

'Adālat al-Ṣaḥāba: The Construction of a Religious Doctrine

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Abstract

This article investigates the development of *'adālat al-ṣaḥāba*, a central doctrine in Sunnī orthodoxy that stresses the integrity of the Prophet Muḥammad's Companions. The examination of relevant Sunnī works indicates that the doctrine crystalized in the 5th/11th century, by which time the basic tenets of the doctrine had been developed. These include, among other things, the definition of Companions and their essential role in securing the authenticity of Islam. Furthermore, it was around that time that medieval Sunnī scholars developed an epistemological—rather than a historical or theological—basis for the doctrine. Establishing the integrity of the Companions during the Prophet's lifetime on the presumption of innocence that is further confirmed by textual evidence, they argued that good Muslims must continue to accept that integrity given the lack of conclusive evidence that they lost it at a later time, particularly when they participated in civil wars. I argue that this epistemological ground was furnished by Murǧī'ism, as the examination of some Murǧī'i texts demonstrates.¹

Keywords

Ṣaḥāba, *'adāla*, Sunnism, Murǧī'ism

Résumé

Cet article historicise le concept de *'adālat al-ṣaḥāba*, doctrine centrale dans l'orthodoxie sunnite et qui met l'accent sur l'intégrité des Compagnons du prophète Muḥammad. L'examen des œuvres sunnites pertinentes pour notre propos indique que ladite doctrine se cristallisa au V^e/XI^e siècle, époque à laquelle les principes fondamentaux en avaient été jetés. Ceux-ci incluent notamment la définition des «Compagnons» ainsi que le rôle essentiel qu'ils jouèrent pour garantir l'authenticité de l'islam. Par ailleurs, les savants sunnites médiévaux fournirent de manière concomitante une base épistémologique – plus qu'historique ou théologique – à la doctrine. Établissant l'intégrité des Compagnons durant la vie même du Prophète, sur la présomption d'innocence que confirmeraient ultérieurement des preuves textuelles, ils arguèrent que les Bons musulmans devaient continuer à accepter cette intégrité du fait du manque d'éléments probants démontrant qu'ils l'auraient perdue plus tard, en particulier lorsqu'ils participèrent aux guerres civiles. Nous soutenons que ce socle épistémologique fut apporté par le murǧī'isme, ainsi que le corrobore l'analyse de quelques textes de ce courant.

¹ This article is based on my M.Phil. dissertation, which I completed in 2004 at the University of St. Andrews. I would like to thank Richard Kimber, Catherine Cobham, Robert Gleave, Michael Cook, Sibtain Abidi, and Luke Yarbrough for their useful comments and suggestions.

Mots clés*Ṣaḥāba*, 'adāla, sunnisme, murǧī'isme**I. Introduction**

Commenting on Marwān b. al-Ḥakam's reliability as *Ḥadīṭ* transmitter, the famous 9th/15th-century Sunnī scholar Ibn Ḥaǧar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) states succinctly but decisively that if it is established that Marwān saw the Prophet Muḥammad, then whatever people say against him does not matter as far as his integrity ('adāla) is concerned.² This statement epitomizes what lies behind the doctrine of 'adālat al-ṣaḥāba and illustrates how it was used by Sunnī scholars to, among other things, assess historical reports and figures. Treating it as an article of faith, these scholars have gone to great lengths to adduce evidence from the Qur'ān, the Sunna, and consensus (*iǧmā'*) to demonstrate that it was an authentic part of the true Muslim creed and one that guaranteed the uncorrupted transmission of the foundational texts of Islam. Therefore, discussions of this doctrine exist in a wide variety of Sunnī sources, including creeds and biographical dictionaries, as well as works of *Ḥadīṭ* sciences (*'ulūm al-ḥadīṭ*), the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and history.

Having accepted it as a fundamental doctrine, most modern Sunnī scholars have failed to critically examine its development. Towards the middle of the 20th century, a fierce debate broke out when an Egyptian scholar, Maḥmūd Abū Rayya, questioned some established views about the Prophetic Sunna, including the doctrine of 'adālat al-ṣaḥāba. Particularly, he harshly criticized Abū Hurayra, a Companion whose transmissions of *Ḥadīṭ* outnumber those of any other Companion (ca. 5000 *ḥadīṭs*).³ Religious circles in Egypt condemned Abū Rayya, considering his work a threat to Islam itself. Many rebuttals to his works were published, at least five of which were exclusively devoted to defending Abū Hurayra.⁴

² *Yuqālu lahu ru'ya, fa-in tabatat, fa-lā yu'arraǧu 'alā man takallama fīhi* ("It is reported that he has seen [the Prophet]. If this is proven, then whoever speaks against him should not be heeded"). Ibn Ḥaǧar al-'Asqalānī, *Hady al-sārī: Muqaddimat Fath al-bārī fī tarīḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*, Riyadh, n.p., 2001, I, p. 466. On Marwān's life and career, see C.E. Bosworth, "Marwān b. al-Ḥakam b. Abī l-'Āṣ", *EI*².

³ Maḥmūd Abū Rayya, *Ṣayḥ al-maḍīra: Abū Hurayra l-Dūsi*, Cairo, n.p., 1965, and *id.*, *Aḍwā' 'alā l-sunna l-nabawiyya*, Cairo, Dār al-ma'ārif, 1994.

⁴ See, for instance, 'Abd al-Mu'min Ṣalāḥ al-'Alī, *Difā' 'an Abi Hurayra*, Cairo, Dār al-ṣurūq, 1973; Muḥammad 'Aǧǧāǧ al-Ḥaṭīb, *Abū Hurayra: Rāwiyat al-islām*, Cairo, Maktabat Wahba, 1982; 'Abd al-Razzāq Ḥamza, *Zulumāt Abi Rayya*, Cairo, al-Maṭba'a l-salafiyya, 1959; Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Ḥawwā', *Abū Hurayra: al-Ṣaḥābī l-muftarā' alayhi*, Cairo, Dār al-ṣa'b,

Some western discussions have contributed to our knowledge of this doctrine. To account for its origin, G.H.A. Juynboll has emphasized the Sunnī need to rehabilitate the Companions who participated in conflicts after the Prophet's death.⁵ It is also within this context that Scott Lucas discusses the doctrine, which he regards as the 3rd/9th-century "*Ḥadīṭ*-scholar" solution to the problem of "warring *ṣaḥāba*".⁶ For his part, Eerick Dickinson has emphasized the importance of the doctrine in solving a technical problem in Sunnī *Ḥadīṭ* criticism.⁷ Based on more extensive and systematic examination of

1998. See also 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Šaraf al-Dīn, *Abū Hurayra*, Najaf, al-Maṭba'a l-ḥaydariyya, 1956 for a modern Šī'ī study on Abū Hurayra. For a discussion of these debates, see G.H.A. Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt*, Leiden, Brill, 1969, p. 62-99.

⁵ In his *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīṭ*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, Juynboll traces the origin of the doctrine to the desire of *Ḥadīṭ* scholars to curb the process of *Ḥadīṭ* fabrication at the end of the 2nd/8th century. Among other things, they needed to defend the integrity of Companions who got involved in schisms and mutual cursing as well as deal with the deteriorating reputation of Abū Hurayra who suffered harshest criticism. This cursing became so widespread that Abū 'Awāna l-Waddāḥ b. 'Abd Allāh (d. 176/792) compiled a work entitled *Ma'āyib aṣḥāb rasūl Allāh* (The Deficiencies of the Companions of God's Messenger). Eventually, however, the reliability of the Companions was accepted by Sunnī scholars when the doctrine of '*adālat al-ṣaḥāba*' was formulated in its definitive form towards the end of the 3rd/9th century, particularly by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 277/890) who realized its usefulness in *Ḥadīṭ* criticism (*ibid.*, p. 192-201).

⁶ Scott Lucas, "The *Ṣaḥāba* in Classical Muslim Theory and Practice", in his *Constructive Critics: Ḥadīṭ Literature and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam. The Legacy of the Generation of Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Ma'in and Ibn Ḥanbal*, Leiden, Brill, 2004, p. 221-85.

⁷ In his *Development of Early Sunnite Ḥadīṭ Criticism: The Taqdimā of Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī*, Leiden, Brill, 2001, Eerick Dickinson argues that the doctrine of '*adālat al-ṣaḥāba*' was part of the general development of Sunnī *Ḥadīṭ* criticism. Whereas some scholars (such as al-Šāfi'ī, Ibn Qutayba l-Dīnawarī, and al-Ṭabarī) sought to "thread their way through the contradictory *ḥadīṭ*s by rational means", *Ḥadīṭ* critics (such as Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī) used a methodology of *Ḥadīṭ* criticism that relied on three sets of evidence: testimonial, biographical, and documentary. Among the cases that troubled these critics was when a chain of transmission mentioned that 'X narrated from Y'. 'From' ('an) does not necessarily indicate that X heard the *ḥadīṭ* directly from Y; the presence of an unknown and possibly unreliable intermediary between X and Y is possible. Two attitudes emerged in respect to this point. Muslim (d. 261/875), in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, argued that contemporaneity was sufficient to validate a chain of transmission that contained 'from', rejecting the necessity of unequivocally stating that X heard from Y. According to Dickinson, Muslim thought that this restriction was both too lax and too strict, for whereas it does not guarantee that absence of an intermediary (for X meeting Y does not demonstrate that all his transmissions from Y were unmediated), it eventually leads to the rejection of many *ḥadīṭ*s, including well-established ones. A typical case of this is when a Successor (*ṭābi*) transmits from a Companion. *Ḥadīṭ* critics rejected Muslim's objections regarding 'from'. Whereas his objection that the stipulation was too lax was unheeded, that it was too strict was dealt with by introducing a new dogma that "decreed that all of the earliest Muslims were to be considered reliable for the purpose of *Ḥadīṭ* transmission". Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) argues in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* that since all of the Companions were declared by God to be "above weakness attaching to

Sunnī sources, this article seeks to examine the process of its construction rather than its origin or applications. It is instructive, however, to begin with a discussion of the term *'adāla* and its usage.

II. The Meaning and Technical Usage of *'adāla*

Arabic lexica list many derivatives from the root *'-d-l*, three of which—*'adala*, *'adula*, and *'addala*—are relevant to our discussion. *'Adala* means to pass a fair verdict (*al-ḥukm bi-l-ḥaqq*); *'adl*, *ma'dala* and *ma'dila*, the verbal nouns, are thus the opposite of injustice (*ḍidd al-ḡawr*). The adjective of *'adl* in this sense can be *'ādil* or *'adl* (pl. *'udūl*), the latter being more emphatic. On the other hand, *'adula* (*'adāla*, *ma'dila*, *ma'dala*, and *'udūla* being the verbal nouns) means to become *'adl*, a person whose testimony is accepted on the basis of his *'adāla* (*riḍān wa-maḡna' fī l-ṣahāda*, as Ibn Manẓūr puts it). *'Addala* is to ascribe purity to (*zakkā*), and *ta'dil*, its verbal noun, is the process of accrediting someone with *'adāla*, or declaring someone to be *'adl*. Those who vouch for people's *'adāla* are called *'adala* and *'udala*. The opposite of *'addala* is *ḡarraḥa* or *ḡarraḥa*, namely, to disqualify someone by declaring them dishonest and unreliable.⁸

As a technical term, *'adāla* is one of two pillars of *'ilm al-ḡarḥ wa-l-ta'dil* (lit., the science of disqualifying and attesting to the integrity of [transmitters of Prophetic *Ḥadīth*]), a *Ḥadīth* science that establishes the criteria which scholars of *'ilm al-riḡāl* (lit., the science of the study of men [i.e., transmitters of Prophetic *Ḥadīth*]) and *Ḥadīth* critics use to evaluate transmitters of Prophetic *ḥadīṡ* (*ruwāt al-aḥādīṡ*). These two sciences constitute the pillars of Sunnī *Ḥadīth* criticism.

Scholars of *'ilm al-ḡarḥ wa-l-ta'dil* evaluate *Ḥadīth* transmitters according to two criteria: *dabṡ* and *'adāla*.⁹ *Dabṡ* refers to the mental capacity of transmitters

them," there was no harm in accepting *ḥadīṡ* from any of them even when they did not state their direct audition from the Prophet. In other words, the doctrine of *'adālat al-ṣahāba*, firstly explicitly formulated by Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938), "allowed the term 'from' to be more strictly interpreted, but rendered the matter virtually meaningless by neutralizing its effect in sphere where it would have been the greatest, namely in the transmission of the earliest Muslims" (*ibid.*, p. 119-24).

⁸ For the root *'-d-l* and its derivatives, see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, 1980, XI, p. 430ff.; and Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Beirut, Librairie du Liban, 1968, V, p. 1972-5.

⁹ Al-Ḥaṡīb al-Baḡdādī, *al-Kifāya fī 'ilm al-riwāya*, Hyderabad, Dā'irat al-ma'ārif al-'uṡmāniyya, 1357/1938, p. 34 and 53; Abū 'Amr b. al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddimat 'ulūm al-ḥadīṡ*, ed. 'Ā'īṣa 'Abd al-Raḡmān, Cairo, Dār al-ma'ārif, 1989, p. 288.

and the accuracy of their transmissions. A transmitter must be fully aware of the qualifications of his sources and what he transmits from them. He must have a reliable memory and be certain of the meaning of his transmissions when not transmitting verbatim.¹⁰ Transmitters known for their forgetfulness or carelessness in learning or transmitting *ḥadīṭs* (*samā' al-ḥadīṭ wa-ismā' uhu*) are deemed weak and their transmissions can thus be discarded.¹¹ In short, this criterion seeks to ensure that a transmitter of *Ḥadīṭ* does not suffer from physical or mental ailments that could affect the accuracy of his transmissions.

On the other hand, possessing *'adāla* denotes that a transmitter cannot be thought of as deliberately putting a false statement into the mouth of someone else. A transmitter's *'adāla* (henceforth integrity) can be established by the testimony of others (the *'udala* or *nuqqād*, plural of *nāqid*, meaning critic), who normally must be *'udūl* themselves,¹² or through common knowledge (*istifāda*), that is, when a person's integrity is so well known to the scholarly community that he does not need to be declared upright and reliable by any individual critic.¹³ There is disagreement on the number of people required to attest to the integrity of a transmitter. Some scholars required the testimony of at least two critics, similar to the requirement of two testimonies in some legal cases. Others were satisfied with one person, drawing analogy with the acceptance of *ḥadīṭs* transmitted by individual transmitters (*aḥādīṭ al-āḥād*).

The reliability of a transmitter thus depends on his accuracy and integrity.¹⁴ However, whereas his lack of accuracy only lowers his status (in which case his transmissions can be accepted only if corroborated by others), his lack of integrity completely disqualifies him, leading to the rejection of his transmissions. Therefore, transmitters are classified into various ranks according to their accuracy, but not typically according to their integrity. When they do, the classification is based on the degree of confidence that critics have in their integrity rather than the presence thereof.

¹⁰ Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī, *Kifāya*, p. 23; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, p. 288.

¹¹ Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī, *Kifāya*, p. 143-4 and 147-8; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, p. 306.

¹² This process raises a particular difficulty, for having to attest the integrity of transmitters and the integrity of those who vouch for their integrity leads to infinite regression. A similar dilemma in the judicial system, where the integrity of witnesses needed to be confirmed by others, was dealt with by the use of 'preliminary *tazkiya*', whereby a judge recognized once and for all the integrity of a certain number of persons who were then accepted as irreproachable witnesses (E. Tyan, "Adl", *EI*²). Presumably, this problem was dealt with similarly in *Ḥadīṭ* criticism.

¹³ Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī, *Kifāya*, p. 86-8; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, p. 288-9.

¹⁴ When a critic says that a transmitter is *'adl*, this probably means that he also considered him accurate. Thus, *'adāla* can refer to a transmitter's integrity or his reliability, including both integrity and accuracy.

In addition to dealing with the qualifications of transmitters, scholars of *'ilm al-ḡarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl* addressed the question of the requirements of ascertaining their integrity. The prominent 5th/11th-century scholar al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī (d. 463/1071) held that attesting someone's integrity required verifying his active fulfillment of the requirements of Islam rather than his mere profession of it. *'Adāla*, he points out, is "something additional to Islam" (*ṣay' zā'id 'alā l-islām*) that is only attested by the examination of behavior. Thus, a critic vouching for someone's integrity has to verify that he avoids prohibited things and performs religious requirements,¹⁵ which requires good knowledge of the transmitter and his conduct.¹⁶ Another prominent scholar, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245), however, held that the absence of reports about a transmitter's violation of religious teachings sufficed to pass a valid judgment on his integrity. Ascertaining that he fulfills all religious duties and avoid all prohibitions is both unnecessary and unrealistic, for there is an indefinite number of them.¹⁷ In other words, the integrity of any person should be presumed unless proven otherwise. However, a critic who disqualifies a transmitter has to mention specific reasons,¹⁸ for critics differ on what constitutes a sufficient cause of disqualification.¹⁹ Noting instances in which prominent scholars like al-Buḥārī and Muslim transmitted from transmitters deemed unreliable by other scholars, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ concludes that the theories of *Ḥadīṭ* critics are "ambiguous and conflicting".²⁰ Other scholars have also noted the subjectivity of this exercise,²¹ rendering *'adāla* variable in its definition due to the lack of objective criteria to assess it.

¹⁵ Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī, *Kifāya*, p. 100.

¹⁶ Remarkably, al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī cites some definitions of *'adāla* that seem to contradict his view. A considerable number of these link a person's integrity with his deeds, which deeds refer to things that should be avoided rather than performed. In one *ḥadīṭ*, the Prophet defines *'adl* as one who does not wrong people, who does not tell lies to them [when transmitting Prophetic *ḥadīṭs*?] (*iḏā ḥaddatāhum*), and who does not break his promises. Another report defines *'adl* as one "who has not shown that which makes him liable to suspicion" (*ibid.*, p. 78). As they stand, these indicate that *'adāla* requires the mere avoidance rather than the performance of certain acts. Al-Ḥaṭīb himself supports the view of some earlier scholars that a person whose good deeds outweigh his wrongdoings should be considered reliable, for sinless people do not exist. He insists, however, that the criteria of assessing people's integrity must not be too lax as to validate the testimony of an evildoer (*fāsiq*) (*ibid.*, p. 79-81).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

¹⁸ For this reason, the testimony of a critic who disqualifies a transmitter supersedes the testimony of one who vouches for his integrity, for the former may have learned information of which the latter was not aware (Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, p. 294).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

²⁰ *Madāhib al-nuqqād li-l-riḡāl ḡamiḏa muḥtalifa* (*ibid.*, p. 291).

²¹ Noting that agreement was never reached on the definition of *'adāla*, Ibn Rušd (d. 595/1198) considered its requirements to be "not committing major sins, and also avoiding minor ones".

III. Medieval Sunnī writings on the Companions

Starting from the 5th/11th century, Sunnī scholars would agree with the following description of the doctrine of *'adālat al-ṣaḥāba*: a Companion is anyone who caught a glimpse of the Prophet Muḥammad. Knowing the Companions is crucial because they were the transmitters of Islam to subsequent generations. They were considered reliable at the time of the Prophet, as attested by his words and deeds as well as the Qur'ān itself. Furthermore, a consensus, made possible by divine grace, prohibits questioning their integrity and reliability or refusing to accept them, for whereas we are certain that God and the Prophet accepted their reliability, we are uncertain that they lost that integrity at a later time. The inconclusiveness of reports about their deeds, particularly their participation in civil wars, does not allow us to pass a valid judgment on them. Therefore, the proper attitude of good Muslims should be to refrain from discussing these reports, interpret them in favor of the Companions as the outcome of a sincere exercise of personal judgment, or simply regard them as lies and distortions.

It has taken this doctrine a long time to be formulated in these terms. It is the purpose of the following discussion of Sunnī writings to examine its development.

A. Early Sunnī references to the Companions

To my knowledge, there is no reference to the 'Companions' as a privileged group before the 3rd/9th century, when some *Ḥadīṭ* collections included chapters on their virtues (*faḍā'il* or *manāqib al-ṣaḥāba*). On this subject, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) lists Prophetic *ḥadīṭs* that prohibit vilifying (*sabb*) the Companions, warning those who do so of God's curse and punishment.²² Other reports explain why they should not be a subject of abuse.²³

Al-Māwardī (450/1058) had a broader definition: *'adāla* is "a state of moral and religious perfection", which probably means that it requires performing some acts and avoiding others (Tyan, "Adl", *EI*²).

²² *Man sabba aṣḥābī fa-'alayhi la'nat Allāh wa-malā'ikatihī wa-l-nās aḡma'in, lā yaqbalu Llāh minhā ṣarfān wa-lā 'adlān* ("Upon him who insults my Companions is the curse of God, the angels and all people. God will not accept from him an excuse or a ransom"). Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Kitāb Faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. Waṣī Llāh b. Muḥammad 'Abbās, Dammam, Dār Ibn al-Ġawzī, 1999, I, p. 62.

²³ *Lā tasubbū aṣḥābī, fa-law anna aḥadākum anfaqa miṭl Uḥud ḍahaban mā balāga mudd aḥadihim wa-lā naṣīfihī* ("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") (*ibid.*, I, p. 59). See also, Ibn Abī Ṣayba, 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad (d. 235/849), *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Ṣayba*, ed. Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh Āl Ḥumayyid, Riyadh, Maktabat al-ruṣd, 2004, XI, p. 215;

"Do not insult Muḥammad's Companions," Ibn 'Abbās is quoted as saying, "for God has enjoined asking Him to forgive them knowing that they would fight each other."²⁴

Other *ḥadīths* praise them,²⁵ associating love of them with love of the Prophet and of God.²⁶ In one of these, the Prophet points out that "the best of people are those of my age, then those who come after them, then those who come after them."²⁷ In another, he says, "You will raid and it will be said to you: Have any of you seen the Messenger? You will say: yes! The gates will then be opened for you."²⁸ Some *ḥadīths* deal with the virtues of individual Companions and participants in particular events.²⁹ For example, on the virtues of Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), al-Buḥārī mentions a report where he errs in the evening prayers in front of a client of Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās. The client reported the incident to his patron, who said: "Let him be, for he was a Companion of [lit., he accompanied] the Messenger of God."³⁰

In the early 4th/10th century, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Aṣ'arī (d. 324/936) lists among his articles of faith his acceptance of the legitimacy of the Prophet's first four successors, his acknowledgement that ten Companions were destined for paradise as testified by the Prophet, and belief that 'Utmān b. 'Affān (the Prophet's third successor who was murdered by Muslims) was killed

and Muslim b. al-Ḥaḡḡāg al-Quṣayrī (d. 261/875), *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Naṣar Muḥammad al-Fāryābī, Riyadh, Dār Ṭayba, 1426/2005, II, p. 1181 (2540).

²⁴ *Lā tasubbū aṣḥāb Muḥammad fa-inna Llāh 'azza wa-ḡalla qad amara bi-l-istiḡfār lahum wa-huwa ya'lamu annahum sa-yaqtatūna* (Ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍā'il*, I, p. 70). The last word in this *ḥadīth* can be read either *sa-yaqtatūna* (they will kill) or *sa-yuqtatūna* (they will be killed). Neither reading seems to fit what the statement seems to be seeking to establish. *Sayaqtatūna* or *sa-yataqātūna* (they will fight) fit the context better.

²⁵ *Inna maṭal aṣḥābī ka-maṭal al-milḥ fi l-tā'ām, wa-hal yaṣluḥu l-tā'ām illā bi-l-milḥ* ("My Companions are like the salt in food. Can food be good without salt?") (*ibid.*, I, p. 68). For a possible biblical origin of this parable, see Mathew 5, 13.

²⁶ *Allāh Allāh fi aṣḥābī, lā tattahidūhum ḡaraḍan min ba'dī, fa-man aḥabbahum fa-bi-ḥubbī aḥabbahum, wa-man abḡadahum fa-bi-buḡdī abḡadahum, wa-man āḍāhum fa-qad āḍāni, wa-man āḍāni fa-qad āḍā Llāh, wa-man āḍā Llāh fa-yūsiku an ya'ḥudahu* ("[Fear?] God, [fear] God 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 me; and he who hurts me, hurts God; and he who hurts God, He is about to strike him [with punishment]") (*ibid.*, I, p. 56).

²⁷ *Ḥayr al-qurūn ḡarnī tumma llaḍīna yalūnahum tumma llaḍīna yalūnahum*. Muḥammad b. Ismā'il al-Buḥārī (d. 256/870), *al-Ġāmī al-ṣaḥīḥ*, Damascus, Dār Ibn Kaṭīr, 2002, p. 897 (3650-3651). See also, Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, II, p. 1178-9 (2533-2536).

²⁸ Al-Buḥārī, *Ġāmī*, p. 897 (3649).

²⁹ See, for instance, Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, II, p. 1119-76 (2381-2527), where he mentions reports about participants in the battle of Badr and the pledge of al-Ḥudaybiya (*bay'at al-riḍwān*).

³⁰ *Da'hu, fa-innahu ṣaḥība rasūl Allāh* (al-Buḥārī, *Ġāmī*, p. 923, 3764).

wrongfully.³¹ He adds that true Muslims are devoted to the love of the ancestors whom God has chosen to accompany his Prophet, praise them in the way He praised them,³² and keep silent on what took place between them.³³ Ibn Abī Zayd (d. 386/996) endorses this attitude of abstaining from discussing conflicts among the Companions, declaring them the most worthy of being given the benefit of the doubt.³⁴

Due to their nature, these works do not typically define a Companion, despite the suggestion of one *ḥadīth* that the mere seeing of the Prophet bestowed a special privilege on people.³⁵ Al-Buḥārī, however, begins his chapter on the virtues of the Companion by stating that any Muslim who accompanied or saw the Prophet was his Companion.³⁶ In Ibn Sa'd's (d. 230/845) *Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, it is reported that Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823) mentioned that a grandson of Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab (d. 94/713) told him that Sa'īd held that the Companions were only those who lived with the Prophet for a year or two, or participated in one or two of his battles. Referring to Ğarīr b. 'Abd Allāh al-Baḡalī (d. ca. 50/670), who embraced Islam five months before the Prophet's death, led a small army at the behest of the Prophet, and transmitted *ḥadīths* from him, al-Wāqidī points out that scholars (*ahl al-'ilm*) had a different view. They considered any adult who saw the Prophet and understood and accepted Islam as a Companion, even if he only saw the Prophet for a short time. This, however, does not mean that all of them were equal in rank, for the status of each is determined on account of his closeness to the Prophet and on what he heard from him.³⁷ Apparently,

³¹ Abū l-Ḥasan al-Aṣ'arī, *al-Ibāna 'an uṣūl al-diyāna*, ed. Fawqīyya Ḥusayn Maḥmūd, Cairo, Dār al-anṣār, 1977, II, p. 28-9.

³² *Wa-nadīnu bi-ḥubb al-salaf alladīna ḥtārahum Allāh ta'ālā li-ṣuḥbat nabīyyihi wa-nuṣni 'alayhim bi-mā aṭna Llah 'alayhim wa-natawallāhum aḡma'in* (*ibid.*, II, p. 28).

³³ *Wa-nakuffu 'ammā ṣaḡara baynahum* (*ibid.*, II, p. 29).

³⁴ Among the necessities of faith, he mentions: *an lā yudkara aḥad min ṣaḥābat rasūl Allāh illā bi-aḥsan ḍikr, wa-l-imsāk 'ammā ṣaḡara baynahum, wa-annahum aḥaqq al-nās an yultamasa lahum aḥsan al-maḥāriḡ, wa-yuḡanna bihim aḥsan al-maḍāhib* ("The Companions of the Messenger of God should not be mentioned except with the best of speech. [Discussing] what took place between them should be avoided. And it should be maintained that they are the most worthy of all people to be granted the best way out and be thought of in the best way"). Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, *al-Risāla l-Fiqhiyya*, ed. al-Ḥādī Ḥammū and Muḥammad Abū l-Aḡfān, Beirut, Dār al-Ġarb al-Islāmī, 1997, p. 80. I owe this reference to M. Cook.

³⁵ See fn. 28 above.

³⁶ *Wa-man ṣaḥiba l-nabī aw ra'āhu min al-muslimīn fa-huwa min aṣḥābihi* (al-Buḥārī, *Ġāmi'*, p. 897).

³⁷ *Wa-qālū, kull man ra'ā rasūl Allāh wa-qad adraka l-ḥulum fa-aslama wa-'aqala amr al-dīn wa-raḍiyahu fa-huwa 'indānā mimman ṣaḥiba l-nabī wa-law sā'a min nahār, wa-lākinna aṣḥābahu 'alā manāzilihim wa-ṭabaqātihim wa-taqaddumihim fī l-islām, fa-yūṣafu kull raḡul minhum bimā adraka min amr al-nabī wa-bi-mā samī'a minhu fa-yarḡū ḍālika ilā ṣuḥbatihī 'alā qadr manāzilihim min ḍālika* ("And they said, every person who saw the Messenger of God after

al-Wāqidī appears to be seeking to reconcile the reported disagreement among early authorities on who was a Companion; whereas any person who saw the Prophet was one, they were not all the same. In any circumstance, this account does not address the issue of what being a Companion entailed.

Other *ḥadīths* from this stage indicate that being a Companion sufficed to excuse or validate one's errors,³⁸ although other *ḥadīths* seem to contradict this. In one of these, the Prophet mentions that on Doomsday, some of his Companions will try to reach his basin (*ḥawḍ*) but be prevented from it. When the Prophet appeals on their behalf, God will tell him that he did not learn about what they did; they kept turning back on their heels after he left them.³⁹ Commenting on this *ḥadīth*, Ibn Qutayba l-Dīnawarī (d. 276/889) argues that although it was well known that some of the Prophet's contemporaries were hypocrites and some even apostatized after his death, his use of the third person as well as the diminutive form *uṣayḥābī* indicates that he was referring to a few Companions only. Furthermore, in addition to mentioning the hypocrites, the Qur'an also reports God's satisfaction with people who witnessed some events with the Prophet.⁴⁰ Remarkably, Ibn Qutayba does not question the authenticity of this *ḥadīth* but only seeks to limit its reference to a few transgressors of the Prophet's contemporaries, whom he still refers to as *ṣaḥāba*.⁴¹

In brief, these accounts appear to be concerned with curbing forms of disrespect to the Companions, perhaps unsurprisingly given that public cursing

reaching puberty and then embraced Islam and comprehended and accepted it is a Companion of the Prophet [lit., has accompanied the Prophet] in our view even if for a short time of the day. However, his Companions vary according to their status, their ranks and precedence of conversion to [or superiority in] Islam. Accordingly, each one of them is described on account of what he witnessed of the affair of the Prophet and what he heard from him, which depends on [the length/quality of] his companionship according to their ranks in this regard"). Muḥammad b. Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar, Cairo, Maktabat al-Ḥāngī, 2001, VI, p. 296. I owe this reference to Lucas's *Constructive Critics*, p. 267.

³⁸ As may be surmised from Ibn 'Abbās's statement about Mu'āwiya (see fn. 30 above), which may also indicate that his client was not aware that Mu'āwiya was a Companion, or that being a Companion provided immunity from criticism.

³⁹ *La-yaridanna 'alayya l-ḥawḍ aqwām ṭumma la-yaḥtalīgunna dūnī, fa-aqūlu yā rabb: uṣayḥābī uṣayḥābī, fa-yuqālu li, innaka lā tadri mā aḥdatū ba'daka, innahum lam yazālū murtaddīn 'alā a'qābihim munḍu fāraqtahum*. Ibn Qutayba l-Dīnawarī, *Ta'wīl muḥtalif al-ḥadīth*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī l-Dīn al-Aṣfar, Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1990, p. 340. Ibn Qutayba mentions that this report was used by some Šī'īs (*Rawāfiḍ*) to argue that only six of the Prophet's Companions were true believers. For an overview of Šī'ī views on the Companions, see E. Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī Šī'ī views of the ṣaḥāba", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 5 (1984), p. 143-75. For the history of the term *rawāfiḍ/rāfiḍa*, see *id.*, "The term 'Rāfiḍa' in Imāmī Šī'ī Usage", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 99/4 (1979), p. 677-9.

⁴⁰ Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl*, p. 340-2.

⁴¹ It is noteworthy that later Sunnī discussions of the Companions and their integrity avoided reference to the hypocrites among the Prophet's contemporaries.

of Companions was a common practice, at least since the time of Mu'āwīya.⁴² Although agreement on their identity is not yet settled, affiliation with them is presented as a religious requirement, and so is avoiding discussing their conflicts. Companionship bestowed a certain privilege on people, but it does not rule out the possibility of being a Companion and a transgressor at the same time. Finally, there is an evident tendency to discourage arguments about disagreements and conflicts among the Companions.

B. *The genesis of 'adālat al-ṣaḥāba*

In his *Taqdimat al-ma'rifa*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938) classifies *Ḥadīṭ* transmitters, including the Companions, into ranks according to their reliability and accuracy.⁴³ The Companions were those who saw the Prophet, witnessed the revelation of the Qur'ān (*al-wahy*), and had knowledge of its interpretation, commands and prohibitions. They were selected by God to accompany and support the Prophet and his message, becoming thereby exemplary models for subsequent Muslims. Therefore, God venerated all of them, ruling out any doubt, lying, or erring on their part,⁴⁴ and calling them the upright members of the Muslim community (*'udūl al-umma*).⁴⁵ Kor 2, 143, "Thus We have appointed you a middle nation (*umma wasaṭ*) that you may be witnesses against mankind, and that the messenger may be a witness against you," he points out, refers to the Companions and *wasat* means 'adl, as explained by the Prophet. As Dickinson has pointed out,⁴⁶ this is probably the first account where the term 'adāla is used, seeking to establish that the Companions (not yet explicitly defined) were irreproachable transmitters of *Ḥadīṭ*. It is also the first account to use the Qur'ān in this context.

Other 4th/10th-century writings reflect more aspects of the emerging doctrine. Defining the proper attitude towards the Companions as a middle way between excessive hate (similar to that of Ḥārīḡīs towards 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib

⁴² This practice intensified when Šī'ī rule was established in Egypt, Iraq and other parts of the Muslim world and was also justified by those who involved in it. For this, see Kohlberg, "Some Imāmi", p. 160ff.

⁴³ Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Taqdimat al-ma'rifa li-Kitāb al-Ġarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Yaḥyā l-Mu'allimī, Hyderabad, Dā'irat al-ma'ārif al-'uḡmāniyya, 1952, I, p. 5-7. For a discussion of Ibn Abī Ḥātim's contribution to *Ḥadīṭ* criticism, see Dickinson, *Development*.

⁴⁴ *Fa-nafā 'anhum al-ṣakk wa-l-kadīb wa-l-ḡalaṭ wa-l-riba wa-l-ḡamz* (*ibid.*, I, p. 7). It is noteworthy that ruling out the possibility of error on the part of the Companions would not appear again in subsequent discussions. However, the centrality of the doctrine of 'adālat al-ṣaḥāba as the guarantee of the authenticity of Islamic texts suggests that the assumption was presumed in subsequent writings about them.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 7.

⁴⁶ See fn. 7 above.

and Mu'āwīya b. Abī Sufyān who fought each other during the schisms) and excessive love (like that of Šī'īs towards 'Alī), Abū Ġa'far al-Ṭahāwī (d. 341/952) states: "We love the Companions of the Messenger of God. We do not exceed in loving one of them, nor dissociate from any of them. We hate him who hates them and mentions them without goodness. We do not mention them except with goodness. Loving them is true faith and doing justice to them; hating them is disbelief and hypocrisy as well as being unjust to them."⁴⁷ For his part, Ibn Ḥibbān, (d. 354/965) asserts that unlike other transmitters of *Ḥadīth*, the Companions cannot be liable to disparagement, for the Prophet himself vouched for their integrity and God declared that on the Day of Judgment, he would not abase the Prophet and those who believed with him.⁴⁸ Therefore, disparaging them contradicts faith, for the Prophet would not have trusted them with Revelation unless he knew that they were truthful and trustworthy witnesses (*ṣādiqūn ḡā'izū l-ṣahāda*).⁴⁹ Commenting on reports that 'Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb used to prohibit Companions from transmitting much *Ḥadīth*, Ibn Ḥibbān argues that while he did not suspect the Companions, 'Umar sought only to set an example to deter less reliable transmitters.⁵⁰ Demonstrating that the Companions held each other in high esteem was in fact the purpose of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Dāraquṭnī's (d. 385/996) *Merits and Virtues of the Companions and Their Sayings about Each Other*. In a clear response to Šī'ī claims, he lists statements attributed to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib praising Abū Bakr and 'Umar and describing the latter as his brother and intimate friend.⁵¹ 'Alī's descendants and Šī'ī *imāms* had similar views on them.⁵²

⁴⁷ *Wa-nuḥibbu aṣḥāb rasūl Allāh wa-lā nufriṭu fī ḥubb aḥad minhum, wa-lā natabarra'u min aḥad minhum, wa-nubḡidu man yubḡiduhum, wa-bi-ḡayr al-ḥayr yaḍkuruhum, wa-lā naḍkuruhum illā bi-ḥayr, wa-ḥubbuhum dīn wa-īmān wa-iḥsān, wa-buḡḍuhum kufr wa-nifāq wa-ṭuḡyān.* Abū Ġa'far al-Ṭahāwī, *al-Aqīda l-ṭahāwiyya*, Beirut, Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1995, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī, *Kitāb al-Maḡrūhin min al-muḥaddiṭin*, ed. Ḥamdī Abd al-Maḡīd, Riyadh, Dār al-Ṣumay'i, 2000, p. 36. Ibn Ḥibbān refers to Kor 66, 8, "on the day when God will not abase the Prophet and those who believe with him."

⁴⁹ *Wa-ammā man ṣahida l-tanzīl wa-ṣahiba l-rasūl, fa-l-ṭalb lahum ḡayr ḥalāl, wa-l-qadh fihim didd al-īmān, wa-l-tanaqquṣ li-aḥadhim naṣf al-nifāq, li-annahum ḥayr al-nās qarnan ba'da rasūl Allāh* ("As for those who witnessed the Revelation and accompanied the Messenger, disparaging them is not lawful, abusing them contradicts faith, and abasing any of them is hypocrisy, for they are the best generation of all people after the Messenger of God") (*ibid.*, p. 36).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37-9.

⁵¹ When 'Alī is asked about a garment that he wore, he said that it was a gift from his brother and friend 'Umar (*aḥī wa-ṣadiqi wa-ṣafiyi*—or *wa-ḥalili*—'Umar). Abū l-Ḥasan al-Dāraquṭnī, *Fadā'il al-ṣahāba wa-manāqibuhum wa-qawl ba'dihim fi ba'd*, ed. Muḥammad b. Ḥalīfa l-Rabbāh, Medina, Maktabat al-ḡurabā' al-aṭariyya, 1998, p. 38. Only parts of this work have reached us.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 47-96.

These few 4th/10th-century accounts contributed significantly to the development of the doctrine. In addition to affirming that one's views on and feelings towards the Companions reflected his faith, they establish a link between their integrity and role as *Ḥadīth* transmitters. The Qur'an is used for the first time to corroborate the belief in the integrity of the Companions. Kor 2, 143, quoted by Ibn Abī Ḥatim, as well as Kor 3, 110 ("You are the best community [*kuntum hayr umma*] that has been raised up for mankind") would become standard in most later discussions of the doctrine.⁵³ However, despite these developments, the doctrine is still absent in other relevant works, such as al-Rāmhurmuzī's (d. 360/971) and al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī's (d. 405/1014) works of *Ḥadīth* sciences.⁵⁴ The question of who a Companion was is not yet settled. However, al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī ranks them in twelve categories (*marātib*), the first of which comprises the early converts, whereas the last consists of children who saw the Prophet on the days of the conquest of Mecca and the Farewell Pilgrimage.⁵⁵ This suggests that thousands of the Prophet's contemporaries were considered Companions by the mere seeing of him.

C. The crystallization of 'adālat al-ṣaḥāba

In a chapter on "our view on the righteous ancestors of the *umma*" in his *Farq bayna l-firaq*, 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baḡdādī (d. 429-1037) states that Sunnis (*ahl*

⁵³ It is noteworthy that early Qur'an exegeses do not reflect this restricted reading of the two verses. For this, see, for instance, Muḡāhid b. Ḡabr (d. 104/722), *Tafsīr Muḡāhid b. Ḡabr*, ed. Muḡammad 'Abd al-Salām Abū l-Nīl, Cairo, Dār al-fikr al-islāmī, 1989, p. 215 and 257 (for the two verses respectively); and Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Maḡmūd Šihāta, Cairo, Mu'assasat al-Ḥalabī, 1969, I, p. 73, and 187. In these exegeses, there does not seem to be a conscious attempt to emphasize that the word *umma* in the two verses referred exclusively to the Companions. Al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) discussion of Kor 3, 110 indicates that there was a disagreement over the reference to this verse. Whereas some Companions and Successors held that it referred particularly to the Companions, others believed that it referred to any Muslim generation that fulfilled the stipulations of being chosen, namely, to command good and forbid evil (Muḡammad b. Ḡarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ḡāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Maḡmūd Muḡammad Šākir and Aḡmad Muḡammad Šākir, Cairo, Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, 1971, VII, p. 100-6). This is also true for later authoritative Sunni exegeses. In fact, Ibn Kaṭīr (d. 774/1373) openly rejects restricting the reference of Kor 3, 110 to a particular group of Muslims (such as the Muhāḡirūn, a view attributed to Ibn 'Abbās), arguing that it applies to all of Muḡammad's community (Abū l-Fidā' Ismā'īl b. Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*, ed. Sāmī b. Muḡammad al-Salāma, Riyadh, Dār Ṭayba, 1999, II, p. 93-4). For the Imāmī Šī'i view that the Qur'anic term *umma* refers particularly to 'Alī and his descendants, see Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī", p. 150-1.

⁵⁴ Al-Rāmhurmuzī, al-Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Raḡmān, *al-Muḡaddiṭ al-fāsil bayna l-rāwī wa-l-wā'i*, ed. Muḡammad 'Aḡḡāḡ al-Ḥaṭīb, Cairo, Dār al-fikr, 1984, p. 180-1; al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḡammad, *Ma'rifat 'ulūm al-ḡadīṭ*, ed. al-Sayyid Mu'azzam Ḥusayn, Hyderabad, Dā'irat al-ma'ārif al-'uḡmāniyya, 1935.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22-4.

al-sunna) have agreed on the soundness of the faith of the Muhāğirūn (a term that only refers to those who migrated *before* the conquest of Mecca, he stresses⁵⁶) and the Anṣār, in opposition to the claim of the Rāfiḍa that they reverted to disbelief upon refusing to swear allegiance to 'Alī, and to a similar charge by the Kāmiliyya (a Ḥārīğī sect) against 'Alī when he abstained from fighting them. According to another agreement, those who witnessed the battles of Badr and Uḥud as well as the pledge of al-Ḥudaybiya were destined for the paradise along with ten Companions whom the Prophet mentioned by name.⁵⁷ Anyone who questions the faith of these ten Companions is not a true believer,⁵⁸ for God has restrained Sunnīs from disparaging their pious ancestors.⁵⁹

This keenness to confirm the preeminence of particular groups of the Prophet's contemporaries is echoed in Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's (d. 463/1071) *Istī'āb fi ma'rifat al-aṣḥāb*, where he discusses the importance of Sunna and its role in understanding the Qur'ān.⁶⁰ Mastery of Sunna requires knowledge of the Companions who transmitted it from the Prophet. They were the best community that has been raised up for mankind and their integrity was confirmed by God's and His Prophet's praise of them.⁶¹ Therefore, Muslims do not need to scrutinize their integrity, which has become a matter of consensus (*iğmā'*) among true Muslims (*ahl al-ḥaqq min al-muslimīn*).⁶² Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, however, is reluctant to regard all the Prophet's contemporaries as equal. Quoting Kor 48, 29, praising "those who are with him [i.e. Muḥammad]," he notes that this refers to those who hastened to believe, accompany, and support him and his message, which does not apply to all who saw him or to all who

⁵⁶ This is the dominant view in Sunnī Islam on the definition of *hiğra*, based on the *ḥadiṡ*: "There is no migration after the Conquest [of Mecca], but [only] *ğihād* and intention (*lā hiğra ba'da l-fath wa-lākin ġihād wa-niyya*)." In his *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source Critical Study*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 100, M. Cook argues that "the concern of the tradition . . . is to absolve the Meccans of the stigma of living in the city that the prophet had left." In other words, by emphasizing that the term *hiğra* only applies to migration from Mecca before its conquest, al-Bağdādī seeks to exonerate the Muhāğirūn of any possible abandonment of Islam after the Prophet's death.

⁵⁷ 'Abd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir al-Bağdādī, *al-Farq bayna l-firaq*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyi l-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Cairo, al-Maktaba l-'aṣriyya, 1995, p. 359.

⁵⁸ *Wa-qālū bi-takfir kull man akfara wāḥid min al-'asara llađina šahida lahum al-nabi bi-l-ğanna* (*ibid.*, p. 360).

⁵⁹ *Wa-qad 'ašama Llāh ahl al-sunna min an yaqūlū fi aslāf ḥādīhi l-umma munkaran aw ya' anū fihim ṭa'nān* (*ibid.*, p. 361-2).

⁶⁰ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī'āb fi ma'rifat al-aṣḥāb*, Beirut, Dār al-fikr, 2006, I, p. 7.

⁶¹ *Ṭabat al-'adālat ġamī'ihim bi-ṭanā' Allāh 'azza wa-ğalla 'alayhim wa-ṭanā' rasūlibi 'alayhi l-salām* (*ibid.*, I, p. 7).

⁶² *Ibid.*, I, p. 18.

believed in him.⁶³ Mentioning the same groups as 'Abd al-Qāhir, he takes interest in fixing the number of Companions in each while quoting early views to argue against a broad interpretation of Kor 2, 143.⁶⁴

Discussing *'adālat al-ṣaḥāba* at length in his *Kifāya fi 'ilm al-riwāya*, al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī states that all transmitters of *Ḥadīṭ* must be scrutinized except the Companions, already declared trustworthy by God and his Messenger. Despite the seemingly broad reference of Kor 2, 143, it is intended to refer specifically to the Companions.⁶⁵ The Prophet had said: "I have asked my Lord about disagreements among my Companions after my death, and God has revealed to me: 'O Muḥammad. Your Companions with me are like the stars in the sky, some of which are brighter than the others. Whosoever follows one of their differing views is guided in my sight."⁶⁶ He also said: "My Companions are like the stars in the sky; whichever of them you follow, you will be guided. Their differences are mercy for you."⁶⁷ Furthermore, "God has chosen me and my Companions, making them my supporters and relatives by marriage. Towards the end of time a group of people will speak ill of them. Do not marry them or give them your daughters in marriage. Do not pray with them or pray for them [when they die]. Upon them the curse has fallen."⁶⁸

Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī goes on to report that some innovators (*ahl al-bida'*) have argued that the condition of the Companions (*ḥāl al-ṣaḥāba*) was satisfactory until they engaged in mutual shedding of blood. Therefore, they must

⁶³ *Fa-hādīhi ṣifat man bādara ilā taṣdīqihī wa-l-īmān bihī wa-āzarahu wa-naṣarahu wa-laṣīqa bihī wa-ṣaḥībahū, wa-laysa kaḏālika ḡamī' man ra'āhu wa-lā ḡamī' man āmana bihī (ibid., 1, p. 7).*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 12.

⁶⁵ *Wa-hādā l-laḡḡ wa-in kāna 'amm fa-l-murād bihī l-ḥāṣṣ.* Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī, *Kifāya*, p. 46. Both Ibn 'Abd al-Barr and al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī opposed broadening the reference of the verse, but whereas the former seems to have rejected it to avoid including all the Prophet's contemporaries in the category of Companions, the latter sought to avoid including all subsequent Muslim generations in it.

⁶⁶ *Sā'altu rabbī fīmā ḥtalafa fihī aṣḥābī min ba'dī, fa-awḥā Llāh ilayya: yā Muḥammad, inna aṣḥābaka 'indī bi-manzilat al-nuḡūm fī l-samā', ba'dihā aḏwa' min ba'd, fa-man aḥada bi-ṣay' mimma hum 'alayhi min iḥtilāfihim, fa-huwa 'indī 'alā hudā (ibid., p. 48).*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48. The first part of this *ḥadīṭ* says: *mahmā ūtitum min kitāb Allāh fa-l-'amal bihī lā 'uḏr li-aḥadikum fī tarkihī, fa-in lam yakun fī kitāb Allāh fa-sunna minnī māḏiya, fa-in lam takun sunna minnī māḏiya, fa-mā qāla aṣḥābī. inna aṣḥābī bi-manzilat al-nuḡūm fī l-samā', fa-ayyuhā aḥadtum bihī htadaytum, wa-ḥtilāf aṣḥābī lakum raḥma* ("Whatever you are given in the Book of God, you should follow it, and you have no excuse for neglecting it; if it is not in the Book of God, then follow a valid *sunna* of mine; if there is no valid *sunna*, then follow what my Companions have said").

⁶⁸ *Inna Llāh iḥtārāni wa-ḥtārā aṣḥābī fa-ḡa'alahum aṣḥāri wa-ḡa'alahum anṣāri, wa-innahu sa-yaḡī'u fī āḥir al-zamān qaḡw yantaqīṣūnahum. alā fa-lā tunākīhūhum, alā fa-lā tankīhū ilayhim, alā fa-lā tuṣallū ma'ahum, alā fa-lā tuṣallū 'alayhim. 'alayhim ḥallat al-la'na (ibid., p. 48).*

be scrutinized like other transmitters to distinguish those who remained trustworthy from those who did not. Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī rules that no righteous scholar ever reported anything about those events that cannot be interpreted as a matter of personal judgment (*iġtihād*), similar to disagreements among jurists.⁶⁹ Therefore, the condition of the Companions remains satisfactory as it presumably was, for nothing was proven that warrants questioning it.⁷⁰ Abū Zur'a l-Rāzī, a close friend of Ibn Abī Ḥātim's, pointed out that those who disparaged the Companions were heretics (*zanādiqa*) who sought to disqualify our witnesses and transmitters of the Qur'ān and Sunna.⁷¹

Next, al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī presents various views on the definition of 'companionship'. Although *ṣuḥba* in the Arabic language is established when someone accompanies another for a long or short time, it is customary to use it to refer to a long or frequent company.⁷² Early authorities disagreed on this matter. Whereas some of them held that the mere seeing of the Prophet qualified a person to be a Companion, others argued that his Companions were only those who lived and fought with him. Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī himself held that "the transmission of an honest and reliable person from the Prophet is acceptable even if his company with the Prophet was not long, and even if he heard no more than one *ḥadīṭ* from him."⁷³ Companionship, he adds, can be ascertained through the concurrence of reports to that effect (*tazāhur al-aḥbār bi-dālika*), the testimony of a known Companion that another person is a Companion, and the testimony of a reliable person that he himself is a Companion.⁷⁴

For his part, Abū l-Ma'ālī l-Ġuwaynī (d. 478/1085) reports an agreement among Qur'ān exegetes that the reference of Kor 2, 143, was to the Companions.⁷⁵ He rejects the argument of those who judged them on the basis of events they participated in as well as those who made insinuations and allegations against famous Companions such as Abū Hurayra and 'Abd Allāh b.

⁶⁹ *Wa-laysa fi ahl al-dīn wa-l-mutaḥaqqiqīn bi-l-'ilm man yaṣrifu ilayhim ḥabar mā lā yaḥtamilu naw' min al-ta'wil wa-ḍarb min al-iġtihād fa-hum bi-maṭābat al-muḥtalifīn min al-fuqāḥa' al-muġtabidīn fi ta'wil al-aḥkām li-iskāl al-amr wa-ltibāsīhi* (ibid., p. 49).

⁷⁰ *Wa-yaġību an yakūnū 'alā l-aṣl alladī qaddamnāhu min ḥāl al-'adāla wa-l-riḍā, id lam yaṭbut mā yuzīlu dālika 'anhum* (ibid., p. 49).

⁷¹ *Wa-innama yuridūna an yuġarriḥū ṣuhūdanā li-yubṭilū l-kitāb wa-l-sunna wa-l-ġarḥ bihim awlā wa-hum zanādiqa* (ibid., p. 49).

⁷² *Wa-mā 'a dālika fa-qad taqarrara li-l-umma 'urf fi annahum lā yasta' milūna ḥādīhi l-tasmiya illā fi-man kaṭurat ṣuḥbatuhu* (ibid., p. 51).

⁷³ *Wa-mā 'a ḥādā fa-inna ḥabar al-ṭiqa l-amin 'anhu maqbūl wa-mā mūl bihi, wa-in lam taṭul ṣuḥbatuhu wa-lā samī'a minhu illā ḥadīṭ wāḥid* (ibid., p. 51).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷⁵ Abū l-Ma'ālī l-Ġuwaynī, *al-Burhān fi uṣūl al-fiqh*, ed. 'Abd al-Azīm al-Dīb, Qatar, Kulliyat al-Šarī'a, 1399/1978-9, II, p. 626.

'Umar. The former was appointed governor by none other than 'Umar, knowing that he used to transmit much *Ḥadīṭ*, whereas the latter was declared righteous by Gabriel himself (*zakkāhu Ġibril*). The Prophet was aware of the existence of hypocrites, whom he named to his Companion Ḥuḍayfa b. al-Yamān, but the fact that he authorized his Companions to transmit from him indicates that he trusted them. This demonstrates that the reliability of the Companions was acknowledged by word and deed by the Prophet himself.⁷⁶

Those who disparage the Companions argue that the Prophet's approval of them did not necessarily entail their future immunity from error (*'iṣma*), especially given that some of them committed lapses and serious transgressions (*aḥḍaṭa ba'duhum hanāt wa-qtahamū mūbiqāt*), the slightest of which would suffice to challenge their integrity. If this argument is lent any credence, al-Ġuwaynī argues, it would open the gate wide to disparaging all Companions, which would have serious consequences on Islam. Furthermore, every Muslim sect interprets the deeds of the Companions they like to their favor while denying other sects the same privilege. This led to contradictory views, none of which is necessarily better than the others. If reconciling these views is not possible, all of them fall together and it must then be presumed that the Companions retained their integrity attested to by God and the Prophet.⁷⁷ It is also invalid to conclude that since their condition oscillated between good and evil, we must refrain from accepting their integrity on the ground that oscillation cannot be a valid basis for a definitive verdict.⁷⁸ In addition to being a retraction from the explicit disparagement of the Companions initially proposed by the opponent, al-Ġuwaynī points out, this view is invalidated by the consensus of the Muslim community on the inadmissibility of refusing to acknowledge their integrity.⁷⁹ It also follows from this argument that we must refrain from acknowledging the reliability of everyone who participated in the schisms as well as those who transmitted from them. This, too, contradicted the creed of the community and the consensus of the scholars.⁸⁰ In fact, it is divine grace that made that consensus possible because the Companions were

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, II, p. 628.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, II, p. 630.

⁷⁸ *Fa-idā taraddadat aḥwāluhum fa-l-yaqtaḍi taradduduhā [wuqūfan] 'alā ta'dilihim, fa-inna l-taraddud yunāqidu l-ḥukm al-bātt* ("If their affairs oscillated, then this oscillation should lead to suspending judgment on accepting their integrity, for hesitation is inconsistent with conclusive judgment") (*ibid.*, II, p. 630).

⁷⁹ *Fa-inna l-umma muḡmī'a 'alā annahu lā yasūgu l-imtinā' 'an ta'dil ḡamī' aḥbāb rasūl Allāh* (*ibid.*, II, p. 631).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 631.

the transmitters of the teachings of Islam (*ṣarī'a*) to subsequent Muslim generations.⁸¹

Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī's and al-Ġuwaynī's discussions are milestones in the development of the doctrine of *'adālat al-ṣahāba*, most aspects of which nearly took their final shape there. The former's is probably the first genuine attempt to define a Companion and address the issue of how a person's companionship is ascertained.⁸² It indicates that the apparent inconsistency between al-Ḥākim's inclusion of all those who saw the Prophet in one or another of the ranks of Companions, and Abd al-Qāhir's and Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's focus on specific groups of the Prophet's contemporaries was old. It also suggests that until the 5th/11th century, no universal definition of companionship was agreed upon by Sunnī scholars. However, al-Ḥaṭīb offers a practical (albeit circular) definition: if a trustworthy person transmits directly from the Prophet, he is a Companion.⁸³ However, the centrality of this doctrine in *Ḥadīth* criticism is unequivocally evident here, such that the mere abstention from vilifying the Companions did not suffice anymore as a proper attitude of true Muslims. A good Muslim must believe in their true faith and integrity, despite reports about their endeavors after the Prophet's death. A new set of *ḥadīths* validate their conflicting views and deeds, presenting them as mercy to Muslims.

Furthermore, everything the Companions did can be interpreted in their favor or explained as the outcome of their sincere judgment. Therefore, there is no justification for questioning their integrity vouched for by God and the Prophet. This argument was extended by al-Ġuwaynī's dialectic. Having established their reliability on the basis of the Qur'ān and the Prophet's deeds and words, he turns to the schisms. That their participation in these may have altered their confirmed integrity is epistemologically rather than historically refuted. Since we are certain of their integrity but uncertain of what happened later, we have to suspend judgment on their status after the Prophet's death and adhere to what we know about their earlier integrity. Uncertainty cannot constitute a valid basis for refusing to acknowledge their integrity, for there is a consensus on the impermissibility of abstaining from acknowledging it, which consensus was facilitated by God due to the seriousness of the issue.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 632.

⁸² To my knowledge, there was no attempt to determine the number of individuals acknowledged as Companions by each method that al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī mentions. Erick Dickinson (*Development*, p. 123) surmises that it may have been common for people to claim that they were Companions, which gave them access to a number of benefits.

⁸³ And as a Companion, this person is then considered trustworthy. This circularity was noted by Ibn Ḥaġar al-'Aṣqalānī (*al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-ṣahāba*, ed. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, n.p., n.d., I, p. 20), who rejected this as a method of establishing companionship.

D. *The maturation of 'adālat al-ṣaḥāba*

Since the testimony of an unknown person (*maḡhūl*) is unacceptable, says 'Izz al-Dīn b. al-Aḡīr (d. 630/1233) in his comprehensive work on the Companions, *Usd al-ḡāba fī ma'rifat al-ṣaḥāba*, it is essential to know the names and biographies of the Companions, the transmitters of *Ḥadīṭ* which, together with the Qur'ān, constitute the pillars of Islam. Asserting that their trustworthiness did not need any confirmation,⁸⁴ he mentions several views on the definition of companionship and seems willing to accept the view that any person who saw the Prophet was his Companion.⁸⁵ His famous contemporary al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233) endorses this view.⁸⁶ Presenting various views on their status after the Prophet's death, he stresses that they were and remained of upright character as evinced by Kor 2, 143 and 3, 110 and by their sacrifices. God's choice, he argues, cannot extend to one who is not upright and reliable. It is therefore the duty of Muslims to interpret the schisms in the best possible way and hold that all Companions believed sincerely that they were serving the interests of Islam.⁸⁷

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) presents what is probably the most thorough discussion of our subject, one that would settle all disagreements on the subject once and for all. He distinguishes between two broad views concerning the definition of companionship. *Ḥadīṭ* transmitters and scholars (*ahl al-ḥadīṭ*) held that any Muslim who saw the Prophet was a Companion. Scholars of the principles of jurisprudence (*al-uṣūliyyūn*) held that a Companion was one who met him several times and received knowledge from him.⁸⁸ When the Companion Anas b. Mālik (d. 93/712) was asked whether any Companion was still living, he replied that while some people who had seen the Prophet were alive, all of his Companions were dead.⁸⁹ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ ignores Anas's view and rejects that of Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab,⁹⁰ which would lead to the exclusion of some well-known Companions.⁹¹ The companionship of a person can be ascertained by four means: *tawātur* (knowledge transmitted by a large number of people), *istifāda* (common knowledge), the testimony of a Companion, and the

⁸⁴ 'Izz al-Dīn b. al-Aḡīr, *Usd al-ḡāba fī ma'rifat al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwad and 'Ādil Aḡmad 'Abd al-Mawḡūd, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1970, I, p. 109-10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119-20.

⁸⁶ Sayf al-Dīn Abū l-Ḥasan al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, Riyadh, Dār al-Ṣumay'ī, 2003, II, p. 112-3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, II, p. 110-2.

⁸⁸ Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Muqaddima*, p. 486-7.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 489.

⁹⁰ For Sa'īd's view, see p. 13 above.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 487.

testimony of a reliable person that he himself is a Companion.⁹² All Companions share a common characteristic: their integrity and reliability were not matters of question or scrutiny, for they were secured by the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the consensus of "those whose consensus matters."⁹³ Because it was the guarantee that religion was properly transmitted, he argues, God must have made possible this consensus on the necessity of accrediting (*ta'dil*) all the Companions, including those who took part in the schisms.⁹⁴

Likewise, the Mālikī scholar Ibn al-Ḥāḡib (d. 646/1248) defines a Companion as any contemporary of the Prophet who saw him.⁹⁵ Ibn Kaṭīr (d. 774/1373) would attribute to "the majority of early and late scholars" the view that a Companion was anyone "who saw the Prophet while being a Muslim, even if he did not accompany him for long, and did not transmit from him".⁹⁶ According to this definition, there were approximately 114,000 Companions. A century later, Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1448) would mention a view that included the *ḡinn* and angels among the Companions,⁹⁷ who are just ranked below God's Messengers (*rusul*).⁹⁸

In the 8th/14th century, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) lists among the articles of faith of Sunnīs the good attitude of their hearts and tongues in respect of the Companions.⁹⁹ They reject the way of the Rāfiḍa who execrated some Companions,¹⁰⁰ and maintain that reports about the misdeeds of some of them were either lies or distortions. Even if any of those reports were true, the

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 490-1.

⁹³ *Bi-iḡmā' man yu'taddu bihi fi l-iḡmā' min al-umma (ibid.*, p. 490).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

⁹⁵ Ibn al-Ḥāḡib, Ḡamāl al-Dīn b. 'Amr, *Muntahā l-wuṣūl wa-l-amal fi 'ilmay l-uṣūl wa-l-ḡadal*, Cairo, Maṭba'at al-sa'āda, 1326/1908, p. 58. It is noteworthy that Ibn al-Ḥāḡib held that the schisms were an outcome of the personal judgment of the Companions, the legitimacy of which was established by consensus (*wa-amma l-fitan, fa-l-wāḡib an tuḡmala 'alā iḡtihādihim fa-lā iṣkāl ba'da ḡālika li-l-iḡmā' 'alā wuḡūb al-'amal bi-l-iḡtihād*). In other words, the role of consensus was to legitimize the use of personal judgment even when it led to violent encounters (*ibid.*, p. 58).

⁹⁶ *Wa-l-ṣaḡābi (huwa) man ra'ā rasūl Allāh fi ḡāl islām al-rāwī, wa-in lam taṣul ṣuḡbatuhu lahu wa-in lam yarwī 'anhu ṣay'*. Abū l-Fidā' b. Kaṭīr, *Iḡtiṣār 'ulūm al-ḡadīṡ*, ed. by Aḡmad Muḡammad Ṣākir as *al-Bā'iq al-ḡaṡīṡ sarḡ Iḡtiṣār 'ulūm al-ḡadīṡ*, Cairo, Dār al-fikr, 2000, p. 125.

⁹⁷ Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī, *Iṣāba*, I, p. 16-8.

⁹⁸ According to a *ḡadīṡ* that he quotes, God has preferred the Companions to the two dependents (men and *ḡinn*) save his Prophets and Messengers (*inna Llāh iḡtāra aṣḡābi 'alā l-'ālamayn/ l-ṡaḡalayn siwā l-nabiyyīn wa-l-mursalīn*) (*ibid.*, I, p. 28).

⁹⁹ *Wa-min uṣūl ahl al-sunna wa-l-ḡamā'a salāmat qulūbihim wa-alsinatihim li-aṣḡāb rasūl Allāh*. Taḡī l-Dīn Aḡmad b. Taymiyya, *al-'Aḡida l-wāṣiṡiyya*, ed. Muḡammad b. Ṣāliḡ b. al-'Uṡaymīn, Alexandria, Dār al-baṣīra, 2002, II, p. 279.

¹⁰⁰ *Wa-yatabarrā'ūna min ṡariḡat al-rāwāfiḡ allāḡīna yubḡiḡūna l-ṡaḡāba wa-yasubbūnahum (ibid.*, II, p. 332).

Companions were excused because they exercised personal judgment, irrespective of whether its outcome was right or wrong.¹⁰¹ Ibn Kaṭīr expresses a similar view, pointing out that although Alī and his party were nearer to the truth than Mu'āwiya and his supporters, God was pleased with all of them. The Prophet once said that his grandson al-Ḥasan was a master whom God would use to reconcile two great groups of Muslims, which refers to al-Ḥasan's abdication (41/660) and the subsequent reconciliation between 'Alī's and Mu'āwiya's partisans. An early scholar once said: "a day that Mu'āwiya witnessed with the Messenger of God is better than 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz and his family."¹⁰² Therefore, the Šī'ī belief that only 17 of the Prophet's Companions remained true believers after his death was "too vicious and prejudiced to be worthy of refutation."¹⁰³

It is noteworthy that Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ speaks of a consensus on considering the Companions reliable (*ta'dīl*) rather than on their reliability (*adāla*). In other words, it is imperative to treat all of them as reliable. Ibn Taymiyya points out that accepting their integrity does not mean that each of them was immune from minor or mortal sins. It is possible that they committed all kinds of sins; nevertheless, their past merits and services to Islam suffice to excuse them, especially that they must have repented or been forgiven by God on account of their services, the intercession of the Prophet, or on account of their exercise of sincere personal judgment.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, the 9th/15th century Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Saḥāwī (d. 902/1496) argues that belief in their upright character does not entail their infallibility; it only means that their transmissions are to be accepted without investigating their reliability. Investigation would be needed only if it were proven that any of them had committed what could jeopardize it, which, by God's grace, was not the case. Therefore, we must continue to accept their condition during the time of the Prophet unless the contrary is proven,¹⁰⁵ and should not give serious attention

¹⁰¹ *Wa-yumsikūna 'ammā lağara bayna l-ṣaḥāba, wa-yaqūlūna inna ḥādīhi l-āṭār al-marwiyya fī masāwihim minhā mā huwa kaḏīb, wa-minhā mā qad zīda fīhi wa-naqaṣa wa-ğuyyira 'an wağhibi, wa-l-ṣaḥīḥ minhu hum fīhi mā dūrūn, immā muğtahidūn muṣībūn wa-immā muğtahidūn muḥṭī'ūn.*

¹⁰² *La-yawm šahidahu Mu'āwiya ma'a rasūl Allāh ḥayr min 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz wa-ahl baytihi* (Ibn Kaṭīr, *Iḥtiṣār*, p. 127-8). 'Umar (r. 99-101/717-719) has been regarded by Sunnis as the most righteous Umayyad Caliph. On him, see P.M. Cobb, "'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz", *EI*'.

¹⁰³ Ibn Kaṭīr, *Iḥtiṣār*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Aqida*, II, p. 356.

¹⁰⁵ *Fa-nahnu 'alā stiḥāb mā kānū 'alayhi fī zamān rasūl Allāh ḥattā yağbuta ḥilāfuhu.* Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Saḥāwī, *Fath al-muğīṭ bi-ṣarḥ Alfīyyat al-ḥadīṭ*, ed. Riḍwān Ġāmi' Riḍwān, Mecca, Maktabat Nizār, 1999, IV, p. 101.

to historical reports which were either false or open to interpretation,¹⁰⁶ an argument that Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) endorses.¹⁰⁷

E. Conclusion

That the earliest Prophetic *ḥadīṡ*s quoted in Sunnī sources were primarily concerned with curbing cursing the Companions suggests that the Sunnī attitude towards them was initially shaped out of opposition to this. This attitude developed into a more positive one that sought to emphasize their merits and religious superiority. Starting from the 4th/10th century, the main objective of Sunnī scholars was to prove that God and the Prophet Muḥammad vouched for their integrity. Qur'ānic verses were interpreted to lead to this conclusion and Prophetic *ḥadīṡ*s increased in number and became more precise in meaning. The main challenge, however, was to demonstrate that they maintained their integrity after the Prophet's death. Al-Ġuwaynī's discussion is based on the assumption that it is hardly possible to make a strong case against them given the lack of conclusive evidence. The sound attitude, therefore, is to maintain our belief in their earlier, confirmed integrity, a pragmatic argument that does not rule out the possibility that some of them may have done what voided that integrity. This argument is consistent with a rule that most Sunnī scholars accepted. According to the rule of the presumption of continuity (*istiṡḥāb al-ḥāl*), everyone is presumed upright and reliable unless proven otherwise. God, knowing the seriousness of the issue, has also contributed to the establishment of the doctrine, for he created a consensus on prohibiting refusing to acknowledge the reliability of all the Companions. *Ta'dīl al-ṣaḥāba*, then, rather than their *'adāla*, is the real doctrine, which meant precisely that believers must abstain from thinking that the Companions may have lost their confirmed integrity by their involvement in schisms after the Prophet's death. In other words, this doctrine was not in fact a belief that medieval Sunnī scholars held as much as an attitude they developed on the basis of religious considerations and technical rules.

The previous analysis reveals the importance of the schisms in the development of this doctrine. It also reveals that the Sunnī treatment of the schisms and the participants therein unmistakably echoes the dealing of an early Muslim sect—the Murġī'īs—with the same issue. This is what the following discussion seeks to demonstrate.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 101.

¹⁰⁷ Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrib al-rāwī fī ṣarḥ Taqrīb al-Nawāwī*, ed. Riḍwān Ġāmi' Riḍwān, Mecca, Maktabat Nizār, 1997, III, p. 846.

IV. Murġi'ism and the Companions

Most of what we know about Murġi'ism comes from Sunnī sources. However, some early documents, also preserved in Sunnī works, are believed to have been written by advocates of or reflected Murġi'ī views. The earliest of these is an epistle attributed to al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya (d. ca. 100/719) entitled *Kitāb al-Irġā'*. In his *Sīrat Sālim*, the Ibāḍī scholar Sālim b. Ḍakwān (d. after 100/719) refutes some Murġi'ī views.¹⁰⁸ Other relevant sources include two epistles attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān (d. 150/767), the eponymous founder of the Ḥanafī legal school. In his *Risāla ilā 'Uṭmān al-Battī*, a letter that he reportedly sent to the Basran scholar 'Uṭmān al-Battī (d. ca. 143/760), he replies to the latter's inquiry about his alleged Murġi'ī inclinations. In *Kitāb al-'Ālim wa-l-muta'allim*, he presents his views on a range of issues in a form of dialogue with his student Abū Muqātil al-Samarqandī.¹⁰⁹ The exact dating of these documents is not essential for the purposes of this article. They are treated as our sources on Murġi'ism, and they

¹⁰⁸ According to J. Van Ess ("Das *Kitāb al-Irġā'* des Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya", *Arabica*, 21/1 (1974), p. 20-52), *Kitāb al-Irġā'* is *das erste ((Buch)) zu diesem Thema und scheint damit den Beginn der Murġi'a zu markieren*. Parts of the original work were quoted by al-Ḍahabī (d. 748/1348) in his *Ta'riḥ al-Islām* and by Ibn Ḥaġar in his *Tahḏīb al-Tahḏīb*. A complete version of the text exists in Ibn Abī 'Umar al-'Adanī's *Kitāb al-Imān* (*id.*, "The Beginning of Islamic Theology", in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, ed. John Emery Murdoch and Edith Dudley Sylla, Boston, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1975, p. 93). Van Ess accepts the authenticity of this epistle, suggesting that it was written when al-Ḥasan and his father reached a kind of rapprochement with the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān in the early AH 70s, late 7th century CE (*ibid.*, p. 95-7). Cook (*Early Muslim*, p. 88) takes a Murġi'ī stance himself regarding it on the ground that its content "does not provide any really strong arguments for or against an early dating." He speculates that it was produced in the mid or late 2nd/8th-century Kufa to "rehabilitate what could be rehabilitated of the Murġi'ite heritage" (*id.*, "Activism and Quietism in Early Islam: The Case of the Early Murġi'a", in *Islam and Power*, ed. Alexander Qudsi and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, London, Croom Helm, 1981, p. 15-23). However, W. Madelung ("Murġi'a", *EI*²) believes that there are no 'cogent reasons' to reject either al-Ḥasan's authorship of the *Kitāb al-Irġā'* or its authenticity. For a discussion of the authorship and content of *Sīrat Sālim*, see Patricia Crone and F.W. Zimmermann, *The Epistle of Sālim b. Ḍakwān*, Oxford, Oxford University Press [Oxford Oriental Monograph], 2001, p. 251-63. *Sīrat Sālim* was dated variously by scholars who studied it, but it can be safely assumed that it was written before 150/767. For a discussion of the authorship, transmission, and content of this document, see *ibid.*, *passim*.

¹⁰⁹ Joseph Schacht ("Abū Ḥanīfa", *EI*²) considers *al-Risāla ilā 'Uṭmān al-Battī* to be "the only authentic document by Abū Ḥanīfa which we possess." He also accepts the authenticity of *Kitāb al-'Ālim wa-l-muta'allim*, although he believes that it probably originated in the circle of Abū Ḥanīfa's disciples (*ibid.*, p. 123). In his "Early Murġi'ite Treatise: The *Kitāb al-'Ālim wal-Muta'allim*", *Oriens*, 17/2 (1964), p. 100, he argues that Abū Muqātil himself, the student in this epistle, was its real author and not simply its transmitter.

do reveal a great deal of consistency in presenting it and with views historically attributed to it.¹¹⁰

The *Kitāb al-Irğā'* begins with a brief presentation of the Prophet's career and the triumph of his message.¹¹¹ One reason for this success was God's selection of people who sacrificed their lives and money for the new religion. These include people who abandoned their homes and families, and others who sheltered them and supported the Prophet and his Message.¹¹² Al-Ḥasan then goes on to say:

If someone asks us about our position and our opinion, we are people whose master is God, whose religion is Islam, whose guide is the Qur'ān, and whose Prophet is Muḥammad. . . . Among the chiefs of our community (*a'immatunā*) 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 (*nurḡi*) about those among the chiefs of our community who participated in the first schism (*ahl al-furqa l-ūlā*). 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 (*irḡā'*) is only due concerning those who are blamed by the people, whereas we were not present. . . .¹¹³

This statement reveals the underlying principles of Murḡi'ism. Murḡi'is held that since they were not present during the schisms and heard only conflicting testimony about them, they could not decide who was right and who was wrong,¹¹⁴ for a valid judgment requires one of two stipulations: autopsy and unanimity. As Cook points out, the former means the direct witnessing of the

¹¹⁰ For a thorough discussion of early Murḡi'is, see Saleh Said Agha, "A Viewpoint of the Murḡi'a in the Umayyad Period: Evolution through Application", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 8/1 (1998), p. 1-42, where he presents five stages of the evolution of Murḡi'ism and its inherent "pragmatic" nature in perceiving events and people. See also Khalil Athamina, "The Early Murḡi'a: Some Notes", *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 35/1 (1990) p. 109-30, where he discusses the origin and doctrine of "two separate streams" of Murḡi'is as well as their relationship with the Umayyads; and J. Meric Pessagno, "The Murḡi'a, Imān and Abū Ubayd", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 95/3 (1975), p. 382-94, where he discusses various aspects of the Murḡi'ī understanding of the nature of faith; and Crone and Zimmermann, *The Epistle*, where other sources of Murḡi'ī views are examined.

¹¹¹ J. Givony (*The Murḡi'a and the Theological School of Abū Hanīfa*, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1977, p. 19) argues that this 'mission *topos*', characteristic of many early epistles (Cook, *Early Muslim*, p. 7), aimed at "emphasizing [al-Ḥasan's] pious beliefs and values . . . to safeguard himself from accusations of infidelity."

¹¹² J. Van Ess, "Das *Kitāb al-Irḡā'*", p. 21-2.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, "The Beginning of Islamic Theology", p. 94. The translation is van Ess's with some changes.

¹¹⁴ Cook, "Activism", p. 16.

events in question and the people involved therein, whereas the latter requires a consensus regarding them. Therefore, Murġi'is accepted the first two Caliphs because the community did not disagree on their conduct, but withheld their judgment regarding other Companions or rulers because people disagreed on their affairs while Murġi'is did not witness them.¹¹⁵ Absent these stipulations, one must refrain from judgment, for certitude, needed for valid judgment, requires either unanimity or autopsy, whereas disagreement on people and events or the physical absence from them creates incertitude (*šakk*). Therefore, if the question that the Murġi'is struggled with was to judge or not to judge, as Cook puts it,¹¹⁶ it is safe to argue that they decided that the answer should be: when in doubt, don't.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ *Id.*, *Early Muslim*, p. 28.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ The *Kitāb al-Irġā'* continues with an attack on the Saba'is, an early extremist Šī'i group, who "lied about the Banū Umayya and God." Seeking to demonstrate that, contrary to what is commonly held about them, the Murġi'is were in fact revolutionaries, Cook ("Activism", p. 20-1) argues that "whether one takes the early Murġi'a to be activists or quietists, one is left with something to explain away." In his view, "the activist assumption leaves us with less to explain away than the quietist" (see also *id.*, *Early Muslim*, p. 33-4 and 36). He takes the Banū Umayya in this passage (which suggests affiliation with them) to be a textual corruption resulting from a misreading by someone "who believed, as modern scholars have tended to, that the Murġi'a followed the religion of their kings" (*ibid.*, p. 43). This is not necessarily true. In this passage, the author states that "among the leaders of our community (*a'immatunā*) we approve of Abū Bakr and 'Umar." By implication, he acknowledges rulers other than Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Furthermore, while *imām* can be used pejoratively (see, for example, Kor 9, 12, where it mentions *a'immat al-kufr*, and *Sīrat Sālim*, where the author refers to the Umayyads as *a'immat al-ġawr*), arguably, suffixing a pronominal ending to it indicates a recognition of the present rulers (the Umayyads) by the speaker, for it is unlikely and unnecessary to suffice it when the word is used pejoratively. Later, the word *a'immatunā* is used again: "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-hādā amrunā wa-ra'yunā... wa-nuḍakkiru bihi qawmanā wa-man sa'alanā min a'immatinā fa-yastahillū ba'dahu dimā'anā aw yu'arriḍū dimā'ahum lanā* (Van Ess, "Das *Kitāb al-Irġā'*", p. 24-5). The author's statement that the Umayyads may use his view to shed their blood may be referring to their refusal to curse 'Alī (Madelung, "Murġi'a", *EI*²). The second part, where he says that the same view can legitimize fighting the rulers, apparently contradicts the thesis that Murġi'is were quietists (and also challenges Van Ess's suggestion that the epistle was written as a sign of gratitude to an Umayyad Caliph). However, it can simply mean that the author points out that if the Murġi'is were forced to give up their views or denied their rights, they were willing to defend them by all possible means. Ṭābit Quṭna (d. 110/728), a Murġi'ī poet, stated that they fought for self-defense (Watt, *Formative*, p. 124). In this case, the second part of the statement might simply be a corollary of the first; if the Umayyads use his views to justify shedding their blood, Murġi'is would retaliate in a similar fashion. Furthermore, the Umayyad denial of equal rights to *mawālī* due to their alleged failure to perform basic requirements of Islam (Madelung, "Murġi'a", *EI*²) may have antagonized the Murġi'is. Being quietist, in other words, does not necessarily mean unconditional unwillingness to fight, nor does it mean complete harmony with

This is consistent with *Sīrat Sālim*,¹¹⁸ according to which Murǧī'īs held that Muslims should only pass judgment on what they witnessed and suspend it on what they did not.¹¹⁹ Sālim seeks to demonstrate their inconsistency in applying this rule which would call into question the faith of 'Alī, Ṭalḥa b. 'Ubayd Allāh, and al-Zubayr b. al-'Awwām (all of whom participated in the schisms), as well as the people of Kufa and Basra; whereas the former called on people who did not witness the causes of the conflict to support them, the latter acted on the basis of what they had not witnessed themselves, namely, the murder of 'Uṣmān. However, Murǧī'īs do not question the faith of all these people. Furthermore, they call their children to dissociate from Mu'āwiya, whose deeds these children did not witness, while he was the Prophet's secretary whom 'Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb admired and appointed governor. Also, he was not the only contemporary of the Prophet on whom Muslims disagreed; people held differing views on Abū Bakr and 'Umar too.¹²⁰ Therefore, consistency requires that Murǧī'īs either accept all, or admit that some on whom they keep silent also went astray and condemn them accordingly.

In line with this view that Sālim attributes to Murǧī'īs is Abū Ḥanīfa's position with respect to the early schisms as presented in his *Risāla ilā 'Uṣmān al-Battī*. "You wrote to me," he writes, "saying that you have been informed that I am one of the Murǧī'īs and that I say [about some Muslims] 'an erroneous believer' (*mu'min ḍāll*)."¹²¹ In his defense, he distinguishes between deeds and faith—the former does not affect the latter. One may have a strong belief in something, yet be in error with respect to practices pertaining to it. In other words, there is a difference between one who is in error because he does not

rulers. It is most likely that in the case of Murǧī'īs, peaceful coexistence with the rulers was the norm and armed rebellion the exception. Also rejecting their characterization as revolutionaries, Givony (*Murǧī'a*, p. 64) argues that the *mawālī* who participated in the revolt of Ibn al-Aṣ'at against the Umayyads had suffered from brutal treatment at the hand of al-Ḥaḡḡāg b. Yūsuf and therefore "could hardly avoid taking sides when the rising came". Whereas other *mawālī* refrained from participating, they were eclipsed by the militants of the sect (*ibid.*, p. 74). See also the articles mentioned in n. 110 above, which also address the issue of the Murǧī attitude towards rulers.

¹¹⁸ I use Cook's translation of *Sīrat Sālim* (in *id.*, *Early Muslim*, Arabic text, p. 159-63; translation, p. 23-6).

¹¹⁹ This passage reads: "[T]hen others, who had no forebears in whose footsteps they followed or authorities on whose rectitude they modeled themselves, propounded the doctrine of suspended judgment (*irǧā'*). They said: 'We 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 ḡāba 'annā*) of the first schism'."

¹²⁰ *Sīrat Sālim*, in Cook, *Early Muslim*, p. 160-1.

¹²¹ Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawṭarī (ed.), *al-'Alim wa-l-muta'allim, al-Fiqh al-absaṭ, al-Fiqh al-akbar, Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā 'Uṣmān al-Battī, al-Waṣīyya*, Cairo, al-Maktaba l-azhariyya li-l-turāṭ, 2001, p. 71.

have knowledge of God and His teachings, and another who does believe in them but does not excel in the deeds or acts required by this belief. God used the word error (*dalāl*) in the Qur'an in reference to some believers and in contexts where it cannot be taken to mean disbelief (*kuf*).¹²² Furthermore, starting from the time of 'Umar, the Caliph was called *amir al-mū'minīn* (commander of the faithful). If good work, unlikely to be observed by every member of the community, was considered a determinant of faith, the Caliph would not be the commander of all the community, a notion definitely not envisioned by 'Umar. Likewise, 'Alī did not call the Syrians who fought him disbelievers. But did 'Alī fight them while considering them to be rightly guided (*muhtadūn*)?, Abū Ḥanīfa's wonders. Dismissing as an innovation the view that all sides were either right (*muhtadūn*) or in error (*dāllūn*),¹²³ he asks: if we agree that only one side was right, how would we characterize the others?¹²⁴ In his view, the sound answer to this question is "God knows best" (*Allāh a'lam*),¹²⁵ a position maintained by the Companions themselves according to some Successors. To be sure, God knows best is not the sound answer to the question of who was right and who was wrong; it relates to the status of those Companions who were on the wrong side in each conflict. Remarkably, despite his belief that a person can be a sinful believer or a believing sinner, Abū Ḥanīfa shies away from considering these Companions as such.

Rejecting the term Murǧi'īs, Abū Ḥanīfa states that it was made up by the enemies of "people of justice and the normative practice" (*ahl al-'adl wa-ahl al-sunna*). In *Risālat al-'Ālim wa-l-muta'allim*, however, he uses some of its derivatives. Answering a question on *Irǧā'*,¹²⁶ he attributes its origin to the angels: when asked about the names of objects that Adam was taught, they feared to speak arbitrarily without knowledge and said: Be glorified! We have

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹²³ *Fa-in za'amtā annahumā muhtadiyatān ḡamī'an ibtada'ta, wa-in za'amtā annahumā dāllatān ḡamī'an ibtada'ta* ("If you contend that both of them were rightly-guided, you have made an innovation, and if you contend that both of them were astray, you have [also] made an innovation").

¹²⁴ *Wa-qad iqtatala aṣḥāb rasūl Allāh wa-lam takun al-fi'atān muhtadiyatayn ḡamī'an, fa-mā sm al-bāḡiya 'indaka?* ("The Companions of the Messenger of God fought each other and both sides [in each conflict] were not rightly-guided. So what do you call the aggressor?").

¹²⁵ *Wa-in qulta inna aḥaduhumā muhtadīn, fa-mā l-āḥar? Fa-in qulta Llāh a'lam, aṣabta* ("If you hold that only one of them was right, what about the other? If you say 'God knows better', you have hit the mark") (*ibid.*, p. 74-5).

¹²⁶ *Aḥbirnī min ayna ḡā'a aṣl al-irǧā' wa-mā tafīrūhu wa-man alladī yu'ahḥaru wa-yurǧā'u amrūhu?* ("Tell me, what is the origin of *irǧā'* and what is its interpretation, and who is he whose fate should be postponed?").

no knowledge save that which You have taught us.¹²⁷ They did not make an innovation (*lam yabtadi' u*) in the way of a person asked about a matter which he does not know yet speaks about it carelessly. If he does not give the correct answer, he is mistaken; if he does, he is not praiseworthy, for he speaks arbitrarily without knowledge. Therefore, God said to his Prophet: follow not that of which you have no knowledge.¹²⁸ In other words, do not utter that of which you are not certain.¹²⁹

As for its meaning, *Irğā'* means that if one is asked about a legal matter which he does not know or about reports on past events, one ought to say: God knows better (*Allāh a'lam*). If three persons come with a story which we do not know to be true or false and which we cannot decide on by experiment or reason (*bi-l-tağārub wa-l-maqāyis*), we ought to defer the matter to God and abstain from taking positions (*tarudda 'ilm dālika ilā Llāh wa-taqif*). And if two groups, whose piety and righteousness are known to us, fight each other while we are not present and neither side can provide independent witnesses, we should abstain from passing judgment because of our lack of certitude. However, whereas it must be inferred from the situation that at least one side is wrong, for both sides cannot be right at the same time, we ought to abstain from passing judgment about their eternal fate and adhere to what we know about their faith and piety. The lack of knowledge about the whole case and about the retribution on the Day of Judgment does not allow us to rightfully pass a judgment. *Irğā'*, then, is abstaining from arbitrary judgment without sufficient knowledge, which knowledge autopsy and unanimity can establish, whereas the testimony of one side for itself or against the other cannot. Absent certitude, a Muslim should hold that one side must be wrong, abstain from holding that one particular side is wrong, and ask for forgiveness for those who are wrong because they are, after all, believers, Abū Ḥanīfa points out.¹³⁰

Sālim attributes to Murǧi'īs the view that their rulers were believing Muslims, who, nonetheless, must not be supported politically or religiously

¹²⁷ *Fa-hāfat al-malā'ika l-ḥaṭā' in takallamū bi-ğayr 'ilm ta'assufan fa-waqafat*. The reference here is to Kor 2, 30-1. It is commonly held that the origin of the term *irğā'* is Kor 9, 106: "And others are deferred for the command of God, that he may punish or forgive them" (Madelung, "Murǧi'a", *EI*²). For a dispute of this origin, see J. Givony, "'Wa 'āḥarūna murjawna li'amri 'llāhi': An Inquiry into the Alleged Qur'ānic Origin of the Idea of Irjā'", *Die Welt des Orients*, 12 (1981), p. 73-80.

¹²⁸ The reference is to Kor 17, 36.

¹²⁹ *Ay lā taqul mā lam ta'lamhu yaqīnan*.

¹³⁰ It must be noted that although he was reported to have prohibited rebellion and defined the appropriate attitude towards unjust rulers as praying that God may lead them to the right path, it was also reported that Abū Ḥanīfa financially supported revolts against the Umayyads, reports that Schacht rejects as anomalous to the works attributed to him (Schacht, "Abū Ḥanīfa", *EI*²).

(by asking God to forgive them, for example). Rulers, he argues, are either believers, in which case supporting them is incumbent upon Muslims, or unbelievers, who must then be dealt with accordingly. Adducing Qur'anic evidence to ridicule combining error (*ḍalāl*) and faith (*īmān*), he similarly rejects regarding them as 'astray believers' (*mū'minūn ḍullāl*), for one can be either a believer (*mū'min*) or an unbeliever (*kāfir*). Similarly, in *Risālat al-'Ālim*, the Student asks about the relationship between faith and work. Abū Ḥanīfa replies that the two are separate, pointing out that God states in the Qur'an that He has revealed only one religion (*dīn*), but several laws (*ṣarā'ī'*).¹³¹ Furthermore, people are of three kinds: those who believe with their hearts and tongues, those who believe with their tongues but without their hearts, and those who believe with their hearts but without their tongues.¹³² People in the first group are believers with God and people alike. Those in the third group are believers in God's knowledge but not in people's sight. However, people in the second group are disbelievers in God's knowledge but must be held believers by people, who cannot ascertain their reality, which, in fact, they have no duty to do (*wa-laysa 'alayhim an yatakallafū 'ilm mā fi l-qulūb*).

It has been mentioned earlier that unlike al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī who held that *Ḥadīṡ* critics needed to seek to ascertain that what transmitters did in public reflected their reality, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, and most *Ḥadīṡ* scholars, held that critics ought to accept what transmitters appeared to be. Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī reflects a Ḥanbalī view here,¹³³ and Ḥanbalīs disagreed with Ḥanafīs on an essential point in their definition of faith; whereas both maintained that deeds *per se* did not lead to disbelief,¹³⁴ they differed on whether it affected the *degree* or quality of one's faith. The former held that deeds did affect faith, which increased or decreased accordingly. Naturally, seeking to ascertain the reality of transmitters was essential to them.¹³⁵ The latter rejected this view, holding that faith was separate from one's deeds. It follows that no sin, minor or mortal, can lead to, or be taken as a sign of, disbelief. This view, presented by

¹³¹ Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān, *Risālat al-'Ālim*, p. 14-6. *Dīn* here obviously refers to theological beliefs like monotheism, resurrection, etc., whereas laws are religious ordinances and prohibitions.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹³³ Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī was Ḥanbalī himself before reportedly opting for the Ṣāfi'ī legal school and perhaps Aṣ'arism in theology. On him, see R. Sellheim, "al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī", *EI*².

¹³⁴ It is this emphasis on the supremacy of belief that distinguished both Ḥanbalīs and Ḥanafīs from Ḥārīgīs and has perhaps made it possible to include both groups in one sect. For a discussion of similarities and differences among Sunni sects, see W. Madelung, "Early Sunni Doctrine Concerning Faith as Reflected in the *Kitāb al-Imān* of Abū 'Ubayd al-Qasīm b. Sallām", *Studia Islamica*, 32 (1970), p. 233-54.

¹³⁵ How this approach actually affected the practice of Ḥanbalī critics is hard to verify.

Abū Ḥanīfa above, was adopted by Aš'arī,¹³⁶ and presents the dominant position of Sunnī Islam.¹³⁷

Abū Ḥanīfa's views are illuminating for some of Sālim's points about Murġi'īs. He mentions that they did not accept the testimony of those who argued against the participants in the schisms. While he does the same by rejecting Ši'ī testimony against the first two Caliphs,¹³⁸ he summons Murġi'īs to "believe the believers" who testified against the perpetrators of the schisms and against the current rulers "who do not judge in accordance with what God has revealed."¹³⁹ But why did they reject the testimony of those who testified against the participants in the schisms? In light of Abū Ḥanīfa's views, and on the assumption that Sālim wrote his epistle some 40 years after the first series of civil wars between 35/656 and 40/661, it is evident that they did not accept those as independent witnesses, for they were probably the immediate descendants of those for whom they testified. Therefore, the proper attitude was to reject their testimony and abstain from judging. This also explains the keenness of Sunnī scholars to argue that the integrity of the Companions was confirmed by God and the Prophet, although as a general rule anyone's integrity should be presumed unless proven otherwise. Since some sects held that most of the Companions were already disbelievers during the time of the Prophet, independent witnesses were needed, and no witnesses are more veracious than God and His Prophet. Moreover, Sunnī scholars must have felt uneasy about the Medinan hypocrites whom the Qur'an mentions and who

¹³⁶ I.H. Inal, *The Presentation of the Murġi'a in Islamic Literature*, Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Manchester, 2002, p. 52. Two views on the issue of the definition of faith were attributed to al-Aš'arī. Inal points out that in many of his works, al-Aš'arī defined faith as the Ḥanbalis did, whereas in *Kitāb al-Luma'* he defined it as *taṣdīq* (belief) only, similar to the Ḥanafī-Murġi'īs.

¹³⁷ A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1932, p. 49; W.M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1973, p. 134. Watt ["The Doctrine of *Imān* in Islamic Theology", *Der Islam*, 18 (1967), p. 5] argues that the issue of *imān* had to do with membership in the Muslim community. By asserting the equality of all people as believers, the aim was to assert their equality as full members of the community in terms of rights and duties. Faith, therefore, cannot increase or decrease.

¹³⁸ Sālim's views reveal other inconsistencies. He states that 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 "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." Earlier, he contends that views differed regarding not only those who participated in the schisms, but also those who did not take part in them, such as the first two Caliphs. If he is willing to accept the testimony of people who shared his beliefs, why deny Murġi'īs the same right?

¹³⁹ *Sīrat Sālim*, in Cook, *Early Muslim*, p. 163. Arguably, this statement supports the view that the Murġi'īs were not hostile to rulers.

were Companions according to the dominant Sunnī definition starting from the 5th/11th century. This was a dilemma that, to my knowledge, they refrained from discussing.

Arguably, it is along the lines presented by Abū Ḥanīfa and attributed to Murǧī's in the works discussed above that medieval Sunnī scholars argued that the Companions who participated in the schisms maintained their integrity, which was confirmed by God and the Prophet and which cannot be nullified on the basis of inconclusive reports that do not establish apodictic knowledge. However, unlike the Murǧī's who abstained from judgment, Sunnī scholars took the argument one step further and maintained their belief in an earlier status of the Companions. In accordance with their belief that everyone is trustworthy unless proven otherwise, they held that since we cannot pass judgment on the schisms and the Companions involved therein for lack of certitude, we must adhere to what we know about their earlier status, namely, they were declared trustworthy by God and the Prophet when he was alive. *Istishāb al-ḥāl* (the presumption of continuity), which was part of *'ilm al-ḡarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl* by the 5th/11th century, provided these scholars with tools needed to defend the integrity of the Companions after the death of the Prophet.¹⁴⁰

V. Conclusion

There is no question that the doctrine of *'adālat al-ṣaḥāba* served useful purposes in Sunnism. Absent *imāms* whose presence guaranteed the preservation of true Islam despite all the chaos in the early decades of the Muslim history, it was essential for Sunnīs to hold that the generation of the Companions collectively and individually provided such guarantee. Therefore, it is inadequate to suggest that the doctrine developed to solve a specific problem in Sunnī *Ḥadīth* criticism, no matter how serious it may have been, not to mention the mere desire to exonerate a specific Companion. The doctrine has become an article of the Sunnī faith simply because it was indispensable. But Sunnī scholars did not just invent it; they had to construct it over several centuries. This article has sought to examine the construction of this doctrine.

¹⁴⁰ Some Zaydī Ṣī'is adopted similar arguments. They held that the Companions were devout Muslims during the Prophet's lifetime. Why they acted the way they did after his death, however, cannot be ascertained on the basis of the available evidence. Therefore, we must leave it to God to judge them. For this, see E. Kohlberg, "Some Zaydī Views of the Companions of the Prophet", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 39/1 (1976), p. 91-8, particularly p. 92-3. This approach, however, did not distinguish the Zaydīs as it did the Murǧī's.

Michael Cook has observed that “the first civil war [was] a favourite ground of sectarian self-definition in early Islam.”¹⁴¹ The previous discussions of the development of the doctrine and of some Murǧīʿī writings indicate that if we are to seek the roots of any attitude towards the Companions, the schisms must be put in the foreground. The epistemology of *Irgāʿ*, arguably first applied to the decision regarding ʿUṣmān and ʿAlī,¹⁴² provided the ground for the Sunnī doctrine. In the beginning, Sunnī scholars sought to halt the vilification of the Companions by some sects, as evinced by the *ḥadīṭs* that circulated in the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries.¹⁴³ They were inclined to discourage discussing the schisms and the liability of the parties that participated in them. However, this attitude was abandoned later, most likely when they realized that it was not sufficient to defend those whom they regarded as the transmitters of Islam to all subsequent Muslim generations. As a result, Qurʾānic passages and Prophetic *ḥadīṭs* that venerated the Companions multiplied. They served the purpose of confirming that when the Prophet Muḥammad was alive, their integrity and reliability were out of the question. When the Prophet died, the Companions participated in civil wars. Rather than conferring immunity from error (*iṣma*) on the Companions or refuting unfavorable reports about the schisms on historical grounds, Sunnī scholars contended that these reports were too contradictory and inconclusive to furnish solid evidence about the intentions of the participants therein. The uncertainty of these reports cannot overrule the certainty in the earlier integrity of the Companions. In other words, since it is certain that the Companions’

¹⁴¹ Cook, “Activism”, p. 16. M.A. Amir-Moezzi (*Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant: Sources scripturaires de l’islam entre histoire et ferveur*, Paris, CNRS, 2011) has recently examined how early Šīʿī scholars perceived the schisms as part of a grand conspiracy led by most Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad to undermine Islam by usurping ʿAlī’s right as the legitimate political and religious leader of the *umma* (for this, see the author’s discussion of the *Kitāb al-Saqifa*, attributed to Sulaym b. Qays [d. ca 76/695-6], p. 27-61 and *passim*). To that end, these Companions, or the hypocrites whom the Qurʾān mentions, were willing to do anything, including altering the text of the Qurʾān itself by, for example, removing explicit references to ʿAlī and his successors or forging *ḥadīṭs* and falsely attributing them to the Prophet (see, for example, p. 84-9). For a variety of reasons, these early Šīʿī views gave way gradually in the 4th/10th century to a Twelver Šīʿī ‘theological-judicial rationalism’ that avoided questioning the authenticity of the official, ʿUṣmānic version of the Qurʾān and toned down or avoided previous views on the integrity of the Prophet’s Companions (p. 119).

¹⁴² Watt, *Formative*, p. 124.

¹⁴³ Some Sunnī scholars, as early as the 3rd/9th century, regarded vilifying the Companions as a legal issue that merited punishment, which could be the death penalty. For this, see Lutz Wiederhold, “Blasphemy against the Prophet Muḥammad and His Companions (*Sabb al-Rasūl, Sabb al-Ṣaḥābah*): The Introduction of the Topic into the Šāfiʿī Legal Literature and its Relevance for Legal Practice under Mamluk Rule”, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 42/1 (1997), p. 39-70, especially p. 47ff.

integrity was confirmed in the Prophet's time and uncertain that their participation in the schisms nullified it, true believers must adhere to what is certain and continue to believe in their earlier integrity, not to mention faith.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, unlike Šī'īs who believed that the exercise of personal judgment (*iğtihād*) was the prerogative of the *imāms*, and Hāriğīs who held that it furnished a legal ground for fighting if it contradicted the Qur'ān, Sunnīs held that exercising it was meritorious irrespective of the outcome. Consensus, a divine blessing to the *umma*, sanctioned the whole argument and the collective integrity of the Companions became an article of faith.

Similarities between Murğī'ism and Sunnism have been recognized by many scholars, including Sunnīs.¹⁴⁵ In fact, the view presented as the hallmark

¹⁴⁴ Lucas (*Constructive*, p. 257-8) has noted that *hadīths* of the *faḍā'il al-ṣahāba* genre do not seem to have played a significant role in the Sunnī approval of all the Companions. The above discussion may explain this, for the problem that Sunnīs had to deal with was not the status of the Companions during the Prophet's lifetime, which these *hadīths* address, but rather their status after his death. Furthermore, the *faḍā'il hadīths* that mentioned the *ṣahāba* as a group were definitely more important than those that mentioned specific Companions. It must also be added that even if Lucas's observation (*ibid.*, p. 281-2) that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's *Musnad*, which included chapters containing the transmissions of hundreds of Companions, provided "an implicit argument for the collective probity of the *ṣahāba*", later Sunnī discussions demonstrate that the mere acceptance of their transmissions did not actually prove their integrity. Furthermore, the issue of the superiority of some Companions is arguably irrelevant to the doctrine of their probity, which doctrine seeks to establish that when it comes to integrity and reliability, all of them were *equal*.

¹⁴⁵ For this, see Madelung, "Murğī'a", *EI*², and Watt, *Formative*, p. 119-43, especially p. 128, where he says that "as opponents of the divisive tendencies of both Šī'ites and Hāriğites, all these early Murğī'ites were forerunners of the Sunnites, and deserve to be honoured as such." For the historical relationship between Murğī'ism and Ḥanafism, see W. Madelung, "The Early Murğī'a in Ḥurāsān and Transoxania and the Spread of Ḥanafism", *Der Islam*, 59 (1982), p. 32-9. Inal (*Presentation*, p. 179-92) describes several techniques that Sunnī scholars used to deal with this. Some of them admitted the similarity between Sunnī and Murğī'ī views. Al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) and Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114) found no difficulty in attributing Murğī'ī views to Abū Ḥanīfa, the eponymous founder of their legal school. However, the former distinguished between good and bad Murğī'īs (*ibid.*, p. 153). Ibn Taymiyya distinguished between the Murğī'īs of the jurists (*murğī'at al-fuqahā'*) and extremist Murğī'īs (*al-murğī'a l-ğulāt*) (*ibid.*, p. 119), and al-Šahrastānī between orthodox and heterodox Murğī'īs (*murğī'at al-sunna wa-murğī'at al-bid'a*) (*ibid.*, p. 91). Other scholars strove to deny any affinity between Sunnism and 'heretical' Murğī'ism, either by avoiding discussing Murğī'ī views while discussing their own (*ibid.*, p. 166), or by presenting an extremist Murğī'ī sect as representative of all Murğī'īs (Watt, "The doctrine of *imān*", p. 4, where he points out that "later Sunnite heresiographers, finding the name 'Murğī'ite' widely used, did their best to describe a sect of Murğī'a who were heretical from the Sunnite standpoint, but in fact they can only produce one or two influential figures who went to extremes on one point or another"). Ibn Taymiyya was aware of how polemics against other sects created false presentations of their creeds: "Scholars rely on rumours in their pronouncements and in attacking so-called heretics. They do not rely on what these heretics themselves say. The result of all this is that they wrongly attribute to these groups

of Murġi'ism—that a person's deeds are not determinant of his faith—has generally been accepted by Sunnī scholars.¹⁴⁶ They also followed the political quietism of Murġi'is. Therefore, because of their acceptance of rulers like the Umayyads, whose faith cannot be challenged on the basis of sins attributed to them, all Sunnis were seen as Murġi'is by Šī'is.¹⁴⁷ Ḥanbalis accused both Ḥanafis and Aš'aris of maintaining Murġi'ī views in their definition of faith.¹⁴⁸ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal himself expressed views historically attributed to Murġi'is—such as the illegality of rising against rulers and the belief that sins did not lead to disbelief,¹⁴⁹ which led some scholars to conclude that “the later Sunnī body of Islam absorbed the mainstream Murġi'ī idea.”¹⁵⁰ By examining the development of the doctrine of *'adālat al-ṣaḥāba*, this study corroborates this thesis.¹⁵¹

opinions they in fact do not hold.” For example, he observes that “the claims that, for the Murġi'a, religion (*dīn*) and belief (*imān*) are the same and that *imān* is [only] confession by the tongue are false and stem from the false method of dealing with the Murġi'a” (*ibid.*, p. 120-1). This was made possible by, and may actually explain, the fact that a single definition of Murġi'ism can hardly be discerned from Sunnī sources (*ibid.*, p. 213; Watt, *Formative*, p. 73). Heretical Murġi'ism was thus a Sunnī construction. “Murġi'ism was indeed not generally considered as heretical among the traditionists despite the vigorous efforts of the ‘followers of Ibn Mas'ūd’ to brand it as such. Only in the 3rd/9th century was Murġi'ism completely suppressed in Sunnī traditionalism,” Madelung argues (“Some reflections”, p. 241). Watt (“The Doctrine of *imān*”, p. 4) adds that Murġi'ism was initially branded heresy “from a Ḥārīgite or Mu'tazilite standpoint; and it is only from such a standpoint that Murġi'a in general are heretics.”

¹⁴⁶ *Lā taḍurru ma'a l-imān ma'siya, wa-lā tanfā'u ma'a l-kufr ṭā'a* (“with faith, no sin harms; and with unbelief, no obedience matters”). Crone and Zimmermann note that both ‘proto-Sunnī traditionalists’ and the Murġi'is sought to avoid sectarianism and preserve the unity of the Muslim community. However, they argue that unlike the latter who suspended judgment on the schisms because they did not witness them, proto-Sunnīs did that, and even associated with different parties in these schisms, because “the protagonists in the first civil war were Companions” who, being superior beings, were “elevated above the rest of mankind” (Crone and Zimmerman, *The Epistle*, p. 229). It goes without saying that for this argument to stand, it must be proven first that these proto-Sunnīs, even if they did hold that the Companions were *sui generis*, considered them to have been above criticism.

¹⁴⁷ Inal, *Presentation*, p. 147.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 110-1.

¹⁵⁰ Inal, *Presentation*, p. 170 and 174. See also Madelung, “Murġi'a”, *El*²; and Watt, *Formative*, p. 119-43.

¹⁵¹ Sunnism, to be sure, encompasses views that are conflicting and even contradictory. However, this does not mean that any discussion of its basic tenets is necessarily arbitrary. Sunnī views discussed here are typical of Sunnism, despite disagreement of Sunnī scholars on their details and applications.