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A few verses of the Qurʾān (33:6, 33:53) instruct Muslims to revere the Prophet’s wives as the “mothers” of the faithful. Men should always respect their private spaces. One should ask permission before entering their homes and stay behind a partition when interacting with them. Over the centuries, those who despised the Prophet’s son-in-law, ʿAlī, claimed that he scandalously flouted such commandments. According to these story-tellers, ʿAlī would secretly climb the walls of the home belonging to a wife of the Prophet to see her. They narrated that ʿAlī did this so frequently that his fingernails were reduced to stubs.1

This book examines the stories that some Muslims shared about a respected caliph in Islamic history, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661). The unique aspect of this study is that none of these tales come from his admirers. Rather, our informants will be individuals who considered him a man prone to error and misguidance. Evidently, from the example above, some portrayed him as a peeping Tom.

ʿAlī can be considered one of the most contested figures in Islamic history. Within a few centuries of his death, he had become a respected authority in both Sunnī and Shīʿī Islam, with the latter tradition especially dedicated to his veneration. However, his nearly universal portrayal in Muslim literature as a pious authority obscures a centuries-long process of contestation and rehabilitation. In fact, ʿAlī’s revered status in Muslim theology and historiography is surprising in view of the early

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1 Abuʾl-Shaykh, Taḥaqāṭ al-muhaddithīn bi-Isbāḥān, 3:303; al-Dhahābī, Taʾrīkh, 23:517; Ibn ʿAdī, al-Kāmil, 4:266. In some versions of this report, the names of ʿAlī and Umm Salama are omitted: see al-Dhahābī, Siyār, 13:229; al-Dhahābī, Tadhkīrat al-huffāẓ, 2:771.
successes of two separate parties that essentially destroyed him, namely, the Khiwārīj (sing. Khārijī) and the Umayyads. The former declared ‘Alī an infidel and managed to assassinate him. Their ideology survived and persisted throughout Islamic history in the doctrines of a small sect, the Ibadī. The Umayyads (r. 40–132/661–750) were ‘Alī’s political rivals and staunchly denounced him, his legacy, his descendants, and his partisans as criminals, both in his lifetime and after his death. Shortly after his assassination, they succeeded in obtaining the reins of the caliphate and establishing a dynasty based in Syria that lasted close to a century. Medieval sources indicate that rhetoric and propaganda hostile to ‘Alī once permeated all public discourse. When the Umayyad state fell, it is generally assumed that hostility to the legacy of ‘Alī was swept away with it as the Umayyads were replaced by a new dynasty, the ‘Abbāsids, that venerated him. The real story, of course, is not so simple.

This book considers the enduring legacy of early Muslims who were hostile to ‘Alī and his descendants, the ‘Alids. Later Muslim authors acknowledged the existence of such figures associated with “anti-‘Alid sentiment” (naṣb) up to the ninth century. Later representatives of both Sunnī and Shi‘ī orthodoxy condemned anti-‘Alid sentiment as heretical, but many of these anti-‘Alids nonetheless became revered figures in Sunnī Islam. They made literary contributions that subsequent Sunnī authorities transmitted, and circulated views about ‘Alī that later Sunnīs partially accepted as accurate. This book identifies those anti-‘Alids and the ways in which their beliefs have impacted Sunnī Islam.

Anti-‘Alid sentiment has received little scholarly attention for a number of reasons. First, unlike pro-‘Alid sentiment, which found intellectual backing in Shi‘ism, anti-‘Alid sentiment in its most radical form was not represented by a parallel independent and enduring sect. Radical anti-‘Alids participated in a variety of ideological and political circles, but it seems that the sects that flourished did not fully embrace their doctrines. Sunnīs adopted only the more moderate beliefs espoused by anti-‘Alids active in pro-Umayyad and ‘Uthmānī circles. The same can be said about Ibadīsm, the sole surviving branch of the Khārijī community that once encompassed numerous rival factions. The Ibadīs denounced other, now extinct Khārijī sects as extremists and hence did not preserve the literary works of their rivals. Although Ibadīs today mildly condemn ‘Alī and reject any veneration of him, Khārijī anti-‘Alidism was much more pronounced in previous centuries. Consequently, heresiographers writing in later centuries did not dedicate separate chapters to anti-‘Alids.
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Second, there was a sectarian incentive for Sunnīs to deny the existence of anti-ʿAlid sentiment among the leading personalities who were popularly depicted as harboring such beliefs. The acknowledgment of anti-ʿAlid feelings on the part of any Companion of Muḥammād was irreconcilable with belief in the righteousness of all Companions and in the superiority of the earliest generations of Muslims, positions that became orthodox in Sunnism. Certain historical precedents, such as the ritual cursing of ʿAlī from Umayyad pulpits, were undeniably anti-ʿAlid. In these cases, many Sunnīs advised against discussing the problematic events altogether.² Scholars argued that such discussions were divisive and had the potential to lead Muslims astray by causing them to dislike some Companions and other venerable predecessors. This kind of history fell under the rubric of fitna (civil war: lit., “sedition”) and was best avoided. An obvious source of concern for anti-Shīʿ polemicists was that the Sunnī hadīth corpus occasionally validated Shīʿ arguments about the sinfulness of some Companions and other early authorities.

Sunnī historiography preserves accounts in which Companions, Followers (tābīʿūn), caliphs, and other respected authorities appear hostile to Ḥanīfī. The Anṣāb al-ʿākrūf of al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), for example, includes numerous reports depicting Ḥanīfī’s pro-Umayyad and ʿUthmānī rivals as anti-ʿAlī. The transmitters of these reports likely did not deem it necessary to interpret conflicts between Companions charitably so as to make all of the participants appear righteous. In these sources, Companions are capable of sins and crimes.³ Loathing Ḥanīfī is one sin among others that include the sale and consumption of intoxicants,⁴ lying,⁵ adultery,⁶ and mass

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³ One example is al-Balādhurī’s treatment of ʿUthmān: see Keane, Medieval Islamic Historiography, 30.
⁴ For reports about Samura b. Jundab selling intoxicants and Muʿāwiya serving intoxicants to guests, see Aḥmad Abī Ḥanīfī, al-Musnad, 1:25, 5:347. For a report about Muʿāwiya selling them during the caliphate of ʿUthmān, see Abū Nuʿaym al-Isbāhānī, Maʿrifat al-sahāba, 4:828. In later sources, Muʿāwiya’s name is omitted so that the owner of the alcohol remains anonymous: see Ibn Abī Asākir, Taʾriḥ, 34:420; Ibn al-ʿĀthīr, Usd al-ghāba, 3:299.
⁵ Taḥā and al-Zubayr pledge allegiance to Ḥanīfī and ask him permission to leave Medina for pilgrimage when their real intentions are to launch a rebellion; see Ibn Abī Ḥadīd, Shahrī, 10:248. The two are described as swearing false oaths to ʿAʾishah in the course of their rebellion: see ibid., 9:311; al-Iskāfī, al-ʿĀʾishah, 56; al-Masʿūdī, Murūj al-dhabāb, 2:358. For a report about Ibn al-Zubayr doing the same, see Abū ‘l-Fidaʾ, Ṭurkbī, 1:173; Ibn Aṭham al-Kufī, al-Futūh, 2:458; al-Samʿānī, al-Anṣāb, 2:286.
murder. But by the end of the ninth century, proto-Sunnis had generally come to reject or reinterpret such reports to avoid identifying their own religious and political authorities as anti-ʿAlid. Such identification would have not only validated the complaints of ʿAlid insurrectionists, who were considered enemies of the state, but also vindicated the claims of their partisans (Shīʿis), who believed that non-Shīʿis persistently ignored the rights of ʿAlids and treated them unjustly. Thus, Sunnis had an incentive to deny the historicity of accounts that depicted certain Companions as anti-ʿAlids. Whenever possible, Sunni biographers and theologians interpreted reports about anti-ʿAlids so that their actions did not entail animosity for ʿAli. For example, they portray the rebellion of ʿAli’s most famous antagonist, the future Umayyad caliph Muʿawiya b. Abī Sufyān (r. 41–60/661–80), as prompted by a simple misunderstanding between the two. In other reports, Muʿawiya is described as openly admiring and weeping for ʿAli. As a result, anti-ʿAlid sentiment came to possess an erased history in Sunni Islam.

Influential hadith scholars of the ninth century began to condemn and cease transmitting many early anti-ʿAlid doctrines that had enjoyed popularity in the Umayyad period. The erasure of the history of anti-ʿAlid sentiment entailed not only its disappearance, but also a denial that it had ever existed among the Companions or their partisans. The suppression of earlier depictions becomes apparent only with a sustained reading of hadith, biographical dictionaries, and theological texts.

The absence of anti-ʿAlidism as an independent sect in heresiographies explains the fact that secondary literature generally contains only brief, tangential notes about individuals accused of anti-ʿAlid sentiment without providing a framework to contextualize and judge such claims.

7 Busr b. Abī Ārāt is infamous for the murderous raids he led near the end of ʿAli’s caliphate: see Madelung, *Succession*, 299–307.
9 According to these Sunnis, Muʿawiya and other rebels wanted to punish ʿUthmān’s murderers right away, while ʿAli desired to delay such action until civil strife had subsided. Some Sunnis speculated that Muʿawiya believed that the punishment of murderers was a collective obligation (fard kafāʿa) that anyone could carry out independent of a ruling authority, while ʿAli believed otherwise: see Amāḥzūn, *Tahqīq mawaqif al-sahāba fī ʿl-fītna*, 454; al-Khamīs, *Hiqba min al-taʾrīkh*, 117–120.
11 On erased histories, identity politics, and their relationship to memories of pain, see Brown, “Wounded Attachments.”
Asma Afsaruddin, Abbas Barzegar, Patricia Crone, Wilferd Madelung, Christopher Melchert, and Muhammad Qasim Zaman have all commented on early anti-ʿAlid attitudes in the nascent Sunnī community, but they have offered neither a comprehensive rubric nor a chronological narrative for understanding the phenomenon. This work aims to fill this lacuna in the study of anti-ʿAlid sentiment in Islamic history.

I survey medieval Muslim literature (from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries) across a number of genres, including hadīth, biographical, historical, and theological works. References to anti-ʿAlids are frequently elusive and brief. Nonetheless, the diversity of the sources provides rich portrayals of a few key anti-ʿAlid figures and their alleged beliefs. I consider common themes in these texts and the reception of this literature among prominent medieval Muslim scholars who discussed them.

Chapter 1 identifies the phenomenon of anti-ʿAlid sentiment in its varied expressions in early Muslim political and intellectual history. The chapter also provides a framework for researchers to locate and contextualize anti-ʿAlid doctrines that appear in later Sunnī and Ibadī historiography. I identify six distinct positions on ʿAlī held by Muslims, and I arrange these doctrines on a spectrum from the ardently pro-ʿAlid to the radically anti-ʿAlid to enable readers to (1) interpret literary depictions of ʿAlī and (2) situate authors who engaged in theological discussions about ʿAlī with like-minded peers even when they were separated by sectarian boundaries, geography, and hundreds of years. The remainder of the book is devoted to the study of influential personalities in Islamic history who articulated anti-ʿAlid doctrines or showed sympathy for them. These case studies are organized chronologically.

Chapter 2 examines the doctrines of two sociopolitical factions that influenced later Sunnī thought: the Umayyads and the ʿUthmāniyya. These two factions were most active in the earliest periods of Islamic history (the seventh and eighth centuries). Historians have attributed the earliest expressions of anti-ʿAlid sentiment to members of these groups (alongside the Khawārij). Since anti-ʿAlids active before the fall of the Umayyads did not leave primary documents discussing ʿAlī, this chapter relies on hadīth and on biographical and historical literature to elucidate the doctrines of the two groups. The historicity of these portrayals is not of primary importance for this literary survey. At the very least, this literature

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documents for us the memories of later Muslims about this early period. Subsequent chapters access the views of influential authors and the religious communities that they represented primarily through the texts they penned themselves.

The case studies in Chapter 2 include Companions of the Prophet and other early Muslims who were portrayed as anti-ʿAlī. A commitment to the belief in the righteousness of the Companions played an important role in the reception of anti-ʿAlī hadith in Sunnī Islam. It created an incentive for scholars to reject or charitably reinterpret not only texts that disparaged ʿAlī but also those that portrayed other Companions despising him.

Chapter 3 examines the views of ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiz (d. 255/869), a Muʿtazili bellettrist who lived in a period in which anti-ʿAlī sentiment still ran high in various parts of the Muslim world. His Risālat al-ʿUthmāniyya examines the views of one of the factions introduced in the previous chapter and constitutes a seminal text for understanding this anti-ʿAlī current in early Islam. The work of al-Jāḥiz foreshadows that of another author, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), discussed in Chapter 5. Both provide comprehensive arguments and many proofs in favor of anti-ʿAlī doctrines while claiming to be Muslims who respected ʿAlī. Al-Jāḥiz’s treatise triggered a number of rebuttals from authors who condemned him as an anti-ʿAlī.

Chapter 4 discusses the literary heritage of one of the least discussed sects in Islamic history, Ibaḍism. The Ibaḍis portray ʿAlī as having been a righteous Muslim and a legitimate caliph until the end of the battle of Ṣiffn. At that point, they believe, he fell from grace in his quest for power. This image of ʿAlī differs from ʿUthmān and Umayyad portrayals of him as vicious and sinful throughout his life. This chapter draws primarily on the Kitaḥ Bahālīl of Abū Yaʿqūb Yusuf al-Wārjalānī (d. 570/1175), an influential Ibaḍi scholar, complemented by expressions of anti-ʿAlī views in other authoritative Ibaḍi historical works. Ibaḍi communities in Oman, Zanzibar, and North Africa still rely on such works to understand history and this suggests that the Khārijī legacy of anti-ʿAlīs survives even in the contemporary world.

Chapter 5 examines the writings of the highly influential Sunnī scholar Ibn Taymiyya and those of some of his detractors, who accused him of advocating anti-ʿAlī doctrines. Ibn Taymiyya discussed his views of ʿAlī and anti-ʿAlīs in his multivolume anti-Shīʿī work Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawīyya. His anti-ʿAlī and anti-Shīʿī claims illuminate the tension

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that some Sunnis (and their predecessors such as al-Jahiz) faced in opposing Shi‘ism while simultaneously rejecting anti-‘Alid sentiments.

The concluding chapter reconsiders certain important assumptions about anti-‘Alid sentiment: namely, that it was limited to the early Umayyads and Khawarij, and that it played no role in shaping Sunni theology. Instead, my literary excavation reveals strong indications of an enduring legacy that continued to shape medieval and contemporary Sunni views about ‘Ali. The conclusion also discusses the methods that Sunnis used to transform ‘Ali from a villainous character to a righteous one. I draw on canonical hadith and parallel recensions in other works to argue that Sunnis writers actively engaged in the process of rehabilitating ‘Ali by censoring, reinterpreting, and emending texts that portrayed him negatively and by circulating counterclaims that exalted him. Scholars also selectively appropriated anti-‘Alid reports to modulate ‘Ali’s image. They tempered the pro-‘Alid (and Shi‘i) portrayal of ‘Ali as an impeccable saint via reports that portrayed him as sinful or frequently mistaken. On the whole, we can consider Sunni efforts to construct an image of ‘Ali that differed from both Shi‘i and anti-‘Alid views to have been successful. After three centuries of contestation, Sunnis came to value ‘Alī b. Abī Talib universally as nothing less than a knowledgeable Companion, a valiant warrior, and the fourth rightly guided caliph. Most Sunnis subsequently understood the succession of rightly guided caliphs to indicate their spiritual ranks in the sight of God. Accordingly, ‘Alī could not have acceded to the caliphate before ‘Uthmān, ‘Umar, or Abū Bakr since God had ensured that those with the most merit would rule first. However, beyond this simple picture lies an intense history of debate among Muslims both inside and outside the Sunni community.14

Sectarianism between Sunnis and Shi‘is is widespread in the Middle East, and continues to affect the region’s geopolitics. Public figures in the Middle East aiming to stir up fear or outrage among their supporters may cite historical fault lines between sects in order to drum up opposition to “the other.” For example, Arab Shi‘is are accused of being agents of Iran. Shi‘is commonly describe Sunnis supportive of anti-Shi‘i doctrines as “anti-‘Alids” (nawāṣib). Sunnis vigorously deny the accusation while nevertheless condemning Shi‘i devotion to ‘Alī as misguided. Obviously, there is a longstanding debate on what can and cannot be categorized as “anti-‘Alid.” For example, some Sunnis deny that the esteemed

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14 For an excellent study of debates regarding spiritual precedence, merit, and their relationship to Muslim debates on the caliphate, see Afsaruddin, Excellence.
personalities discussed in Chapters 2 and 5 were truly anti-ʿAlids. This book notes these debates and theorizes a framework for resolving such identity questions. I have aimed to make its writing style accessible to a wider audience while providing extensive references to engage with current scholarship. Appendices to Chapters 1, 2, and 5 offer extracts from anti-ʿAlid texts in English translation as illustrative supplements to the themes discussed in their respective chapters.

EARLY PORTRAYALS OF ʿALĪ

This study is not a biography of ʿAlī, although Muslim historiography regarding his life is central to it. Rather, it is an attempt to understand unfavorable depictions of ʿAlī popular in the Umayyad era and their subsequent transmission and reception among Muslim scholars. Despite the warranted objections to the term “proto-Sunnī,”16 I use it to refer to authorities who lived between the eighth and tenth centuries and appear in influential Sunnī hadith collections and legal texts. In spite of their differences, these proto-Sunnī authorities generally considered the first three caliphs to have been legitimate, and apparently abstained from attending Khārijī and Shiʿī circles of learning. Some proto-Sunnīs considered ʿAlī’s life to have been one of complete wisdom, whereas others condemned his conduct. Contestation within the Sunnī community regarding ʿAlī’s place in history, law, and theology is an important indication of his prominence in the literature.

The author of Kitaḥ Sulaym b. Qays was a Kufan Shiʿī who denounced the majority of Muslims as misguided for following political leaders other than ʿAlī. Although the narratives in this polemical and hagiographical

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15 For simplicity’s sake, I reference hadith as I do any other literature: I refer to the title of the collection, volume, and page number. Free online access to many of the editions I use is readily available with an Arabic-language search. One website, www.shiaonlinelibrary.com, has digitized essential texts from both the Shiʿī and Sunnī traditions. Those wishing to follow up my citation of a hadith from a famous collection (e.g., al-Bukhārī, Sāhilī, 7:73 or al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 8:58) will find that they correspond to these digitized editions. To accommodate various editions of a single collection, academic conventions in the citation of hadith have changed over the years to include bāb, hadith number, or the first sentence of the text. One drawback to implementing these conventions is their inconsistent adoption for some hadith collections and not others. For these reasons, I avoid their use and hope the above alternative meets the needs of those desiring to perform Arabic-language searches of hadith.

16 For a discussion of the methodological problems associated with the term, see Dann, “Contested Boundaries,” 8–14.
Early Portrayals of ʿAlī

Shīʿī text do not seem to offer any reliable historical information, its reproduction of a sermon of ʿAlī’s summarizing the edicts of the first three caliphs deserves some attention.17 The sermon depicts ʿAlī as a nonconformist, frequently disagreeing with the judgments of his predecessors and thus diverging from other Companions who adopted the opinions of the first three caliphs.18 Shīʿī writers emphasized the motif of ʿAlī’s nonconformism to the point of making it seem that ʿAlī never agreed with the actions of the other caliphs; but this depiction is not entirely faithful to the sources. Twelver Shīʿī law and ethics, which claim to reflect the opinions of ʿAlī, converge so frequently with Sunnism and the views of other Companions that the claim that ʿAlī always disagreed with his peers is unwarranted.

Nonetheless, this Umayyad-era portrayal of ʿAlī as a dissident is echoed by prominent proto-Sunnī hadīth transmitters, who depict him or his family members contradicting the first three caliphs on a variety of issues. They also report that ʿAlī considered himself to be the most qualified person to lead the community after the Prophet’s death. Naṣb (anti-ʿAlīd sentiment) and tasbāyyuʿ (pro-ʿAlīd sentiment) stood against each other as currents in the nascent Sunnī community, always in perpetual conflict, both politically and intellectually. Anti-ʿAlīds considered ʿAlī the worst calamity to befall the community, whereas his partisans saw him as a peerless and charismatic leader. A third group consisted of Muslims who were ambivalent about ʿAlī’s personality and treated him simply as a Companion no different from other Companions of the Prophet. For them, ʿAlī was liable to making mistakes, but he was not evil. This middle ground between the warring factions eventually became the hallmark of Sunnism, and it enshrined the Sunni view of ʿAlī as a nondescript personality among many righteous peers.

Various Sunnī and Shīʿī sources have depicted ʿAlī’s kin, close friends in Medina, and disciples in Kūfah as the earliest individuals who championed

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his views and resolutely followed them despite their divergence from the community’s normative practice. This pro-ʿAlid faction generally believed that the community had wronged ʿAlī in rebelling against him during his reign as caliph, while some considered him the direct heir of the Prophet’s authority. Shiʿism eventually came to represent the sentiments of the latter group and developed its own literary tradition that embellished (sometimes clearly ahistorical) anecdotes in which ʿAlī would display his superior wisdom at the expense of the first three caliphs. 19 However, the same motif exists implicitly in Sunnī sources as well.20 Theological, historical, and biographical works written in Sunnī and Shiʿī circles alike mention individuals and groups who believed in the superiority of ʿAlī (tafdīl ʿAlī) in relation to other Companions. For example, members of ʿAlī’s own clan (the Hashimids), a number of Companions, and Kūfīans who fought for him all appear as proponents of tafḍīl ʿAlī in various genres of Sunnī literature. Some Muʿtazilī and Sufi scholars became proponents of tafḍīl ʿAlī in later centuries. It is frequently unclear whether this tafḍīl was spiritual, political, or both.21 The scope of this book, however, is limited to the study of anti-ʿAlid sentiment.

Anti-ʿAlidism appears to have been fairly common among some populations before its suppression and virtual extinction among Sunnīs. Early anti-ʿAlids despised the personality of ʿAlī and considered him to have been evil. They likewise condemned those who cherished the memory of ʿAlī as heretics. On the other hand, influential hadīth scholars of the ninth century, such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), are reported to have expressed public discontent with peers and predecessors who had displayed anti-ʿAlid sentiment.22 The formation of Sunnism as a social and intellectual tradition seems to have encouraged the censure of eccentric views at both the pro-ʿAlid and the anti-ʿAlid end of the spectrum.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MUSLIM HISTORIOGRAPHY

This book does not attempt to provide a definitive narrative of the life of ʿAlī or to judge the historicity of the reports on which it draws. The historicity of accounts describing events in the life of the Prophet and his

19 For example, see Ibn Shahrashūb, Manaqīb, 2:178–194.
21 For a comprehensive study of tafḍīl ʿAlī, see Mamduhī, Ghiyāt al-tabjīl, 113–205.
22 See Chapter 6.