfa afterwards: "I hold concerning the disagreement that took place among the Companions of the Apostle of God on what faced them: only God knows (*wa-innī aqūlu fi-mā maḡdā min ikhtilāfi aṣḡābi rasūli 'llāhi fi-mā kāna baynahum: allāhu a'lamu*.)" This, Abū Ḥanīfa asserts, was the position maintained by the Companions of the Prophet according to some Successors. Regarding the term al-Murji'a Abū Ḥanīfa explains that the term was coined by the enemies of "*ahl al-'adl wa-ahl al-sunna* (people of justice and the Sunna);" with whom Abū Ḥanīfa seems to associate himself.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75

In the second work ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfa, *Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfa*⁵², only one article is of direct interest to us. That article says: “We confess that the most excellent of this community, after Muḥammad, our Prophet, is Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān, then ‘Alī—Allāh’s good pleasure be on all of them, according to His word: ‘And they were foremost on earth, the foremost still; these are they who shall be brought nigh to God, in gardens of delight.’ And everyone of them who has the foremost place is also the most excellent. Every God-fearing believer loves them, and every reprobate *munāfiq* hates them.”⁵³ The first comment to make here is that we cannot be sure to whom this article specifically refers. The verse it adduces is one of no particular reference. We cannot be certain who “everyone of them” refers to. Yet from the use of the Qur’ānic verse, which we encounter here for the first time, and the subsequent sentence (and everyone of them who has the foremost place is also the most excellent) it seems that the author of the creed accepts the Qur’ān as a witness to the merits of certain people. Whoever is praised by the Qur’ān should be held in high esteem by the believers. The fact that the names of the first three Caliphs are mentioned here also suggests that the article was directed mainly against the Shī‘a. The last point to make is that we see here talk of “hate” and “love,” which is reminiscent of many Prophetic traditions that were quoted later by Sunnī scholars in support of the concept of collective *ta’dīl* and which is also consistent with the earliest Sunnī accounts about the Companions. The only accusation made here is of “*nifāq*” (an elusive

⁵² Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu‘mān, *Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfa*, in Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu‘mān. *Al-‘Ālim wa-’l-Muta’allim, al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ, al-Fiqh al-Akbar, Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā ‘Uthmān al-Baṭī, Al-Waṣīyya*. (Ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī). Al-Qāhira: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li-’l-Turāth, 2001

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 85

term that was used differently by different early Islamic sects), and not an absolute *kufṛ*. Again this agrees with the earliest writings we examined in chapter three.

In *Risālat al-‘Alim wa-‘l-Muta‘allim*,⁵⁴ there is one question that has a particular significance for our purpose here: no other passage in any of the works we are consulting represents the logic of *irjā’* and how it is related to other theological ideas better than this passage. The passage opens with a question on the origin of *irjā’*, its meaning, and to whom it should apply (*la-qad waṣaḥṭa ‘l-‘adla, wa-lākin akhbirnī min ayna jā’a aṣlu ‘l-irjā’i wa-mā tafsīruhu wa-mani ‘lladhī yu’akhhharu wa-yurja’u amruhu?*). In his answer, the scholar ascribes the origin of *irja’* to heavenly creatures, the Angels, and *irjā’* is thus associated with the story of the beginnings of humankind (“the origin of *irjā’* is from the Angels when God asked them: “Inform me of the names of these.” The Angels feared [to make] a mistake should they speak arbitrarily without knowledge and they refrained (*fa-khāfati ‘l-malā’ikatu ‘l-khaṭa’a in takallamū bi-ghayri ‘ilmin ta’assufan fawaqafat*) and said: “Be glorified! We have no knowledge save that which Thou last taught us,”⁵⁵ and they did not make an innovation (*wa-lam yabtadi‘ū*); in the way of a man who is asked about a matter which he does not know [yet] speaks about it heedlessly. If he does not give the correct answer, then he is mistaken; and if he does give the right answer, he is [still] not to be praised, because he spoke arbitrarily without knowledge. This is why God said to his Prophet: “follow not that whereof thou hast no knowledge;” i.e., do not

⁵⁴ Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu‘mān, *Risālat al-‘Alim wa-‘l-Muta‘allim*, in Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu‘mān. *Al-‘Alim wa-‘l-Muta‘allim, al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ, al-Fiqh al-Akbar, Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā ‘Uthmān al-Battī, Al-Waṣīyya*. (Ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī). Al-Qāhira: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li-‘l-Turāth, 2001

⁵⁵ The reference here is to Qur’ān II, 30-1. This reference is peculiar. The widely held view about the root of *irjā’* is Qur’ān IX, 106 which says “some are deferred for the command of God.” Madelung,

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say what you do not know for certain (*ay lā taqul mā lam ta'lamhu yaqīnan*). And He said: “Lo! The hearing and the sight and the heart—of each of these it will be asked.”⁵⁶ [He] did not permit his Messenger to speak [on] or slander anybody [counting] on doubt without certitude (*bi-'l-ḡanni min ḡhayri yaqīnin*).

And in explaining the meaning of *irjā'* the scholars says: “the meaning of *irjā'* is: if you are asked about a matter, pertaining to what is legal and what is illegal, which you do not know; or about the reports of [the events of] those who were before us, you [ought to] say: God knows better about it (*allāhu a'lamu bi-hi*). If three people come with a story (*ḡadīthan*) which we do not know [to be either true or false] and which we cannot [know] by experiment and analogies (*bi-'l-tajārubi wa-'l-maqāyīsi*); you [ought to] defer the knowledge of this to God and abstain (*taruddu 'ilma dhālika ilā 'llāhi wa-taqif*.” To illustrate his point, he gives an apparently hypothetical case although its bearing on what took place among the Companions is unmistakable. Two groups, well known to us for their piety and righteousness (and the author calls this the “*aṣl*,” i.e., their original state), fight each other while we are absent. Neither side can provide us with an independent witness. Consequently, no certitude can be established. No judgment, therefore, should be passed. It must be inferred from the situation, however, that at least one side is in the wrong. Both sides cannot be in the right at the same time. It is also according to *irjā'* that we do not pass judgment about their eternal fate. Lack of knowledge about the whole case and about the retribution on the Day of Judgment prevents us from passing a valid judgment.

“Murdjī'a” in *ET*², vol. VII, p. 606; and Givony, *The Murji'a and the Theological School of Abū Hanīfa*, pp. 5-12

⁵⁶ The reference is to Qur'an XVII, 36

The meaning of *irjā'*, which has been interpreted differently as we have said before, is made clear here: it means abstention from arbitrarily passing a judgment without sufficient knowledge. Two key terms are unequivocally used here by the scholar: doubt and certitude (*shakk* and *yaqīn*). Whereas the former cannot constitute a valid ground for knowledge and judgment, the latter can. This supports our point that it is the issue of doubt and certitude that constitutes the real epistemological concern of the Murji'a. Autopsy and unanimity are only tools that establish certitude in place of doubt. This is evident in the passage when the author says that neither of the two belligerent sects can produce witnesses other than itself; i.e., the testimony of either against the other cannot establish certitude because one's testimony for oneself or against one's opponent can always be suspected. In case of lack of certitude, therefore, the appropriate stance that a Muslim should take is to refrain from passing any judgment or holding any view on events or on the people who participate therein, the scholar argues. In other words, the proper attitude towards the whole issue then is: to hold that one side must be wrong, to abstain from holding that one side in particular is wrong; and to ask for forgiveness for those who are wrong because they are, after all, *believers*. (This links the whole issue to the debate over the definition of faith which we will discuss later.) This last point is in full agreement with "and we do not mention them except to speak well of them (*wa-lā nadhkuruhum illā bi-'l-khayr*)", a statement about the Companions that we have encountered in many Sunnī sources starting from the 4th/10th C. to as late as Ibn Taymiyya in the 8th/14th C. As we have argued in the last chapter, it is implicit in this statement that they could be mentioned otherwise.

Some other points raised here are also relevant to our discussion. In an earlier question the Student asks about the relation between faith and work. The Scholar replies that the two are completely separate. To support this, he points out that in the Qur'ān it is stated that God has revealed only one religion (*dīn*; religion here is the subject of belief or faith), but several laws (*sharā'i*; laws, in the wider sense, are the sources or determiners of work).⁵⁷ People, the Scholar continues, are of three kinds: those who believe with their hearts and tongues, those who believe with their tongues without their hearts, and those who believe with their hearts without their tongues.⁵⁸ The first group are considered believers by both God and people. The third group are believers in God's knowledge but infidels in people's sight. The second group are infidels in God's knowledge but must be held believers by people who, first of all, do not know what is inside their hearts; and, secondly, have no duty to know it (*wa-laysa 'alayhim an yatakallafū 'ilma mā fi-'l-qulūb*).

It is this second group that brings us back to the fundamental difference between al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ concerning the basis upon which a critic can justifiably pass a judgment on the *'adāla* of a transmitter. While Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ argued that the critic could do so on the basis of what the transmitter openly shows in front of people, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī argued that this was not enough, and that he had to exert more effort to make sure that what the transmitter shows is consistent with what he does in secret. We have said that most other works on Ḥadīth sciences are favorable to the view presented by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. These two differing views are consistent with what we know about the two scholars and the schools to which they belonged. Unlike

⁵⁷ Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān, *Risālat al-'Ālim wa-'l-Muta'allim*, pp. 14-16

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī was a Ḥanbalī scholar and held a very negative view of Abū Ḥanīfa, to whom he devotes a whole chapter in his *Tārīkh Baghdād*, a chapter full of stories ascribed to earlier authorities about the evil nature of Abū Ḥanīfa and the perniciousness of his teachings.⁵⁹ This may also explain the relatively long chapter in *al-Kifāya* where al-Khaṭīb refutes the claim of the “Irāqī scholars” that ‘*adāla* can be established on the mere manifestation of Islam. The Ḥanafīs and the Ḥanbalīs in their definition of faith differ on a specific point: while both maintain that work does not lead to *kufr*, they differ on whether it affects the degree of *īmān* of a believer or not. Since the Ḥanbalīs acknowledge an important role for work in the determination of the degree of faith, a Ḥanbalī critic would understandably be dissatisfied with what a transmitter manifests and would exert as much effort as he could to uncover the reality of the transmitter being scrutinized. As we will see later, the Ḥanafī definition of *īmān* has prevailed over the Ḥanbalī; hence the triumph of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s view on the issue of bestowing ‘*adāla*. This analysis assumes a relation between faith and ‘*adāla*. It will be argued in the conclusion that the two cannot be separated and that the Sunnī treatment of the issue of collective *ta’dīl* of the Companions seems to have followed, or at least to have been affected by, the earlier arguments about the Companions’ faith.

This might answer the question we asked earlier in connection with Sālim’s charges against the Murji’a: why did the Murji’a reject the testimony of those who judged against the participants in the schisms? In light of what Abū Ḥanīfa says, and on the assumption that Sālim wrote his epistle some 40 years after the beginning of the *fitna* (the murder of

⁵⁹ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. *Tārīkh Baghdād*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1967, vol., XIII, pp. 325-7

'Uthmān was in 35/655), we can say that the Murji'a were consistent in their views as represented by Abū Ḥanīfa. The testimony of those who took parts in the events or, by implication, their immediate descendants, none of whom can act as independent witnesses because their impartiality can be easily challenged, cannot be taken to constitute evidence for or against either side. Therefore, the proper attitude is to reject their testimony and abstain from judging. This might also answer a question we raised in Chapter three: why was it important for the Sunnīs to argue that the *'adāla* of the Companions was confirmed by the Qur'ān and the Sunna, since it is in fact the original state of anybody that he is *'adl* until proven otherwise? It is known that some non-Sunnī sects, notably the Shī'īs, held and argued that some of the Companions (most of the Companions whom the Sunnī venerate even more than the others, including the first three Caliphs and nine of the ten to whom the Prophet testified that they were destined to Paradise) were unbelievers during the very time of the Prophet.⁶⁰ Therefore, an independent witness was needed. What witness could be more veracious than God and His Apostle? Moreover, the Sunnī scholars must have also felt uneasy about the hypocrites whom the Qur'ān often mentions as living in Medina together with the Muslims, and who are therefore Companions by the dominant Sunnī definition of Companionship. This is a point from which, to the best of my knowledge, they did not try to escape, and which they even refrained from discussing. It may have been their eagerness to block any argument against the "original" *'adāla* of the Companions that made it necessary for the Sunnī scholars to resort to the Qur'ān for support.

⁶⁰ For an overview of the Shī'ī opinions on the Companions, see E. Kohlberg, "The attitude of Shī'ī Muslims to the Companions." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, no. 5 (1984), pp. 143-175

In *Al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, there is an article that says the “the most excellent of men after the Apostle of Allāh is Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq; after him, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-Fārūq; after him, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, he of the two lights; after him, ‘Alī al-Murtaḍā, may Allāh encompass all of them with His good pleasure, being His servants who persevere in truth and with truth. We cling to all of them and we name all the Companions of Allāh’s Apostle in the way of praise only.” This article, as it stands, does not seem to belong to the 4th/10th C., which is when Wensinck dates the whole creed. It also differs in one important respect from what al-Ash‘arī writes about the Companions. Al-Ash‘arī, as we have seen in his *Ibāna*, shows a degree of awareness, albeit primitive, of the importance of having a say on the first schisms. It is true that he does not give a verdict on the battles of the Camel and Ṣiffīn, yet he does pass a verdict on the murder of ‘Uthmān. The lack of any reference to either the murder of ‘Uthmān or the fighting between ‘Alī on the one hand, and Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, Mu‘āwiya and ‘Amr on the other, suggests that this present creed cannot have been compiled by the author of *al-Ibāna* or by any of his disciples. The last sentence of the article (and we name all the Companions of the Apostle of God by way of praise only) suggests that this creed belongs to earlier times, when the main interest was to stop the abuse of the Companions and hopefully establish love for and association with them.⁶¹

⁶¹ In *The Muslim Creed*, p. 246, Wensinck counts on many things to date the creeds. Among these are the length of the creed, the diversity of the subjects it touches upon, and the degree of theological sophistication that the creed displays. Basing his speculation on a number of articles that he thinks developed within the course of the 4th/10th C., he came to the conclusion that this creed has an Ash‘arite stamp.

Sunnism and Murji'ism:

In a recent Ph.D. thesis that examines the way the Murji'a are portrayed in Sunnī literature,⁶² I. H. Inal emphasizes certain ideas that are relevant to our purpose in this section. First of all, all the Sunnīs were seen by the Shī'īs to be Murji'a; one of the reasons for this was the Sunnī attitude towards the authorities which was considered by the Shī'īs to amount to total and unconditional submission to the authorities in general and the Umayyads in particular.⁶³ Second, the Ḥanbalīs accused the Ḥanafīs and the Ash'arīs of maintaining some Murji'ī views, especially in their definition of *īmān* and the position of the grave sinner.⁶⁴ However, Ibn Ḥanbal himself, Inal points out, expressed some of the views historically ascribed to the Murji'a. Some of these are the view that no one ought to be considered an unbeliever because of a sin he has committed,⁶⁵ and the illegality of revolting against the ruler.⁶⁶

The Sunnī scholars were thus aware that their ideas brought them in line with the Murji'a. Inal shows that many Sunnī scholars acknowledged the similarity between their "sect" and the heretical Murji'a in many an issue. Inal, therefore, argues that his study supports the thesis that "the later Sunnī body of Islam absorbed the mainstream Murji'ī idea" especially concerning the issues of *īmān*, the position of the grave sinner, and the attitude towards the authorities.⁶⁷ This in itself is not a novel idea. Other scholars have come to the same conclusion regarding some of the basic Sunnī beliefs as we have said before.⁶⁸ What is new,

⁶² Inal, I. H. *The Presentation of the Murji'a in Islamic Literature*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 147

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 110

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 170, 174

⁶⁸ Cf. Madelung, "Murjī'a" *EF*², vol. VII, p. 607. Watt, *Formative Period*, pp. 119-43

however, is the thesis that this recent study and our current study allude to: that the Sunnīs and the Murji'a have more in common than was previously thought and, more importantly, more than the Sunnī scholars might have wanted us to believe. Below is an endeavor to place the concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet Muḥammad's Companions in a wider theological Sunnī context in view of the Murji'ī ideas put forward above.

Some other Sunnī views:

Under the rubric of "Sunnism" there is always more than one view on almost every theological and legal issue. Some views are too contradictory to be reconciled, and this explains the fact that some prominent "Sunnī" scholars charged other prominent "Sunnī" scholars with not only heresy, but also unbelief. Therefore, the mere identification of different sects does not necessarily mean that each one of them is homogenous, or that the boundaries between them are watertight. Yet the fact remains that ideas in Islam were classified under what we might call "ideal types," where each type was represented by a sect; and the *avant-garde* of each sect were concerned with either carefully distinguishing their sect from all other sects, or at least representing it in such a way that makes that sometimes arbitrary distinction. This is a reality that this study has to deal with, though this is not to suggest that the process of demarcation was completely arbitrary. Though it is not one of the main aims of this study, we will briefly point out how the classification of seemingly contradictory views under the rubric of Sunnism was made possible as far as some theological issues are concerned.

Two different views on the issue of the definition of faith (*īmān*) were once in contention in Islam. The first is the definition held by the

Ḥanafīs. Here faith is defined as belief (*taṣḍīq*) to the total exclusion of work (*ʿamal*). Work and faith, in other words, have nothing whatsoever to do with each other. Consequently, faith is not liable to increase or decrease: one is either a believer or an unbeliever and a distinction cannot be made between a “good” believer and a “bad” one. Closely related to this debate is the position of the grave sinner. If faith has nothing to do with work or acts, then no sins, not even mortal ones, ever lead to, or can be taken as a sign of, unbelief (*kufṛ*). Not even grave sins, the Ḥanafīs argue, affect the very core of faith. One can perfectly well, but of course not preferably, be a true believer and a grave sinner at the same time. These views are typical of the Murjiʿī view which Abū Ḥanīfa expresses in more than one of his works discussed above. Al-Ashʿarī expresses two views as far as the issue of *īmān* is concerned; although most Ashʿarīs maintain the view presented above.⁶⁹ This view has indeed been dominant in Sunnī Islam. As Wensinck points out, “this, then, is the position of orthodox Islam: faith alone is sufficient for salvation; but this should not become a reason for neglecting works.”⁷⁰

The other definition, which was held by the Ḥanbalī scholars, considered work an integral part of faith. Since people differ in their acts, they also differ in their faith. Put differently, faith increases and decreases depending on work.⁷¹ Grave sins, therefore, can seriously impair faith and can be taken as a sign of the feebleness of one’s faith. How, then, did the Ḥanbalīs avoid arguing that grave sins may lead to *kufṛ*; and, how was it

⁶⁹ Inal, *The Presentation of the Murjiʿa*, p. 52. Inal points out that in many of his works, al-Ashʿarī defined *īmān* as the Ḥanbalīs defined it. In *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, however, he defines it “as *taṣḍīq* only, which is shared by the Ḥanafī-Murjiʿīs.”

⁷⁰ Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p. 49; Watt, *Formative Period*, p. 134

⁷¹ Watt argues that the whole issue of *īmān* had to do with membership of the community. In other words, by asserting the equality of all people as far as *īmān* is concerned, the aim was to assert the equality of all people as members of the Islamic community in terms of their rights and duties; “The

possible for the Ḥanbalīs and the Ḥanafīs to be eventually classified together under the same rubric of Sunnism? The Ḥanbalīs generally held that although grave sins can seriously degrade faith, they never lead to *kufr*. In other words, *kufr* and *īmān* are two distinct things. We are not dealing with a continuum at one end of which we have faith and at the other unbelief. We are dealing with two continuums. Believers move on the continuum of *īmān* according to their acts. But their acts never take them out of the realm of faith if belief (*taṣḍīq*) exists. A distinction was also made between the so-called "*kufr shirk* (denial of God or associating someone with Him)" which is basically lack of belief, and "*kufr ni'ma* (denial of God's blessings by disobeying him)" which is negligence of religious duties and observances. It is this the supremacy of *taṣḍīq* which made it possible first to put the Ḥanbalīs and the Ḥanafīs in the same sect; and, second, to distinguish between both of them on the one hand and the Khawārij on the other. It will be seen later how the Sunnīs distinguished themselves from the Murji'a on this and on other points. Suffice it to say here that the Sunnī views on this point share the basic emphasis they put on belief.⁷²

Closely related to and consistent with these ideas is the Sunnī attitude towards the authorities. This debate may go back to the murder of 'Uthmān and the question whether he was justly or unjustly killed. The proto-Sunnīs argued that 'Uthmān was unjustly killed, probably not at this stage on the basis of his being a Companion, but on the basis that he was a believer and had not done anything to justify his being killed. By

Conception of *īmān* in Islamic Theology," *Der Islam*, vol., XVIII (1967) p. 5. This is why faith cannot be taken to increase or decrease.

⁷² For a detailed discussion on this issue and similarities and dissimilarities among the Sunnī sub-sects, see Madelung "Early Sunnī Doctrine Concerning Faith as Reflected in the *Kitāb al-īmān* of Abū 'Ubayd Al-Qasīm B. Sallām," *Studia Islamica*, vol. XXXII (1970), pp. 233-54

the same token, the participants in the subsequent schisms did not abandon *taṣḍīq* and thus cannot be justifiably charged with *kufr*. The same applied to the Umayyad Caliphs after the schisms. All kinds of grave sins were ascribed to them, but this was not a valid reason to challenge their faith. Praying behind them was therefore incumbent upon or at least recommendable to Muslims. Revolt against them was, not only unnecessary, but also unjustifiable. Again, this is not to say that the Sunnīs were unanimous on this. To Abū Ḥanīfa, for example, were attributed many contradictory opinions on this (from financially supporting revolts against the Umayyads to prohibiting revolt against them and defining the appropriate attitude towards unjust rulers as praying that God may lead them to the right path).⁷³ It is a fact, however, that quietism is the attitude that has characterized Sunnī Islam and has been held and expressed by most Sunnī scholars.

Conclusion:

This chapter has sought the roots of the Sunnī attitude towards the Companions, which eventually became a conviction of their collective '*adāla*, by analyzing the early Murji'ī texts at our disposal. Resorting to the Murji'ī texts was suggested by analyzing the medieval Sunnī writings about the Companions. The Murji'ī texts discussed here clarify the ground upon which the Sunnī scholars might have developed their final attitude towards the Companions. That the Murji'ī attitude towards the

⁷³ Cf. Schacht, "Abū Ḥanīfa" in *EF*², p. 124; Inal, p. 99. Of course this debate can be related to wider debate about the attitude of the Murji'a at large. As we have said before the idea that Abū Ḥanīfa is an early Murji'ī authority has established itself in modern Western scholarship. Defining his attitude towards the authorities is important for supporting either side of the debate over the attitude of the Murji'a. In his article on Abū Ḥanīfa in *EF*², vol. I, p. 124, Schacht rejects the accounts of Abū Ḥanīfa's putative revolutionary attitude as anomalous to the works ascribed to him, the point that supports my thesis that, contrary to what M. Cook maintain, the quietism of the Murji'a is much easier to prove than the contrary.

Companions may have provided the ground for the Sunnī concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet's Companions is further evidenced by the similarities between the two sects in other beliefs that are directly related to the concept of the collective *'adāla* of the Companions.

How then did the Sunnī scholars deal with the reality that they had much in common with the Murji'a? Inal describes several techniques that the Sunnī scholars used to solve this problem. On the one hand, some Sunnī scholars were willing to admit the similarity between their beliefs and those ascribed to the Murji'a. The two Ḥanafī scholars, al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) and Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114), found no difficulty in ascribing Murji'ī views to the founder of their school.⁷⁴ The distinction was made, however, between the so-called "good" Murji'a and the "bad" Murji'a (a distinction made by al-Māturīdī);⁷⁵ or between the Murji'a of the jurists (*murji'at al-fuqahā'*) and the extremist Murji'a (*al-murji'a al-ghulāt*) (made by Ibn Taymiyya);⁷⁶ or, ironically, between "*murji'at al-sunna*" and "*murji'at al-bid'a*" (made by al-Shahrastānī)⁷⁷. On the other hand, many Sunnī scholars strove to deny any resemblance between their ideas and those of the "heretical" Murji'a. One way of doing so was to avoid elaborating on or even mentioning the views of the Murji'a while explaining their own views.⁷⁸ Another technique was to present one extremist Murji'ī sub-sect as making a false generalization on behalf of the whole sect.⁷⁹ Watt, for instance, explains this by arguing that "later Sunnite heresiographers, finding the name 'Murji'ite' widely used, did their best to describe a sect of Murji'ites who were heretical from the

⁷⁴ Inal, *The Presentation of the Murji'a*, pp. 179-192

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91. For a complete summary of these distinctions, see *ibid.*, p. 206.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 166

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

Sunnite standpoint, but in fact they can only produce one or two uninfluential figures who went to extremes on one point or another. . . . among these extreme views was that ascribed to Muqatil that sins along with *īmān* did not harm.”⁸⁰

This was made possible by, and may even explain, the fact that a single definition of Murji’ism can hardly be discerned from the Sunnī sources.⁸¹ Other techniques were to manipulate the definition of some terms, such as unbelief (*kufr*), or to make distinctions such as that made between *islām* and *īmān*.

Heretical Murji’ism was thus a Sunnī construction. Madelung argues that “Murji’ism was indeed not generally considered as heretical among the traditionists despite the vigorous efforts of the ‘followers of Ibn Mas‘ūd’ to band it as such.” “Only in the 3rd/9th century was Murji’ism completely suppressed in Sunnī traditionalism,” he points out.⁸² Watt explains that Murji’ism was initially branded heresy “from a khārijite or Mu‘tazilite standpoint; and it is only from such a standpoint that Murji’ites in general are heretics.”⁸³ It should not be surprising then to find the basis of the concept of the collective *ta’dīl* of the Prophet Muḥammad’s Companions in the Murji’ī creed.

⁸⁰ Watt, “The conception of *īmān*,” p. 4. Watt here refers to the dictum taken by many Sunnī scholars to be the main adage of the Murji’a that says “*lā taḍurru ma‘a ‘l-īmānī ma’siyatun, wa-lā tanfa‘u ma‘a ‘l-kufri tā‘atun* (with faith, no sin harms; [whereas] with unbelief, no obedience matters.” In the *Presentation of the Murji’a*, p. 119, Inal points out that it was the tendency of the Ḥanbalī sources to argue that this was the main tenet of the Murji’ī creed. He also points out that it was only Ibn Taymiyya, the well-known 8th/14th Ḥanbalī scholar, among the Ḥanbalīs who was aware of how polemics against other sects created false ideas about them. “The scholars rely on rumours in their pronouncements and in attacking so-called heretics. They do not rely on what these heretics themselves say. What the result of all this is that they wrongly attribute to these groups opinions they in fact do not hold,” Ibn Taymiyya points out; p. 120. As for the Murji’a, Ibn Taymiyya observes that “the claims that, for the Murji’a, religion (*dīn*) and belief (*īmān*) are the same and that *īmān* is [only] confession by the tongue are false and stem from the false method of dealing with the Murji’a;” *ibid.*, pp. 120-1

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 213; Watt, *Formative Period*, p. 73

⁸² W. Madelung. “Some reflections,” p. 241

⁸³ Watt, “The conception of *īmān*,” p. 4

General Conclusion

All the previous discussion suggests that if we are to seek the roots of any attitude towards the Companions, the schisms that they were involved in must be put in the foreground. As Cook rightly points out, "the first civil war is a favourite ground of sectarian self-definition in early Islam."¹ It is our contention in this study that the creed of *irjā'* provided the ground for the later Sunnī concept of the collective *ta'dīl* of the Prophet Muḥammad's Companions. Arguing along the same line as Cook, Watt concludes that "it is most likely that the first application of the idea of *irjā'* was to the decision in respect of 'Uthmān and 'Alī."²

The issue that seems to have early occupied the minds of Muslim theologians was whether anything that the Companions had done could have led to the nullification of their *īmān*. The eventual Sunnī position on this question was determined on the basis of two points. The first is the importance of deeds vis-à-vis faith; i.e. whether deeds are constituents of faith and thus affect it. The second, which was a later development, is the issue of *ijtihād*: who has the right to use *ijtihād* and what is the scope of *ijtihād*. On the first point, Sunnism does indeed show a great deal of similarity with the Murji'ī position. Deeds, regardless of how evil they might be, never lead to the nullification of faith. The two do not intersect, so to speak. While the Ḥanafīs took the view that faith, which neither increases nor decreases, is never affected by acts, the Ḥanbalīs granted some role to deeds in deciding the degree, rather than the existence, of faith.

The second issue is that of *ijtihād*, which was developed primarily in Sunnī Islam within the domain of jurisprudence. It was settled in Sunnī

¹ Cook, "Activism and Quietism," p. 16

² Watt, *Formative Period*, p. 124

Islam that anyone, if he has the proper knowledge, had the right to exercise *ijtihād*. Exercising *ijtihād* is a good deed that is to be rewarded regardless of the outcome it produces. Therefore, the stances that the Companions took in the schisms are to be seen as a matter of *ijtihād*. This perception of *ijtihād* was rejected by both the Shī‘a and the Khawārij. The former argued that it the *imāms* had the right to exercise *ijtihād* because they were the only ones who possessed the proper knowledge. ‘Alī, therefore, was the only Companion entitled to use *ijtihād* and all other Companions sinned gravely when they disobeyed him or abstained from supporting him. The Khawārij, on the other hand, gave no one the right to exercise *ijtihād* in any matter that the Qur’ān clearly addresses. They held that the Qur’ān was unequivocal in its rejection of any compromise between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiya. Consequently, ‘Alī disobeyed the Qur’ān when he accepted the arbitration and he thus put himself in no better situation than his enemies. The same ground was used by the Sunnī scholars to argue for the *ta’dīl* of the Companions. In other words, while the issue of *ijtihād* played an important role in early Islam in defending the Companions against accusations of *kufṛ* (leveled against them by the Khawārij, early Shī‘a and others), it played an important role later, starting roughly from the fifth century of the Hijra, in defending the same Companions against charges of loss of *‘adāla*.

A modern scholar, J. Givony, has argued that the real root of *irjā’* lies in the position that some leading Companions took concerning the conflict between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiya. Those Companions “refused to take sides and remained neutral,” he explains.³ Refusal to take sides and remaining neutral, however, does not support his idea on the root of *irjā’*. This study argues that the creed of *irjā’* was based upon a specific

³ Givony, *The Presentation of the Murji‘a*, p. 13

epistemological ground. This ground necessitates abstention from passing any judgment if certitude is lacking. It was likely that the Murji'a, would have taken part in the civil war had they witnessed it. This confusion about the Murji'ī stance may have stemmed from the fact that the Murji'a are argued by many a scholar to have tried to reconcile the differences within the Muslim community in order to establish peace. In Givony's words, "it does seem plausible as a historic situation, that at a time of political schism a third neutral block would emerge, and would either take a non-aligning, passive stand, or adopt a pacifying active role."⁴ The epistemological ground that we, on the other hand, contend to be the essence of the Murji'ī creed and therefore the real basis of the concept of collective *ta'dīl*, may also explain to us some points which the sources do not help us to answer in a direct way. For instance, though the Sunnī scholars did not address the question of the Qur'ānic verses that talk about the hypocrites and did not try to reconcile them with their concept, it can be surmised that a Sunnī scholar admit that some of the Companions were hypocrites, but say we are in no position to know who the hypocrites were and thus have to abstain from judgement.

What this study has concluded is that: the Sunnī attitude towards the Companions was initially built upon the Murji'ī position on the same issue. This Murji'ī/Sunnī attitude was consistent with other theological points that both sects held. The definition of faith and the perception of *ijtihād* adopted from jurisprudence were employed to defend the Companions against accusations of unbelief. At a later stage, when the Prophetic Ḥadīth had come to play a role of great importance in Sunnī Islam, the focus was now on defending the *'adāla* of the Companions to legitimize them as Ḥadīth transmitters. Again, defending the *'adāla* of

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15

the Companions was in harmony with other general rules agreed upon by Sunnī scholars of Ḥadīth criticism. The main argument here is that what we know about the schisms in which the Companions participated is insufficient to nullify their original state of *'adāla*, confirmed by the Qur'ān and the Sunna, and thus cannot constitute a valid ground for disparagement. This idea also represents the core of the Murji'ī attitude towards the Companions: we were not there and people differ on what happened and on who was right and who was wrong; therefore, we refrain from judgment. Refraining from judgment means only refraining from disparagement. The Murji'a did not need to go one step further and argue that the original *'adāla* was maintained. The Sunnīs had to take this step only when they began to theorize about chains of transmission.

When the Sunnī scholars came to establishing the concept of collective *ta'dīl*, they had to deal with the problem that some sects argued against the faith, and, therefore, the *'adāla* of the Companions, even during the lifetime of the Prophet. Moreover, the Sunnī scholars themselves acknowledged the possibility of different views on whether a certain act is enough to deprive someone of his *'adāla*, which made it difficult for them to avoid responding to the charges made against the Companions. The Qur'ān and the Sunna provided the answer. The Sunnī scholars strove to adduce as many Qur'ānic verses as they could and the number of Prophetic traditions that venerate the Companions multiplied to confirm the original *'adāla* (the *aṣl*) of the Companions. Having done so, they were able to argue that the Companions are to retain their *'adāla* because we can never be certain that what they had done vitiated their original *'adāla*. Incertitude, they argued, cannot overrule a certain ruling. This means that we, when we talk about the concept of the collective *ta'dīl*, have to make the distinction between the *'adāla* and the *ta'dīl*. The

former, from a Sunnī point of view, is the original state of the Companions because, first, it is the original state of everyone until proven otherwise, and second because the Qur'ān and the Sunna confirmed it. The *ta'dīl*, however, is a Sunnī conclusion based on the epistemological ground of the Murji'a and taken one step further. Whereas the former, the *'adāla*, is based mainly upon the Qur'ān and the Sunna; the latter is based on the *umma* (taken in the wider sense, i.e., including the early "heretical" sects). It is the *umma* by its disagreement on the schisms which deemed the whole situation uncertain. The *ijmā'*, as usual, has sanctioned the whole view and the collective *'adāla* of the Prophet's Companions has become an article of faith.

As we have seen, the Sunnīs, facing the repugnant reality that they shared some views with a sect that, for some reason, had acquired a negative reputation too obvious to be hidden, had to construct other representations of the Murji'a against which to compare themselves. We are neither this sect nor that sect, the Sunnīs seem to have wished to show; and the names of sects can be put according to the issue under consideration. In the case of the attitude towards the Companions, the Sunnīs would say: "we are neither Khawārij nor Murji'a;" or they might say: "we are neither Shi'a nor Khawārij."

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