

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

BETWEEN CONDEMNATION AND EXONERATION
THE SUNNĪ SCHOLARLY DEBATE ON YAZĪD IN *BILĀD*
AL-SHĀM AND *BILĀD AL-RŪM* (1300-1700)

by
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Between Condemnation and Exoneration: The Sunnī Scholarly Debate on Yazīd in *Bilād al-Shām* and *Bilād al-Rūm* (1300-1700)

This thesis examines the Sunnī scholarly debate surrounding Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya, the controversial Umayyad caliph, by analyzing historical and theological perspectives from *Bilād al-Shām* (the Levant) and *Bilād al-Rūm* (Anatolia) between 1300 and 1700. Through a comparative study of seventeen primary sources authored by fourteen scholars, the research explores key themes such as the legitimacy of Yazīd’s caliphate, his moral character, his role in the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn, and the permissibility of cursing him. The study reveals a stark contrast between the *ahl al-baytist* tendencies of Ottoman scholars, who overwhelmingly condemned Yazīd, and the more nuanced, often apologetic stances of Levantine scholars, who sought to balance criticism with historical and theological justifications. By situating these debates within their regional and intellectual contexts, the thesis argues that the portrayal of Yazīd was deeply influenced by local historiographical traditions. The findings challenge the notion of a monolithic Sunnī position on Yazīd, highlighting instead the diversity of scholarly opinions across time and space.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
ABSTRACT	2
TABLES	5
INTRODUCTION	6
1.1. Main Research Questions	9
1.2. Scope, Limitations, and Structure	12
1.3. The Sources.....	13
1.3.1. Yazīd’s Presence in Ottoman Historiography	16
1.3.2. Steeped in Hadith Methodology: Yazīd in Syrian Historical Sources.....	28
1.4. Yazīd in Modern Historical Literature.....	41
<i>BAY’A</i> OR JUSTIFIED REBELLION? SCHOLARLY PERCEPTIONS OF YAZĪD’S LEGITIMACY	43
TYRANT OR ENFORCER? Umayyad Campaigns in the Hejaz under Yazīd	52
3.1. Yazīd as Enemy of the Believers in the Ottoman Imagination.....	53
3.2. A Variety of Opinions in a Single Scholarly Tradition	55
YAZĪD <i>AL-ZINDĪQ</i> OR MERELY YAZĪD <i>AL-FĀSIQ</i> ?	69
4.1. The Drunken Caliph: Yazīd’s moral failings in Ottoman historical writing	69
4.2. The Redeeming Qualities of a <i>Fāsiq</i>	71

YAZĪD THE MURDERER? THE MARTYRDOM OF AL- ḤUSAYN.....	78
5.1. An Unforgivable Sin: Yazīd as Persecutor of <i>Ahl al-Bayt</i> in the Ottoman View	80
5.2. Absolving Yazīd: A Profound Sunnī Need?	85
WHEN DOES A ṢAḤĀBĪ’S SON BECOME CURSABLE?	94
6.1 Cursed by (Near) Consensus: The Universal Ottoman maligning of Yazīd.....	96
6.2 “We Neither Love nor Curse Him”: Syrian Rulings on Cursing Yazīd	102
CONCLUSION	111
BIBLIOGRAPHY	114
8.1 Primary Sources	114
8.2 Secondary Sources	115

TABLES

Table

1. <i>Rūmī</i> Sources	15
2. <i>Shāmī</i> Sources	16

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Yazīd b. Mu‘āwīya’s (d. 64/683) brief and turbulent reign, marked by the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (d. 61/680) and attacks on Islam’s two holy cities, remains one of the most controversial periods in Islamic history. So contentious was his rule that it sparked rich and ongoing scholarly discourse, resulting in a vast body of academic work on the subject, especially in the Islamic tradition. Not all Muslim scholars, however, were divided on this issue. Shī‘ite scholars are unanimous in their animosity towards Yazīd, so much so that cursing him is deemed permissible by consensus. Sunnī scholars, on the other hand, have debated this matter with utmost technicality. These debates have continued well into the twenty-first century, with numerous contemporary scholars publishing works dealing with key issues regarding Yazīd. One example of such intellectual contributions is *Haqaba min al-Tārīkh* (henceforth *Haqaba*), a book tackling the appropriate methodologies one should implement in studying early Islamic history. The book was published in 2000 by the prominent Salafist scholar ‘Uthmān al-Khamīs, a figure known for his anti-Shī‘ite polemics. *Haqaba* directly ties into the discourse on Yazīd’s legacy by emphasizing Sunnī methodologies and countering Shī‘ite narratives concerning early Islamic history.

To further understand how al-Khamīs approached Yazīd’s personality, it is essential to examine his book in greater detail. *Haqaba* offers a clear methodology for interpreting the historical narratives that surround controversial figures like Yazīd. The work is divided into four key chapters, each addressing distinct aspects of early Islamic historiography. The first chapter deals with Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310/923) approach to

early Islamic history and the significance of *isnāds* (chains of transmission). The second addresses Islam's early controversies, utilizing narrations that are traditionally accepted as reliable by Sunnī scholars. The third asserts the *'adāla* (moral and religious righteousness) of the *ṣaḥāba* (Companions of Prophet Muḥammad), countering arguments regularly cited by Shī'ites against this concept. And finally, the fourth chapter deals with the issue of succession to the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, refuting Shī'ite claims for the *Imāmate* of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661). Yazīd and the events that ensued during his reign are discussed in the second chapter where al-Khamīs takes a relatively apologetic stance towards Yazīd, arguing that a Muslim must not curse another Muslim, especially those who have passed away. His position was inspired by the works of multiple prominent Sunnī scholars, namely Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347-8), and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372-3), all of whom will be discussed later in the thesis.¹

In contrast to 'Uthmān al-Khamīs, another contemporary Sunnī scholar Adnan Ibrahim adopts a diametrically opposite stance. In one of his lectures, Ibrahim quotes nineteenth-century *mufasssir* (exegete) Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854), who argues for the permissibility of explicitly cursing Yazīd. Al-Ālūsī's exegesis of chapter 47 verses 22-23 reads:

Now if you [hypocrites] turn away, perhaps you would then spread corruption throughout the land and sever your [ties of] kinship! These are the ones who Allāh has cursed, deafening them and blinding their eyes (47:22-23).

... What predominates in my mind is that the wicked man, [Yazīd], did not truly believe in the Prophet's message, [Islam]. The sum of what he did to

¹ 'Uthmān al-Khamīs, *Haqaba min al-Tārīkh*, eds. Muḥammad al-Muqaddim and Muḥammad Nūḥ (Alexandria: Dār al-Īmān, 1999), 141-143.

the people of Allāh’s sanctuary, the people of His Prophet’s sanctuary, and his pure, virtuous family—both during their lives and after their deaths—and the disgraceful acts that he decreed are no less indicative of his disbelief than throwing a page of the Noble Qur’ān into filth. I do not think this reality was hidden from the majority of Muslims of that time, but they were overpowered and oppressed and had no choice but to endure patiently until Allāh’s decree came to pass.

Even if it is granted that the wicked man was a Muslim, then he is a Muslim who committed so many grave sins that words fail to encompass them. I believe it is permissible to curse someone like him specifically, even if it cannot be imagined that he has an equal among the sinful. It appears that he did not repent, and the probability of his repentance is weaker than the probability of his belief [in Islam]. ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād, ‘Umar b. Sa’d, and a group of others are in the same category, so may Allāh’s curse be upon them all, upon their supporters, aides, followers, and all those inclined toward them until the Day of Judgment—so long as a tear is shed for Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn.²

Ibrahim explicitly states that he subscribes to al-Ālūsī’s position, along with a score of other Sunnī scholars and historians who deemed Yazīd a *kāfir* (disbeliever/infidel) and allowed cursing him specifically. Thus, it is evident that Sunnīs have disagreed on this matter for over a millennium. Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya had his defenders and his critics, with no standard Sunnī position on whether it is permissible to damn him or not, nor regarding his righteousness or the legitimacy of his caliphate. Indeed, the disagreement is not exclusive to the issue of cursing him, it is rather much more complicated. Perhaps the most contested matter is whether he was directly responsible for the murder of al-Ḥusayn in Karbalā’ where he allegedly ordered his governor ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād (d. 67/686) to “take care of him.”³

² Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī fī Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm wa al-Sab‘ al-Mathānī*, ed. ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Bārī ‘Aṭīyya, vol. 13 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1994), 229.

³ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Waḥayāt al-Mashāhīr wa al-A‘lām*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmūrī, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1987), 356.

One must not presuppose, however, that Sunnī scholars are split into two camps regarding this issue; rather, three main perspectives dominate this discussion.⁴ One view regards Yazīd as a Muslim ruler who was entitled to his people’s obedience, citing Qur’ān 4:59, which commands believers to obey “those in authority” (*ulū al-amr*). Throughout Islamic history, rulers have invoked this verse to justify suppressing dissent and rebellions. From this perspective, al-Ḥusayn’s revolt against Yazīd is interpreted as a rebellion, and Yazīd is seen as a Muslim—albeit flawed—who should not be cursed. On the opposite side are those who highlight Yazīd’s apparent impiety and immoral behavior, pointing to his role in the tragic killing of al-Ḥusayn and members of the Prophet’s family at Karbalā’ as evidence of infidelity. Between these two polar opposites is a middle ground that acknowledges Yazīd’s wicked nature while recognizing him as a ruler without religious legitimacy. Some in this group even approve of cursing him, arguing that his actions render him an unbeliever. This variety in opinion, highlighting the lack of an absolute consensus, prompted me to dig deeper into traditional Muslim scholarship on Yazīd. One interesting dimension of the debate surrounding Yazīd is the geographical and cultural divide which seems to infiltrate the otherwise united Sunnī-Muslim fold.

1.1. Main Research Questions

One such divide that this thesis seeks to investigate closely is that which existed between the neighboring regions of *Bilād al-Shām* (Levant) and *Bilād al-Rūm* (Anatolia). To examine this divide, this thesis will focus on two primary objectives. First, it seeks to determine whether a *regional* consensus existed among Sunnī scholars in *Bilād al-Shām*

⁴ Vefa Erginbaş, “Reading Ottoman Sunnism through Islamic History: Approaches toward Yazīd b. Mu’āwiya in Ottoman Historical Writing,” in *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450-c. 1750*, eds. Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 451-452.

and *Bilād al-Rūm* regarding Yazīd’s legitimacy, righteousness, or actions. Beyond identifying such a consensus, the goal is to analyze what it reveals about the scholars in these regions. Second, the thesis compares perspectives from these two regions to explore their intellectual traditions, examining methodological differences and how they shaped Yazīd’s portrayal. These two regions were chosen due to their historical and scholarly significance, particularly their connections to Yazīd and the broader impact of their historiography. On one hand, *Bilād al-Shām*, especially Damascus, served as the Umayyad base of power and was central to the Empire, prompting some *Shāmī* historians to adopt a nostalgic attitude toward their Umayyad past. This often resulted in a more lenient stance toward Yazīd when contrasted with perspectives from other regions. On the other hand, scholars active in the early centuries of the Ottoman Empire demonstrated strong *ahl al-baytist* tendencies in their works, showing empathy towards the political cause of the family of the Prophet and their descendants, which often led to a harsher treatment of Yazīd and his legacy.⁵

Dissimilarity in perceptions of Yazīd can also be correlated to different methodological approaches to early Islamic history. Scholars in *Bilād al-Shām*, for instance, generally adhered to the *ḥadīth* methodology in their historical works, relying on authentic narrations that often absolved Yazīd of the crimes attributed to him. They followed the classical Arabic model of historiography, compiling traditions and

⁵ *Ahl al-Baytism*, a concept first introduced by R.D. McChesney in his study of an ‘Alid shrine in Central Asia, refers to reverence among Sunnīs for the family of the Prophet Muḥammad. Vefa Erginbaş utilized and expanded this term in his works, using it to refer to an affinity among Sunnī intellectuals not only for the immediate family of the Prophet but also for their descendants, including the Twelve *Imāms* recognized by Twelver Shī‘īs. See Robert McChesney, *Waqf in Central Asia: Four Hundred Years in the History of a Muslim Shrine, 1480-1889* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Vefa Erginbaş, “Problematizing Ottoman Sunnism: Appropriation of Islamic History and Ahl al-Baytism in Ottoman Literary and Historical Writing in the Sixteenth Century,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 60, 5 (2017).

occasionally commenting on their *isnād* (chain of transmitters) and *matn* (content). In contrast, *Rūmī* scholars produced literary-historical narratives, often drawing from Persian sources that negatively depicted Yazīd without substantiating their claims through traditions deemed reliable by mainstream Sunnī scholars. Recent scholarship, particularly the works of Tijana Krstić and Helen Pfeifer, has asserted that this dissimilarity diminished after the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.⁶ It is argued that political developments, mainly the conquest of Arab lands in 1516-17 and the rise of the Shīʿite Safavid threat, led to major shifts in Ottoman Sunnism. A “Sunnitization process,” where the Ottoman government emphasized its Sunnī identity more vigorously, was undertaken. Through the example of scholarly portrayals of Yazīd, I intend to put these recent findings to the test.

It is also worth noting that *Bilād al-Shām* and *Bilād al-Rūm* had distinct jurisprudential compositions. In *Bilād al-Rūm*, Ḥanafism was the official state *madhhab* (school of jurisprudence), dominating the scholarly class and often leading to unanimous rulings.⁷ Conversely, *Bilād al-Shām* exhibited greater sectarian diversity, with thriving Ḥanafī, Shāfiʿī, and Ḥanbalī communities. As a result, readers of *Rūmī* and *Shāmī* historical sources will notice a more monolithic *Rūmī* approach to questions concerning Yazīd’s legacy, whereas *Shāmī* scholars present a wider range of perspectives on the

⁶ Among other works, see: Garrett Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition: A Social and Intellectual History of Hadith Transmission across a Thousand Years* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Helen Pfeifer, “Encounter After the Conquest: Scholarly Gatherings in 16th-Century Ottoman Damascus,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47, 2 (2015); Guy Burak, *The Second Formation of Islamic Law: The Hanafi School in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁷ See Rudolph Peters, “What Does It Mean to Be an Official Madhhab? Hanafism and the Ottoman Empire,” in *Shariʿa, Justice and Legal Order* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 585-599.

caliph.⁸ Consequently, much of the content and conclusions of this study, though not intended to be monotonous, reflect a recurring and largely consistent perspective shared by *Rūmī* scholars across different periods and disciplines, whether in Islamic or secular sciences.⁹ This uniformity stands in contrast to the varied viewpoints found among *Shāmī* scholars. The influence of these jurisprudential compositions on perceptions of Yazīd will be further examined throughout the thesis.

1.2. Scope, Limitations, and Structure

The sources available for a study on Yazīd are vast and countless. The caliph's legacy has been disputed since the early decades of Islam when the Umayyad caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 101/720) ordered twenty lashes for a man who referred to Yazīd as *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (Commander of the Believers).¹⁰ His legacy has continued to be debated ever since and has often peaked in times of sectarian tensions. In seventeenth-century Istanbul, for instance, followers of the puritanical Qāḍīzādeli movement clashed with followers of the Sufi leader Sivāsī Efendi (d. 1049/1639), quarreling over a plethora of theological and social issues.¹¹ One of the many points of dispute between the two groups was the permissibility of cursing Yazīd, with the Qāḍīzādelis choosing to adopt a permissive stance and allowing his cursing. Such endless examples prompt me to restrict

⁸ Helen Pfeifer, "A New Hadith Culture? Arab Scholars and Ottoman Sunnization in the Sixteenth Century," in *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450-c. 1750*, eds. Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 39.

⁹ For more on the intellectual diversity in *Bilād al-Shām*, see: Tarek Abu Hussein, "Worlds Apart in the Ottoman World: Islamic Education in Bilad Al-Sham and Bilad Al-Rum 1530-1650," PhD diss., (Harvard University, 2024).

¹⁰ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, ed. Ma'mūn al-Ṣāgharjī, vol. 4 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1985), 36.

¹¹ For more on the Qāḍīzādeli movement, see: Mustafa Sheikh, *Ottoman Puritanism and Its Discontents: Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥīṣārī and the Qāḍīzādelis* (London: Oxford University Press, 2016).

myself to a feasible timeframe and retain a manageable framework. Therefore, this study will survey legal rulings and Islamic histories written by Levantine Arab and Ottoman Turkish scholars from the early fourteenth century through the late seventeenth century. The continuous debate – stretching ever deeper into later Islamic history – reveals its importance to the Sunnī scholarly universe. While not exhaustive, this survey is intended to be representative of the time period in question.

My thesis will be organized into five chapters, each addressing a key aspect of Yazīd’s legacy. Said aspects represent the five themes that are most frequently and elaborately discussed in scholarship on Yazīd. Chapter one will explore the legitimacy of Yazīd’s caliphate, including whether some historians considered the rebellious ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73/692) a rival caliph. Chapter two will examine Yazīd’s record as a ruler, with particular focus on his actions in Mecca and Medina. Chapter three will investigate debates surrounding Yazīd’s moral character, including allegations of prohibited practices such as hunting for sport and drinking alcohol. Chapter four will assess the question of Yazīd’s responsibility for al-Ḥusayn’s death, particularly whether he directly ordered his killing. Chapter five will analyze the permissibility of explicitly cursing Yazīd, considering reasons why some scholars permitted or forbade damning him, such as anti-Shī‘ite polemics, *ahl al-baytist* leanings, and the Qāḍīzādeli-Sufī violent debates. The thesis will conclude with a summary and final reflections, including some questions for future research.

1.3. The Sources

The sources examined in this study do not offer any original contributions to the narrative of early Islamic history. After all, by the advent of the fourteenth century, some

seven centuries had passed since the birth of Islam. As such, the scholars discussed in this study merely aimed to draw upon and reiterate earlier accounts of Yazīd's reign. My interest lies in understanding how they repeatedly reworked these narratives, adapting them to align with the needs and expectations of their own era. This deliberate reshaping of earlier sources represents their distinctive contribution. In some cases, the analysis will also consider a scholar's views on Yazīd's father, Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), the founder of the Umayyad Caliphate, as such perspectives often provide critical insights into their broader attitudes toward Yazīd.

This study examines seventeen primary historical sources authored by fourteen different scholars.¹² While not all of these sources are strictly historiographical, each offers valuable insights into its author's perspective on Yazīd. The following section briefly introduces the sources and their authors in chronological order, starting with *Rūmī* works followed by *Shāmī* ones. Each introduction to an author includes pertinent biographical information about its subject, paired with an assessment of three key features regarding his work: its sources, methodology, and significance. While the sources below are presented chronologically, the subsequent analytical chapters do not adhere to this sequence. This approach reflects the study's primary objective: not to trace the evolution of the *Rūmī* and *Shāmī* intellectual traditions, but to systematically compare their respective perceptions of Yazīd.

¹² I am deeply indebted and thankful to my advisor, Dr. Tarek Abu Hussein, for aiding me with Ottoman Turkish texts.

Table 1. *Rūmī* Sources

Source	Historian	Type	Language	Madhhab
<i>Iskendernāme</i>	Aḥmadī (d. 815/1413)	Poem	Ottoman Turkish	Ḥanafī
<i>Al-Risāla al-Muḥammadiyya</i>	Yāzījī Oghlū (Yazıcıoğlu) Meḥmed (d. 855/1451)	Poem	Originally in Arabic, later translated to Ottoman Turkish	Ḥanafī
<i>Bahjat al-Tawārīkh</i>	Shukrullāh (d. 894/1488)	Universal history	Persian	Ḥanafī
<i>Fatwas</i>	Abū al-Su‘ūd Efendi (d. 982/1574)	Legal rulings	Ottoman Turkish	Ḥanafī
<i>Al-‘ilm al-Zākhir fī Aḥwāl al-Awā’il wa-al-Awākhir (Tārīkh al-Jannābī)</i>	Muṣṭafā al-Jannābī (d. 999/1590)	Universal history	Arabic	Ḥanafī
<i>Kunh al-Akḥbār</i>	Muṣṭafā ‘Ālī (d. 1008/1600)	Universal history	Ottoman Turkish	Ḥanafī
<i>Nukḥbat al-Tawārīkh wa-al-Akḥbār</i>	Edirnevī (d. 1051/1641)	Universal history	Ottoman Turkish	Ḥanafī
<i>Mīzān al-Ḥaqq</i>	Kātīb Chelebī (d. 1068/1657)	Theological reform treatise	Arabic	Ḥanafī
<i>Sullam al-Wuṣūl ilā Ṭabaqāt al-Fuḥūl</i>		Biographical dictionary	Arabic	

Table 2. *Shāmī* Sources

Source	Historian	Type	Language	Madhhab
<i>Minhāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya</i>	Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328)	Polemical theology	Arabic	Ḥanbalī
<i>Tārīkh al-Islām</i>	al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348)	Universal history	Arabic	Shāfi‘ī
<i>Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’</i>		Biographical dictionary	Arabic	
<i>Mīzān al-I‘tidāl fī Naqd al-Rijāl</i>		Biographical dictionary	Arabic	
<i>Al-Bidāya wa-al-Nihāya</i>	Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373)	Universal history	Arabic	Shāfi‘ī
<i>Al-Qayd al-Sharīd min Akhbār Yazīd</i>	Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 953/1546)	Treatise	Arabic	Ḥanafī
<i>Akhbār al-Duwal wa-Athār al-Uwal fī al-Tārīkh</i>	al-Qaramānī (d. 1019/1610-1)	Universal history	Arabic	No info available
<i>Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār man Dhahab</i>	Ibn al-‘Imād al-Ḥanbalī (d. 1089/1679)	Biographical dictionary	Arabic	Ḥanbalī

1.3.1. Yazīd’s Presence in Ottoman Historiography

The earliest *Rūmī* source to be examined is Aḥmadī’s (d. 815/1413) *Iskendernāme*. Tāj al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. Khidr, known simply as Aḥmadī, was the foremost *Rūmī* poet of the 8th/14th century.¹³ He was likely born in Germiyān before 735/1334-5 and studied in Anatolia and Cairo under Akmal al-Dīn al-Bābartī (d. 786/1384). He served as a court poet for Sulaymān Shāh (d. 788/1386-7), an Anatolian bey who ruled over Germiyān, before later joining the Ottoman court under Sultan Bāyezīd I (d. 805/1403) and his son

¹³ Geoffrey Lewis, “Aḥmadī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. Peri Bearman (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

Sulaymān Ćelebi (d. 813/1411).¹⁴ Aĥmadī's most notable work, *Iskendernāme*, recounts the life of Alexander the Great, drawing from the accounts of Persian poets Firdawsī (d. 411/1020) and Nizāmī (d. 613/1217).¹⁵ Despite its name, the *Iskendernāme* is much more than a Turkish poetic rendition of the Alexander romance. It includes a universal history covering the early years of Islam, the history of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, and the Ottoman dynasty's formative years.

Aĥmadī did not intend for his work to be seen as a historical account, but rather a literary one. This explains the countless historical inaccuracies found in his *Iskendernāme*, where he mixes up the names and genealogies of most Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs.¹⁶ Moreover, he includes traditions that are not found in any earlier source. Among the many innovative elements in his narrative is the claim that Mu'āwiya betrayed the Prophet's trust during his lifetime and was exiled, contradicting all established early Islamic accounts, including Shī'ite ones. Nonetheless, the *Iskendernāme* is evidently more a morality tale than anything else.¹⁷ After his treatment of Yazīd's reign, which shall be analyzed later in this study, he digresses to discuss the attributes of an ideal ruler. Aĥmadī's reliance on limited sources reflects his focus on crafting a compelling narrative rather than a rigorous historical account.¹⁸ Despite its inaccuracies, the *Iskendernāme* remains a landmark work in Ottoman literary and historiographical

¹⁴ Vefa Erginbař, "The Appropriation of Islamic History and Ahl-al-Baytism in the Ottoman Historical Writing, 1300-1650," PhD diss., (Ohio State University, 2013), 32.

¹⁵ For more information on the *Iskendernāme*, see: Caroline Sawyer, "Alexander, History, and Piety: A Study of Aĥmadī's 14th-Century Ottoman *Iskendernāme*," PhD diss., (Columbia University, 1997).

¹⁶ Erginbař, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 33.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

traditions. Its portrayal of the Ottoman dynasty's rise laid the foundation for later historiography, ensuring its enduring influence.¹⁹

Another early *Rūmī* poet, Yāzījī Oghlū (Yazıcıoğlu) Meḥmed (d. 855/1451), was a venerated Sufi figure active in the first half of the 9th/15th century.²⁰ Although his birth date and exact place of origin remain uncertain, it is speculated that he was born in Qāḍī Köy, located in the Thracian district of Mālkarā. After pursuing advanced studies in Persia and Transoxania, he settled in Gallipoli, where he became a *murīd* (novice) of Ḥajjī Bayrām (d. 833/1430), likely encountering him during one of his visits to the region.²¹ Yāzījī Oghlū passed away in 855/1451, leaving a rich poetic corpus behind. His most notable work, *Maghārib al-Zamān*, was originally composed in Arabic prose but was later translated into Turkish verse under the title *al-Risāla al-Muḥammadiyya*, commonly referred to as the *Muḥammadiyya*.²² The original Arabic version is no longer extant. While it incorporates Sufi elements, its overarching approach is firmly orthodox, adhering to the Qur'ān and the authentic Sunnah.²³ The poem addresses profound themes typically found in Sufi poems, as well as the life of the Prophet Muḥammad and his immediate family, and the reigns of the four *Rāshidūn* (rightly guided) caliphs.

Similar to Aḥmadī's *Iskendernāme*, the *Muḥammadiyya* was not intended to be a history. It presents events in a moralistic manner rather than a historical one, avoiding

¹⁹ Halil İnalçık, "The Rise of Ottoman Historiography," in *Historians of the Middle East*, eds. Bernard Lewis and Peter Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 161.

²⁰ Edith Ambros, "Yazıdjī-Oghlu," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. Peri Bearman (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

²¹ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 45.

²² For more info on the *Muḥammadiyya*, see: Âmil Çelebioğlu, "Yazici-oğlu Mehmed ve Muhammediye'si," PhD diss., (Atatürk Üniversitesi, 1971).

²³ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 46.

details unless there is a moral to be learned. Unlike Aḥmadī, however, the sources Yāzījī Oghlū utilized were much greater in quantity and quality, at least in terms of their perceived authority.²⁴ For instance, in his account of early Islamic history, Orthodox Sunnī *ḥadīth* compilations, such as the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* (two *Ṣaḥīḥs*) of Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/875), are utilized.²⁵ Despite the brevity of its early Islamic history sections, the *Muḥammadiyya* clearly depicts Yāzījī Oghlū's attitude towards Yazīd.

The last *Rūmī* scholar to be covered from the fifteenth century is Shukrullāh Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad (d. 894/1488), a historian who was active during and under the patronage of Sultan Mehmed II (d. 886/1481). Shukrullāh's only work is *Bahjat al-Tawārīkh* (henceforth *Bahja*), an encyclopedic universal history book written in Persian.²⁶ In his work, he provides glimpses into his life, recording that he entered Ottoman service at twenty-two and served for fifty-one years, completing his history at seventy-three. This places his birth around 790/1388. Shukrullāh began writing his *Bahja* in 861/1456, completing it two years later. While he does not explicitly explain his decision to write in Persian, it is likely influenced by his patron's evident fondness for the language. After all, Persian was the language of scholarly discourse in fifteenth-century Ottoman Anatolia. Scholars who did not write in Persian tried their best to imitate Persian models.²⁷ Nonetheless, Shukrullāh's proficiency in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish reflects a sophisticated education.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 47.

²⁶ Ibid., 56.

²⁷ Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, trans. Ralph Manheim, ed. William C. Hickman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 412.

²⁸ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 56.

Shukrullāh claims that some sixty sources, including works of Qur'ānic exegesis, *ḥadīth* compilations, and historical texts were consulted before writing his *Bahja*. He criticizes earlier works as “too long,” asserting that his work is, in contrast, concise and sufficient. He begins with the creation of the universe, before moving on to the life of Prophet Muḥammad, the eponymous founders of the four Sunnī schools of jurisprudence, and the compilers of the six canonical *ḥadīth* collections.²⁹ Moreover, he covers the history of various peoples and empires, including the Persians, Chinese, Indians, Ethiopians, Turks, and Arabs. When it comes to his section on the grandkids of the Prophet, al-Ḥasan (d. 49/669) and al-Ḥusayn, Shukrullāh covers them only briefly. This also applies to his coverage of the *Rāshidūn* caliphs. The longest part of his work, however, concerns Sufi figures, where he outlines the lives of 107 Sufi masters, a clear indication of his mystical tendencies.³⁰ The *Bahja*'s most notable attribute is its critical approach to its sources, distinguishing it as the first Ottoman history to do so.³¹

Born roughly a century after Shukrullāh, Muṣṭafā al-Jannābī (d. 999/1590-91), also known as Cenābī, was an Ottoman historian who significantly influenced the historical writing tradition of his time.³² While the exact date and place of his birth remain uncertain, it is highly likely that he was born in Bursa, where his father Emīr Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf al-Amāsī (d. 976/1568) worked as a professor.³³ Little is known about Jannābī's

²⁹ Ibid., 62.

³⁰ Ibid., 65.

³¹ Ibid., 59.

³² For a detailed study on Muṣṭafā Cenābī, see: Mehmet Canatar, “Müverrih Cenābī Mustafa Efendi ve Cenābī Tarihi,” PhD diss., (Ankara University, 1993).

³³ Mehmet Canatar, “Mustafa Cenabi,” *Historians of the Ottoman Empire*, 2005, <https://ottomanhistorians.uchicago.edu/tr/historian/mustafa-cenabi>.

early life and education; however, one can assume that he was taught by his father during his childhood.³⁴ Later, he studied for an extended period in Istanbul under *Shaykh al-Islām* Abū al-Su‘ūd Efendi (d. 982/1574).³⁵ In 969/1562, Jannābī accompanied his father to Edirne, where he met numerous scholars and Sufī masters. After spending over a decade as a teacher in the city, he was appointed as a judge in Aleppo in 995/1587, likely owing to his connection to Abū al-Su‘ūd Efendi. According to Kātīb Chelebī (d. 1068/1657), he passed away in 999/1590-91.³⁶

Jannābī’s most notable work is a universal history which consists of an introduction and eighty-two chapters, each chapter representing a state, dynasty, or empire.³⁷ Commenting on his work, Kātīb Chelebī stated, “I have never seen the history of so many kingdoms combined in one book.”³⁸ This work has no known title, with many varieties used by historians throughout the years. *Al-Ḥāfil al-Waṣīt wa-al-Aylām al-Zāhir al-Muhīt* and *al-‘Ilm al-Zākhir fī Aḥwāl al-Awā’il wa-al-Awākhir* are two examples. However, the most prominent title used to refer to the book is *Tārīkh al-Jannābī*, which is what I will utilize henceforth. Jannābī started working on his magnum opus in 1564 and finished it in 1577-1578, taking well over a decade. This should not come as a surprise considering the breadth of the work.³⁹ What is even more fascinating about *Tārīkh al-*

³⁴ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 136.

³⁵ “Shaykh al-Islām” was an honorific title used in the Islamic world up until the early 20th century, applied essentially to religious dignitaries. In the Ottoman Empire, however, the title was most famously associated with the Ottoman office of the Grand *Muftī* of the Empire. See, Richard Repp, *The Mufti of Istanbul* (London: Ithaca Press, 1986).

³⁶ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 136.

³⁷ Kātīb Chelebī, *Kashf al-Zunūn ‘an Asāmī al-Kutub wa al-Funūn*, ed. Muḥammad Sharaf al-Dīn Yalṭaqaḳyā and Rif‘at Bilge al-Kilisī, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Wikālat al-Ma‘ārif, 1941-1943), 291.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 137.

Jannābī is the fact that it was composed in Arabic, something completely unusual for an Ottoman historian of the sixteenth century. Up until *Jannābī*'s time, all Ottoman universal histories were compiled in Turkish or Persian. Arabic, on the other hand, was primarily used in Ottoman madrasas for religious scholarship and instruction, not for historical writing.⁴⁰ Once the content of the book is closely scrutinized, however, one understands why *Jannābī* chose Arabic as his medium.

Jannābī's work diverges from all previous Ottoman histories in that it follows the Arabic historical tradition, highlighting his utmost respect for it. He does not follow the usual Ottoman method of combining literature with history writing; rather, he chooses to emulate Arab historians instead.⁴¹ Throughout his work, *Jannābī* lists a plethora of contradictory narratives and accounts related to a certain event or figure and, in most cases, analyses these reports and draws his own conclusions. One can immediately see the extensive list of works *Jannābī* had access to in compiling his history by reading the section on the life of the Prophet.⁴² This type of source-critical approach was indeed alien to Ottoman historians. Nonetheless, *Jannābī* successfully set a precedent for later historians such as Muṣṭafā 'Ālī (d. 1008/1600) and Kātib Chelebī.⁴³

In this study, I am only interested in *Jannābī*'s section on early Islamic history and the sources he utilized to compose it. Interestingly, his Umayyad section is the only part where he does not refer to any source.⁴⁴ Moreover, he does not offer alternative accounts

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 137-8.

⁴² Ibid., 140-1.

⁴³ Ibid., 149.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 152-3.

of any of the events he recorded. It seems that Jannābī was not too interested in the Umayyad dynasty's history, perhaps due to its harsh treatment of *ahl al-bayt* and their descendants, whom Jannābī held in high regard.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, one can assume that some of the sources Jannābī listed in his section on the life of the Prophet were used in this section as well. This includes *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa-al-Mulūk* of al-Ṭabarī and *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* of Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233).

Another Ottoman figure whose career had clear resemblances to Jannābī's was Muṣṭafā 'Ālī.⁴⁶ Muṣṭafā b. Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Mawlā was an Ottoman poet, historian, and civil servant. He was born in Gelibolu (Gallipoli) in 1541 to a rich merchant family and received an excellent education at Istanbul's finest madrasas.⁴⁷ However, rather than pursuing a traditional scholarly career, he sought opportunities at the court of Prince Selim, later Sultan Selim II (d. 982/1574). In Konya and Kütahya, he presented Selim with his first collection of Persian poetry but was only appointed as a clerk in the prince's administration. He later secured the patronage of Selim's tutor, Lālā Muṣṭafā Pāṣa (d. 988/1580), who employed him as a private secretary.⁴⁸ For the next two decades, Muṣṭafā 'Ālī accompanied his patron to various posts, including Aleppo, Damascus, Cairo, and Istanbul, and even joined him on a military campaign in the Caucasus against the Safavids. Following Muṣṭafā Pāṣa's death in 988/1580, 'Ālī had to rely on other influential figures, most notably the historian and *Shaykh al-Islām* Khoca Sa'd al-Dīn

⁴⁵ Ibid., 152.

⁴⁶ For a detailed study on Muṣṭafā 'Ālī, see: Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁴⁷ Jan Schmidt, "Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three Online*, eds. K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas, and D. J. Stewart (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Efendi (d. 1008/1599).⁴⁹ Through his support, ‘Ālī secured a series of bureaucratic posts in Aleppo, Erzurum, Baghdad, and Sivas. Yet, none of these positions met his aspirations for a prestigious role in Istanbul or the governorship of Egypt. ‘Ālī’s career reflects his remarkable literary productivity and his persistent quest for recognition and high office within the Ottoman imperial system.⁵⁰

‘Ālī was a prolific writer who produced over fifty works in prose and poetry. He adopted the ambitious pen name ‘Ālī, meaning ‘exalted,’ as his poetry was widely regarded as among the finest of his time.⁵¹ This study, however, will focus on his world history, which he completed during his later years in Istanbul. The work, titled *Kunh al-Akhhbār*, is a four-volume world history composed in Turkish. He lists 600 works which he consulted to write his magnum opus in his introduction, showing his proficiency in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian.⁵² In his section on early Islamic history, ‘Ālī gives one of the most detailed accounts of the Umayyad caliphate, utilizing the same sources used by Jannābī. He even employs narratives of Umayyad caliphs and their rule to draw parallels to his own times.⁵³ His style highly resembles that of Aḥmadī’s *Iskender-nāme*, where strong emphasis is given to storytelling. ‘Ālī’s narrative style was such that he often strayed from the primary chronological account, inserting lengthy narratives purely for the sake of the tale itself. Nevertheless, in his section on Yazīd, ‘Ālī emulates the Arab historical tradition and opts for listing traditions and commenting on their authenticity

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 157.

⁵² Ibid., 159.

⁵³ Ibid., 161-163.

instead of offering a literary narrative.⁵⁴ How this affected his view on the second Umayyad caliph will be discussed later in this study.

The popularity of universal histories continued well into the seventeenth century with Meḥmed b. Meḥmed Edirnevī's (d. 1051/1641) *Nukhbat al-Tawārīkh wa-al-Akhhbār* (henceforth *Nukhba*). Very little biographical information is known about Edirnevī, besides what he stated in the introduction of his work.⁵⁵ He says he was employed as a scribe in the Ottoman court during the reign of Murad IV (d. 1049/1640) and served in the retinue of Ḥāfiẓ Aḥmad Pasha (d. 1041/1632) for over twenty years.⁵⁶ Later in his career, he served as a madrasa professor, likely in Edirne, and also identified himself as a *muḥāsib* (a financial scribe). According to Kātib Chelebī, *Nukhba* was completed in 1030/1620 and presented to Osman II (d. 1031/1622).⁵⁷ Fortunately, one can easily figure out the sources utilized by Edirnevī in his section on early Islam.

According to Kātib Chelebī, the *Nukhba* is largely a reproduction of Jannābī's history with some additional material. However, in his sections on early Islamic history, Edirnevī primarily relied on Muṣliḥ al-Dīn al-Lārī's (d. 979/1572) *Mir'āt al-Adwār wa-Mirḳāt al-Akhhbār*, a universal history in Persian, as his main source.⁵⁸ Apart from al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*, al-Lārī's sources were mainly a score of Mamluk and Ayyubid chronicles: Ismā'īl Abū al-Fidā's (d. 732/1331) *al-Mukhtaṣar fī Akhhbār al-Bashar*, Badr

⁵⁴ Ibid., 165.

⁵⁵ For a comprehensive study on Edirnevī, see: Abdurrahman Sağırlı, "Meḥmed b. Meḥmed er-Rumi (Edirneli)'nin Nuhbetu't-tevarih ve'lahbarı ve Tarih-i Al-i Osman (Metinleri, Tahlilleri)," unpublished PhD diss., (Istanbul University, 2000).

⁵⁶ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 201.

⁵⁷ Kātib Chelebī, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, 2:1936.

⁵⁸ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 203.

al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad al-‘Aynī’s (d. 855/1451) *‘Iqd al-Jumān fī Tārīkh ahl al-Zamān*, Abū al-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf ibn Taghrībīrdī’s (d. 874/1470) *al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah*, Al-Sakhāwī’s (d. 902/1497) *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Mu’ayyad*, al-Suyūṭī’s (d. 911/1505) *Tārīkh al-Khulafā’*, Ibn Kathīr’s *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, and al-Dhababī’s *Tārīkh al-Islām*.⁵⁹ Because of this source base, Edirnevī pays great attention to medieval Muslim dynasties. His *Nukhba* begins with the life of the Prophet and continues up to his time, covering every major Muslim dynasty in the millennium that separated them.⁶⁰ Indeed, Lārī’s ideas heavily influenced Edirnevī’s own thinking, which will be investigated in the coming chapters.

The last and most reputed Ottoman scholar to be covered in this study is Kātib Chelebī, also known as Ḥajjī Khalīfa.⁶¹ Born in Istanbul in 1609, he became the leading representative of a changing Ottoman intellectual tradition.⁶² He began his education early, attending formal studies around five or six years old. At the tender age of fourteen, he embarked on an apprenticeship within the Anadolu Muḥāsebesi’s office, kickstarting his bureaucratic career. His early life intertwined with military service, due to being the son of a soldier.⁶³ In 1624, at the age of fifteen, he accompanied the Ottoman army on a campaign against the rebellious governor Ābāza Meḥmed Pasha. Two years later, he participated in the Baghdad campaign, a poignant period marked by the loss of his father

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 204.

⁶¹ Kātib Chelebī gives his full autobiography in *Mizān al-Ḥaqq*. He also gives scattered information about himself in *Sullam al-Wuṣūl* and *Fadhlakat al-Tawārīkh*.

⁶² Orhan Şaik Gökyay, “Kātib Čelebi,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. Peri Bearman (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

⁶³ Ibid.

in Mosul during their return journey. Despite this personal loss, he continued his service in the Ottoman government, managing to get promoted the same year.⁶⁴ Returning to Istanbul in 1628-9, he eagerly sought intellectual enrichment, attending the lectures of the esteemed scholar Qāḍīzāde Meḥmed (d. 1045/1635), an experience that profoundly impacted him. After a decade of dedicated military service, a fortuitous inheritance enabled him to relinquish his military duties and immerse himself fully in scholarly pursuits. He diligently attended lectures from various esteemed scholars, before resigning from his government position due to stagnation in his career.⁶⁵

Despite passing away at forty-eight, Kātib Chelebī left many encyclopedic works that had a lasting effect on later Ottoman intellectuals.⁶⁶ His most notable works include *Kashf al-Zunūn ‘an Asāmī al-Kutub wa-al-Funūn*, a bibliographical dictionary with over 14,500 entries, and *Fadhlakat Aqwāl al-Akhyār fī ‘Ilm al-Ta’rīkh wa-al-Akhhbār*, or *Fadhlakat al-Tawārīkh*, a universal history compiled from 1300 sources.⁶⁷ However, for the sake of this study, I will be looking at *Mīzān al-Ḥaqq fī Ikhtiyār al-Aḥaqq* (henceforth *Mīzān al-Ḥaqq*), a discussion of various questions which at the time were causing violent controversy, and *Sullam al-Wuṣūl ilā Ṭabaqāt al-Fuḥūl* (henceforth *Sullam al-Wuṣūl*), a compendium of biographies in Arabic, arranged alphabetically and compiled from over one-hundred sources.⁶⁸ I have chosen not to engage with his larger works, as their content

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

is largely reiterated in these two sources, particularly in *Mīzān al-Ḥaqq*, where he devotes an entire chapter to the issue of cursing Yazīd.

1.3.2. Steeped in Hadith Methodology: Yazīd in Syrian Historical Sources

The interest of Sunnī Muslim scholars of *Bilād al-Shām* in the Yazīd question is no less pronounced. If anything, it may be even greater than that of their *Rūmī* counterparts, owing to the greater local relevance of Umayyad history. Born in 661/1263, *Shaykh al-Islām* Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya was one of the most influential Muslim theologians in history.⁶⁹ He was a prominent Ḥanbalī jurist raised in Damascus after his family fled the Mongol invasions. Renowned for his staunch opposition to religious innovations (*bid‘a*) and his emphasis on strict adherence to the Qur’ān and Sunnah, he critiqued Ash‘arism, *kalām* (speculative reasoning), and saint veneration in his works.⁷⁰ He was deeply involved in political and social activism, issuing *fatwas* (legal rulings) and leading campaigns against the Mongols and other threats to Islam. His controversial views led to multiple imprisonments, particularly for his positions on anthropomorphism and *ṭalāq* (divorce). Despite facing significant opposition, his influence persisted, shaping Islamic reformist thought. He died in Damascus in 728/1328, leaving behind a substantial corpus of writings that continue to impact Islamic scholarship.⁷¹

Towards the end of 716/1317, Ibn Taymiyya became involved in a controversy surrounding Ḥumayḍa, the ruler of Mecca, who had entered into an agreement with the

⁶⁹ For extensive studies on Ibn Taymiyya, see the works of Jon Hoover.

⁷⁰ Henri Laoust, “Ibn Taymiyya,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. Peri Bearman (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Īlkhān Khudābanda (d. 716/1316), the ruler of the Ilkhanate.⁷² Khudābanda was a convert to Islam who initially adhered to Sunnism but later adopted Shī‘ism, becoming a significant figure in the promotion of Shī‘ite beliefs within the Muslim world. His agreement with Ḥumayḍa aimed to promote policies in Mecca that were favorable to Shī‘ism, prompting a strong reaction from Ibn Taymiyya.⁷³ It was likely during this period that the *Minhāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya* (henceforth *Minhāj al-Sunna*) was authored, a work in which Ibn Taymiyya critiques Shī‘ite theology. The book was written in response to al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī’s (d. 726/1325) *Minhāj al-Karāma fī Ma‘rifat al-Imāma*. Al-Ḥillī’s work defends the concept of *Imāmate*, particularly the notion that the leadership of the Muslim community after the Prophet should be divinely appointed.⁷⁴ In his *Minhāj al-Sunna*, Ibn Taymiyya comprehensively responds to al-Ḥillī’s attacks on Yazīd, making his work a valuable resource for this study.⁷⁵

One of Ibn Taymiyya’s most prominent students, Shams al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Dimashqī al-Shāfi‘ī, known as al-Dhahabī, was born in 673/1274 in Damascus to a rich and prestigious family of Turkmen origins.⁷⁶ Al-Dhahabī was so widely respected as a historian and *ḥadīth* expert that his biographers often described him as “the traditionist of his age” (*muḥaddith al-‘aṣr*). During his celebrated academic career, he assumed multiple posts as a preacher and instructor in numerous prestigious

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ For a study of al-Ḥillī, his works, and his theology, see: Sabine Schmidtke, *The Theology of al-‘Allāma Al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325)* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1991).

⁷⁵ For a study on Ibn Taymiyya’s *Minhāj al-Sunna*, see: Roy Vilozy, “Some Remarks on Ibn Taymiyya’s Acquaintance with Imāmī Shī‘ism in light of his *Minhāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*,” *Der Islam* 97, 2 (2020).

⁷⁶ Caterina Bori, “al-Dhahabī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three Online*, eds. K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas and D. J. Stewart (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

institutions throughout the Levant. His first post, acquired in 703/1304, was that of a preacher in the mosque of Kafr Baṭnā, a village near Damascus.⁷⁷ Fifteen years later, he was appointed to one of the most renowned schools in Damascus, Madrasat al-Ṣāliḥiyya, as an instructor of the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and Shāfi'ī *fiqh* (jurisprudence). Later on in his career, he assumed positions in Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Zāhiriyya, Dār al-Ḥadīth wa-al-Qur'ān al-Tankiziyya, and Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Nāfisiyya.⁷⁸

Al-Dhahabī was an exceptionally productive scholar, primarily recognized for his contributions to biographies, history, and the study of *ḥadīth*. His work reflects the intellectual climate of his era, where historical biographies formed a significant part of historical literature.⁷⁹ Alongside these major contributions, he authored a range of lesser-studied theological, moral, didactic, and polemical texts, which provide valuable insight into his early role as a preacher and teacher. Additionally, al-Dhahabī compiled a remarkable number of abridgments (*mukhtaṣarāt*), either of his own writings or those of earlier scholars, as well as specialized *ḥadīth* collections and commentaries focused on particular themes or drawn from specific sources (*takhārīj*).⁸⁰

This study will examine three of his works where he addresses Yazīd's controversial personality and actions. The first is *Tārīkh al-Islām*, a historical work devoted to documenting the periods and regions where Islam emerged and thrived.⁸¹ It begins with the life of the Prophet Muḥammad and concludes in 700/1300–1. The book

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ For a study of al-Dhahabī's *Tārīkh*, see: Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf, *al-Dhahabī wa-Manhajuhu fī Kitābihi Tārīkh al-Islām*, ed. 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī (Baghdad: University of Baghdad, 1976).

is divided into seventy *ṭabaqāt* (classes or generations), typically spanning ten years each. Significant events are interwoven within these sections with obituaries of individuals who passed away during that time. The text places far greater emphasis on biographical accounts than on historical events. In the introduction, al-Dhahabī outlines his sources, including several of his earlier histories' abridgments.⁸² *Tārīkh al-Islām* was regarded by his contemporaries as his most significant achievement, earning him the title “the historian of Islam” (*mu'arrikh al-Islām*) among his peers.⁸³

The second work to be investigated is *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'* (henceforth *Siyar*), mainly accepted as al-Dhahabī's second masterpiece in history and biography. Similar to his *Tārīkh*, the *Siyar* is a massive collection of biographies organized in thirty-five classes, from the Companions to the year 700/1300–1.⁸⁴ It gathers the biographies of prominent Sunnī scholars as well as those of Shī'īs, Mu'tazilīs, and Zāhirīs. Moreover, it includes biographies of philosophers, kings, poets, grammarians, and doctors amongst others. Although it shares much with his *Tārīkh*, *Siyar* contains exclusive material not found in any of his other works. The third and final relevant work to this study is his *Mīzān al-I'tidāl fī Naqd al-Rijāl* (henceforth *Mīzān*), al-Dhahabī's most famous work in the science of traditionists. It contains an alphabetically arranged evaluation of traditionists who were considered weak. His inclusion of Yazīd in this book speaks volumes of his perception towards the Umayyad caliph. His evaluation will be further studied in the coming chapters.

⁸² Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 1:11-16.

⁸³ Caterina Bori, “al-Dhahabī,” in *EI3*.

⁸⁴ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, 1:7-140.

Another student of Ibn Taymiyya who achieved great fame in scholarship is ‘Imād al-Dīn Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar ibn Kathīr, a Shāfi‘ī historian, *ḥadīth* expert, and *mufasssīr*.⁸⁵ Ibn Kathīr’s career is quite similar to al-Dhahabī’s in many ways. He was born around 701/1301 in the town of Buṣrā and moved to Damascus to begin his education at a very young age.⁸⁶ In Damascus, he studied under a plethora of well-established Shāfi‘ī jurists like Burhān al-Dīn al-Fazārī (d. 729/1329), ‘Alam al-Dīn al-Qāsim al-Birzālī (d. 739/1339), Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341), and al-Dhahabī. Much like his teachers, he did not concern himself with the rational sciences of scholastic theology (*kalām*) and philosophy.⁸⁷ Instead, he focused more on developing the various branches of *ḥadīth*, from histories to biographical dictionaries. Ibn Kathīr’s relationship with al-Dhahabī was especially strong, choosing to regularly cite him in his works and succeeding him as the teacher of *ḥadīth* at Madrasat al-Şāliḥiyya. Moreover, he was a friend of the student most closely affiliated with Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), and considered him to be one of his dearest companions.⁸⁸

Although Ibn Kathīr never held an official government position, he was frequently sought out by state officials for his counsel, particularly by the Mamluk ruler Sayf al-Dīn Manjak (d. 764/1362-3). In 759/1358, for example, he was among the scholars and jurists consulted about the *amīr*’s proposal to demolish houses whose bathrooms were

⁸⁵ For a detailed study on Ibn Kathīr, see: Younus Mirza, “Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373): His intellectual circle, major works, and Qur’ānic exegesis,” PhD diss., (Georgetown University, 2012).

⁸⁶ Younus Mirza, “Ibn Kathīr, ‘Imād al-Dīn,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three Online*, eds. K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas and D. J. Stewart (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ ‘Imād al-Dīn Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, ed. Faraj Allāh al-Kurdī, vol. 14 (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sa‘āda, 1929-1939), 230.

contaminating the city's drinking water supply.⁸⁹ During the revolt of the *amīr* Baydamūr in 762/1361, Ibn Kathīr offered a *fatwa* advocating reconciliation and compromise. Later, when Baydamūr regained his post in 766/1365, Ibn Kathīr participated in commemorating the event by overseeing public readings of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* in Damascus.⁹⁰ Similarly, during the 767/1365 trial of the prominent Shāfi'ī judge Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), Ibn Kathīr was asked about the judge's character and defended him, asserting that he had only ever known him to be upright.⁹¹

Ibn Kathīr's key works aimed to align the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* more closely with *ḥadīth* by drawing on the contributions of earlier Shāfi'ī traditionists.⁹² As a prolific scholar of the Mamluk era, his extensive writings spanned fields such as history, *ḥadīth*, Qur'ānic exegesis, and Islamic law. The majority of his works were scholarly references intended for specialists, with only a small number created for educational purposes. This study will analyze Ibn Kathīr's most important historical work, his universal history *al-Bidāya wa-l-Nihāya*. The work starts at the beginning of time with the creation of Adam and then concludes at the end of Ibn Kathīr's life. It became so significant that many later historical works, such as the Egyptian Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's (d. 852/1449) *Inbā' al-Ghumr bi-Anbā' al-'Umr*, were based on it. When it comes to his section on Yazīd and early Islamic history, Ibn Kathīr followed the methodology of only listing traditions related to a figure and/or event as long as they were accepted as *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound). However, he occasionally included unauthentic accounts and clarified why they were considered

⁸⁹ Ibid., 14:255.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 14:302.

⁹¹ Ibid., 14:306.

⁹² Younus Mirza, "Ibn Kathīr, in *EI3*.

unreliable. He utilized all early Islamic historical works and gathered as many traditions as possible. This methodology significantly affected his, and other traditionists', views toward Yazīd, leading to a unique stance on the early controversies of Islam.

A few generations later, another Damascene scholar who produced scholarship on Yazīd was Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Aḥmad, known as Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 953/1546). Ibn Ṭūlūn was a renowned scholar during his lifetime known as a teacher of *ḥadīth* and Islamic jurisprudence.⁹³ In modern scholarship, he is especially valued for his historical works documenting the transition from Mamluk rule to Ottoman control in Syria. His autobiography, *al-Fulk al-Mashḥūn fī Aḥwāl Muḥammad b. Ṭūlūn*, provides valuable insights into his intellectual growth and the traditional Islamic educational system of the time. Born in al-Ṣāliḥiyya, a Damascus suburb on Mount Qāsiyūn, Ibn Ṭūlūn came from a scholarly family.⁹⁴ His paternal uncle, Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Ṭūlūn, was a *qāḍī* (judge) and *mufī* (jurist) of the Palace of Justice (Dār al-ʿAdl). Raised by his father and uncle, he displayed early intellectual promise, completing his Qurʾānic studies by the age of seven and receiving a stipend from the *waqf* of the Māridāniyya madrasa as a student of jurisprudence at just eleven years old.⁹⁵

Throughout his life, Ibn Ṭūlūn held various religious teaching and administrative roles. He avoided high-profile positions and, towards the end of his life, declined offers such as preacher at the Umayyad Mosque or Ḥanafī *mufī* of Damascus, citing his advanced age.⁹⁶ He dedicated most of his life to scholarship and writing, steering clear of

⁹³ William Brinner, "Ibn Ṭūlūn," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three Online*, ed. Peri Bearman (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

political entanglements under both the Mamluks and Ottomans. His scholarly breadth and prolific output mirror that of his Egyptian contemporary, al-Suyūṭī, from whom he received an *ijāza*.⁹⁷ In his autobiography, he meticulously records the scholars he studied with and the books he read, spanning at least thirty disciplines, including traditional Islamic sciences, medicine, and astronomy. His writings, numbering over 750 works, ranged from brief treatises to extensive volumes, though many are now lost.⁹⁸ For this study, *al-Qayd al-Sharīd min Akhbār Yazīd* (henceforth *al-Qayd al-Sharīd*) is of particular importance. As one of Ibn Ṭūlūn’s surviving treatises, it focuses exclusively on Yazīd, his life, reign, virtues, and immoralities. As this is the only source solely dedicated to Yazīd, his legacy, and the traditions circulating about him, it will be examined in greater detail. The subsequent analysis will delve deeply into this work, investigating Ibn Ṭūlūn’s methodology and sources.

It is unclear when and why Ibn Ṭūlūn composed this treatise, as he does not address these details in his introduction. However, one can speculate that the rise of the Safavids under Shāh Ismā‘īl (d. 930/1524) and the spread of Shī‘ism in Persia played a significant role, and perhaps some of the evidence within the text itself points to this interpretation.⁹⁹ Alternatively, the treatise could have been a response to scholarly debates in Ibn Ṭūlūn’s circle about the permissibility of cursing Yazīd.¹⁰⁰ What we know,

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ For a probe into Ibn Ṭūlūn’s autograph manuscripts, see Kristina Richardson, “Reconstructing the Autograph Corpus of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Ṭūlūn,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135, 2 (2015).

⁹⁹ Ibn Ṭūlūn’s hostility towards Shī‘ites is well-documented in numerous instances in his work, where he employs a polemical tone to counter their claims and arguments. These instances will be further highlighted in subsequent chapters.

however, is his methodology and sources. Ibn Ṭūlūn followed a similar method to those of al-Dhahabī and Ibn Kathīr, choosing to list all traditions and accounts he found in previous works that were related to a certain event. Regarding the sources, some thirty historians and histories were mentioned. Unfortunately, however, Ibn Ṭūlūn often mentioned the authors of sources he quoted without mentioning the specific works to which he was referring. Those authors include: ‘Aṭā’ b. al-Sā’ib (d. 136/753), Abū Bakr b. ‘Ayyāsh (d. 193/809), al-Wāqidi (d. 207/823), Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Madā’inī (d. 225/840), al-‘Utbī (d. 228/842), Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī (d. 261/875), al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū Ya‘lā (d. 307/919), al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971), al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1176), Abū ‘Umar ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d. 643/1245), Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī (d. 676/1278), Ibn Muflīḥ (d. 763/1362), Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390), Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī (d. 795/1393), Abū Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Shāfi‘ī, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ardabīlī, Abū al-Qāsim al-Taymī, al-Ṭalḥī al-Aṣbahānī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Dhahabī.

Concerning the content of the treatise, which consists of seventeen folios, Ibn Ṭūlūn begins with Yazīd’s lineage and early life, including his mother’s pregnancy, his parents’ divorce and remarriage, his childhood, and his physical build.¹⁰¹ He then moves on to the various administrative and military responsibilities that Yazīd held during his

¹⁰⁰ In his chronicle, *Mufākahat al-Khillān*, Ibn Ṭūlūn discusses episodes of ‘*Ashūrā*’ processions by Shī‘ites in Damascus. These demonstrations led to violent controversies in the city and were firmly criticized by Ibn Ṭūlūn. See: Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahat al-Khillān*, ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1998), 71, 156, & 196.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qayd al-Sharīd min Akhbār Yazīd*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Azab (Cairo: Dār al-Ṣaḥwa li al-Nashr, 1986), 23.

father's reign, including his governorship of frontier regions in Anatolia, his participation in military expeditions, and his role as an advisor in his father's court.¹⁰² Accounts of conversations held between Yazīd and Mu'āwiya regarding the skills required to rule over a vast empire are outlined, as well as the first pledge of allegiance given to Yazīd, which happened during his father's reign.¹⁰³ Ibn Ṭūlūn lists Yazīd's virtues and vices, before moving on to various traditions that both praise and condemn the caliph.¹⁰⁴ The authenticity of many of these traditions is called into question by Ibn Ṭūlūn, demonstrating his critical approach to the sources. Multiple folios are dedicated to Yazīd's military campaign against the people of Medina led by his general Muslim ibn 'Uqba (d. 63/683) and the subsequent looting of the city.¹⁰⁵ The rest of the treatise lists the rulings of several scholars regarding the permissibility of cursing Yazīd, along with their position on his responsibility for the murder of al-Ḥusayn.¹⁰⁶

Continuing the trend of Damascene scholars, Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Yūsuf b. Aḥmad b. Sinān al-Qaramānī al-Dimashqī (d. 1019/1610-1) was a historian active in the late sixteenth century. Very little is known about al-Qaramānī; however, it is evident from his *nisbas* that he was based in Damascus and had Turkish origins. In the catalogs of manuscript libraries in Turkey, his birth date is recorded as either 939 A.H. or 966 A.H.¹⁰⁷ Kātib Chelebī writes in his biographical dictionary *Kashf al-Zunūn* that he died in

¹⁰² Ibid., 24-25.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 26-27.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 28-29.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 32-39.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 40-81.

¹⁰⁷ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 186.

1019/1610-1.¹⁰⁸ Further fueling the obscurity that surrounds him, the only work attributed to al-Qaramānī is *Akhbār al-Duwal wa-Athār al-Uwal fī al-Tārīkh* (henceforth, *Akhbār al-Duwal*). *Akhbār al-Duwal* is a universal history composed of an introduction and fifty-five sections, each further divided into numerous subsections. Like many works of its genre, it starts with the world's creation and concludes with events from the author's time.¹⁰⁹ However, rather than providing a year-by-year account, even for the author's contemporary era, it focuses more on the lives of prominent figures, with political events given less priority. Kātib Chelebī and other later historians have characterized *Akhbār al-Duwal* as an abridged version of Jannābī's history with minimal additions.¹¹⁰ However, Qaramānī added and omitted many sections in his work, offering valuable insight into his perspective on Yazīd.

Contrary to al-Jannābī, al-Qaramānī preferred to draw mainly on medieval Mamluk and Ayyubid sources rather than early *sīra* works. His section on early Islamic history mainly utilized Ibn Sa'd's (d. 230/845) *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī's (d. 276/889) *Uyūn al-Akhbār*, al-Mas'ūdī's (d. 345/956) *Murūj al-Dhahab*, al-Hākim's (d. 405/1014) *al-Mustadrak*, al-Tha'labī's (d. 427/1035) *al-Kashf wa-al-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, al-Māwardī's (d. 450/1058) *Kitāb al-Adab*, Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ's (d. 544/1149) *al-Shifā'*, Sharwīn ibn Shīrawayh's (d. 557/1163) *Kitāb Firdaws al-Akhbār bi-Ma'thūr al-Khiṭāb*, Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1201) *Nuzhat al-'Uyūn al-Nawāzīr*, Ibn 'Arabī's (d. 638/1240) *Muḥāḍarāt al-Abrār wa-Musāmarāt al-Akhyār*, Ibn 'Asākir's *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, Ibn Khallikān's (d. 681/1282) *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, Ismā'īl Abū

¹⁰⁸ Kātib Chelebī, *Kashf al-Ẓunūn 'an Asāmī al-Kutub wa-al-Funūn*, trans. Rüştü Balcı, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2007), 73.

¹⁰⁹ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 187.

¹¹⁰ Kātib Chelebī, *Kashf al-Ẓunūn*, 1:73.

al-Fidā's *al-Mukhtaṣar fī Akhbār al-Bashar*, al-Dhahabī's *Tārīkh al-Islām*, Ibn Kathīr's *al-Bidāya wa-al-Nihāya*, Jāmī's (d. 898/1492) *Shawāhid al-Nubuwwa*, and al-Suyūṭī's *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*.¹¹¹ Al-Qaramānī's wide range of sources provides insight into the methodology he used in his universal history, which is that of the Arab Damascene scholars who preceded him. For instance, when it comes to controversial events and figures such as Yazīd, al-Qaramānī presented a plethora of narrations and critiqued them. After compiling and commenting on these narrations, he outlined his position and explained his logic. In his discussion of the permissibility of cursing Yazīd, al-Qaramānī cited the rulings of Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150 /767), Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, before clarifying the stance he adopts.

The only other Ḥanbalī to be explored in this study besides Ibn Taymiyya is Abū al-Falāḥ 'Abd al-Ḥayy b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-'Ukāri al-Ṣāliḥī al-Ḥanbalī (d. 1089/1679), also known simply as Ibn al-'Imād. According to his biographical entry in al-Muḥibbī's *Khulāṣat al-Athar fī A'yān al-Qarn al-Ḥādī 'Ashar*, Ibn al-'Imād was an esteemed Damascene scholar, teacher, and biographer.¹¹² Born in 1032/1623, he possessed remarkable talent as a chronicler and was highly skilled in intellectual discussions. Ibn al-'Imād authored several works, most of which are commentaries and treatises, including his commentary on the Ḥanbalī legal text *al-Muntahā*.¹¹³ His most notable work is a biographical dictionary titled *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār Man Dhahab* (henceforth *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*). In Damascus, he was the student of many well-known scholars, including 'Abd al-Bāqī al-Ḥanbalī (d. 1071/1661) and Muḥammad

¹¹¹ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 190.

¹¹² Al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-Athar fī A'yān al-Qarn al-Ḥādī 'Ashar*, ed. Muṣṭafā Wahbī, vol. 2 (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Wahbiyya, 1867), 340.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

b. Badr al-Dīn al-Balbānī al-Ṣāliḥī (d. 1083/1673).¹¹⁴ Later in his life, Ibn al-‘Imād traveled to Cairo, where he stayed to study with its scholars for an extended period. In Cairo, he learned from Sulṭān al-Muzāḥī, al-Nūr al-Shabrāmalsī, al-Shams al-Bābilī (d. 1078/1668), al-Shihāb al-Qalyūbī (d. 1069/1659), and others. He then returned to Damascus, where he engaged in teaching and mentoring. He passed away in 1089/1679 at the age of fifty-eight while he was performing *Hajj* (pilgrimage) in Mecca.¹¹⁵

Shadharāt al-Dhahab was completed in 1080/1670 and is organized in an annalistic format. It spans the first thousand years of the *Hijrī* calendar and primarily focuses on detailed obituary notices. Ibn al-‘Imād intended the work to serve as a resource for scholars who, like himself, lacked the means to build large personal libraries.¹¹⁶ In his section on the *Hijrī* years 60-64, Ibn al-‘Imād outlines the obituaries of Yazīd, al-Ḥusayn, and other prominent figures.¹¹⁷ In Yazīd’s obituary, Ibn al-‘Imād discusses the permissibility of explicitly cursing the caliph and cites the positions of six scholars, al-Kiyā al-Harrāsī (d. 504/1110), al-Ghazālī, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245), al-Dhahabī, al-Yāfi‘ī (d. 768/1367), and al-Taftāzānī.¹¹⁸ Ibn al-‘Imād’s choice of said scholars is rather peculiar and will be discussed in further detail later in this study.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Franz Rosenthal, “Ibn al-‘Imād,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. Peri Bearman (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

¹¹⁷ Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār man Dhahab*, eds. Maḥmūd al-Arnā’ūt and ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā’ūt, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1986), 66.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 68-69.

1.4. Yazīd in Modern Historical Literature

Modern studies compiling Sunnī scholarly perceptions of Yazīd are scarce. In fact, the only contemporary study I came across was Vefa Erginbaş's 2013 PhD dissertation, which inspired most of this study's Ottoman section.¹¹⁹ Erginbaş's dissertation examines Ottoman historical narratives from the pre-1700 period that address early Islamic history, offering an analysis of how formative events in Islam were represented in Ottoman thought. The study explores Ottoman perspectives on key historical controversies, including the question of succession following the Prophet's death in 11/632, the conflict between 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Mu'āwiya, and the subsequent rise of the Umayyad dynasty.¹²⁰ It mainly focuses on sources such as universal histories, biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad, religious treatises, and other narrative texts. It also examines Ottoman interpretations of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, including significant events and figures associated with these periods.¹²¹

The study places particular emphasis on the Sunnī-Shī'ī schism. While the Ottomans are traditionally portrayed as staunch Sunnīs, Erginbaş challenges this assumption by arguing that Ottoman Sunnism was not monolithic. Instead, competing intellectual currents shaped the nature of Sunnī identity within the empire. Drawing on a range of Ottoman Turkish and Arabic manuscript sources, many previously unexamined, the dissertation reveals the complexity of Ottoman attitudes toward early Islamic history.¹²² It demonstrates that Ottoman intellectual life accommodated diverse

¹¹⁹ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-4.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 5-8.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 9-15.

perspectives. Erginbař analyzes the works of early Ottoman historians, including those studied in this thesis. A significant contribution of the dissertation is its exploration of *ahl al-baytism* in Ottoman historiography. Erginbař defines *ahl al-baytism* as the reverence Sunnī Muslims exhibited toward not only the immediate family of the Prophet Muḥammad but also the Twelve *Imāms* revered by Shī'īs. This definition was correspondingly adopted in this study. Erginbař argues that *ahl al-baytism* was a pervasive cultural phenomenon among Ottoman intellectuals, challenging the notion that the Ottomans adhered to rigidly zealous Sunnī orthodoxy. Instead, he posits that Ottoman Sunnism reflected a spectrum of viewpoints, with many scholars demonstrating an affinity for *ahl al-baytism*. This perspective reframes Ottoman religious and intellectual history, suggesting that divergent and sometimes contradictory trends coexisted within Ottoman Sunnī thought, with a notable inclination toward *ahl al-baytism*.

CHAPTER 2

BAY'Ā OR JUSTIFIED REBELLION? SCHOLARLY PERCEPTIONS OF YAZĪD'S LEGITIMACY

Sunnī Muslim scholars have long debated the legitimate means of attaining power. What distinguishes a legitimate ruler from a usurper? When can Muslims justifiably revolt and overthrow their governor? What are the duties and rights of a ruler over his subjects? Since these political issues are not explicitly and comprehensively addressed in the Qur'ān and authentic Sunnah, scholars relied on independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) to derive relevant legal rulings. As such, several works have been composed in an attempt to establish authoritative answers to these questions. One of the most prominent examples of such literature is Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī's (d. 450/1058) *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya wa al-Wilāyāt al-Dīniyya*, henceforth *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya*, translated into English by Asadullah Yate as *The Ordinances of Government*.¹²³

Al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya is one of the foundational works in Islamic political and administrative theory.¹²⁴ It was written during the Abbasid era, offering practical solutions to the political challenges of the time. It explores six central themes: the role and authority of the caliphate, the selection and legitimacy of leaders, the delegation of power, the judicial system, defense and security, and public welfare. The text significantly influenced later Islamic political theorists, such as Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), and

¹²³ For a short biography of al-Māwardī, see: Roy Jackson, "Abu Al-Hasan Ali Al-Mawardi (972–1058)," in *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹²⁴ While there is no single work on al-Māwardī and his works, several works on Islamic political thought during this particular period refer to al-Māwardī. See, among others: Ann Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Thought: The Jurists* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981).

remains a key work in Islamic studies, particularly in political studies, law, and history. In the first chapter, al-Māwardī discusses the qualifications required for a caliph, such as piety, knowledge, and competence, and emphasizes the caliph’s accountability to both God and the Muslim community. Additionally, he explains the process of selecting a caliph, citing two ways a ruler can be chosen, “*Imāmate* comes into being in two ways: the first of these is by the election of those of power and influence (*ahl al-ḥall wa-al-‘aqd*), and the second is by the delegation of the previous *Imām*.”¹²⁵ Al-Māwardī derives this ruling from the practices of the early Muslims, particularly the ascension of the *Rāshidūn* caliphs to power. The second method of choosing an *Imām*, however, is perhaps controversial, as one might argue that a ruler is naturally inclined to name his son or another family member to be his successor. Al-Māwardī acknowledges this controversy and cites three different legal opinions that address it:

If the *Imām* wants to entrust the *Imāmate* to a successor he should strive to arrive at a clear decision as to who has the greatest claim to it and who best fulfills its conditions. If, in his effort to decide, someone becomes clear to him, then this choice should be examined: if it is neither his son nor father, he may, on his own, make the contract of allegiance to him and may delegate authority to him without taking council with any of the electors. There is a difference of opinion, however, as to whether or not there must be some sign of acceptance on their part of the contracting and execution of his act of allegiance. Some of the scholars of Basra maintain that the electors’ acceptance of his transfer of allegiance must exist before it is binding on the *Ummah* (Muslim community) as it is a right that belongs to the electors and the transfer of *Imāmate* is not binding on the *Ummah* except with the acceptance of those amongst them involved in the election. The valid position is that this transfer of allegiance stands and that their acceptance of it is not taken into consideration as the act of allegiance to ‘Umar, may Allāh be pleased with him, was not dependent upon the acceptance of the Companions and as the *Imām* has more right over the *Imāmate* than them - his choice of another for the *Imāmate* takes precedence and his word in the matter is executed.

If the successor is his son or father there are three differences of opinion as to whether he is permitted to carry out the transfer of *Imāmate* alone.

¹²⁵ Al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya*, trans. Asadullah Yate (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 2006), 12.

The first of these is that it is not permitted until he has sought the counsel of the electors and they consider that he is worthy of this post: if this does happen his act of allegiance to a successor is validated as this seeking of council is like an assessment of his integrity and has the same value as a testimony and the appointment conferred on him over the *Ummah* has the same value as a legal judgment. It is not permitted that he bear witness in favor of his father or son or that he decide in their favor because of the suspicion that he will naturally show partiality towards them. According to the second, however, he may entrust the *Imāmate* to his son or father as he is the *Imām* of the *Ummah* and the executor of affairs both in their favor or against them: thus the status of this office takes precedence over that of family ties and no cause for suspicion may be entertained and no possibility of opposition to him in this matter is accepted; it is treated in the same way as his entrusting of the *Imāmate* to any person other than his son or father.

As we have already discussed above, there are two aspects as to whether or not the acceptance of the electors - made after the valid assigning of the *Imāmate* - is considered with regard to making this *Imāmate* binding on the *Ummah*. The third opinion is that it is permitted for him, acting alone, to make the contract of allegiance with his father but not with his son as he will be naturally more inclined to favor the son than the father; for this reason, everything he acquires is usually stored up for the son rather than the father. As for the transfer of the *Imāmate* to his brother or other relations amongst his kin, the ruling as to whether he may act alone in this is the same as if he were transferring it to totally unrelated persons.¹²⁶

As is evident, this ruling brings into question the legitimacy of Yazīd's caliphate. Yazīd came to power as the second caliph of the Umayyad dynasty through a combination of dynastic succession and political maneuvering by his father. It was Mu'āwiya who, following the assassination of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the resolution of the First Fitna, established the precedent of hereditary succession in the caliphate. This precedent led to many Muslims rejecting the legitimacy of Yazīd and, in some cases, pledging allegiance to rival caliphs such as 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr.

What did later scholars think of Yazīd's ascension to power? Was it perceived to be legitimate? Unfortunately, most Ottoman historians studied in this thesis, bar Muṣṭafā

¹²⁶ Ibid., 18-19.

‘Ālī and Edirnevī, do not explicitly address these questions. This is most likely due to the methodology followed by these scholars, who opted for literary narratives that emphasized moral and ethical lessons rather than providing a detailed critique of political events and figures. In contrast, Yazīd’s legitimacy was more thoroughly analyzed by *Shāmī* historians. Indeed, this issue was a recurring theme in the works of Levantine scholars, with every scholar examined in this study engaging with the topic in some capacity.

The most elaborate discussion of Yazīd’s legitimacy comes from Ibn Taymiyya who, owing to the nature of his work, employs a highly polemical tone. In his *Minhāj al-Sunna*, Ibn Taymiyya responds to al-Ḥillī’s attack on Yazīd by making a series of systemic arguments. His account reads:

As for the scholars of *ahl al-Sunnah* whose views are authoritative, none of them believe that Yazīd and others like him among the caliphs were among the rightly guided caliphs, such as Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘Ālī (may Allāh be pleased with them). Rather, *ahl al-Sunnah* believe in the *ḥadīth* found in the *Sunan*: “The caliphate of prophethood will last for thirty years, then it will become a kingdom.” If, however, one believes that Yazīd was the ruler of the majority of Muslims and their caliph in his time, the one with authority, as were others like him from the caliphs of the Umayyads and Abbasids, then this is well-known to everyone, and anyone who denies this is being stubborn. The people of Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Khurasan, and other lands of the Muslims pledged allegiance to Yazīd after the death of his father, and he became the ruler over them.

Then, when the conflict occurred between Ibn al-Zubayr and Yazīd, Ibn al-Zubayr declared his intention to claim the leadership after Yazīd’s death. During Yazīd’s life, however, he initially refused to pledge allegiance to him and then offered his allegiance later, but Yazīd did not accept unless he came to him as a prisoner. This led to the conflict between the two, and Yazīd sent forces to besiege him in Mecca until he died while Ibn al-Zubayr was still under siege. After Yazīd’s death, most Muslims pledged allegiance to Ibn al-Zubayr and he took the title of *Amīr al-*

Mu`minīn. Therefore, his rule is considered to have begun after Yazīd’s death.¹²⁷

Ibn Taymiyya claims that Ibn al-Zubayr did not rival Yazīd in his leadership, rather merely refusing to submit to him as a prisoner. Surprisingly, however, no traditions are cited to support this claim, which is unusual for a traditionist such as Ibn Taymiyya. Moreover, it is asserted that Yazīd was similar to other Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs who received the pledge of allegiance from most Muslims of their time and held power, therefore, they were legitimate rulers.

Other scholars refrained from following Ibn Taymiyya’s direct approach and resorted to other, sometimes subtle, ways to outline their position. For example, in his extensive treatise focused on Yazīd, Ibn Ṭūlūn opted to include the perspectives of other scholars rather than using his own voice. When addressing the issue of Yazīd’s legitimacy, he cites the view of a Ḥanbalī scholar, as recorded in Zayn al-Dīn Ibn Rajab’s *Dhayl Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah*. Here, Ibn Rajab narrates the *fatwa* of ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Qudsī: “His caliphate is valid.” Ibn Ṭūlūn adds, “Some scholars said: ‘Sixty of the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh pledged allegiance to him, including Ibn ‘Umar, and there is no distinguishing feature in him compared to other caliphs like ‘Abd al-Malik and his sons.’”¹²⁸ Similar to Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Ṭūlūn likens Yazīd to other Umayyad caliphs, without addressing Mu‘āwiya’s controversial decision to make the caliphate a hereditary institution. Moreover, he invokes a well-known argument in favor of Yazīd’s legitimacy:

¹²⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya fī Naqd Kalām al-Shī‘a al-Qadariyya*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, vol. 4 (Riyadh: Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, 1991), 522.

¹²⁸ Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qayd al-Sharīd*, 70.

a considerable number of the moral and religious *ṣaḥāba*, namely ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar (d. 73/693), pledged allegiance to him, thus affirming his worthiness for the caliphate.¹²⁹

Al-Dhahabī and Ibn Kathīr, on the other hand, offered their perspectives on Yazīd’s legitimacy not through direct argumentation but through the use of political titles. In his *Siyar*, al-Dhahabī uses the word ‘caliph’ to refer to Yazīd and the more prestigious *Amīr al-Mu’minīn* to refer to Ibn al-Zubayr.¹³⁰ Unfortunately, however, al-Dhahabī does not elaborate on why he used those titles or what they signify to him. It would have been instructive if the use of these titles by al-Dhahabī had occurred in a chronological schema rather than biographical entries. If that had been the case, we could have established whether the term *Amīr al-Mu’minīn* as applied to Ibn al-Zubayr precedes or post-dates Yazīd’s death.¹³¹ One can reasonably speculate that due to Yazīd’s immoral actions, which al-Dhahabī acknowledges and highlights in his biography of Yazīd, he refrained from giving him the honorific *Amīr al-Mu’minīn*. Alternatively, he might have been influenced by the widely reported tradition of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ordering twenty lashes for a man who referred to Yazīd as *Amīr al-Mu’minīn*. Nevertheless, by describing Yazīd as a caliph, al-Dhahabī effectively recognizes Yazīd as a legitimate ruler and adopts a position similar to that of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Ṭūlūn. Ibn Kathīr, on the other hand, leaves less

¹²⁹ For a detailed study of Ibn ‘Umar’s life and political endeavors, as well as the significance of his pledge of allegiance, see: Mursal Farman, “Examining Ibn ‘Umar’s stance during Fitān times and its impact: Re-reading his approaches to peace and conflict,” PhD diss., (Australian Catholic University, 2022).

¹³⁰ For Ibn al-Zubayr’s entry, see: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 3:363. For Yazīd’s entry, see: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 4:35.

¹³¹ The possibility remains that al-Dhahabī was following his mentor Ibn Taymiyya in suggesting that Ibn al-Zubayr became *Amīr al-Mu’minīn* only after Yazīd died. However, in the absence of any corroborating evidence, and taking into account the discrepancies between master and pupil in their attitudes towards Yazīd – as we shall see later – we cannot make this claim definitively. It is worth noting that a later Syrian scholar, Ibn al-‘Imād, also refers to Ibn al-Zubayr as *Amīr al-Mu’minīn*. However, this reference is clearly used for Ibn al-Zubayr’s status *after* the Umayyad caliph’s death. The entire quote and the context in which the title *Amīr al-Mu’minīn* was invoked is included below, p. 67.

room for speculation as he describes Yazīd as *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* in his universal history *al-Bidāya wa-al-Nihāya*.¹³²

On their part, Ibn al-ʿImād and al-Qaramānī were no less vague in their discussion of Yazīd's legitimacy. Ibn al-ʿImād, for instance, does not directly address the issue but rather refers to scholarly positions on the permissibility of revolting against Yazīd. In his *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, he states that the revolts of al-Ḥusayn, Ibn al-Zubayr, and the people of Mecca and Medina against Yazīd are praiseworthy by consensus.¹³³ This, however, does not reveal his position as according to some Sunnī scholars, revolting against a legitimate caliph is permissible if he is unjust and oppressive. Al-Qaramānī, on the other hand, takes a more critical stance towards Yazīd's legitimacy in his *Akhbār al-Duwal*. He merely cites the famous tradition of ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's punishment through lashing, hinting at his approval of the ruling.¹³⁴ It is therefore reasonable to assume that al-Qaramānī deemed Yazīd's caliphate as illegitimate, making him the only *Shāmī* scholar to hold this position.

In his discussion of Yazīd's legitimacy, Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī includes a critical report of the famous ascetic al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728). According to al-Baṣrī, four actions of Muʿāwiya are deemed impossible to justify: his alleged involvement in the murder of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, his supposed killing of one of the Prophet's Companions, his favoritism toward his own family, and the controversial appointment of his son Yazīd as his successor.¹³⁵ Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī also includes a report from ʿĀ'isha in which she rationalizes

¹³² Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, 14:226.

¹³³ Ibn al-ʿImād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, 1:68.

¹³⁴ Al-Qaramānī, *Akhbār al-Duwal wa Āthār al-Uwal fī al-Tārīkh*, ed. Maḥmūd Amīn al-Sayyid, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2021), 131.

Mu‘āwīya’s caliphate by noting that God sometimes bestows power upon unbelievers or sinners, citing the example of the Pharaohs ruling Egypt for centuries.¹³⁶ ‘Ālī’s level-headed approach highlights his nuanced position, seemingly justifying Yazīd’s appointment as caliph while also acknowledging its moral shortcomings. Edirnevī, on the other hand, approaches the matter in a way similar to that of al-Dhahabī and Ibn Kathīr. In his *Nukhba*’s table of contents, he chooses an unconventional way of listing Islam’s early political rulers. He begins with the life of the Prophet followed by the reigns of the four *Rāshidūn* caliphs and al-Ḥasan. Then, his next two sections are surprisingly titled “The Caliphate of al-Ḥusayn” and “The Caliphate of ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr.”¹³⁷ This line of succession, which completely overlooks the reigns of Yazīd and his predecessor, highlights Edirnevī’s *ahl al-baytism* and suggests that he outright rejects the legitimacy of all Umayyad caliphs. This impression is further reinforced when one continues reading the table of contents, where the Ottoman scholar uses the word ‘rulers’ to refer to the Umayyads and ‘caliphs’ to refer to the Abbasids.¹³⁸ Despite this, upon reading the content of his universal history, one notices an unusual discrepancy. Despite referring to al-Ḥusayn as a caliph in the table of contents, he does not use that title in his section on the Prophet’s grandson.¹³⁹ Moreover, in his biography of Ibn al-Zubayr, Edirnevī claims that the former did not become caliph until *after* Yazīd died.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, in his section on the

¹³⁵ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 164.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Mehmed b. Mehmed Edirmeli, *Nuhbetü’l-tevârih ve’l-ahbar* (Istanbul: Takvimhane-yi Âmire, 1860).

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., fol. 23.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., fol. 24.

Umayyads, he explicitly refers to Yazīd and his father as caliphs.¹⁴¹ It is unclear why such inconsistencies arise in the text, however, what we can assert with confidence is that Edirnevī recognizes Yazīd's legitimacy.

In summary, no consensus is established amongst the investigated scholars regarding Yazīd's legitimacy; however, a few takeaways can be deduced. The majority of scholars accepted Yazīd's authority and likened him to the rest of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs. Whether this is due to the legality of his appointment by his father or because he held military power over his subjects is unclear. Nevertheless, scholars rarely explicitly articulated their position, choosing instead to express their nuanced views through political titles or the citation of traditions. The tradition of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz and the title of *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* are the most prominent. Moreover, the effect of Ottoman reliance on literary narratives was on full display. The lack of a critical approach to the sources meant that most Ottoman historians did not acknowledge or reject Yazīd's caliphate, although one would assume that the majority would have chosen the latter position. Nonetheless, the subsequent chapters offer greater insight into scholarly perceptions of Yazīd, with scholars taking more straightforward positions, leaving very little room for speculation.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., fol. 4.

CHAPTER 3

TYRANT OR ENFORCER? UMAYYAD CAMPAIGNS IN THE HEJAZ UNDER YAZĪD

It was reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, and *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*, that Prophet Muḥammad said: “You should listen to and obey your ruler even if he was an Ethiopian slave whose head looks like a raisin.”¹⁴² Sunnī scholars have often cited this *ḥadīth*, among others, as evidence for the obligation upon Muslims to obey their ruler. But what if the ruler is unjust or oppressive? Would obedience still be required, or could rebellion be justified? It is hard to identify a definitive scholarly answer to this question as it has been a highly contested issue amongst Sunnī jurists. Generally, however, scholars from all four schools of jurisprudence agree that obedience is obligatory as long as the ruler is Muslim, regardless of their injustice. The great Shāfi'ī *Imām* Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī records in his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* that Sunnī scholars prohibit rebelling against a Muslim ruler even if they are corrupt or oppressive.¹⁴³ Similarly, Ibn Taymiyya in his *Minhāj al-Sunna* emphasizes the importance of patience and submission in the face of tyranny, reflecting the dominant Sunnī perspective.¹⁴⁴

The rulings of al-Nawawī and Ibn Taymiyya call the anti-Yazīd rebellions of Islam's early decades into question. As is reported in the Islamic tradition, multiple revolts were waged against the young caliph, with the most prominent example being that which was led by al-Ḥusayn. The people of Mecca and Medīna, led by Ibn al-Zubayr, were also

¹⁴² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 7142, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* 2860, and *Sunan al-Nasā'ī* 4192.

¹⁴³ Al-Nawawī, *al-Minhāj Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj*, vol. 12 (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1972), 529.

¹⁴⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, 4:529.

skeptical of Yazīd's legitimacy and refused to pledge allegiance to him. After the failure of diplomatic reconciliation between the two sides, Yazīd is said to have sent an army, fought and defeated the rebels of Medina, and sacked the city. The battle between Yazīd's army and the Medinan rebels came to be known as the Battle of al-Ḥarra, where a great score of the *ṣaḥāba* and their children were killed. Yazīd's army then moved on to Mecca and besieged the city, using catapults to assault the entrenched forces of Ibn al-Zubayr. This, however, allegedly caused damage to the Ka'ba's walls, leading to its partial destruction. Before the siege could end, news reached the besieging army that Yazīd had passed away, leading to their withdrawal.

Was the Muslim community justified in their opposition to Yazīd? More importantly, were Yazīd's evidently brutal actions in seeking to restore law and order across Muslim lands warranted? This chapter examines scholarly perceptions of Yazīd's record as a ruler, with a particular focus on his management of the rebellions that broke out in Mecca and Medina. A separate chapter will address Yazīd's response to al-Ḥusayn's revolt and the responsibility for his martyrdom, given the event's profound significance, for both Muslim sectarian and even intra-Sunni reasons.

3.1. Yazīd as Enemy of the Believers in the Ottoman Imagination

In this section, I will examine how Ottoman scholars viewed the anti-Yazīd rebellions of Mecca and Medina. The earliest example of such perceptions can be found in Aḥmadī's *Iskendernāme*, which, owing to its poetic nature, employs a highly allusive style. In just seven verses, Aḥmadī's brief portrayal of Yazīd's reign paints him as a tyrant who inflicted harm on the public, stating, "People continuously became worse due to his

cruelty, and they suffered greatly under his rule.”¹⁴⁵ Although Aḥmadī does not explicitly mention Mecca, Medina, or the rebellions, his disapproval of Yazīd’s reign and his treatment of his subjects is clear. With similar brevity, Muṣṭafā ‘Ālī echoed Aḥmadī’s position in his *Kunh al-Akhhbār*, writing that Yazīd’s attacks against the people of Mecca and Medina signal a lack of submission to Islam.¹⁴⁶

Jannābī offers a more comprehensive account in his *Tārīkh*, stating:

Ahl al-Medina revoked their pledge of allegiance to Yazīd due to his bad reputation, his consumption of alcohol, and what he did to al-Ḥusayn. After that, a great *fitna* occurred, Banū Umayya were kicked out of Medina, and Ibn al-Zubayr left for Mecca. Yazīd readied an army under Muslim ibn ‘Uqba and ordered him to fight the rebellious Medinans. If victorious, Ibn ‘Uqba was commanded to sack the city for three days and force Medinans to pledge allegiance to Yazīd as slaves and servants.

After the battle, Yazīd’s army entered the city, killed a great deal of people, looted its money, and committed *fisq* (grave sins) with women. [Ibn Shihāb] al-Zuhrī reported that those who died in the Battle of al-Ḥarra were seven hundred notables from Quraysh, *al-Muhājirūn*, and *al-Anṣār*, along with ten thousand others. On that day, one thousand women were impregnated, as reported by multiple people.¹⁴⁷

After Ibn ‘Uqba forced people to pledge allegiance to Yazīd as slaves, he prepared his army to march on Mecca. However, God swiftly struck him down and he died before he could reach the city. Today, his grave is stoned just like the grave of Abū Lahab, turning it into a pile of stones.

Ḥusayn b. Numayr al-Sakūnī replaced Ibn ‘Uqba as the military commander, leading the army in its march onto Mecca. They arrived at the city after some seventy days had passed since they left *al-Shām*. Ḥusayn tried to persuade Ibn al-Zubayr to pledge allegiance to Yazīd but he refused, later regretting his decision. Ḥusayn then besieged Mecca and attacked *al-Bayt al-Ḥarām* (Ka‘ba) with a catapult and set it on fire, may God curse him for doing such a vile act!

Yazīd’s reign did not last long after what his army did to the people of Medina, as he passed away in the month of Rabī‘ al-Awwal in the year 64. He melted away like molten lead. Indeed, the Messenger of Allāh (peace

¹⁴⁵ Aḥmadī, *Iskendernāme*, eds. Yaşar Akdoğan and Nalan Kutsal (Istanbul: Presidency of Turkish Manuscripts Institute, 2019), 774.

¹⁴⁶ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 165.

¹⁴⁷ Muṣṭafā al-Jannābī, *Tārīkh al-Jannābī*, Süleymaniye Library, MS Murad Molla 1429, 201.

be upon him) spoke the truth when he said: ‘Whoever intends harm to the people of Medina, Allāh will melt him just as salt melts in water.’¹⁴⁸

Jannābī presents a highly critical account of Yazīd’s reign, condemning both the caliph and his military commanders. Unlike some historians who suggest that Yazīd initially sought a diplomatic resolution with the Medinans before resorting to force, Jannābī omits any mention of such an approach. He further claims that more than ten thousand people were killed in the Battle of al-Ḥarra and that over one thousand women were impregnated in its aftermath. As discussed in the next section, most Arab historians dismissed these numbers as exaggerations. To highlight his criticism, al-Jannābī invokes a well-known prophetic tradition, reported in the authoritative Sunnī *ḥadīth* compilations *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, and *Sunan Ibn Mājah*.¹⁴⁹ This *ḥadīth*, which describes the fate of those who harm the people of Medina, serves as a moral reference for Ottoman historians in their assessment of Yazīd’s short-lived reign. By referencing this tradition, Jannābī aligns Yazīd’s fate with the divine retribution highlighted by the Prophet. Multiple Arab historians similarly invoked this *ḥadīth* to make sense of Yazīd’s brief rule.

3.2. A Variety of Opinions in a Single Scholarly Tradition

Unlike *Rūmī* historians’ brief accounts of Yazīd’s reign, *Shāmī* historians were much more elaborate and comprehensive in their works. Moreover, while *Rūmīs* did not address the justifiability of the Meccan and Medinan revolts, *Shāmī* scholars did not shy away from critiquing the uprisings and lamenting their consequences, most importantly,

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 202.

¹⁴⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 1877, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 1387, and *Sunan Ibn Mājah* 3114.

the shedding of Muslim blood. Ibn Taymiyya, for instance, takes an unsympathetic stance towards the rebellions in his *Minhāj al-Sunna* and writes:

The ultimate fate of these individuals, [such as Yazīd], is that they are either victorious over their enemies, or that they are defeated and then their reign is over, leaving them with no lasting legacy. For example, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Alī and Abū Muslim were responsible for the deaths of many people, and both were ultimately killed by Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr. As for the people of al-Ḥarra, Ibn al-Ash‘ath, Ibn al-Muhallab, and others, they were defeated, and their followers were also defeated. They did not [rightfully] establish their religion nor preserve their worldly affairs. And Allāh, the Almighty, does not command anything that does not result in the betterment of one’s faith or worldly affairs. Even if the one who carries out such actions is one of the righteous servants of Allāh and among the people of Paradise, [it is not praiseworthy]. [Indeed], ‘Alī, ‘Ā’isha, Talḥa, al-Zubayr, and others, were not praised for their fighting, even though they were of the highest status and had better intentions than others.¹⁵⁰

Throughout the reigns of most caliphs and kings, there were uprisings, such as during the time of Yazīd, when the killing of al-Ḥusayn occurred, the Battle of al-Ḥarra, and the siege of Ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca. During the time of Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, there was the Fitna of Marj Rāhiṭ between him and Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr. During the time of ‘Abd al-Malik, there was the Fitna of Muṣ‘ab ibn al-Zubayr and his brother ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr, and their siege in Mecca. During the time of Hishām, there was the Fitna of Zayd ibn ‘Alī. During the time of Marwān ibn Muḥammad, there was the Fitna of Abū Muslim, which eventually led to the Abbasid family gaining power. Then, during the time of al-Manṣūr, there was the Fitna of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥusayn in Medina, and his brother Ibrāhīm in Basra, followed by other rebellions, the description of which would take too long.¹⁵¹

As for what happened to the people of al-Ḥarra, when they rebelled against Yazīd and expelled his representatives and relatives, he repeatedly sent messages demanding their submission. They refused, so he sent Muslim ibn ‘Uqba and instructed him to pillage the city for three days if he emerges victorious. This is the action of Yazīd that people most strongly objected to.

That is why when Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was asked, “Will you narrate traditions from Yazīd?” he replied, “No, nor would it be appropriate.” [He added], “Is he not the one who did what he did to the people of Medina?”

However, not all of the nobility were killed, nor did the number of the dead exceed ten thousand, nor did the blood reach the Prophet’s grave, nor did

¹⁵⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, 4:528.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4:545.

it reach the *Rawḍa*, nor was the killing done inside the mosque. As for the Ka‘ba, Allāh has honored it and made it sacred, and He has not allowed anyone to dishonor it, neither before nor after Islam.¹⁵²

Once again, Ibn Taymiyya likens Yazīd’s reign to that of other Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, downplaying the severity of his actions. Moreover, he claims that infighting between Muslims is a normal occurrence throughout history, citing that even the most righteous followers of Islam, such as ‘Alī, ‘Ā’isha, Talḥa, and al-Zubayr, had differences that led to armed conflict. Ibn Taymiyya argues that, in order to avoid the unnecessary spilling of blood, Muslims must patiently endure and tolerate the tyranny of their rulers until, eventually, God strikes them down. As for the anti-Yazīd rebellion in Medina, and the subsequent Battle of al-Ḥarra, Ibn Taymiyya maintains that Yazīd had sought a diplomatic resolution at first, which was rejected by the people of Medina. Here, however, Yazīd is criticized for ordering his army to sack the city and loot it for three days. Despite this, Ibn Taymiyya pushes back against the alleged exaggeration of the sacking’s outcome, including the number of casualties. This critique continues to include the siege of Mecca, where Ibn Taymiyya claims that catapults never hit the Ka‘ba, as it is sacred and protected by God before and after the advent of Islam. Interestingly, Ibn Taymiyya does not cite any traditions to back up his arguments, nor does he critique the *isnād* of those that contradict his claims.

As we can already see, Ibn Taymiyya’s highly nuanced narrative is much kinder to Yazīd than those which *Rūmīs* expressed. This nuance, however, is not shared by Ibn Taymiyya’s student, Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī. In his *Tārīkh al-Islām*, al-Dhahabī states, “And when Yazīd did what he did to the people of Medina..., people became hostile

¹⁵² Ibid., 4:575-576.

towards him. Allāh did not bless his life, and multiple people rose against him, including Abū Bilāl al-Ḥanzalī, Nāfi‘ ibn al-Azraq, Ṭawwāf ibn Ma‘allā al-Sadūsī, and Ibn al-Zubayr.”¹⁵³ He adds in his *Siyar*:

Then Yazīd prepared an army of six thousand [men] when he learned that the people of Medina had rebelled against him. This led to the Battle of al-Ḥarra, in which about a thousand Medinans were killed. The [Umayyad] army, led by Ḥuṣayn ibn Numayr, then marched and laid siege to the Ka‘ba, where Ibn al-Zubayr was based. Great events unfolded, and Allāh removed Yazīd from power. Ḥuṣayn [ibn Numayr] and his army pledged allegiance to Ibn al-Zubayr and then returned to Syria.¹⁵⁴

Al-Dhahabī avoids being too explicit in his narrative, preferring not to mention what happened in Mecca while it was under siege by Yazīd’s army. Instead, he states that “great things unfolded,” highlighting the severity of events. Moreover, although he does not mention that Yazīd allowed his army to sack Medina for three days, he clearly disapproves of his strategy in suppressing the rebellion, arguing that his savagery led to multiple other rebellions throughout the Muslim world. Al-Dhahabī also claims that Yazīd’s actions were the cause of his short-lived reign, arguing that ‘God did not bless his life’ after what he did to the people of Medina. Indeed, al-Dhahabī’s account paints Yazīd in an extremely negative manner, demonstrating a stark contrast between his narrative and that of his mentor Ibn Taymiyya.

Ibn Kathīr, another prominent *Shāmī* historian, offers a very detailed account of Yazīd’s rule in his universal history *al-Bidāya wa-al-Nihāya*. Concerning the revolt of *ahl al-Medina*, Ibn Kathīr writes that in the year 62 AH, Yazīd welcomed the delegation sent by Medinans for the pledge of allegiance by honoring them and rewarding them with

¹⁵³ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 2:359.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*, 3:374.

extravagant gifts.¹⁵⁵ Once they returned, however, they revoked their pledge and elected ‘Abdallāh b. Ḥanzala al-Ghasīl (d. 63/683) as their leader. Moreover, they began to publicly curse and criticize Yazīd, alleging that he is a faithless man who drinks wine, listens to music, and skips his five daily prayers. ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Umar (d. 73/693), however, refused to revoke his pledge of allegiance and did not participate in the public slandering of Yazīd. Upon hearing of Medina’s revolt against him, Yazīd sent Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr (d. 65/684) to the city to dissuade the locals from further wrongdoing and urge them to submit to his rule. Ibn Bashīr was also instructed to warn them of the consequences of their disobedience, which was the spilling of blood.¹⁵⁶ *Ahl al-Medina* refused to submit to Yazīd, however, and sought to humiliate his tribe, Banū Umayya, prompting them to send a plea to the caliph urging him to intervene.¹⁵⁷ Upon hearing of this, Yazīd was furious and sent an army to the city, consisting of 10,000 to 12,500 soldiers, led by Muslim ibn ‘Uqba. Before he dispatched his army, Yazīd ordered his general to call them back to submission and obedience for three days.¹⁵⁸

Ibn Kathīr continues his narrative by writing that once the Umayyad army arrived at Medina, Ibn ‘Uqba followed Yazīd’s orders and gave Medinans three days to return to their pledge of allegiance; however, they refused and prepared themselves for battle. After narrating the battle’s outcome, Ibn Kathīr makes his thoughts on Ibn ‘Uqba clear:

Muslim ibn ‘Uqba was a wicked old man, may God curse him. How ignorant he was! As Yazīd had ordered, he was permitted to ravage the city for three days, may God punish him for this wrongdoing. He killed many of its nobles, confiscated property, and looted a great deal of wealth. A

¹⁵⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, 14:215.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 14:216.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 14:218.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 14:219.

great evil and widespread corruption ensued, as reported by several historians.¹⁵⁹

Yazīd also gets his share of criticism as Ibn Kathīr adds:

Yazīd made a grievous mistake when he told Muslim ibn ‘Uqba to ravage the city for three days. This was a serious and disastrous error, especially considering that it led to the killing of many of the *ṣahāba* and their children. During those three days, great and indescribable evils occurred in the city of the Prophet, matters that only God Almighty knows. By sending Muslim ibn ‘Uqba, Yazīd intended to solidify his authority and power, ensuring his rule without any challengers. But God punished him with the opposite of what he intended and prevented him from what he desired. God, the Almighty and All-Powerful, struck him as he struck many tyrants before him.¹⁶⁰

Bukhārī reported in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, on the authority of Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, who said: ‘I heard the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, say: ‘No one plots against the people of Medina except that he will melt away, just as salt melts in water.’”¹⁶¹

Here, Ibn Kathīr invokes the same prophetic tradition later used by al-Jannābī to make sense of Yazīd’s fate. He also holds Yazīd directly responsible for the sacking of Medina, arguing that it was counterproductive in his cause to consolidate his authority. Despite his condemnatory comments toward Yazīd for the caliph’s responsibility in subjecting the inhabitants of Medina to injustices, Ibn Kathīr refuses to accept a vision of Yazīd as merely a cruel tyrant. This is evidenced in his attitude toward reports of Yazīd feeling delight at the suffering of *ahl al-Madina*:

As for what some people mention concerning Yazīd, that he was extremely pleased when he heard the news of *ahl al-Madina* and what happened to them during the Battle of al-Ḥarra..., it is because he believed he was the rightful *Imām* and that they had rebelled against his authority, appointing someone else over them. Therefore, he saw it as his duty to fight them

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 14:220.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 14:222.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 14:223.

until they returned to obedience and remained united, as he had warned them through the words of al-Nu‘mān bin Bashīr and Muslim bin ‘Uqba. And it has been reported in the *Ṣaḥīḥ*: ‘Whoever comes to you intending to divide you, then kill him, whomever he may be.’¹⁶²

Ibn Kathīr justifies Yazīd’s joy after hearing the news of al-Ḥarra, arguing that he saw it as his duty to reunite Muslims under his banner after the people of Medina had divided the *Ummah*. He also portrays Yazīd as a patient man who repeatedly warned *ahl al-Medina* against defying him, while portraying the rebels as stubborn and irrational. Ibn Kathīr’s polishing of Yazīd’s image continues:

Al-Madā’inī narrated that Muslim bin ‘Uqba sent Rawḥ bin Zinbā‘ to Yazīd with the news of the Battle of al-Ḥarra. When he informed him of what had happened, Yazīd exclaimed: ‘Woe! My people!’ Then he called for al-Ḍaḥḥāk bin Qays al-Fihri and asked him: ‘Did you see what the people of Medina endured? What will compensate them?’ He replied: ‘Food and gifts.’ So Yazīd ordered that food be sent to them, and he generously distributed gifts among them. This is contrary to what the liars among the *Rāfiḍa* (Shī‘īs) claim, who say that he rejoiced in their suffering and took pleasure in their deaths.¹⁶³

After initially arguing that Yazīd was justified in rejoicing at the defeat of *ahl al-Medina*, Ibn Kathīr cites a tradition that tells a completely different story. Allegedly, Yazīd was distraught upon hearing what had happened at al-Ḥarra, even sending generous amounts of food and gifts to Medinans after the battle. Overall, Ibn Kathīr’s account of the rebellion in Medina is highly sympathetic towards Yazīd, mirroring that of his teacher Ibn Taymiyya. Yazīd is mostly absolved of his grievous wrongdoings, only facing criticism for allowing the sacking of Medina for three days. Despite this, Ibn Kathīr asserts that

¹⁶² Ibid., 14:224.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 14:233-234.

Yazīd regretted what had happened in Islam's second holiest city, ordering gifts to be distributed amongst Medinans.

Ibn Kathīr's highly detailed narrative of Yazīd's reign continues with his account of the siege of Mecca, a crucial event that remains a deeply contentious aspect of Yazīd's rule. The siege is described in two concise paragraphs, with a significant focus on the controversial act of catapulting the Ka'ba. Ibn Kathīr's account reads:

Ḥuṣayn ibn Numayr marched with his army towards Mecca and arrived there on the fourth day of Muḥarram, according to al-Wāqidī. Some say it was the seventh day. Various nobles from Medina [who had escaped from al-Ḥarra] joined Ibn al-Zubayr, and Najda ibn 'Āmir al-Ḥanafī from Yamama, along with a group of his people, also joined him to protect the Ka'ba from *ahl al-Shām* (the Umayyad army). Ḥuṣayn ibn Numayr camped outside Mecca and Ibn al-Zubayr went out to meet him with a group of his followers.

Ahl al-Shām launched a vigorous attack on the people of Mecca, and the people of Mecca were overwhelmed. The mule of Ibn al-Zubayr stumbled and he fell, prompting a group of his followers to rush to his protection. They fought fiercely but were eventually pushed back. Ibn al-Zubayr held his ground until nightfall, and the attackers withdrew. The fighting continued throughout the remainder of Muḥarram and the entire month of Ṣafar. On Saturday, the third of Rabī' al-Awwal in the year 64, the catapults were set up against the Ka'ba, and they were used to hurl stones, even setting the Ka'ba on fire. The wall of *al-Bayt* [*al-Ḥarām*] was burned on that Saturday, according to al-Wāqidī.¹⁶⁴

Here, Ibn Kathīr relies on the account of second-century Medinan historian Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Wāqidī (d. 207/822).¹⁶⁵ Al-Wāqidī's account is fairly straightforward,

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 14:225.

¹⁶⁵ Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Wāqidī was a historian from Medina, known for his expertise in Islamic history, *sīra* (biography of the Prophet), *maghāzī* (military campaigns), *rida* (apostasy wars), and *futūḥ* (Islamic conquests). A client of the Sāhm tribe, he moved to Baghdad in 796–7 and later served as a judge under the Abbasid caliphs Hārūn al-Rashīd and al-Ma'mūn. Despite financial struggles, he amassed an extensive library and employed scribes to document historical accounts. Al-Wāqidī was a pioneer in Islamic historiography, emphasizing chronology, source evaluation, and personal inquiry. His *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* is the only surviving book directly attributed to him, though his works influenced later historians like Ibn Sa'd. While hadith scholars criticized his reliability, historians valued his detailed accounts. His methodology and extensive writings cemented his legacy as a key source for early Islamic history. Stefan

accusing Yazīd’s army of catapulting the Ka‘ba and setting it on fire. However, Ibn Kathīr includes other accounts that seem to absolve Ibn Numayr of this callousness. He writes:

It is also said that the Ka‘ba caught fire because the people who took care of the mosque were lighting fires around the Ka‘ba, and the fire caught onto some of the drapes of the Ka‘ba and spread to its wood and ceiling, causing it to burn. Another account says that the fire started because Ibn al-Zubayr heard the *takbīr* (shouting Allāhu Akbar) from some of the mountains of Mecca on a dark night and thought that they were *ahl al-Shām*. A fire was raised on a spear to see who these people were. Then, a breeze of air carried a spark from the tip of the spear to the Ka‘ba, where it caught the drapes and wood of the Ka‘ba, setting it alight. The corner became blackened, and the Ka‘ba cracked in three places.¹⁶⁶

It is unclear why Ibn Kathīr included these alternative narratives, but his omission of specific sources suggests an attempt to mitigate the culpability of Yazīd’s forces. This reflects his broader approach to Yazīd’s reign, which, while detailed, occasionally exhibits a degree of sympathy or reluctance to assign blame directly. This can be attributed to his polemical, anti-Shī‘ite tone, which is evident in much of his writing.

Building on Ibn Kathīr’s nuanced portrayal of Yazīd, Ibn Ṭūlūn offers a similar approach to understanding the caliph’s reign. In fact, Ibn Ṭūlūn’s account in *al-Qayd al-Sharīd* mirrors Ibn Kathīr’s conclusion almost verbatim, a clear indication of the latter’s influence. His account reads:

When the people of Medina rebelled against him and deposed him, appointing Ibn Muṭī‘ and Ibn Ḥanzala as their leaders..., they did not accuse him of *zandaqa* (heresy), as some of the *Rāfiḍa* do. Rather, he was considered a *fāsiq* (grave sinner), and a *fāsiq* should not be deposed, as it could lead to chaos and other consequences. Fighting *ahl al-Medina* in the Battle of al-Ḥarra was enough, but the situation worsened when the city was allowed to be plundered for three days, which led to great harm.¹⁶⁷

Leder, “al-Wāḳidī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. Peri Bearman (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

¹⁶⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, 14:225.

Ibn Ṭūlūn also mentions al-Madā'inī's tradition which absolves Yazīd of rejoicing after the battle of al-Ḥarra, again emulating Ibn Kathīr.¹⁶⁸ By choosing these sections of Ibn Kathīr's account and reproducing them without any edits or changes, Ibn Ṭūlūn indicates his approval of this sympathetic approach towards Yazīd. Notably, however, he does not credit Ibn Kathīr as his source, leaving the impression that these words and attitudes are his own. Consequently, Fāṭima 'Āmir, one of the editors of *al-Qayd al-Sharīd*'s manuscript, erroneously attributed this narrative entirely to Ibn Ṭūlūn.¹⁶⁹

While scholars like Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr approached Yazīd's legacy with theological and historical arguments, al-Qaramānī, writing centuries later, adopts a more narrative-driven approach. His account is fairly short, dedicating no more than two folios for Yazīd's entire reign in his *Akhhbār al-Duwal*. He begins his account by narrating Yazīd's ascension to power and the refusal of al-Ḥusayn and Ibn al-Zubayr to pledge allegiance.¹⁷⁰ Yazīd's preparations to send an army led by Muslim ibn 'Uqba and the orders he gave to his military commander are briefly recounted. When it comes to al-Ḥarra, al-Qaramānī acknowledges that Ibn 'Uqba gave Medinans three days to back down and resubmit to Yazīd's authority, before narrating the outcome of the battle. Similar to Muṣṭafā al-Jannābī, al-Qaramānī gives an exact number of the Medinan casualties on the battlefield, which is seven hundred notables from Quraysh, *al-Muhājirūn*, and *al-Anṣār*, along with ten thousand others.¹⁷¹ He also writes that Medina's valuables were looted for

¹⁶⁷ Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qayd al-Sharīd*, 40-41.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, editor's intro.

¹⁷⁰ Al-Qaramānī, *Akhhbār al-Duwal*, 1:130.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

three days by Yazīd’s army, and one thousand women were raped during the sacking. Here, al-Qaramānī invokes a *ḥadīth* not mentioned by any other historian in this study, he writes, “the Messenger of Allāh (peace be upon him) said: ‘Whoever frightens the people of Medina, Allāh, the Mighty and Majestic, will frighten him, and upon him will be the curse of Allāh, the angels, and all of mankind,’ recorded by Muslim.”¹⁷² Similar to Ibn Taymiyya, al-Qaramānī makes a mistake in locating the origins of this *ḥadīth*. This tradition is not found in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, rather, it was only recorded by al-Nasā’ī (d. 303/915) and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal.¹⁷³ At any rate, al-Qaramānī concludes his account by narrating the siege of Ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca. He writes that al-Ḥuṣayn ibn Numayr led Yazīd’s army after the death of Ibn ‘Uqba, fighting Ibn al-Zubayr and catapulting the Ka‘ba after the latter fortified himself in it. All things considered, al-Qaramānī’s account is fairly similar to Ottoman works in terms of its style and content. This is unsurprising considering that his work drew heavily from al-Jannābī’s *Tārīkh*. Yet, al-Qaramānī does not explicitly condemn Yazīd the same way *Rūmī* scholars did. As we shall see in later chapters, al-Qaramānī’s views on Yazīd correspond more closely to those of Ottoman scholars with their *ahl al-baytist* tendencies.

Writing in the seventeenth century, Ibn al-‘Imād offers a later scholarly perspective on Yazīd’s reign in his chronologically arranged history, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*. His account of the years 63 AH reads:

The Battle of al-Ḥarra took place when the people of Medina revolted against Yazīd due to his lack of religious commitment. Muslim ibn ‘Uqba confronted them, and they met him outside Medina at Ḥarrat Wāqim. He killed 306 individuals from among the sons of the *Muhājirūn* and *Anṣār*, including several notable Companions: Ma‘qil ibn Sinān al-Ashja‘ī, ‘Abdullāh ibn Ḥanzala al-Ghasīl al-Anṣārī, ‘Abdullāh ibn Zayd ibn ‘Āṣim

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Al-Nasā’ī’s *al-Sunan al-Kubra* 4265, *Musnad Aḥmad* 16559.

al-Māzinī, who transmitted the Prophet's *wuḍū'* (ablution), Muḥammad ibn Thābit ibn Qays ibn Shammās, Muḥammad ibn 'Amr ibn Ḥazm, Muḥammad ibn Abī Juhaym ibn Ḥudhayfa, Muḥammad ibn Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Mu'ādh ibn al-Ḥārith Abū Ḥalīma al-Anṣārī, whom 'Umar [ibn al-Khaṭṭāb] appointed to lead *tarawīḥ* (night prayers), Wāsi' ibn Ḥibbān al-Anṣārī, Ya'qūb ibn Ṭalḥa ibn 'Ubaydullāh al-Tamīmī, Kathīr ibn Aflaḥ, one of the scribes who wrote the *maṣāḥif* (Qur'āns) sent by 'Uthmān [ibn 'Affān], and Abū Aflaḥ, the freed slave of Abū Ayyūb [al-Anṣārī].

This occurred three days before the end of Dhū al-Ḥijja. The Prophet's Mosque was abandoned, and congregational prayers were not held there for several days. Yazīd did not live much longer after this, nor did his commander, Muslim ibn 'Uqba.¹⁷⁴

In his account, Ibn al-'Imād focuses on the loss of life that occurred as a result of the Battle of al-Ḥarra, giving an exact number of the casualties suffered and a list of the most notable victims. This does not come as a surprise, considering that *Shadharāt al-Dhahab* is a biographical dictionary focused on brief obituaries. However, unlike al-Qaramānī and al-Jannābī, Ibn al-'Imād offers a much smaller number of people killed in action, reiterating Ibn Taymiyya's position. When it comes to Yazīd, Ibn al-'Imād seems to equivocally hold him, and his military commander, accountable for this calamity. He argues that Yazīd's death shortly after the battle came as a direct result of his wrongdoings, signifying a form of divine retribution. Perhaps Ibn al-'Imād was aware of the prophetic tradition that promised misfortune to those who harmed *ahl al-Medina*. His account continues with the year 64 AH:

At the beginning of the year, Muslim bin 'Uqba died in a place called Harshā, a mountain near Mecca and Medina, close to the area of al-Juḥfa. [He died] while preparing for the battle against Ibn al-Zubayr and after desecrating Medina, committing vile acts. He was struck by yellow bile in his stomach as a punishment from God. Strangely, he had attended the Battle of al-Ḥarra while ill, lying on a stretcher as though he were a fighter.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, 1:70-71.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:71.

In this year, *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* 'Abdullāh bin al-Zubayr demolished the Ka'ba and rebuilt it on the foundations of [prophet] Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him), according to what his aunt 'Ā'isha (may God be pleased with her) reported. He also included the *Hijr* (the area of the Ka'ba that was originally part of it) inside the building. The Ka'ba had been damaged by the catapults and its roof had been burnt.¹⁷⁶

Here, Ibn al-'Imād once again scorns Ibn 'Uqba for sacking Medina and asserts that God sent his death and illness as a result of his grave sins. He also adds that Ibn al-Zubayr had rebuilt the Ka'ba after it had been damaged by catapults, without specifying that it was Yazīd's army who caused the destruction. Although Yazīd is rarely explicitly mentioned as the person responsible for the calamities that befell Mecca and Medina, it must be assumed that Ibn al-'Imād held him directly accountable. Any criticism aimed at Ibn 'Uqba is by extension a criticism of Yazīd due to the former acting upon the orders of the latter.

To conclude, when it comes to methodology and content, there is clear dissimilarity between *Rūmī* and *Shāmī* scholarly perceptions of Yazīd's reign. Ottoman scholars mainly produced short accounts with strong *ahl al-baytist* inclinations, leading to a unanimous condemnation of Yazīd. In contrast, Arab Levantine scholars preferred long, and often polemical, accounts, focusing on every detail of the caliph's reign. Concerning Yazīd's actions in suppressing opposition, *Shāmī* scholars fail to produce a concrete consensus, highlighting the diversity of attitudes in the Levantine scholarly tradition. Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Kathīr, and Ibn Ṭūlūn were sympathetic towards Yazīd's general conduct as caliph, with Ibn Taymiyya going as far as saying that the Ka'ba was never attacked nor damaged by Yazīd's army. Similarly, Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Ṭūlūn claim that all of Yazīd's actions in suppressing the Hejazi rebellions were justified, except for

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 1:73.

his orders to ransack Medina for three days. This rehabilitation of Yazīd's image is most likely a result of two factors. The first is the fact that all three of the above-mentioned historians were based in Damascus and probably felt a sense of nostalgia toward their Umayyad past.¹⁷⁷ The second is their anti-Shī'ī polemics, as all three scholars frequently countered Shī'ite arguments throughout their accounts. On the other hand, al-Dhahabī, al-Qaramānī, and Ibn al-ʿImād offer unfavorable accounts of Yazīd's reign, although their criticism is much less explicit than that of *Rūmīs*. Despite their differences, both *Rūmī* and *Shāmī* scholars invoke prophetic traditions to frame their narratives on Yazīd. One notable similarity is their use of the *ḥadīth*: "Whoever intends harm to the people of Medina, Allāh will melt him just as salt melts in water." This tradition appears in both Ottoman and Levantine Arab accounts, particularly in discussions of the Battle of al-Ḥarra, serving as a moral indictment of Yazīd's actions.

¹⁷⁷ Other aspects of their writing could be examined to ascertain the truth, or lack thereof, of such a statement. A further comparative dimension meant to determine Syrian scholars' attachment to the Umayyad past would be assessing Sunnī Arabic-speaking scholars from outside Syria. If a solid majority of these scholars do not hold the same ambivalent attitude toward Yazīd's legacy as their *Shāmī* counterparts, then it can be reasonably concluded that the latter group held a uniquely pro-Umayyad stance due to their localist sentiment.

CHAPTER 4

YAZĪD AL-ZINDĪQ OR MERELY YAZĪD AL-FĀSIQ?

The various rebellions waged against Yazīd were closely tied to perceptions of his moral character. As explored in the previous chapter, the Medinan revolt was driven by accusations of Yazīd’s impiety and misconduct, which his opponents saw as disqualifying for leadership. His defenders, however, portrayed him as a pious and capable ruler, dismissing all reports of moral transgressions as fabrications intended to tarnish his reputation. It was reported that, during the reign of Mu‘āwiya, Yazīd took part in the first-ever Muslim raid of Constantinople. This is often cited as one of Yazīd’s main virtues, as Bukhārī recorded in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* that Prophet Muḥammad said, “The first army amongst my *Ummah* to raid Caesar’s City (Constantinople) will have their sins forgiven.”¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, allegations against Yazīd include drinking alcohol, listening to music, hunting for sport, and neglecting prayer. Did *Rūmī* and *Shāmī* scholars accept these accusations, or did they seek to absolve him? This chapter examines the debates surrounding Yazīd’s moral character, analyzing the competing narratives that shaped his legacy.

4.1. The Drunken Caliph: Yazīd’s moral failings in Ottoman historical writing

Most Ottoman authors, with their characteristically brief literary accounts, avoided delving into details about Yazīd’s personality. Instead, they presented their stances through succinct statements or even mere words. Aḥmadī, for instance, simply declares in his *Iskendernāme* that Yazīd had “no share in religion.”¹⁷⁹ Likewise, Yāzījī

¹⁷⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 2924.

¹⁷⁹ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 37.

Oghlū labels Yazīd a *mulḥid* (deviant/godless person).¹⁸⁰ Shukrullāh goes a step further, using a list of derogatory terms to describe Yazīd and his fellow Umayyad rulers, he states, “[they were] greedy, arrogant, lustful, dull, insensitive, violent, and irreligious [people].”¹⁸¹ Muṣṭafā ‘Ālī endorses the positions of previous historians and writes that Yazīd exhibited clear signs of disbelief and a lack of submission to Islam.¹⁸²

Writing in the seventeenth century, Kātib Chelebī favors a slightly more nuanced treatment of Yazīd. After stating that the caliph’s grave has turned into a dumpster, he writes in *Sullam al-Wuṣūl*, “He was a *fāsiq* and a prolific poet. He was one of the most prominent poets of Quraysh, with most of his poetry being renowned for its wine-related lyrics.”¹⁸³ By merely faulting the caliph for being a grave sinner, Kātib Chelebī stands as an exception in this chapter. Unlike the other Ottoman scholars who implicitly accused Yazīd of being a *kāfir*, once again demonstrating the dominant *ahl al-baytist* tendencies in the Ottoman intellectual tradition, Kātib Chelebī refrained from this harsh judgment. The reason for this differing stance is unclear, however. One possibility is the late nature of his work, as he was active more than half a century after his predecessors, potentially reflecting a shift in the Ottoman intellectual tradition. Another plausible factor is his

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

There is no consensus concerning the meaning of *mulḥid/ilḥād*, as it has been used for different purposes throughout Islamic history. In the Umayyad age, the terms were used to denote desertion of the *Ummah* and rebellion against the legitimate caliphs. In the early ‘Abbāsīd age, *kalām* theologians began to use the term *mulḥid* in the meaning of “heretic, deviator in religious beliefs.” In Ottoman usage, *mulḥid* and *ilḥād* were terms commonly employed to describe subversive doctrines among the Shī‘īs and Ṣūfīs. The religious meaning of the term is derived from the basic sense of the root *l-h-d* “to incline, to deviate.” Wilferd Madelung, “Mulḥid,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. Peri Bearman (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

¹⁸¹ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 66.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁸³ Kātib Chelebī, *Sullam al-Wuṣūl ilā Ṭabaqāt al-Fuḥūl*, eds. Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā’ūt, Akmal al-Dīn Iḥsān Oghlū, Şālīḥ Sa‘dāwī Şālīḥ, and Şalāḥ al-Dīn Uygūr, vol. 3 (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2010), 415.

reliance on different sources, particularly those composed by Arab intellectuals, given that he wrote in Arabic rather than Turkish or Persian. In contrast, earlier Ottoman scholars drew heavily from Persian works, which often carried a more pronounced *ahl al-baytist* sentiment.¹⁸⁴ Despite these differences, none of the scholars examined in this chapter attributed any positive traits to Yazīd. Notably, his participation in the first Muslim raid of Constantinople is entirely overlooked. This omission emphasizes the overwhelmingly negative portrayal of Yazīd within the Ottoman scholarly tradition, even as Kātib Chelebī's relatively moderate stance introduces a nuanced exception to this trend.

4.2. The Redeeming Qualities of a *Fāsiq*

While the Ottoman scholarly tradition provides a highly negative perspective on Yazīd's moral character, the Levantine scholars offer a noticeably different viewpoint. Writing in the early fourteenth century, Ibn Taymiyya's highly polemical work only briefly addresses Yazīd's moral character:

The *ṣaḥāba* (may Allāh be pleased with them) participated in expeditions alongside Yazīd and others. He, [Yazīd], fought in the campaign to raid Constantinople during the reign of his father, Mu'āwiya (may Allāh be pleased with him). Among those in the army was Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī (may Allāh be pleased with him), and this army was the first to march towards Constantinople.

In *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, it is narrated by [‘Abdullāh] Ibn ‘Umar (may Allāh be pleased with them both) that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “The first army to raid Constantinople will be forgiven.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 75.

¹⁸⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, 4:544.

Ibn Taymiyya asserts that Yazīd’s participation in the first raid of Constantinople is a significant virtue, as it aligns with the prophetic tradition in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* promising forgiveness to the members of that army. Here, however, Ibn Taymiyya errs by attributing this *ḥadīth* to Ibn ‘Umar. Instead, this tradition was transmitted by Umm Ḥarām (d. 28-9/649), and it was recorded by Bukhārī with different wording. The *ḥadīth* reads:

Ishāq ibn Yazīd al-Dimashqī narrated: Yaḥyā ibn Ḥamza narrated to me, saying: Thawr ibn Yazīd narrated to me, from Khālid ibn Ma‘dān, that ‘Umayr ibn al-Aswad al-‘Ansī reported to him that he came to ‘Ubāda ibn al-Ṣāmit while he was staying on the coast of Ḥimṣ in a building of his, and with him was Umm Ḥarām.

‘Umayr said: Umm Ḥarām narrated to us that she heard the Prophet (peace be upon him) say: “The first army from my *Ummah* to undertake a naval expedition has indeed secured their reward.” Umm Ḥarām said: “O Messenger of Allāh, am I among them?” He replied, “You are among them.”

Then the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “The first army from my *Ummah* to raid the city of Caesar, [Constantinople], will have their sins forgiven.” Umm Ḥarām said, “O Messenger of Allāh, am I among them?” He replied, “No.”¹⁸⁶

It is unclear where Ibn Taymiyya got his version of the *ḥadīth* from or why he attributed it to Ibn ‘Umar instead of Umm Ḥarām. Nonetheless, while discussing the permissibility of cursing Yazīd, Ibn Taymiyya adds in his *Minhāj al-Sunna* that the caliph was a *fāsiq*.¹⁸⁷ Unfortunately, he does not specify which grave sins Yazīd committed to deserve such a title.

Ibn Taymiyya’s brief discussion of Yazīd’s morality is similar in length to al-Dhahabī’s, who commented on the Umayyad caliph’s virtues and vices in all three of his works. His most elaborate account is found in his *Siyar*, where he writes:

¹⁸⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 2924.

¹⁸⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, 4:567.

He has a virtue despite his faults, and that virtue is the raid of Constantinople. He was the commander of that army, which included figures like Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī.¹⁸⁸

He was strong, brave, decisive, intelligent, eloquent, and wrote good poetry. However, he was a rough, rude, and vulgar *nāṣibī*.¹⁸⁹ He drank alcohol and engaged in immoral acts.¹⁹⁰

Al-Dhahabī adds in his *Mīzān* that Yazīd’s integrity is questionable, making him unreliable in the transmission of Prophetic traditions. He then quotes one of the eponyms of the four Sunnī schools of jurisprudence, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, who said, “It is not appropriate to narrate [*ḥadīth*] from [Yazīd].”¹⁹¹ As for his account in *Tārīkh al-Islām*, al-Dhahabī further emphasizes Yazīd’s habitual consumption of alcohol, reinforcing the image of a ruler whose personal conduct fell short of Islamic ideals.¹⁹² Overall, al-Dhahabī’s discussion agrees with that of Ibn Taymiyya on some points, while diverging on others. Both scholars acknowledge Yazīd’s participation in the first military expedition of Constantinople, with al-Dhahabī going further and identifying Yazīd as the commander of that campaign. However, while Ibn Taymiyya categorizes Yazīd simply as a grave sinner without elaboration, al-Dhahabī employs a more nuanced approach, using a score of complimentary and derogatory terms to describe the caliph. Among these, the most striking is his characterization of Yazīd as a *nāṣibī*. The term *nāṣibī* is an Islamic theological and historical term used to describe someone who harbors enmity or hatred

¹⁸⁸ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*, 3:36.

¹⁸⁹ The term *nāṣibī* is an Islamic theological and historical term used to describe someone who harbors enmity or hatred toward *Ahl al-Bayt*.

¹⁹⁰ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*, 3:37.

¹⁹¹ Al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-I‘tidāl fī Naqd al-Rijāl*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa li al-Ṭibā‘a wa al-Nashr, 1963), 440.

¹⁹² Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 2:359.

toward *Ahl al-Bayt*, particularly toward ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his descendants. The word is derived from the Arabic root *n-ṣ-b*, which means “to display hostility.” By applying this term to Yazīd, al-Dhahabī calls the caliph’s commitment to Islam into question, as mainstream Sunnī Islam regards it a duty upon all Muslims to revere and respect the family of the Prophet.¹⁹³ In summary, al-Dhahabī’s portrayal of Yazīd presents him as a deeply flawed figure, whose actions and character stand in contrast to the ideals of Islamic leadership.

Ibn Kathīr’s discussion of Yazīd’s moral character far exceeds those of al-Dhahabī and Ibn Taymiyya in terms of length and comprehensiveness. He begins his detailed narrative of Yazīd’s life in *al-Bidāya wa-al-Nihāya* by addressing the caliph’s appointment of governors. His account reads:

[People] pledged allegiance [to Yazīd] after his father [passed away] in Rajab of the year 60, and he was born in the year 26, so when he became caliph, he was 34 years old. He kept his father’s governors in their positions, making no changes, which demonstrates his intelligence.¹⁹⁴

From the outset, Ibn Kathīr praises Yazīd for his decision not to replace any of Mu‘āwiya’s governors, arguing that it is a sign of political shrewdness. This portrayal, however, appears inconsistent with the historical record, as several of these governors were implicated in significant atrocities. For instance, ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād, the governor of Basra, played a central role in the massacre of al-Ḥusayn and his followers at Karbalā’ in 61/680. Nevertheless, Ibn Kathīr’s account continues with a list of Yazīd’s virtues:

¹⁹³ See *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 2424 and 2408.

¹⁹⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, 14:146.

Yazīd was the first to raid the city of Constantinople. Then, he performed the pilgrimage that same year after returning from the military campaign in *Bilād al-Rūm*. It has been established [as authentic] that the Messenger of Allāh (peace be upon him) said: “The first army to raid the city of Caesar will be forgiven.”¹⁹⁵

And Yazīd had commendable qualities such as generosity, forbearance, eloquence, poetry, courage, and sound judgment in governance. He was also charming in social interactions.¹⁹⁶

Here, Ibn Kathīr, like other *Shāmī* historians, praises Yazīd for his participation in the first Muslim raid of Constantinople. He also adds that Yazīd performed the Muslim pilgrimage (*Hajj*) in Mecca, something which is notably absent in the accounts of other historians examined in this study. This detail adds a layer of religious legitimacy to Yazīd’s rule, suggesting a degree of piety that contrasts with the more critical portrayals of his character. In addition, Ibn Kathīr offers a list of Yazīd’s “commendable qualities” which exceeds al-Dhahabī’s. Both historians describe the caliph as brave, eloquent, and prolific in poetry, however, Ibn Kathīr goes further and claims Yazīd was generous, forbearing, charming, and politically shrewd.

Despite his favorable portrayal of Yazīd, Ibn Kathīr strives to offer a balanced view of the caliph’s character. He writes, “[Yazīd] indulged in his worldly desires, neglecting his [five daily] prayers at certain times and frequently skipping them.”¹⁹⁷ Additionally, Ibn Kathīr labels Yazīd a *fāsiq*, echoing the accounts of earlier *Shāmī* historians.¹⁹⁸ He also addresses reports about the caliph’s moral shortcomings:

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 14:229.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 14:230.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 14:232.

It is reported that Yazīd was notorious for his indulgence in musical instruments, wine, singing, hunting, and raising monkeys and dogs. He also enjoyed having rams fight each other and organizing competitions for monkeys and baboons. There was hardly a day when he did not wake up drunk. He would tie a monkey to a saddled horse and ride it, dressing the monkey in a golden cap, as he did with his servants. He also enjoyed racing horses and would mourn when a monkey died. It was said that his death came about when he carried a monkey and it bit him while jumping around. Other reports have been mentioned about him, but Allāh knows best about their authenticity.¹⁹⁹

Interestingly, Ibn Kathīr refrains from commenting on the authenticity of these reports, leaving their evaluation to the reader. This omission is notable, as it contrasts with his usual practice of critically assessing the reliability of historical narratives. By presenting these accounts without explicit judgment, Ibn Kathīr may be subtly acknowledging the complexity of Yazīd’s legacy while leaving room for further scholarly inquiry.

Writing nearly two centuries after Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Ṭūlūn once again relies exclusively on the former for his discussion of Yazīd’s moral character and copies his account verbatim.²⁰⁰ As such, his account will not be examined in this chapter, considering his position is identical to Ibn Kathīr’s. Al-Qaramānī, on the other hand, offers a unique yet succinct perspective on Yazīd’s morality. He writes in his *Akhhbār al-Duwal* that the caliph frequently drank alcohol, played with dogs, and neglected his religious duties.²⁰¹ Notably, al-Qaramānī is the only Arab historian who does not attribute any positive qualities to Yazīd, instead focusing solely on his moral failings. This omission, however, is not surprising given that his work is considered by many historians

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 14:235-236.

²⁰⁰ Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qayd al-Sharīd*, 30-31, 35, 40-41.

²⁰¹ Al-Qaramānī, *Akhhbār al-Duwal*, 1:130. Concerning the Muslim ruling of owning dogs, see *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 2322, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 1574 and 1575.

to be an abridgment of al-Jannābī's *Tārīkh*. Al-Jannābī's own critical stance toward Yazīd likely influenced al-Qaramānī's portrayal, resulting in a condensed yet uniformly negative account of the caliph's character. Al-Qaramānī's reliance on al-Jannābī's work has so far separated him from the rest of *Shāmī* historians, often presenting him as an exception to the Levantine intellectual tradition.

Bar al-Qaramānī, there seems to be a *Shāmī* consensus regarding Yazīd's moral character. Ibn Taymiyya, al-Dhahabī, Ibn Kathīr, and Ibn Ṭūlūn all offer strikingly similar discussions of Yazīd's virtues and vices. They consistently highlight his participation in the first Muslim raid of Constantinople, citing it as a significant merit, and acknowledge that he possessed some positive traits, such as leadership skills and administrative competence. At the same time, they all recognize his *fiṣq* and indulgence in worldly desires, particularly in areas like music and alcohol consumption. However, despite acknowledging his moral failings, *Shāmī* scholars stop well short of labeling Yazīd a *kāfir*. Instead, they present a more nuanced evaluation, balancing his merits and faults. This contrasts sharply with the Ottoman scholarly tradition, where Yazīd is overwhelmingly depicted as an irredeemable figure with no share in religion. The *ahl al-baytist* inclinations in Ottoman historiography led most scholars to cast Yazīd in an entirely negative light, offering no room for nuance.

CHAPTER 5

YAZĪD THE MURDERER? THE MARTYRDOM OF AL-ḤUSAYN

Yazīd's reign was controversial for many reasons, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, but nothing was as contentious as the killing of al-Ḥusayn at Karbalā'. Had it not been for the atrocious massacre of the Prophet's grandson and his companions, Yazīd would likely have been remembered like any other Umayyad caliph – a tyrant, but not an extraordinarily bloodthirsty one. While Shī'ites unanimously contend that Yazīd was directly responsible for the murder, Sunnīs are divided on the matter. Some Sunnīs argue that Yazīd was fully aware of al-Ḥusayn's plans and directly issued the order to eliminate him and his followers, thereby committing one of the worst crimes in Islamic history. Others counter this argument, asserting that Yazīd issued no direct orders regarding al-Ḥusayn to his governors and only learned of the massacre after it had occurred. Despite the discrepancies between these positions, each group of historians cites a number of traditions to support its argument. This chapter will examine Ottoman and Levantine scholarly views on Yazīd's responsibility for the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn, categorizing them as either part of the first or second school of historians. However, before delving into these perspectives, a brief chronological account of al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom will be presented, following the mainstream Sunnī narrative.²⁰²

After the death of Mu'āwiyā in 60/680 and Yazīd's assumption of power, al-Ḥusayn refused to pledge allegiance to the new caliph, viewing his rule as illegitimate

²⁰² It is important to acknowledge that no contemporary sources from Yazīd's reign, or the Umayyad period in general, have survived intact. Consequently, all extant accounts of the caliph derive from later Abbasid-era historiography, which was often shaped by ideological biases. This transmission history necessitates caution, as Abbasid narratives may have systematically distorted Umayyad legacies, including that of Yazīd.

and contrary to the agreement previously made between Mu‘āwiya and al-Ḥasan. Initially living in Medina, al-Ḥusayn fled to Mecca along with Ibn al-Zubayr following the inception of Yazīd’s rule. There, he received numerous letters from the people of Kufa, urging him to lead them in revolt against Yazīd. These letters, signed by prominent Kufan tribal leaders, promised him their support and allegiance. After careful consideration and consultation with his companions and family, who repeatedly advised him not to leave Mecca, al-Ḥusayn decided to head for Kufa, hoping to establish a just Islamic state.

Accompanied by his family and a small group of loyal supporters, al-Ḥusayn set out for Kufa on the eighth of Dhū al-Ḥijja of the same year. However, as they traveled, news reached them that the situation in Kufa had changed. Yazīd had appointed ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād as the governor of Kufa, and through a combination of threats and bribes, Ibn Ziyād had successfully dissuaded most of the Kufan opposition from supporting al-Ḥusayn’s cause. Many of those who had initially pledged allegiance to al-Ḥusayn withdrew their support out of fear of reprisal. Despite this, al-Ḥusayn continued his journey, believing it was his duty to stand against tyranny, even if it meant facing certain danger. As they approached Kufa, they were intercepted by a large Umayyad army led by ‘Umar ibn Sa‘d (d. 66/685). The Umayyad forces blocked al-Ḥusayn’s path and forced him to camp in the desert plains of Karbalā’, far from water and other basic resources. Ḥusayn attempted to negotiate, offering three options: to return to Mecca, to go to the frontier and fight alongside the Muslims against external enemies, or to meet Yazīd directly in Damascus to resolve the matter peacefully. However, Ibn Ziyād demanded unconditional surrender, which al-Ḥusayn refused, as it would have meant absolute humiliation. After failing to reach an agreement with the Umayyad army, on the tenth of Muḥarram, 61/680, al-Ḥusayn’s camp was attacked. Despite several soldiers, led by Ḥurr

ibn Yazīd al-Riyāhī (d. 61/680), defecting to al-Ḥusayn’s side, the Prophet’s grandson and his followers were vastly outnumbered. One by one, the small contingent of Hashemites was struck down, before al-Ḥusayn himself was martyred after a courageous stand. His body was brutally mutilated, and his head was severed and sent to Ibn Ziyād.²⁰³

5.1. An Unforgivable Sin: Yazīd as Persecutor of *Ahl al-Bayt* in the Ottoman View

In their discussion of al-Ḥusayn’s murder at Karbalā’, the *ahl al-baytist* tendencies of Ottoman scholars were most clearly evident. This, however, did not prompt them to discuss the matter in extensive detail, choosing to keep their accounts consistently succinct. Yāzījī Oghlū Mehmed, for instance, simply wrote that Yazīd “destroyed” al-Ḥusayn and betrayed *ahl al-bayt*, seemingly holding the caliph directly responsible for what went down at Karbalā’.²⁰⁴ Remarkably, however, Yāzījī Oghlū not only held Yazīd responsible for al-Ḥusayn’s demise, he also believed Yazīd was guilty of the “destruction” of his brother, al-Ḥasan. How Yāzījī Oghlū came to this odd conclusion is unclear, as even Shī’ites do not profess this claim. Instead, they believe that it was Yazīd’s father, Mu’āwiya, who poisoned al-Ḥasan through one of his wives. One can speculate that Yāzījī Oghlū believed Yazīd had a role in the poisoning of al-Ḥasan, although such a scenario would be improbable.

Ottoman animosity towards Yazīd did not stop with Yāzījī Oghlū, as Shukrullāh professed a similar position in his *Bahja*. Writing in the fifteenth century, the Anatolian historian condemns Yazīd for the “massacre of al-Ḥusayn and his family at Karbalā’.”²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A’lām al-Nubalā’*, 3:280-285 and Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, 11:521-570.

²⁰⁴ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 50.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

Shukrullāh adds an analytical twist to his narrative, as he likens the followers of the Umayyad caliph to the followers of Timur (d. 807/1405), a staunch enemy of the Ottoman state. The implication behind Shukrullāh’s analogy is that Yazīd liked to humiliate his opponents, much like Timur did, and by extension, perhaps the Mongol conquerors. The association of Yazīd with a Turco-Mongol ruler might indirectly be meant to cast suspicion on his status as a Muslim. Indeed, even after converting to Islam, the Central Asian peoples’ status as Muslims was always brought into question because of their non-Islamic practices.²⁰⁶ The trend continues with al-Jannābī and Edirnevī, who hold Yazīd directly responsible for al-Ḥusayn’s death without any elaboration.²⁰⁷

Contrary to al-Jannābī and Edirnevī, Muṣṭafā ‘Ālī offers a much longer account in his *Kunh al-Akhhbār*. In his portrayal of Yazīd, ‘Ālī demonstrates his skill as a historian by presenting conflicting accounts of the caliph’s legacy. Initially, he carefully avoids taking sides, neither fully endorsing narratives that praise Yazīd nor those that condemn him.²⁰⁸ Instead, he acknowledges the existence of questionable traditions supporting both perspectives. For instance, he shares a tradition suggesting that Yazīd eventually distanced himself from ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād, holding him accountable for the massacre of al-Ḥusayn and his followers at Karbalā’. On the other hand, he also cites a *ḥadīth* that unequivocally condemns Yazīd as destined for hell. Despite his neutral presentation of these accounts, ‘Ālī reveals his stance through his discussion of Yazīd’s

²⁰⁶ For Islamic scholarly attitudes towards Turco-Mongol practices, see István Vásáry, “Yāsā and Sharī‘a: Islamic Attitudes Towards the Mongol Law in the Turco-Mongolian World (From the Golden Horde to Timur’s Time),” in *Violence in Islamic Thought from the Mongols to European Imperialism*, eds. Robert Gleave and Istvan T. Kristó-Nagy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

²⁰⁷ Regarding al-Jannābī’s position, see Muṣṭafā al-Jannābī, *Tārīkh al-Jannābī*, 202. Regarding Edirnevī’s position, see Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 204.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

role in the murder of al-Ḥusayn.²⁰⁹ He argues that Yazīd’s brutal treatment of the Prophet’s descendants, particularly Ḥusayn, demonstrates a lack of true faith and submission to Islam. While some mystics claimed to have seen dreams in which Yazīd expressed that God had forgiven him, Muṣṭafā ‘Ālī dismisses these accounts as unreliable, pointing to Yazīd’s actions as evidence of his unworthiness of such forgiveness.²¹⁰ Furthermore, ‘Ālī highlights what he sees as divine retribution against Yazīd’s lineage. He notes that none of Yazīd’s children lived long enough to enjoy worldly success, despite the fact that some, like his son Mu‘āwiya II (d. 64/684), were known for their piety and righteousness. This, according to ‘Ālī, serves as further proof of the consequences of Yazīd’s crimes against *ahl al-bayt*.²¹¹

While all other Ottoman scholars exhibited strong *ahl al-baytist* tendencies and held Yazīd responsible for the tragedy of Karbalā’, Kātib Chelebī offers a less direct approach. His brief entry on Yazīd in *Sullam al-Wuṣūl* reads:

Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān ibn Ṣakhr, Abū Khālid al-Mustanṣir, and his mother was Maysūn al-Kalbīyya. He was born in the year 25 or 26 AH. People pledged allegiance to him the day his father died, as his father had designated him as his successor. However, al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī and ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr did not pledge allegiance to him and went into hiding, remaining in seclusion until the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn in Karbalā’.²¹²

Here, Kātib Chelebī mentions that the Prophet’s grandson was martyred in Karbalā’, without holding Yazīd directly or indirectly accountable. Meanwhile, he takes a more

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid., 166.

²¹² Kātib Chelebī, *Sullam al-Wuṣūl*, 3:415.

direct approach in his entry on al-Ḥusayn, specifying the name of the person who killed him:

He was killed by Sinān ibn Anas al-Nakhaʿī, the grandfather of Sharīk the Judge (d. 177/793), and his head was severed by Shimr ibn Dhī al-Jawshan al-Ḍabbabī (d. 66/685). The commander of the army that killed him was ʿUmar ibn Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, on the orders of ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād, the governor of Kufa, who acted on the command of Yazīd.²¹³

Kātib Chelebī writes that ʿUmar ibn Saʿd, leader of the Umayyad army who intercepted al-Ḥusayn, was following the orders of Ibn Ziyād, who acted on the command of Yazīd. This seems like an implicit accusation aimed at Yazīd; however, it is unclear why Kātib Chelebī worded it this way. Most other historians who held Yazīd directly responsible for the killing were not hesitant to explicitly say so. Why, then, did Kātib Chelebī choose to outline the hierarchy of command instead of being more straightforward? If one is to look at his universal history, *Fadhlakat Aqwāl al-Akhyār fī ʿilm al-Tārīkh wa al-Akhhbār* (henceforth *Fadhlaka*), Kātib Chelebī's methodology in analyzing and narrating early Islamic history becomes clear. He chose to follow Ibn Khaldūn's footsteps and used his magnum opus, *al-Muqaddimah*, extensively.

Since Ibn Khaldūn heavily influenced Kātib Chelebī, the former's interpretation of the issue of succession in early Islamic history will be examined. Ibn Khaldūn's view reflects what could be described as a mainstream Sunnī position. He supports the Umayyads, arguing that they embodied *ʿaṣabiyyah* (group solidarity), which he saw as essential for maintaining the unity of the Muslim community and preventing its fragmentation.²¹⁴ While Ibn Khaldūn acknowledges Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiya's moral failings,

²¹³ Ibid., 2:50.

²¹⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, *al-ʿIbar wa Dīwān al-Mubtadaʿ wa al-Khabar fī Tārīkh al-ʿArab wa al-Barbar wa man ʿĀṣarahum min Dhawī al-Shaʿn al-Akbar*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 3-217.

including his alleged role in the murder of al-Ḥusayn, he also critiques the latter's decision to oppose the Umayyads. In Ibn Khaldūn's view, the Prophet's grandson made a strategic error by challenging the powerful *'aṣabiyyah* of the Umayyads, even though his intentions were noble. For this reason, Ibn Khaldūn regards Ḥusayn as a martyr, but one whose actions were ultimately misguided.²¹⁵ Kātib Chelebī, on the other hand, adopts a somewhat similar outlook but with notable differences. Like Ibn Khaldūn, he does not openly condemn Yazīd, but he does not shy away from discussing the caliph's moral shortcomings. Additionally, Kātib Chelebī does not argue that al-Ḥusayn erred in his judgment, choosing to present a more balanced view instead.²¹⁶

Ultimately, Kātib Chelebī's perspective on Yazīd can be seen as a combination of *ahl al-baytist* leanings and a mainstream Sunnī position. Besides Ibn Khaldūn's influence, he was also inspired by the founder of the Qāḏīzādeli movement, Qāḏīzāde Meḥmed, as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis.²¹⁷ Despite all of this, Ḥajjī Khalīfa's position did not diverge from the Ottoman consensus demonstrated in this chapter. All six *Rūmī* scholars held Yazīd directly responsible for the massacre of Karbalā', once again demonstrating a monolithic Ottoman intellectual tradition. Even after the Sunnitization process of the early sixteenth century and the rise of the puritanical Qāḏīzādelis, *Rūmī* distaste for the Umayyad caliph was unopposed.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 224-225.

²¹⁷ On the Qāḏīzādeli movement, see Madeline Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age 1600-1800* (Beirut: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988), 129-183 and Madeline Zilfi, "The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45, no. 4 (1986): 251-269.

5.2. Absolving Yazīd: A Profound Sunnī Need?

Similar to *Rūmī* scholars, *Shāmī* historians were very interested in scrutinizing Yazīd's role in the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn. Writing in the heartland of the Umayyad Caliphate, all six *Shāmī* historians examined in this study commented on the extent of Yazīd's responsibility for the killing. Beginning with Ibn Taymiyya, the Ḥanbalī traditionist addressed the issue at hand in his polemical work, writing:

And al-Ḥusayn (May Allāh be pleased with him) was martyred on the day of 'Āshūrā' in the year 61 AH, which was the first year of Yazīd's rule. He was martyred before Yazīd had assumed authority over any of his lands.²¹⁸

Bukhārī reported in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* that Anas ibn Mālik (may Allāh be pleased with him) said: The head of al-Ḥusayn (peace be upon him) was brought to 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād and placed in a tray. He began poking at it with a stick and made a remark about its beauty. I (Anas) said, "He (al-Ḥusayn) resembled the Messenger of Allāh (peace and blessings be upon him) the most, and his beard was dyed with *wasmah* (a type of dye)."²¹⁹

It has been narrated through an unverified chain of transmission that this occurred in front of Yazīd, that the head was brought to him, and that it was he who struck the teeth of al-Ḥusayn's head with a stick. However, although the chain of transmission already proves its falsehood, the content of the narration also suggests that it is false, as the Companions who were present when the head was struck with a stick were not in Syria but in Iraq.²²⁰

According to what multiple sources report, Yazīd did not order the killing of al-Ḥusayn, nor did he have any intention of doing so. On the contrary, he preferred to honor and respect him, as his father, Mu'āwiya, had instructed him to do. Yazīd, however, wanted al-Ḥusayn to remain loyal to him and not rebel against him. When al-Ḥusayn arrived and learned that the people of Iraq had abandoned him and would hand him over, he (al-Ḥusayn) requested to go to Yazīd or back to Mecca, or even go to the frontier [and fight alongside the Muslim army]. But they prevented him from doing so until he surrendered as a prisoner, and they fought him until he was unjustly killed. [He was] a martyr, may Allāh be pleased with him.²²¹

²¹⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, 4:522.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4:556.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4:557.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 4:558.

When the news of al-Ḥusayn’s killing reached Yazīd and his family, they were distressed and wept over his death. Yazīd said: “May Allāh curse ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād, By Allāh, if there had been any familial bond between him and al-Ḥusayn, he would not have killed him.” He also said: “I would have been satisfied with the loyalty of the people of Iraq without the need to kill al-Ḥusayn.” Furthermore, Yazīd gave al-Ḥusayn’s family the finest provisions and sent them to Medina. However, despite this, he neither avenged al-Ḥusayn nor commanded the killing of his murderer.²²²

As for the claim regarding the captivity of al-Ḥusayn’s women, parading them across the land, and being made to ride camels without saddles, this is a lie and baseless: The Muslims, praise be to Allāh, never captured a Hashemite woman, and the *Ummah* of [Prophet] Muḥammad (peace be upon him) never permitted the capturing of the women of Banī Hāshim. However, those with misguided desires and ignorance often spread such lies.²²³

Here, Ibn Taymiyya unequivocally absolves Yazīd of any role in the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn, asserting that the latter died before the former had even established full authority over his domains. In essence, Ibn Taymiyya argues that Yazīd’s governor and his army acted independently, without direct orders from the caliph. He also argues that the head of al-Ḥusayn was never brought to Yazīd. Instead, it was Ibn Ziyād who received the severed head and poked it with a stick. According to Ibn Taymiyya, not only do the chains of transmission prove this, but so does the content of the narrations. The *Shāmī* scholar continues his highly apologetic account and maintains that when the news of al-Ḥusayn’s killing reached Yazīd and his family, they were distressed and wept over his death. Additionally, the young caliph allegedly cursed Ibn Ziyād for what he had done to the Prophet’s grandson. As for the claim that the women of al-Ḥusayn’s camp were humiliated and paraded, Ibn Taymiyya indisputably rejects such “falsehood,” arguing that such lies are only spread by those with misguided desires and ignorance.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

Unlike Ibn Taymiyya, who strictly argues for Yazīd’s innocence and critiques the authenticity of certain reports, al-Dhahabī writes a single statement that directly accuses Yazīd of killing the Prophet’s grandson.²²⁴ The Shāfi‘ī scholar, in his *Tārīkh al-Islām*, does not add any clarification on why he believes so, nor does he address the issue in his other works. Another Shāfi‘ī scholar of *Bilād al-Shām*, Ibn Kathīr, provides a more comprehensive narrative of the events surrounding al-Ḥusayn’s martyrdom. In his magnum opus, *al-Bidāya wa-al-Nihāya*, he writes:

Ḥusayn narrated that Sa‘d ibn ‘Ubayda said: A freed slave of Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān told me that when Yazīd received the head of al-Ḥusayn and placed it before him, I saw him weeping and saying: “Had there been a blood relationship between Ibn Ziyād and him, he would not have done this.”²²⁵

Hishām narrated from ‘Abdallāh b. Yazīd b. Rūḥ b. Zunbā‘ al-Judhāmī, from his father, from al-Ghāz ibn Rabī‘a al-Jurashī from Ḥimyar, who said: Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya’s eyes filled with tears [when al-Ḥusayn’s head was presented to him], and he said: “I would have been satisfied with your obedience without the killing of al-Ḥusayn. May Allāh curse Ibn Sumayya (meaning Ibn Ziyād). By Allāh, if I had been in his position, I would have pardoned him. May Allāh have mercy on al-Ḥusayn.” The one who brought the head of al-Ḥusayn was not rewarded with anything. And when the head of al-Ḥusayn was placed before Yazīd, he said: “By Allāh, if I had been the one responsible, I would not have killed you.”²²⁶

Not all of the army [that killed al-Ḥusayn] was pleased with its actions, [but they did it] either out of desire or fear, nor was Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya pleased with it, and Allāh knows best. It is most likely that Yazīd, had he been able to stop the killing before it occurred, would have pardoned al-Ḥusayn, as his father (Mu‘āwiya) had advised him to do and as he himself explicitly mentioned. He did curse Ibn Ziyād for his actions and spoke ill of him, as it seems and appears, but he did not remove him from his position, nor did he punish him, nor did he send anyone to rebuke him for what he did. And Allāh knows best.²²⁷

²²⁴ Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 2:359.

²²⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, 14:171.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14:191.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 14:202-203.

After narrating two traditions that depict Yazīd as regretful and mournful upon hearing the news of al-Ḥusayn's death, Ibn Kathīr adds his own comments to further absolve the caliph. He claims that Yazīd was not pleased with what had happened at Karbalā' and that he would have chosen to pardon the Prophet's grandson if it was up to him. Yazīd also allegedly felt enraged with his governor, Ibn Ziyād, going as far as cursing him. Ibn Kathīr tries to make his account slightly more balanced, however, as he critiques Yazīd for not removing Ibn Ziyād from his position or even reprimanding him.

In line with his thorough account, Ibn Kathīr includes an alternative narrative regarding Yazīd's reaction to al-Ḥusayn's death. His second narrative reads:

I have previously mentioned that Yazīd said: "If it were up to me, I would not have done to him what Ibn Murjāna (a derogatory nickname for 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād) did." [Moreover,] he said to the messengers who brought him al-Ḥusayn's head: "Your obedience would have sufficed without this," and he gave them nothing. Instead, he honored the family of al-Ḥusayn, returned to them all that they had lost and more, and sent them back to Medina in great comfort and with generous provisions. His family mourned al-Ḥusayn in his house for three days while the family of al-Ḥusayn stayed with them.

It is also said that Yazīd initially rejoiced at the news of al-Ḥusayn's killing but later regretted it. Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar b. al-Muthannā reported that Yūnus b. Ḥabīb al-Jurmī narrated to him: "When Ibn Ziyād killed al-Ḥusayn and his companions, he sent their heads to Yazīd. At first, Yazīd was pleased with his killing, and Ibn Ziyād's reputation improved in the eyes of Yazīd. However, it was not long before Yazīd regretted it. He began saying: 'What would it have cost me to endure some inconvenience and host him (al-Ḥusayn) in my home, allowing him to pursue his goals? Even if it had weakened my authority, it would have been worth it to honor the Messenger of Allāh and respect his kinship.' He then said: 'May Allāh curse Ibn Murjāna, for he forced him into this situation and pressured him. Al-Ḥusayn had asked to be released, to come to me, or to be stationed at one of the Muslim frontiers until Allāh took his soul, but Ibn Ziyād refused and killed him. This has made me hated by the Muslims and sown enmity in their hearts. Now, both the righteous and the wicked despise me for what they see as my role in al-Ḥusayn's killing. What do I have to do with

Ibn Murjāna's [actions]? May Allāh curse him!' And he became angry with him."²²⁸

Here, Ibn Kathīr reiterates his previously stated position, asserting that Yazīd felt sorrowful upon receiving the news of al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom. However, he demonstrates his historical craft by presenting an alternative narrative, supported by a tradition, to further strengthen his argument. The purpose of introducing this second narrative is clear: to emphasize that Yazīd never ordered the killing of al-Ḥusayn, even if one were to accept that he initially felt joy at the news. The elaborate monologue of Yazīd, expressing so much lamentation about his victim, reads almost like a pious atonement of sins. In summary, Ibn Kathīr's account closely resembles that of Ibn Taymiyya. Both scholars emphasize that Yazīd did not order the killing of al-Ḥusayn and would not have done so if the decision had been his. They also stress that Yazīd was deeply distressed by the news of al-Ḥusayn's death and expressed fury toward 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād, even cursing him and using derogatory language. Regarding the treatment of the women from al-Ḥusayn's camp, both scholars assert that they were treated with honor and provided with generous provisions, contradicting Shī'ite claims. Finally, both Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Taymiyya criticize Yazīd for failing to punish Ibn Ziyād or hold accountable those responsible for al-Ḥusayn's death.

Much like other topics, Ibn Ṭūlūn closely follows Ibn Kathīr, reproducing his two accounts of Yazīd's responsibility for al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom verbatim.²²⁹ However, the

²²⁸ Ibid., 14:232.

²²⁹ Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qayd al-Sharīd*, 39-40.

Ḥanafī scholar subtly indicates which version he finds more credible by offering his own perspective. His account reads:

As for what has been mentioned regarding the killing of al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, the established position among people of virtue is that ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād was responsible for it, as he sought to secure Kufa. Yazīd had written to him to prevent anyone from attempting to take control of the city. When al-Ḥusayn headed toward Kufa, Ibn Ziyād’s cavalry intercepted him to prevent his entry. They were unable to stop him except by killing him. This is what has been established among reliable narrators, alongside evidence of Yazīd’s disapproval of the killing, his cursing of Ibn Ziyād, and his statement: “I would have been satisfied with you (Ibn Ziyād and his army) without killing him (al-Ḥusayn).” Yazīd also openly mourned and wept for al-Ḥusayn, striking his thigh in grief and cursing his killer. He even crucified the murderer of al-Ḥusayn and said: “Ibn Ziyād acted hastily by killing him, may Allāh curse him.”²³⁰

It has not been established that Yazīd struck al-Ḥusayn’s teeth with a stick; rather, this act is reliably attributed to Ibn Ziyād. Furthermore, it is narrated from ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (Zayn al-‘Ābidīn) that he said: “We were brought before Yazīd, twelve young boys, and he said: ‘By Allāh, I did not know of the departure of Abū ‘Abdallāh (al-Ḥusayn) when he left, nor of his killing when he was killed.’” Then he recited the verse: “*No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being - indeed that, for Allāh, is easy,*” (Qur’ān 57:22).²³¹

Al-Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr said to Yazīd: “Treat them as the Messenger of Allāh (peace and blessings be upon him) would have treated them if he saw them in this state.” Yazīd wept intensely, and the people of his household wept until their voices rose. Then he said: “Remove the chains from them,” and he personally removed the chains from ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn’s neck. He ordered that they be taken to the bathhouse, washed, and provided with tents. He also ordered food to be prepared for them, clothed them, and gave them many gifts.

It is narrated on the authority of ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn that he said: “After we were taken from Kufa, we arrived in Damascus, where a large crowd had gathered outside Yazīd’s gate. We were then brought before him as he sat on his throne, surrounded by silent onlookers from *al-Shām*, Iraq, and the *Hijāz*. I stood in front of my family and greeted him. Yazīd asked, ‘Which of you is ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn?’ I replied, ‘I am.’ He said, ‘Step forward,’ so I approached. Then he motioned again, ‘Come even closer,’ until my chest was nearly touching his couch. He then said, ‘Had your father come to me,

²³⁰ Ibid., 64.

²³¹ Ibid., 65.

I would have honored our kinship and fulfilled my obligations toward him. But Ibn Ziyād acted hastily and killed him, may Allāh curse him.’ I said, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, we have suffered a great tragedy.’ He responded, ‘May Allāh ease your hardship.’ I then said, ‘O Commander of the Faithful, our wealth has been seized. Please order for it to be returned to us.’ Immediately, he issued the order for its return and said, ‘Stay with me, and I will provide for you and treat you well.’ I replied, ‘I would rather return to Medina. Being close to my family is better for me.’ ‘As you wish,’ he said. I added, ‘My family has been scattered. I will gather them, and they will praise Allāh for this blessing.’ Yazīd then provided us with more than what we had lost in terms of clothing and provisions, assigned messengers to accompany us to Medina, and allowed us to settle wherever we wished.’²³²

Ibn Ṭūlūn argues that the most authentic narrative, supported by sound traditions and reliable narrators, is that Yazīd did not order the killing of al-Ḥusayn. Instead, Yazīd had instructed ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād to prevent anyone from attempting to seize control of Kufa, and it was Ibn Ziyād who resorted to killing al-Ḥusayn to stop him from entering the city. Ibn Ṭūlūn emphasizes that the tragedy did not please Yazīd, going so far as to claim that Yazīd crucified al-Ḥusayn’s killer, a detail unattested in the accounts of other historians examined in this thesis. He further clarifies that Yazīd was not the one who struck al-Ḥusayn’s teeth with a stick, as this act is reliably attributed to Ibn Ziyād. Additionally, Ibn Ṭūlūn highlights Yazīd’s treatment of the survivors from al-Ḥusayn’s camp, noting that the caliph honored them with money, clothing, and tents. He personally removed the chains from ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn’s neck and recited a Qur’ānic verse to console the survivors. Ibn Ṭūlūn also includes a detailed tradition attributed to ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn himself, describing his experience upon arriving in Damascus and the respectful treatment he and his family received from Yazīd.

²³² Ibid., 66.

A stark contrast to Ibn Ṭūlūn's sympathetic portrayal of Yazīd appears in al-Qaramānī's *Akḥbār al-Duwal*. The latter Ḥanafī scholar explicitly holds Yazīd responsible for al-Ḥusayn's killing, claiming that he ordered his governor, Ibn Ziyād, to execute the Prophet's grandson.²³³ However, al-Qaramānī provides no supporting evidence for this assertion and offers no further elaboration. Ibn al-ʿImād al-Ḥanbalī, in *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, takes a more cautious approach. Rather than directly blaming Yazīd, he notes that scholars have disagreed on whether the caliph was responsible for al-Ḥusayn's death and presents multiple scholarly perspectives on the issue.²³⁴ However, Ibn al-ʿImād's discussion is closely tied to the question of whether cursing Yazīd is permissible, a debate that will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

While their assessments vary, most *Shāmī* scholars examined in this chapter strove to distance Yazīd from direct responsibility. Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr constructed highly apologetic accounts, insisting that Yazīd neither ordered the killing nor desired it. They emphasize his alleged grief upon hearing the news, his cursing of Ibn Ziyād, and his favorable treatment of al-Ḥusayn's surviving family members. Ibn Ṭūlūn followed this approach, though he went a step further by asserting that Yazīd even crucified the murderer of al-Ḥusayn, a claim absent from other accounts. Conversely, al-Dhahabī and al-Qaramānī unequivocally assert that Yazīd ordered the killing, though without presenting evidence to this effect. Ibn al-ʿImād adopts a more nuanced stance, framing the question as a matter of scholarly dispute rather than taking a definitive position.

A clear difference appears in the methodologies of these two groups. Those who absolved Yazīd provided highly detailed accounts, while those who blamed him stated

²³³ Al-Qaramānī, *Akḥbār al-Duwal*, 1:107.

²³⁴ Ibn al-ʿImād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, 1:68.

their accusations without elaboration. More importantly, the first group relied heavily on traditions regarded as *ṣaḥīḥ* in mainstream Sunnī scholarship. By contrast, those who accused Yazīd, including *Rūmīs*, cited no traditions. Regarding the similarities and differences between *Shāmī* and *Rūmī* scholars, the former tended to mitigate Yazīd's culpability, portraying him as a ruler who, at worst, failed to prevent the tragedy rather than actively orchestrating it. This contrasted with the harsher Ottoman view, where Yazīd was universally condemned as the chief architect of al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom.

CHAPTER 6

WHEN DOES A ṢAḤĀBĪ'S SON BECOME CURSABLE?

The practice of cursing (*la'n*) in Islam is a complex and nuanced subject with significant theological implications. In its essence, to curse someone in the Islamic context is to pray for them to be expelled from Allāh's mercy. The Qur'ān employs this concept in several instances, such as in *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2:89), where Allāh says, "So the curse of Allāh is upon the disbelievers." However, cursing in Islam can be divided into two categories: cursing a group of people, such as sinners or disbelievers, in general terms, and cursing a specific individual whom no scriptural text explicitly condemns. The first type is widely accepted as permissible in Sunnī Islam, as evidenced by numerous examples in the Qur'ān and prophetic tradition. The second type, however, is more contentious, with scholars differing on its permissibility. The predominant view is that cursing a specific individual, particularly a Muslim, is not allowed and is even considered highly discouraged.²³⁵

Multiple prophetic traditions can be found in the authentic Sunnah that prohibit Muslims from excessive cursing. For instance, al-Tirmidhī narrates in his *Sunan* that the Prophet Muḥammad said: "A believer is not a slanderer, one who curses a great deal, one who indulges in obscenity, or one who engages in foul talk."²³⁶ Similarly, in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, the Prophet is reported to have said: "It is not appropriate for a sincere believer to curse habitually."²³⁷ Commenting on this *ḥadīth*, al-Nawawī explains that cursing is a

²³⁵ Al-Dhahabī, *Kitāb al-Kabā'ir*, ed. Rāmī ibn 'Abd al-Qādir Sūbra (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Rayyān, 1991), 164-167.

²³⁶ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* 1977.

²³⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 2597.

form of supplication in which one prays for someone to be cast far from Allāh’s mercy.²³⁸ Such a practice, he argues, contradicts the qualities of believers, whom Allāh describes as merciful to one another. The gravity of cursing a believer is further emphasized in another *ḥadīth*, where the Prophet said: “Cursing a believer is like killing him.”²³⁹ This analogy, al-Nawawī asserts, highlights the severity of the act: just as killing someone cuts them off from the benefits of this world, cursing them severs them from the blessings of the Hereafter and the mercy of Allāh.²⁴⁰

In light of this context, the practice of cursing Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya has emerged as one of the most controversial issues in the history of Sunnī-Muslim discourse. Yazīd’s alleged role in the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn, as explored in the previous chapter, has made him a focal point of intense theological debate. For many, particularly within the Shī‘a tradition, cursing Yazīd is seen as a moral and religious duty. However, within Sunnī Islam, the permissibility of cursing Yazīd has been a source of significant controversy. Some scholars argue that cursing Yazīd is justified due to his malicious actions, while others caution against it, citing the potential for divisiveness within the Muslim community. This chapter examines scholarly opinions on cursing Yazīd, with a particular focus on the theological and historical debates that emerged in *Bilād al-Rūm* and *Bilād al-Shām*.

²³⁸ Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 16:148-149.

²³⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 6105.

²⁴⁰ Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 16:148-149.

6.1 Cursed by (Near) Consensus: The Universal Ottoman maligning of Yazīd

The literary nature and textual brevity of early Ottoman works extended to their treatment of the question of cursing Yazīd. Most scholars discussed in this section avoided engaging in highly technical or theological debates about the permissibility of cursing a Muslim. Instead, they directly stated their positions without extensive elaboration. Did this lead to a preservation of their monolithic *ahl al-baytist* tradition when addressing the issue of cursing the second Umayyad caliph? Or did it allow for a diversity of perspectives to emerge? At the outset, it is important to note that all Ottoman scholars examined in this study, with the exception of Kātib Chelebī, explicitly cursed Yazīd in their works. However, their reasons for doing so varied significantly.

Ahmedī, for instance, cited Yazīd's actions toward his subjects as the primary justification, arguing that they demonstrated a lack of submission to Islam.²⁴¹ The fourteenth-century poet was likely referring to the caliph's brutal military campaigns in Mecca and Medina, which led to the death of many Companions. In contrast, Yāzījī Oghlū and Shukrullāh focused on Yazīd's role in the tragedy of al-Ḥusayn and his camp, cursing him for his alleged complicity in the massacre.²⁴² Combining both perspectives, Muṣṭafā 'Ālī and Edirnevī cursed Yazīd for his attacks on the people of Mecca and Medina, as well as his harsh treatment of the Prophet's descendants, particularly al-Ḥusayn.²⁴³ Uniquely, while most scholars condemned Yazīd for his political and military actions, Muṣṭafā Jannābī expanded his critique to include the caliph's alleged statements. Indeed,

²⁴¹ Erginbaş, *The Appropriation of Islamic History*, 37.

²⁴² Concerning Yāzījī Oghlū's position, see *ibid.*, 50.
Concerning Shukrullāh's position, see *ibid.*, 75-76.

²⁴³ Concerning Muṣṭafā 'Ālī's position, see *ibid.*, 165.
Concerning Edirnevī's position, see *ibid.*, 204.

al-Jannābī chose to curse Yazīd not only for his actions but also for the poetry he allegedly composed about wine. Additionally, the remarks made by the Umayyad caliph upon hearing of al-Ḥusayn's death were interpreted by al-Jannābī as an explicit denial of the Prophet Muḥammad's revelation.²⁴⁴

In summary, despite their different reasoning, Ottoman scholars overwhelmingly condemned and damned Yazīd. Their near consensus reflects a broader pattern in Ottoman historiography, where Yazīd was not just seen as a flawed ruler but as the embodiment of impiety and tyranny. This uniform stance suggests that Ottoman scholars were not merely engaging with historical narratives but also responding to deeper moral and religious concerns. Yazīd's portrayal served to reinforce broader ethical lessons about just governance, the sanctity of the Prophet's family, and the consequences of impiety in leadership.

Amid this widespread condemnation, Kātib Chelebī took an unusual stance. Rather than repeating the standard denunciations, he explored the question in depth and ultimately deemed it impermissible to curse Yazīd. He dedicates an entire chapter in his *Mizān al-Ḥaqq* to the contentious issue, where he critiques extremist positions, whether they come from rigid traditionalists or radical reformers, and seeks to promote moderation and discourage divisive practices. He begins his chapter by describing the practice of cursing Yazīd as a “battlefield of opinions,” noting that it has long been a divisive issue

²⁴⁴ Muṣṭafā al-Jannābī, *Tārīkh al-Jannābī*, 202.

Jannābī claims that the majority of scholars deemed Yazīd a *kāfir* due to the poetic verses he composed. This, however, is inaccurate. Most scholars, particularly those regarded as authoritative in the study of historical traditions, did not consider these verses to be authentically attributed to Yazīd. For more on the authenticity of these poetic verses, see Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, 14:192, 204, & 224 and al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, 3:314.

between Sunnīs and Shī‘ites, as well as between the Umayyads and Abbasids.²⁴⁵ This controversy, he argues, continues to spark debate in his own time. He then provides a brief overview of the early Islamic succession dispute, framing it as a struggle between Hashemites and Umayyads.²⁴⁶ This portrayal is somewhat surprising coming from a scholar who advocates for orthodox Sunnism, as such a framing aligns more closely with Shī‘ite perspectives. Nonetheless, Kātib Chelebī contends that after al-Ḥusayn and his followers were killed at Karbalā’, the Hashemite camp was consumed by deep resentment but lacked the military strength to avenge their fallen leader.²⁴⁷ Instead, they resorted to verbal condemnation, using their tongues to “slake their burning anger.” According to Kātib Chelebī, this practice became ingrained among the *Rāfiḍa* and gradually made its way into certain Sunnī circles. He further argues that the Abbasid rise to power exacerbated the situation, as they actively promoted the cursing of Yazīd on a much wider scale.²⁴⁸

Kātib Chelebī then shifts his focus to outlining the orthodox Sunnī stance on the Prophet’s Companions, emphasizing that they should not be spoken of negatively.²⁴⁹ However, he does acknowledge that Mu‘āwiya was in the wrong for opposing ‘Alī. Regarding Yazīd, Kātib Chelebī recognizes the lack of unanimity concerning his legacy. He notes that Yazīd was not one of the Prophet’s Companions, as he was born in 25/645—

²⁴⁵ Kātib Chelebī, *Mīzān al-Ḥaqq (The Balance of Truth)*, trans. Geoffrey Lewis (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957), 84.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

6.²⁵⁰ He then observes that some Sunnī scholars, influenced by Shī‘ite views, have accused Yazīd of impiety and unbelief, often citing his poetry as evidence of his supposed infidelity. Among those who adopted this stance, he names the Shāfi‘ī jurist Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Kiyā al-Harrāsī and the theologian Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī. However, Kātib Chelebī counters that the majority of Sunnī scholars do not consider it lawful to curse Yazīd.²⁵¹ A ruling issued by *Imām* al-Ghazālī, as cited by Kātib Chelebī, declared it unlawful to curse the Umayyad caliph, stating, “It is better to refrain from cursing anyone, whether an infidel or the devil.” Kātib Chelebī also recounts the words of Imām Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Alī ibn ‘Uthmān al-Awshī (d. 575/1179-80), who writes in his versified treatise on the principles of religion, *Yaqūl al-‘Abd*, “And after his death, Yazīd was no longer cursed.”²⁵² Kātib Chelebī criticizes those who disregard these words and insist on cursing Yazīd. He asserts that engaging with such individuals is futile, as their motivations are rooted in “vain fanaticism” or “ignorance.” Instead, one should adhere to the moderate path of Sunnī orthodoxy, exemplified by *Imām* al-Ghazālī.²⁵³

Kātib Chelebī departs from the *ahl al-baytist* Ottoman tradition and chooses to promote a moderate orthodox Sunnī stance instead. His position on the issue reflects his broader commitment to fostering unity within the Muslim community, as he argues that cursing Yazīd only exacerbates sectarian divides. By presenting his critique of those who insist on cursing Yazīd, Chelebī highlights the futility of such actions and the harm they

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid., 87.

bring to collective harmony within the religious community.²⁵⁴ His decision to take this approach was likely influenced by the sectarian tensions prevalent in the Ottoman Empire during his time. His position is reiterated in his biographical dictionary, *Sullam al-Wuṣūl*, where he addresses the same issue in his entry on Yazīd. There, he writes:

Scholars have disagreed regarding whether he should be cursed. Some have expressed opinions about this, but the more widely accepted view among the majority of Islamic scholars is that it is not permissible to curse him because he was a Muslim who prayed. The Prophet (peace be upon him) forbade cursing those who pray, and after his death, Yazīd was only cursed by extremists.²⁵⁵

Here, Kātib Chelebī reaffirms his earlier stance, though with one notable addition: he emphasizes that Yazīd was a praying Muslim and, therefore, cursing him is forbidden. However, he does not cite any prophetic tradition to support this claim, nor does he engage with opposing reports that suggest Yazīd was negligent in performing the five daily prayers. By presenting this assertion without addressing counterarguments, Kātib Chelebī reinforces his broader objective of discouraging divisive discourse, even if it means overlooking alternative perspectives.

Another notable figure who engaged with this issue, though absent from earlier chapters, is Abū al-Su‘ūd Efendī. Also known as Khoja Chelebī, Abū al-Su‘ūd was a distinguished Ottoman jurist and scholar who held the positions of *Qāḍī ‘Askar* (chief military judge) and *Shaykh al-Islām*. He was appointed as *Shaykh al-Islām* in 952/1545 by Sultan Sulaymān I and became one of the empire’s most influential legal authorities. As such, the way he addressed the issue of cursing Yazīd offers a useful glimpse into how

²⁵⁴ Many Qur’ānic verses and Prophetic traditions encourage Muslims to achieve and maintain unity. See, for instance, Qur’ān 3:102-103, 49:10, 9:71, 8:1, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 6105 and 3606, and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 1715 and 1847.

²⁵⁵ Kātib Chelebī, *Sullam al-Wuṣūl*, 3:415.

members of the Ottoman religious elite handled this sensitive subject.²⁵⁶ When asked about the legal consequences for someone who curses Yazīd and those who refrain from doing so, Abū al-Su‘ūd responded: “It is not lawful to condemn those who do not curse [Yazīd]. Not cursing him does not equate to affirming his actions.”²⁵⁷ This statement suggests a degree of tolerance toward the practice of cursing Yazīd, as Abū al-Su‘ūd does not explicitly forbid it. His stance becomes even clearer when compared to his rulings on Yazīd’s father, Mu‘āwiya. When asked about someone who states that Mu‘āwiya was not a good person, Abū al-Su‘ūd ruled that they should receive a discretionary punishment (*ta‘zīr*).²⁵⁸ However, for someone who explicitly curses the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, he prescribed a more severe *ta‘zīr* along with imprisonment.²⁵⁹ This distinction suggests that while cursing Mu‘āwiya was considered unacceptable and punishable, cursing Yazīd was treated with more leniency and did not carry equivalent legal consequences. This distinction in Abū al-Su‘ūd’s rulings can be attributed to Mu‘āwiya’s status as a Companion of the Prophet and scribe of revelation. In Sunnī Islam, the Companions are generally regarded with reverence, and speaking ill of them is discouraged, if not outright condemned.²⁶⁰ This likely explains why Abū al-Su‘ūd treated

²⁵⁶ For studies of Abū al-Su‘ūd’s fatwas and legal opinions, see Colin Imber, *Ebu’s-su‘ud: The Islamic Legal Tradition* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1997).

²⁵⁷ Abdurrahman Atçıl, “Ottoman Religious Rulings Concerning the Safavids,” in *The Empires of the Near East and India: Source Studies of the Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal Literate Communities*, ed. Hani Khafipour (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 104.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ See al-Nawawī, *al-Taqrīb wa al-Taysīr li-Ma‘rifat Sunan al-Bashīr al-Nadhīr fī Uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, edited by Muḥammad ‘Uthmān al-Khasht (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1985), 92; and Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Iṣāba fī Tamayīz al-Ṣaḥāba*, edited by ‘Ādil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwaḍ, vol. 1 (Beirut Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1994), 10.

the cursing of Mu‘āwiya with greater severity while displaying relative tolerance toward those who cursed Yazīd.

Despite Kātib Chelebī’s more orthodox Sunnī stance, the overwhelming majority of *Rūmī* scholars either explicitly cursed Yazīd or deemed it permissible to do so. This trend persisted even among scholars who came after the Ottoman conquest of the Arab lands, demonstrating that the empire’s expansion did not immediately reshape Ottoman religious discourse. Furthermore, figures like Muṣṭafā ‘Ālī and Muṣṭafā Jannābī, who employed tradition-critical methodologies rather than composing literary narratives, still upheld the tradition of cursing Yazīd. It was not until Kātib Chelebī’s time that a more explicitly orthodox position, discouraging cursing altogether, was articulated. This suggests that Ottoman *ahl al-baytism* remained deeply ingrained well into the seventeenth century, enduring despite the political transformations of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

6.2 “We Neither Love nor Curse Him”: Syrian Rulings on Cursing Yazīd

Among *Shāmī* scholars, the question of cursing Yazīd was often framed as a matter of legal permissibility rather than moral obligation. Historians and jurists engaged in nuanced discussions, grappling with the theological and juridical implications of openly cursing a deceased Muslim ruler. Ibn Taymiyya, for instance, offers a detailed response to al-Ḥillī’s cursing of Yazīd. He begins by comparing Yazīd to other rulers, arguing that the Umayyad caliph was better than many who came after him.²⁶¹ He claims that Yazīd was superior to figures such as al-Mukhtār ibn Abī ‘Ubayd al-Thaqafī (d. 67/687), the

²⁶¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, 4:567.

governor of Iraq, who falsely claimed that *Jibrīl* (Angel Gabriel) visited him, and al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (d. 95/714), who, according to scholarly consensus, was more oppressive than Yazīd. Nevertheless, Ibn Taymiyya acknowledges that Yazīd was a *fāsiq* and then turns to the question of whether it is permissible to curse a *fāsiq* by name.²⁶² He asserts that cursing a grave sinner is not a religious obligation, explaining that the authentic Sunnah only mentions curses upon certain categories of wrongdoers, not individuals. He cites traditions in which the Prophet cursed thieves, as well as those involved in the production, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages.²⁶³

Ibn Taymiyya then notes that Ḥanbalī scholars have differed on the issue of cursing a grave sinner specifically (*al-fāsiq al-mu‘ayyan*). Some, such as Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī, permitted it, while others, including Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 363/974), prohibited it.²⁶⁴ He then discusses the position of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, who, according to the most reliable reports, discouraged cursing individuals. Instead, Ibn Ḥanbal preferred to invoke the Qur’ānic verse: “*Indeed, the curse of Allāh is upon the wrongdoers*” (Qur’ān 11:18).²⁶⁵ To support this stance, Ibn Taymiyya cites a *ḥadīth* from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*:

A man called *Ḥimār* (Donkey), who frequently drank alcohol, was repeatedly brought to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) for punishment. One day, when he was brought again, a man said, “May Allāh curse him! How often he is brought to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) [for drinking alcohol].” The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) replied, “Do not curse him, for he loves Allāh and His Messenger.”²⁶⁶

²⁶² Ibid., 4:568.

²⁶³ See, for instance, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 6401, 6783, and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 1687.

²⁶⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, 4:569.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 6780.

Ibn Taymiyya comments that this *ḥadīth* demonstrates the distinction between cursing a general category of sinners, such as drinkers of alcohol, and cursing a specific individual. Even though the Prophet cursed those who drink alcohol in general, he prohibited cursing this particular man, emphasizing that he loved Allāh and His Messenger. For Ibn Taymiyya, this principle extends to Yazīd: while one may condemn his actions, cursing him by name is not permissible.²⁶⁷

Ibn Taymiyya builds on his earlier argument by presenting two key conditions that must be met for cursing Yazīd, or any grave sinner, to be justified.²⁶⁸ First, it must be definitively established that he was among the corrupt and oppressive individuals whom the *Sharī‘a* permits cursing and that he persisted in his wrongdoing until his death. Second, one must accept the permissibility of cursing a specific individual rather than limiting it to general categories of sinners. According to Ibn Taymiyya, opponents of cursing Yazīd oppose both premises, particularly the first. He then echoes the position of Ibn Ḥanbal and cites the Qur’ānic verse: “*Indeed, the curse of Allāh is upon the wrongdoers*” (Qur’ān 11:18), arguing that such verse functions like other warnings in the Qur’ān. He compares it to “*Indeed, those who consume the wealth of orphans unjustly are consuming fire in their bellies, and they will be burned in a Blaze*” (Qur’ān 4:10). These verses indicate that wrongdoing leads to divine punishment, but their application to specific individuals depends on additional factors. He explains that divine punishment may be averted by three things: repentance, good deeds that erase sins, or tribulations that expiate wrongdoing.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, 4:570.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4:571.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Ibn Taymiyya then poses a rhetorical challenge: “How can one be certain that Yazīd did not repent before his death? Or that he had no good deeds to counterbalance his misdeeds? Or that he was not afflicted with hardships that atoned for his sins?”²⁷⁰ He further supports his argument by citing the Qur’ānic verse: “*Indeed, Allāh does not forgive associating partners with Him, but He forgives anything less than that for whomever He wills*” (Qur’ān 4:48). This verse, he suggests, reinforces the idea that divine mercy is vast, and one cannot definitively declare Yazīd doomed for the hellfire. Here, Ibn Taymiyya reintroduces a *ḥadīth* from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* in which the Prophet is reported to have said: “The first army to raid Constantinople will be forgiven.”²⁷¹ Ibn Taymiyya states that, since Yazīd was the commander of that army, it is highly likely he was among those granted forgiveness. He adds, “Since this prophecy applies to a specific group of people (the soldiers of that army), it carries more weight than a general curse upon oppressors, which does not necessarily apply to every individual case.”²⁷² Finally, Ibn Taymiyya warns against opening the door to indiscriminate cursing. He asserts that most Muslims have committed some form of injustice in their lives, and if cursing sinners by name were permissible, then it would be possible to curse most deceased Muslims. Instead, he reminds his readers that Allāh commands believers to pray for deceased Muslims, not to curse them.²⁷³

Ibn Taymiyya’s comprehensive discussion stands in contrast to al-Dhahabī’s much briefer treatment of the issue. In his *Siyar*, the Shāfi‘ī scholar sums up his position

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 4:572.

²⁷¹ This tradition was already discussed in chapter three.

²⁷² Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, 4:572.

²⁷³ Ibid.

in just three sentences: “Yazīd is someone whom we neither curse nor love. He has counterparts among the caliphs of both dynasties (Umayyads and Abbasids), as well as the rulers of various regions. Indeed, some among them were even worse than him.”²⁷⁴ Unlike Ibn Taymiyya, al-Dhahabī does not address the jurisprudential aspect of cursing Yazīd. Instead, he simply states that he neither curses nor loves the caliph. Like Ibn Taymiyya, he draws comparisons between Yazīd and other rulers, emphasizing that some were even worse. Despite the brevity of his statement, al-Dhahabī’s position is evident: refraining from cursing Yazīd is the preferred stance.

While al-Dhahabī kept his assessment brief, Ibn Kathīr engaged more thoroughly with the debate, drawing heavily from the arguments of earlier scholars. He begins by acknowledging that the permissibility of cursing Yazīd is a matter of dispute, citing five scholars who ruled in favor of it: al-Khallāl (d. 311/923), Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, al-Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā (d. 458/1066), al-Qāḍī Abū al-Ḥusayn (d. 526/1131), and Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī.²⁷⁵ Notably, despite being a Shāfi‘ī, Ibn Kathīr lists only Ḥanbalī scholars, perhaps reflecting the influence of his Ḥanbalī teacher, Ibn Taymiyya. Concerning their reasoning, Ibn Kathīr notes that these scholars base their position on multiple traditions, including a prophetic *ḥadīth* warning of punishment for those who terrify the people of Medina.²⁷⁶ They also cite a statement attributed to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, where he approves of cursing the Umayyad caliph by name.

²⁷⁴ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*, 4:36.

²⁷⁵ Although Ibn Taymiyya previously identified Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-‘Azīz as opposed to cursing Yazīd, Ibn Kathīr states otherwise. While this contradiction is noteworthy, resolving it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

²⁷⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, 14:223.

On the opposing side, Ibn Kathīr states that some scholars prohibited cursing Yazīd to safeguard the reputation of his father, Mu‘āwiya, and other Companions from slander.²⁷⁷ Yazīd’s major blunders, according to this view, should be interpreted as unintended errors rather than deliberate wrongdoing. As for his own stance, Ibn Kathīr remains ambiguous. Commenting on poetic verses attributed to Yazīd, he states: “If Yazīd actually said this, then may Allāh’s curse be upon him; and if he did not, then may Allāh curse whoever falsely attributed these verses to him.”²⁷⁸ However, he neither confirms nor denies the authenticity of these reports, leaving his ultimate position open to interpretation.

Ibn Ṭulūn provides the most exhaustive treatment of this issue, compiling and analyzing past rulings in greater detail than any of his predecessors. In his treatise, he surveys scholarly positions from both sides of the debate, drawing from fifteen scholars across the Ḥanbalī, Ḥanafī, and Shāfi‘ī schools of jurisprudence. However, since this thesis is primarily concerned with Ibn Ṭulūn’s own position, I will list the scholars he cites without delving into their individual arguments. Among those who supported cursing Yazīd, Ibn Ṭulūn includes: al-Khallāl (Ḥanbalī), Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (Ḥanbalī), al-Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā (Ḥanbalī), al-Qāḍī Abū al-Ḥusayn (Ḥanbalī), Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī (Ḥanbalī), Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (Ḥanafī), and al-Kiyā al-Harrāsī (Shāfi‘ī). Conversely, those who opposed cursing Yazīd include: Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nu‘aymī (Shāfi‘ī), al-Ghazālī (Shāfi‘ī), Taqī al-Dīn Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) (Shāfi‘ī), Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī (Shāfi‘ī), Ibn Taymiyya (Ḥanbalī), Ibn al-Ḥaddād Abū Bakr

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ The verses in question are the same verses that al-Jannābī cites in his treatment of Yazīd’s reign. The most notable line reads: “[Banū] Hashem sought power yet, no power nor revelation [was received].” Ibid.,14:224.

Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 302/914) (Shāfi‘ī), Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ardabīlī, and Abū al-Barakāt al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310) (Ḥanafī).²⁷⁹ Ibn Ṭūlūn’s own stance, on the other hand, is clear and unequivocal. He asserts that since Yazīd was a Muslim, cursing him is impermissible, citing the Qur’ānic verse: “*Not for you, [O Muhammad, but for Allāh] is the decision whether He should [cut them down] or forgive them or punish them, for indeed, they are wrongdoers*” (Qur’ān 3:128). By referencing this verse, Ibn Ṭūlūn emphasizes that ultimate judgment belongs to God alone, reinforcing his argument against cursing Yazīd.

Unlike most *Shāmī* Arab scholars, al-Qaramānī stands out as the sole figure to permit the direct cursing of Yazīd. In his discussion of Yazīd’s caliphate, al-Qaramānī addresses the question of whether it is appropriate to curse Yazīd. He notes that three of the four founders of the Sunnī legal schools, Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik ibn Anas, and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, agreed on the permissibility of cursing Yazīd, whether explicitly by name (*taṣrīḥ*) or indirectly by cursing those responsible for al-Ḥusayn’s death (*talwīḥ*). For his part, al-Qaramānī leaves no room for ambiguity: he firmly believes it is acceptable to curse Yazīd directly.²⁸⁰ Qaramānī’s departure from the broader *Shāmī* scholarly consensus on cursing Yazīd can be attributed, in large part, to his reliance on al-Jannābī as his principal source. This dependence not only informs al-Qaramānī’s assessment of Yazīd but also explains his frequent divergence from the prevailing *Shāmī* positions, which tended to either prohibit or at least discourage the practice of explicitly cursing the Umayyad caliph. By drawing heavily from al-Jannābī, al-Qaramānī aligns himself more closely with the Ottoman historiographical tradition that places significant emphasis on condemning Yazīd.

²⁷⁹ Ibn Ṭūlūn, *al-Qayd al-Sharīd*, 52-72.

²⁸⁰ Al-Qaramānī, *Akḥbār al-Duwal*, 1:130-131.

Like many before him, Ibn al-‘Imād does not offer an independent ruling on the cursing of Yazīd but instead compiles and transmits the opinions of earlier scholars. In *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, he presents a range of scholarly views without explicitly endorsing any particular stance, reflecting a continued reliance on past authorities in shaping the debate. He begins by acknowledging that the permissibility of cursing Yazīd is a matter of dispute, citing three scholars who ruled against it: Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, al-Ghazālī, and al-Dhahabī.²⁸¹ To balance his account, he also transmits the views of al-Kiyā al-Harrāsī and al-Taftāzānī, both of whom argued that Yazīd should be explicitly cursed due to his satisfaction with the killing of al-Ḥusayn. Beyond these five scholars, Ibn al-‘Imād also relays the position of al-Yāfi‘ī, who does not take a clear stance. Al-Yāfi‘ī asserts that whoever killed al-Ḥusayn, ordered his killing, or deemed it permissible was a *kāfir*, whereas those who ordered it but did not consider it lawful were grave sinners.²⁸² However, he does not explicitly state where Yazīd falls within this framework, perhaps deliberately leaving the matter obscure. While Ibn al-‘Imād refrains from issuing a direct ruling, his selection of earlier opinions does not strongly indicate his personal stance, as he cites an almost equal number of scholars on both sides of the debate. However, since he himself does not engage in the practice of cursing Yazīd, it is reasonable to assume that he at least mildly opposed it, situating him within the broader Levantine scholarly tradition.

In sum, the prevailing near-consensus among *Shāmī* scholars was to refrain from explicitly cursing Yazīd. Although they viewed the Umayyad caliph as a *fāsiq*, according to their legal reasoning, explicit cursing was reserved for disbelievers. Since they lacked

²⁸¹ Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, 1:68.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 1:69.

conclusive evidence that Yazīd had personally committed acts that warranted a curse, they avoided making definitive pronouncements against him. Furthermore, many of these scholars may have been responding to Shīʿī polemics, adopting a more restrained tone to counter the sectarian condemnation of Yazīd. Their methodological approach was also consistent: rather than offering entirely independent rulings, they relied on the opinions of earlier scholars, compiling and transmitting a range of views before clarifying their own positions. This directly contrasts with the Ottoman scholarly tradition, which almost unanimously cursed the Umayyad caliph. The singular *Shāmī* exception, al-Qaramānī, highlights the role of historiographical influences, as his reliance on al-Jannābī, an Ottoman historian, set him apart from his *Shāmī* counterparts. Ultimately, this consensus reflects a broader methodological and ideological tendency within *Shāmī* scholarship, one that prioritized restraint, legal precedent, and a cautious approach to historical controversy.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This study has aimed to determine whether a regional consensus existed among Sunnī scholars in *Bilād al-Shām* and *Bilād al-Rūm* regarding Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya, whether in terms of his legitimacy, personal conduct, or his role in the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn. By analyzing a range of historical and legal writings, I have demonstrated that while *Rūmī* scholars were largely unanimous in their condemnation of Yazīd, *Shāmī* scholars adopted a more measured and jurisprudentially grounded approach. As a result, Syrian scholars were much more restrained in their discussion of Yazīd’s legacy as a ruler and as a Muslim. This divergence, I argue, was mainly shaped by two distinct historiographical traditions. In *Bilād al-Rūm*, for instance, scholars upheld a firm *ahl al-baytist* sentiment, even when relying on Mamluk and Ayyubid histories. This can be primarily attributed to the culture of Sufism that dominated Ottoman lands, where reverence for the Prophet’s family was deeply embedded in both popular piety and scholarly discourse. Sufi orders like the Bayramiye, to which Yāzījī Oghlū Mehmed belonged, actively promoted devotion to the descendants of the Prophet, creating an intellectual environment where criticism of Yazīd’s actions against al-Ḥusayn became not just acceptable but morally imperative.²⁸³ It is important, however, not to exaggerate this uniformity. Despite the widespread adoption of *ahl al-baytism*, the *Rūmī* intellectual tradition was far from monolithic. Ottoman historiography displayed remarkable plurality in its *ahl al-baytist* expressions, with scholars dealing with the question of Yazīd’s legacy along a spectrum of condemnation. *Shāmī* scholars, on the other hand, applied the

²⁸³ For more on the culture of Sufism in Ottoman lands, see Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004).

classical source-critical method that prioritized the authentication of reports. Caution and technical precision dominated their approach to the Umayyad caliph's legacy, with extensive dependence on traditions and legal reasoning.

While methodological pluralism characterized both regional traditions, the jurisprudential composition of *Bilād al-Shām* appears to have exerted surprisingly limited influence on scholarly positions regarding Yazīd. The case of al-Dhahabī and Ibn Kathīr, both Shāfi'īs and students of Ibn Taymiyya, yet holding opposite views on Yazīd, demonstrates that legal affiliation did not dictate one's perception of the Umayyad ruler. This suggests that each scholar utilized historical traditions in ways that were shaped by their own attitudes rather than relying on the dominant position of their school of jurisprudence. Nonetheless, the extent to which jurisprudential affiliation influenced these divergent interpretations remains an open question, requiring further study in future research.

Alongside legal and methodological factors, a sense of local attachment may have influenced the more cautious views of Yazīd expressed by scholars from *Bilād al-Shām*. Living in Damascus, the former capital of the Umayyad Caliphate, Syrian scholars were active in a region deeply tied to Umayyad legacy. We can confidently presume that this connection created a sense of regional loyalty, or at least a cultural sensitivity, that discouraged strong condemnation of Yazīd. This does not mean that *Shāmīs* endlessly praised Yazīd, but rather that their criticism tended to be more reserved. Indeed, geography and cultural identity heavily influenced historical interpretation.

My findings also reassess the role of political developments in forming scholarly attitudes toward early Islamic figures. While recent scholarship has emphasized the

impact of the Ottoman conquest of Arab lands (1516–17) and the rise of the Shī‘ī Safavid threat in intensifying Ottoman Sunnitization efforts, I have demonstrated that these factors had little to no effect on scholarly views of the second Umayyad caliph. Condemnation of Yazīd remained strong in Ottoman historiography well into the seventeenth century, until figures like Kātib Chelebī broke free from the standard *ahl al-baytist* trend. Instead, the effect of Ottoman-Arab scholarly discourse after 1516 was limited to other fields of knowledge, such as *ḥadīth* studies.

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