

# “The Other” Among Us: The Perception of Khārijī and Ibādī Islam in the Muslim Exegetical Traditions\*

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## Abstract

This article analyses the perception of Khārijī and Ibādī Islam in Sunni and Shi‘i Qur’anic commentaries and compares the depiction of these groups by their opponents with the actual teachings of the Ibādīyya as expressed in their exegetical, legal and theological literature. As will be shown, misrepresentations abound: the Khārijīs and Ibādīs assume the role of the paradigmatic “other,” characterised by heresy, *takfīr*, excessiveness and the spreading of discord (*fitna*). This negative image has certain roots in the early history of Islam, but is maintained by exegetes and historians of exegesis until today, even though the target of their polemics has long disappeared and in spite of the availability of sources that provide a more accurate idea of Khārijī, and specifically Ibādī, beliefs. The need to construct a cautionary tale of an internal enemy provides a motivation to adopt the anti-Khārijī narrative from earlier exegetes instead of verifying stereotypes about the alleged theological, ritual and juridical differences between the Khārijīyya and other branches of Islam. In reality, the differences between Ibādī Islam and mainstream Sunni and Shi‘i beliefs are relatively small in many respects. Still, most exegetes go so far as to ahistorically assign an anti-Khārijī agenda to the Qur’anic text itself, which shows that self-assertion and the drawing of boundaries are functions of *tafsīr* that are at times more powerful than the quest for the meaning of the text.

**Keywords:** Khawārij, Ibādīs, Exegesis, Heretic Groups, Mainstream Islam, Shi‘ites.

## Öz

Bu makale Sünni ve Şîf tefsirde Hâricîlerle İbâdîlere bakış açısını değerlendirmektedir. Her ne kadar Hâricîler erken dönemde İslam ümmeti arasında ciddi bölünme ve kaosa sebep olmuşlarsa da üçüncü-dördüncü asırdan sonra tamamen marjinalleşerek ortadan kalkmışlardır. Geride ise bugün Hâricîlikle ilişkili olduklarını bile kabul etmeyen ve belirli bölgelerde yaşayan İbâdî gruplar kalmıştır. Bu makale, Hâricî dışı kaynakların Hâricîleri hâlâ potansiyel bir tehlike olarak gördükleri için Müslümanların şuur altında bu tür ifratları devamlı canlı mı tutmak istedikleri, yoksa Hâricîlik’i daha çok genel geçer bir akım olarak görüp her zaman nüks edebilecek bir hastalık olarak mı telakki ettikleri sorusunu ele almaktadır. Özellikle de müfessirlerin, Kur’an metni bağlamında, İslam toplumunun selameti için Hâricîlik düşüncesi hakkında nasıl bir tarih inşa ettikleri ve tefsir metinlerini bu çerçevede nasıl kullandıkları tartışılacaktır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Hâricîler, İbâdîler, Tefsir, Fırak, Sünnî İslam, Şîler.

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## Introduction

Differences exist within every religious tradition because of theological, socio-political, cultural, economic, and ethnic factors. As an inevitable result, each group has a tendency to refer to those who differ from them as “the other”, even though they belong to the same religion. Such is the case in all religions, not only in Islam. A noteworthy example appears in the early years of Christianity, when St. Paul wrote “Is Jesus Christ divided?”<sup>1</sup> to rival Christian groups. While divergence from the mainstream does not *ipso facto* create a need for a formal split into factions, there will always be groups who use opposition to the dominant tradition as a means of affirming their separateness; and similarly, the mainstream understanding of a tradition can be strengthened by criticising alternative understandings.

The groups differing from the mainstream<sup>2</sup> within the field of Islam, that is, “internal others”, are called *al-firaq al-dālla* or *ahl al-bid‘a* –terms that refer to “deviant” ideological trends or sects within Islam. Because of their divergent viewpoints, they are perceived as the origin of *fitna* (sedition) and a threat to the unity of Islam. The irony here is that while the sects try to exclude the mainstream by accusing it of being insufficient and heretical, they are themselves called “outsiders” (*khawārij* means “others” or “outsiders”) in the mainstream traditions. The Khārijīs provide a very good illustration of such marginalisation, and the construction of their “otherness” through Qur’anic exegesis will be the focus of this article.

In the following, I will analyse the perception of the Khārijīs and the Ibādīs in pre-modern Qur’anic commentaries; I will complete this analysis by drawing on selected works of theology and law that make reference to Khārijī Islam. All of the works I will examine have been written by non-Khārijī authors and therefore represent an outsider perspective on this group. Based on the analysis of these texts, I will discuss the reasons for the marginalisation of the Khārijīs and the increasingly negative discourse about them in the mainstream Islamic intellectual history. The article will thus

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<sup>1</sup> I Cor. 1:10-13: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” Elsewhere St Paul describes other Christian groups and some Jews as “fake siblings” (Gal. 2:4-5); “the ones leading people to heresy” (Tit. 1:10-11); and “dogs” that must be avoided (Phil. 3: 1-2). The Bible translation used is the King James Bible.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the term “mainstream” is used to denote groups and individuals who are generally accepted as being part of Sunni Islam.

provide an example of how the exegesis of the Qur'an can be used in order to reinforce and transmit stereotypes and imagined boundaries within the religious tradition of Islam, and also describe the methodology that allows for the demarcation and perpetuation of such boundaries.

### **1. The Perception of the Khārijīs and the Ibādīs in Classical Qur'anic Exegesis**

Among Muslims, the Khārijīs hold a reputation for having caused anarchy and terror in early Islamic history. Muslim scholars writing about the Khārijīs frequently point out that the Prophet had already uttered warnings about them, quoting a hadith contained in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's (d.241/855) *Musnad*: "Pointing [to] the direction of Iraq, the Prophet had talked about a group of people who will arise there. They read the Qur'an, but what they read does not go through their throats; like an arrow departing from a bow, they depart from Islam."<sup>3</sup>

In the following sections, I will detail the position of non-Khārijī Qur'anic commentators concerning the supposed insufficiency of the Khārijīs' reading and understanding of the Qur'an. Subsequently, I will expound the image of Khārijīs arising from their approaches to certain jurisprudential (*fiqhī*) and theological (*kalāmī*) issues as presented in non-Khārijī sources. I will then examine some of the allegations levelled against the Khārijīyya by comparing them with the ideas outlined in Khārijī, and more specifically Ibādī, literature.

The Ibādīyya deserves special attention because it is usually considered a quietist branch of the Khārijīyya and is the only significant Khārijī group that survived the first few centuries of Islam. Therefore, the available Khārijī literature on exegesis, theology and law is primarily Ibādī. Interestingly, while the Ibādīyya shares few of those characteristics that the Khārijīyya is frequently accused of, Muslim scholars do not tend to make such distinctions, as my analysis will show.

#### **1.1. Perspectives on the Khārijīs' and Ibādīs' Interpretation of the Qur'an**

The overall attitude of non-Khārijī Muslim scholars on the Khārijī approach to Qur'anic exegesis is exemplified in a particularly wide-spread

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<sup>3</sup> Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), v.3, p.486; See. Ethem Ruhi Fiğlalı, "Hāriciler," *Diyanet İslām Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, v.16, p.169. The commentator on the *Musnad*, Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Bannā, challenges the credibility of the report's *isnād* as well as its text (*matn*), which is found in the other hadith collections as well. Cf. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Bannā, *al-Fath al-Rabbānī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, nd.), v.24, p.19.

tradition that contains the fourth caliph ‘Alī’s (d.40/661) advice to Ibn ‘Abbās (d.68/687) when sending him to convince the Khārijīs not to fight against the caliph: “Discuss with them, but never put forth a proof from the Qur’an because the Qur’an is *dhū wujūh* (its words may have different meanings and connotations).”<sup>4</sup> ‘Ikrima (d.105/723), himself a Khārijī, reports Ibn ‘Abbās’s subsequent conversation with ‘Alī, drawing on Ibn ‘Abbās himself. According to this report,

Ibn ‘Abbās said: “Oh *amīr al-mu’minīn* (commander of the faithful)! I know the Book of Allāh better than them. The Qur’an was revealed in our houses.” ‘Alī responded: “You are right. ... The [words of] the Qur’an carry numerous meanings [*ḥammāl dhū wujūh*]. When you introduce a proof from the Qur’an, they respond to you with the verses of the Qur’an. Thus, while arguing with them, prove with the Sunna as much as possible so that they cannot find any way out.” Following ‘Alī’s suggestion, Ibn ‘Abbās silenced the Khārijīs with proofs from the prophetic tradition ...<sup>5</sup>

This anecdote clearly shows that the Khārijīs were perceived as being skilled with words when interpreting the Qur’an; in other words, they were competent enough to derive any meaning they wished from the Qur’an.

A further reference that non-Khārijī scholars have frequently used in order to attack the Khārijīs’ interpretation of the Qur’an is a segment of 3/Āl ‘Imrān:7 “Those who harbour doubts in their hearts will pursue the verses with multiple meanings to create confusion and to extract a certain meaning.”<sup>6</sup> The famous commentator al-Ṭabarī (d.310/922) records that when Qatāda (d.117/735), a *tābi‘ī*, read this verse, he said, “If they are not the Khārijīs [*al-ḥarūriyya*] and Sabaʿīs, I do not know who is indicated in this verse.”<sup>7</sup> By mentioning the Khārijīs together with the Sabaʿīs, al-Ṭabarī reinforces his negative assessment of the Khārijīs. He also stresses the

<sup>4</sup> Al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1993), v.1, p.446.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, v.1, p.446.

<sup>6</sup> The full version of 3/Āl ‘Imrān:7 is: “He sent down to you this scripture, containing straightforward verses – which constitute the essence of the scripture – as well as multiple-meaning or allegorical verses. Those who harbour doubts in their hearts will pursue the multiple-meaning verses to create confusion, and to extricate a certain meaning. None knows the true meaning thereof except God and those well founded in knowledge. They say, ‘We believe in this – all of it comes from our Lord.’ Only those who possess intelligence will take heed.” This verse is, of course, discussed extensively in Qur’anic commentaries, and the frequent reference to the Khārijīs is only a minor aspect of its interpretation. The Qur’an translations used in this paper are those of Yusuf Ali and Marmaduke Pickthall unless otherwise noted.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), v.3, p.178.

heretical nature of their Qur'an interpretation as follows: "The Khārijīs were mentioned in the presence of Ibn 'Abbās. ... Then he stated that the Khārijīs believed in the straightforward (*muḥkam*) verses of the Qur'an but that they are cursed because of the allegorical or ambiguous (*mutashābih*) verses of the Qur'an. Afterwards, he read the seventh verse of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*."<sup>8</sup>

An analysis of the Qur'an commentary by Ibn Kathīr (d.774/1373) demonstrates that the negative reputation of the Khārijīs has not changed in the four centuries that had passed since al-Ṭabarī had written his work. Indeed, the critique raised by Ibn Kathīr is even harsher than that of al-Ṭabarī. We do not know if the meticulous commentator Ibn Kathīr has ever personally encountered any Khārijīs who reflected the features ascribed to early Khārijī Islam. However, due to the negative historical accounts about the sect, Muslim scholars have always identified Khārijīs with *fitna* and portrayed them accordingly. For instance, Ibn Kathīr has no doubt that 3/Āl 'Imrān:7 refers to the Khārijīs. Furthermore, he expands on this interpretation by pointing to 3/Āl 'Imrān:106 "The day will come when some faces will be brightened (with joy), while other faces will be darkened (with misery)", commenting that those whose faces will be darkened are none other than the Khārijīs. After emphasising the credibility of this point of view on the basis of exegetical reports, Ibn Kathīr states that if not heretics, "they are, at least, under suspicion" and he adds that the Khārijīs were undoubtedly the first heretical group in Islamic history.<sup>9</sup> As can be understood from all this, Ibn Kathīr does not consider it problematic to associate a group that emerged only after the Prophet's lifetime directly with a verse of the Qur'an; and this approach is entirely consistent with previous interpretations. For example, some of the companions are reported to have associated the unrest in the periods of the Caliphs 'Uthmān (d.36/656) and 'Alī with the Khārijīs, although the latter group had not even emerged at that time. What concerns us here is the question how such early misrepresentation of the Khārijīs' activities turned into conviction eight centuries later.

Ibn Kathīr explains the alleged unrest caused by the Khārijīs as connected with the aim of gaining worldly goods. He reports that after the Ḥunayn war in 8/630, certain individuals had the absurd notion that the Prophet did not behave justly while distributing the loot. He also recounts that a man called Dhū'l-Khuwayṣira (meaning "the owner of a small flank")

<sup>8</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, v.3, p.181.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Mukhtaṣar Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), v.1, pp.264-5.

explicitly articulated the suspicions of that group of people. After cursing the man thus: “May God split his flank into two,”<sup>10</sup> Ibn Kathīr reports that the Prophet responded to the man with the following words: “If I do not behave justly, I will commit a great sin or I will be cursed”. Thereupon, ‘Umar asked the Prophet for permission to kill that man, but he was told to let him go. The Prophet Muḥammad also talked about the offspring of that man as follows:

[His offspring will consist of those] when one of you compares his prayer to that of them, you will belittle your prayers. Likewise, when you compare their recitation of the Qur’an with yours, you will find yours deficient. In fact, they are those who departed from the religion as if an arrow should depart from a bow ...<sup>11</sup>.

Ibn Kathīr notes that the group anticipated by the Prophet existed in the time of the fourth caliph, ‘Alī, and they were killed at Nahrawān. Nevertheless, other sects, groups and communities with heretical beliefs originated from them and spread widely.<sup>12</sup> Apart from a positive assessment of the reliability of the hadith reports he cites, Ibn Kathīr does not provide a personal evaluation of the issue. He does not comment on the apparent contradiction between the Prophet’s order, in one hadith, to leave the alleged originator of the *fitna* alone and the instruction he is reported to have given to his community, in another hadith, to kill the evil groups bred from that *fitna* when they appeared and wherever they were seen. It seems that Ibn Kathīr interprets this latter hadith, which appears in many hadith collections, as being directed against the later activities of the Khārijīs. Thus, by relating the different hadiths to different historical events, he manages to achieve some coherence. Furthermore, Ibn Kathīr perceives the existence of “heretical” groups besides the Khārijīs, such as Qadariyya, Mu‘tazila, and Jahmiyya, as evidence confirming the Prophet Muḥammad’s knowledge of

<sup>10</sup> The curse uttered by Ibn Kathīr fits the picture because, as al-Ghazzālī asserts, there are three tolerable reasons for uttering a curse: profane attitude, *bid‘a* (illicit innovation) and *fisq* (wickedness). Additionally, under a separate heading called “cursing,” al-Ghazzālī explains that cursing *ahl al-bid‘a*, who insert illicit innovations into religion (e.g. Jews, Christians, Shi‘is, Khārijīs, and Qadariyya), is permissible. However, he also warns his reader that it is hard to correctly identify true *ahl al-bid‘a*. See al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, Turkish trans. Ahmed Serdaroğlu (Istanbul: Bedir Yayınları, 1974), v.3, p.280.

<sup>11</sup> Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), v.3, p.486; Ibn Kathīr, *Mukhtaṣar Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr*, v.1, p.264.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Mukhtaṣar Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr*, v.1, pp.264-5. This report is also contained in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s *Musnad*. Al-Haythamī asserts that all the transmitters of this hadith are reliable. For more information see al-Bannā, *al-Faṭḥ al-Rabbānī*, v.23, pp.148-9.

past, present and future events unknown to his contemporaries (*ghayb*). In fact, the Prophet is said to have informed his community in another hadith that the community of Islam would split into 73 groups, all of which would deserve hell, except for the one that follows his own and his companions' path; that group will be saved from hell and deserve heaven.<sup>13</sup>

Ibn Kathīr documents the inadequacy of the Khārijīs' interpretation of the Qur'an with another hadith attributed to the Prophet: "A group among my *umma* recite the Qur'an, but they throw it away as if throwing dates away; they misinterpret it."<sup>14</sup> He maintains that several Qur'anic verses support the meaning of this hadith; for instance, 3/Āl 'Imrān:7 "Those who have perversity in their hearts (*zaygh*)" follow a wrong path in the interpretation of the Qur'an. Al-Ṭabarī deducts a similar meaning from 18/al-Kahf:104 "They are the ones whose works in this life are totally astray, but they think that they are doing good." According to an exegetical tradition, Muṣ'ab b. Sa'd asked his father, Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ (d.54/674), whether the ones who "think they are doing good" are the Khārijīs (*al-ḥarūriyya*). Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ's response was that this verse refers to *aṣḥāb al-ṣawāmi'* [the Christians who devoted themselves to churches and monasteries]; the Khārijīs, Sa'd said, were the subject of another verse, 61/al-Ṣaff:5 "When they deviated, God diverted their hearts."<sup>15</sup> This exegetical tradition, transmitted by al-Ṭabarī, contains the words *zāghū* or *azāgha* that are derived from the root *zaygh* (deviation), which is also contained in 3/Āl 'Imrān:7.

In sum, classical commentators strove to make a quick connection between the verses in which the same word stem (*zaygh*) was used. Even though the verse in *sūra* 61/al-Ṣaff explicitly refers to the tribe of Moses, i.e., the Jews, or any whose hearts are remote from the worship of God, the commentators associated this verse with the Khārijīs in order to prove their view that the Khārijīs' Qur'an interpretation is faulty. An exegetical report narrated by al-Ṭabarī about Abū Umāma with regard to 61/al-Ṣaff:5 reinforces the mainstream conception: "They are Khārijīs ... and God never

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Mukhtaṣar Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr*, v.1, pp.264-5. This hadith, occurring in the authoritative hadith collections, is considered reliable by Muslim scholars of Hadith. See al-Bannā, *al-Faḥ al-Rabbānī*, v.17, p.101; v.24, p.6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Mukhtaṣar Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr*, v.1, p.264.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, v.9, pp.32-33. In some versions of this anecdote, *ahl al-kitāb* (the People of the Book) or *al-yahūd wa al-naṣārā* is used instead of the expression *aṣḥāb al-ṣawāmi'*.

lets those reach success who prefer unbelief and deviation to faith<sup>16</sup> because there is perversity in their hearts.”<sup>17</sup>

Al-Qurṭubī (d.671/1272) enlarges the circle of those who allegedly misinterpret the Qur’an by including the *rāfiḍa*, which he understands to be an extremist Shi‘i group.<sup>18</sup> The reason for the Khārijīs’ failure in understanding the Qur’an, according to al-Qurṭubī, is that by ignoring the Sunna, which refers to the Prophet Muḥammad’s speech and lifestyle and illustrates the spirit of the Qur’an without necessarily being an intentional explanation of the Qur’an, they adhere only to the Qur’an’s apparent, superficial meaning, and thus they cannot comprehend it properly.<sup>19</sup> In addition to reinforcing his condemnation of the Khārijīs by putting them on

<sup>16</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, v.14, p.87.

<sup>17</sup> Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır, *Hak Dini Kur’an Dili* (İstanbul: Eser Yayınları, 1971), v.2, p.1040.

<sup>18</sup> Monopolism is a dominant feature of “otherisation” in Shi‘i literature as well. The following statement attributed to Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Bāqir (d.114/733) underlines this: “Move away from five groups of people: Murji‘a, Khārijīs, Qadariyya, Shāmī, and Nāṣib.” When asked who the Nāṣib were, he replied, “those who get angry with the ones they love.” See Mīrzā Ḥusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il wa Mustanbat al-Masā’il* (Beirut: Mu‘assasat Āl Bayt, 1991), v.12, p.317 (hadith no.14191). Al-Kulaynī reports in his work *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī* that God cursed Qadariyya, Khārijīs and Murji‘a (twice). It is interesting that al-Kulaynī mentions this in a chapter called *Kitāb al-imān wa al-kufr* (Chapter on Belief and Unbelief) (al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī* (Tehrān: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya 1395 AH), v.2, p.409).

<sup>19</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-Arabī, 1984), v.1, p.38. Al-Ṭabarī relates a number of anecdotes that are meant to confirm the condemnation of the Khārijīs by the authoritative figures of early Islam. One of these anecdotes is contained in the section on the interpretation of 3/Āl ‘Imrān:7 in his Qur’an commentary. It cites Qatāda as follows: “I swear that when the Khārijīs appeared, the warriors of Badr, consisting of both *muhājirūn* and *anṣār*, many companions of the Prophet who had participated in the *Riḍwān* allegiance (*bay‘a*), as the people of Hudaybiyya, and some of his wives were [still] alive and residing in Madina, Damascus, and Iraq. They were not pleased with the existence of the Khārijīs. Neither of them has a tendency to Khārijism, because the Khārijīs were talking about the “mistakes” of the Prophet, feeling resentment in their hearts, and vilifying him with their words. ... I swear to God that if the Khārijīs had been on a divine path, they would have gathered people around them. In fact, however, they are in heresy. Therefore, they make people disperse and divide into factions.” Qatāda also makes the following comment: “As it is outside of God’s approval, you will find many controversies in their work. They will wait for a long time until they are to return to the right path. Alas! The successors did not correct themselves by looking at their predecessors. If they had dwelt on the approved way, God would have saved them and helped them. The fact is that they are on a false path; God falsified them and caused their fall. When a group rises out of Khārijism, I swear to God that they reject the proofs of God, falsify His words, and cause bloodshed. ... I swear to God that their idea of religion is bad; avoid them. Judaism is a *bid‘a*, Christianity is a *bid‘a*, Khārijism is a *bid‘a*, and Saba‘iyya is a *bid‘a*. Neither the Qur’an nor the Sunna talk about them positively” (al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, v.3, p.178). Al-Qurṭubī’s words are reminiscent of 4/al-Nisā’:82 which reads “Why do they not study the Qur’an carefully? If it were from someone other than God, they would have found in it numerous contradictions” (Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, v.1, p.78). By citing Qatāda’s words in his work, al-Ṭabarī emphasises the marginal position of the Khārijīs as compared with Sunni Islam. A noteworthy point here is his way of “otherising” the Khārijīs by mentioning them together with the People of the Book. Al-Ṭabarī supports his perspective on the Khārijīs by the following hadith: “My community does not unite on heresy. When you face disagreements, I advise you to follow the congregation.” (Ibn Mājah, *Sunan* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), v.2, p.1303) The traditions he quotes are meant to attest to the departure of the Khārijīs from the community and their opposition to the main community’s consensus.



the same level as the *rāfiḍa*, he also diagnoses the malady of ignoring the prophetic tradition in exegesis as a symptom of their sickness, and insists that people should avoid this disease. In order to illustrate the indifference of the Khārijīs to the Sunna, al-Qurṭubī conveys the words of a repentant Khārijī *shaykh*: “[Before] When we had wanted [to do] something, we used to introduce it as if it were a hadith.”<sup>20</sup>

The negative reputation of the Khārijīs is pervasive in works of *tafsīr*. An anecdote about Ibn Abzī is illustrative; al-Ṭabarī mentions it in order to demonstrate how the Khārijīs distort the Qur’an’s meaning by situating verses in inappropriate contexts or introducing them with fallacious comments and implications. The anecdote concerns a Khārijī who comes to Ibn Abzī and reads the verse: “Praise be to God, who created the heavens and the earth, and made the darkness and the light. Yet those who disbelieve in their Lord continue to deviate” (6/al-An‘ām:1). Then the Khārijī asks Ibn Abzī: “Do infidels not attribute partners to God?” After Ibn Abzī’s approving response, he leaves. A group of people remind Ibn Abzī that the man was a Khārijī, who will probably try to include Muslims within the circle of unbeliever groups that Ibn Abzī addressed because they do not think like him, and suggest that what he understood from Ibn Abzī’s words was different from what Ibn Abzī meant. Thereupon, Ibn Abzī wants them to find that man and bring him back. When the man returns, Ibn Abzī clarifies what he meant and warns him not to exceed the limits of the meaning of the verse.<sup>21</sup>

Critique of the Khārijīs’ interpretation of the Qur’an is not restricted to Sunni scholars. Imāmī Shi‘i sources display a hostile attitude towards the Khārijīyya. This would make sense since the Khārijīs rebelled against ‘Alī after the arbitration (*taḥkīm*) incident that led to his death. What is interesting here is the “otherising” of the Khārijīs by a group that is itself “otherised” by the Sunnis.

According to a report on Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Bāqir (d.115/733), Khārijīs are a group of people who set themselves narrow limits.<sup>22</sup> Abū Ja‘far describes the Khārijīs as narrow-minded and implies that it is impossible to derive a reliable perspective on religion from such a

<sup>20</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, v.1, p.78.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Abzī asks a Khārijī whether he knows whom the verse addresses. The Khārijī replies that he does not know. Subsequently, Ibn Abzī himself explains: “This verse was revealed about the People of the Book...” (al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, v.5, pp.144-5).

<sup>22</sup> Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, v.2, p.405.

mindset. According to another tradition, when a man came and asked Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ja‘far b. Muḥammad al-Šādiq (d.148/765) whether “the Khārijīs are irresolute and doubting (*shukkāk*) people”, Abū ‘Abd Allāh<sup>23</sup> confirmed this fact and described the Khārijīs’ way of interpreting the Qur’an as indecisive and therefore deficient. To sum up, according to Shi‘i scholars, the Khārijīs, who did not deeply ground religion in their hearts, could grow neither in the exploration of its meaning nor in its practice in daily life. When explaining the Khārijīs’ weakness in interpreting the Qur’an, the famous Imāmī commentator al-‘Ayyāshī (third/ninth century) refers to the verse “Those who believe and do not pollute their belief with idol worship have deserved perfect security, and they are truly guided” (6/al-An‘ām:82). And then he employs the notion of *mafhūm al-mukhālafa* (application of opposite meaning) and states that “those who pollute their belief with idol worship are the Khārijīs themselves ... .”<sup>24</sup> The Khārijīs consequently acquire the status of idolaters and thus lose the right of being granted security. Al-Qummī (d.381/991), another Imāmī commentator, claims that the verse “They can never fathom the greatness of God” (39/al-Zumar:67) was revealed about the Khārijīs.<sup>25</sup>

An important argument used by Shi‘i scholars when “otherising” the Khārijīs is that the specificity of the occasion of revelation does not restrict the general meaning of the verse. This is a pervasive argument in Qur’anic exegesis, among the Sunnis as much as among the Shi‘is, and is used, in this context, to relate Qur’anic verses to the Khārijīs even when these verses are reported to have been revealed with respect to a different, pre-Khārijī group of people. For instance, al-Qummī’s explanation of the verse “Such are the ones who disbelieved in the revelations of their Lord and in meeting Him, and therefore, their works are in vain; on the Day of Resurrection, they have no weight” (18/al-Kahf:105), perfectly matches the condemnatory mode of Sunni commentators. According to a comment that al-Qummī ascribes to ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm, the verse originally addressed the Jews, but it is also applicable to the Khārijīs.<sup>26</sup> An identical argument is found in al-Ṭabarī’s commentary on the verse “Say, shall I tell you who the worst losers are?”

<sup>23</sup> Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-Shī‘a ilā Taḥṣīl Masā’il al-Sharī‘a* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1991), v.10, p.81. Al-‘Āmilī was a 17th century Shi‘i scholar.

<sup>24</sup> Al-‘Ayyāshī, Muḥammad b. Maṣ‘ūd, *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-‘Alamī, 1991), v.1, pp.353, 367.

<sup>25</sup> www.altafsir.com/Tafasir/asp (Āl al-Bayt Institute).

<sup>26</sup> www.altafsir.com/Tafasir/asp (Āl al-Bayt Institute).

(18/al-Kahf:103).<sup>27</sup> In a tradition that al-Ṭabarī quotes, when Muṣ‘ab asked his father whether this verse was about the Khārijīs, his father Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ said “No”, adding that a verse which concerns the Khārijīs appears in the second *sūra*: “Who violate God’s covenant after pledging to uphold it ... .” (2/al-Baqara:27), although that verse appears to refer to the Jews. The transmitter of this exegetical anecdote notes that Sa‘d b. Abī Waqqāṣ defined Khārijīs as *fāsiqūn*, a term referring to people who openly violate Islamic law. According to al-Ḍaḥḥāk and another commentator whose name is not mentioned, 18/al-Kahf:103 describes the Khārijīs along with Jews and Christians; they assert that although this verse was revealed about Jews and Christians, it addresses everyone who serves God in a way that He does not approve of.

Ibn Kathīr concludes his extensive diatribe against the Khārijīs with the following verse from the Qur’an: “As for those who disbelieve, their works are like a mirage in the desert. A thirsty person thinks that it is water. But when he reaches it, he finds that it is nothing, and he finds God there instead” (24/al-Nūr:39).<sup>28</sup> In so doing, Ibn Kathīr introduces the Khārijīs as those who believe to be on the right path, while they are in reality immersed in sin.

The same argument is frequently advanced in commentaries on 6/al-An‘ām:159: “Those who divide themselves into sects do not belong with you ... .” After stating that this verse was revealed about Jews and Christians, Ibn Kathīr quotes the following report from Ibn ‘Abbās: “Jews and Christians had divided into groups and broke their religions into factions before the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad. But this verse was revealed after the Prophet Muḥammad was sent to the people as a prophet. Therefore, those divided into factions should be the Khārijīs.” According to an anonymous transmitter, the people addressed in this verse are the *ahl al-bid‘a* (heretics).<sup>29</sup> Ibn Kathīr concludes with the following comment: “The apparent meaning of the verse indicates that this verse addresses everybody who divides the religion of God into factions.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See similar reports and explanation in al-Ṭabarī’s exegesis (al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, v.9, p.34).

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Mukhtaṣar Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr*, v.2, p.438.

<sup>29</sup> Those who adopt illicit innovations.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Mukhtaṣar Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr*, v.1, pp.637-8. Commenting on a similar expression, “[Do not fall into idol worship] like those who divide their religion into sects (*kānū shi‘ya’an*), each party rejoicing with what they have” in 30/al-Rūm:32, Ibn Kathīr explains that members of different religions sometimes disagree. While some groups within Islam also had their disagreements, only those groups that set themselves apart from mainstream Islam (*ahl al-sunna wa al-jamā‘a*) are in heresy (Ibn Kathīr,

## 1.2. The Critique of Khārijī Jurisprudence

Another noteworthy feature of the treatment of Khārijīs in classical Qur'anic commentaries is the harsh critique of Khārijī jurisprudence. As mentioned before, the Khārijī interpretation of the Qur'an was considered insufficient by both Sunni and Shi'ī scholars. Additionally, they maintain that the Khārijīs were lacking in recourse to *ijtihād* and *istinbāṭ* (inference), which are prerequisites of jurisprudential assessment. In this respect, the Zāhirī scholar Ibn Ḥazm's comment on Khārijī jurisprudence is highly significant. He asserts that because the Khārijīs try to explain the Qur'an without referring to the Sunna of the Prophet, they cannot produce real Islamic jurists.<sup>31</sup>

As a natural corollary, questions arise concerning the credibility and applicability of Khārijī fatwas. In general, according to non-Khārijī scholars, Khārijī jurisprudence is faulty and unreliable. It is possible to find many relevant examples of such an assessment, ranging from the earlier period to more recent exegesis and including exegetes from various schools of law and branches of Islam. All emphasize the jurisprudential inadequacy of the Khārijīs. For instance, al-Ālūsī (d.1270/1854) points out that regardless of the Prophet's practice and the companions' consensus, the Khārijīs reject the *rajm* (stoning) of married, divorced and widowed adulterers.<sup>32</sup> Al-Ālūsī also reports, without indicating any specific source, that the Khārijīs agree that a thief's hand may be cut off after any type of theft.<sup>33</sup> When explaining how to apply this type of punishment, Abū al-Su'ūd adds that the Khārijīs think the hand should be cut off at the shoulder rather than the wrist.<sup>34</sup>

Al-Qurṭubī, famous for attaching much importance to the consensus of the pre-eminent scholars of Islam (*ijmā'*), does not make any distinction between the widespread pejorative description of the Khārijīs and the actual facts when explaining the purported Khārijī point of view on a particular

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*Mukhtaṣar Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr*, v.3, p.55). The lively discussion of monopolism in the *milal* and *niḥal* tradition is reflected in this particular commentary.

<sup>31</sup> Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl fī al-Mīl wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal* (Beirut, 1986), v.4, p.156.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, nd.), v.18, p.78. Al-Qurṭubī had mentioned this issue earlier in his exegesis (al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, v.7, p.145); al-Shahrastānī, on the other hand, attributed the denial of *rajm* to the Azāriqa (*al-Mīl wa al-Niḥal*, Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifaḥ 1993), v.1, p.140). It is unfortunate that although Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, the author of *al-Tafṣīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, would have had the resources to test the plausibility of this judgement –i.e., the Ibādīs' alleged denial of *rajm*– in a scholarly way, he uncritically follows the classical discourse. See his *al-Tafṣīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn* (Cairo, 1976), v.2, p.313.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, v.6, p.133.

<sup>34</sup> Abū al-Su'ūd, *Irshād al-Aql al-Salīm ilā Mazāyā al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Muṣḥaf, nd.), v.3, p.35.

legal issue. In the section on illicit marriages, al-Qurṭubī claims that according to the Khārijīs, marriage with two sisters at the same time or marriage with a woman and her paternal/maternal aunt at the same time is permissible. In conclusion to this comment, he states, “They opposed the established Sunna and therefore they departed from the religion as an arrow departs from a bow.”<sup>35</sup>

In the times of al-Qurṭubī, Abū al-Su‘ūd and al-Ālūsī, the Khārijīs had almost perished except for a few isolated Ibādī groups. It is worthwhile to consider the question why these exegetes even mention the Khārijīs’ alleged jurisprudential positions in spite of the fact that they lost all practical relevance. One possible explanation is that they might merely have had a historical interest in jurisprudential positions that had long been abandoned. Another factor behind the negative attitude toward the Khārijīs’ jurisprudence might be the Sunni scholars’ emphasis on *ijmā‘*. Having examined a practice and found that the majority of scholars disapproved of it, they understandably came to a negative assessment of this practice in their exegesis. The question, however, is whether Khārijī legal practice and theory were at all consistent with the description presented in the Qur’anic commentaries mentioned above.

We should point out that in the period from the fifth century of Islam, despite the limited amount of Ibādī writings, some works of the Ibādīs were still in circulation; and the Ibādīs were the only remaining group of what was conventionally labelled as Khārijīyya. One would therefore expect some of the exegetes to undertake an analysis of the actual Khārijī jurisprudential understanding, at least according to the resources circulated among the Ibādīs. None of them, however, makes an effort to examine the Ibādī sources.

Concerning the punishment for adultery, for example, it is evident that there is no difference between the Sunni and the Ibādī approach to the issue. Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Huwwārī (d. ?290/903) explains the punishment of a person committing adultery in his exegesis as follows: “If not married, one hundred strikes to the soles of the feet; if married, *rajm* (stoning).”<sup>36</sup> Ibādī literature over the last two centuries has preserved the approach of its predecessors. Muhammad b. Yūsuf Aṭfayyash (d.1332/1914) reports that a single woman is punished with one hundred lashes to the soles of the feet, a

<sup>35</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, v.5, p.125.

<sup>36</sup> Hūd b. Muḥakkam, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-‘Azīz* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990), v.1, p.358.

slave is punished with fifty lashes to the soles of the feet, and a married man or woman is stoned (*rajm*).<sup>37</sup> With regard to the punishment of cutting off the hand of a thief, there is again no significant difference between Sunni and Ibādī positions. Hūd b. al-Muḥakkam explains, based on hadiths, that a person who steals at least 10 drachma<sup>38</sup> or an item of one dinar in value has to be punished by cutting off his hand. He also adds that if stolen property is less than one quarter of one dinar in value, the thief is not punished by cutting off the hand, in accordance with the practice of the Prophet. Additionally, he states that the *ḥadd* penalty does not apply if the thief does not depart with the stolen property.<sup>39</sup> Concerning the marriage restriction mentioned by al-Qurṭubī, the general consensus of the Ibādīs, from Hūd b. al-Muḥakkam until today, is that marriage with two sisters or a woman and her aunt at the same time is illicit.<sup>40</sup>

With regard to the Khārījīs' alleged ignorance of the Sunna and *ijmā'* (consensus), we should take notice of the words of Aṭfayyash in his exegetical work *Himyān al-Zād*:

Some rules of religion were explained in the Qur'an. Some others were explained in the Sunna, some via consensus (*ijmā'*) and some via analogy (*qiyās*). Both consensus and analogy should be based on the Sunna, which explains issues in the light of the Qur'an. Because of the aforementioned relationship between the Qur'an and the Sunna, consensus and analogy also originate in the Qur'an.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Muhammad b. Yūsuf Aṭfayyash, *Taysīr al-Tafsīr lil-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa al-Thaqāfa, 1989), v.2, p.283; v.9, p.65. The exegete Sa'īd b. Aḥmad al-Kindī also puts forth a similar approach; see *al-Tafsīr al-Muyassar* (Maṭba'at Muzūn, 1998), v.1, p.226.

<sup>38</sup> 1 drachma equals 4 grams.

<sup>39</sup> Hūd b. Muḥakkam, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-'Azīz*, v.1, pp.468-469. Yūsuf Aṭfayyash states: "Abū Ḥanīfa asserts that the punishment of cutting off the hand applies if the value of the stolen property reaches 10 *dirhams*. According to us, the thief's hand is cut off at the wrist if the stolen property is worth one fourth of one *dirham*." Aṭfayyash explains that Khārījīs cut off the thief's hand whether the value of the stolen property is big or small. He also adds that the Ṣufriyya, a Khārījī group, cuts the arm off at the shoulder, whereas the Imāmite Shi'a cuts the hand from the far end of the fingers (Aṭfayyash, *Taysīr*, v.3, p.88). What is noteworthy here is the attitude of Aṭfayyash. By "otherising" the Khārījīs, he draws a clear distinction between them and his own sect, the Ibādīyya.

<sup>40</sup> Hūd b. Muḥakkam, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-'Azīz*, v.1, pp.354-5; al-Kindī, *al-Tafsīr al-Muyassar*, v.1, pp.229-230; Aṭfayyash, *Taysīr*, v.2, pp.293-296.

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad b. Yūsuf Aṭfayyash, *Himyān al-Zād ilā Dār al-Ma'ād* (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wa al-Thaqāfa, 1989), v.9, p.237. While explaining 27/al-Naml:4, Aṭfayyash devotes even more attention to the Sunna (see Aṭfayyash, *Taysīr*, v.4, p.8). A contemporary Islamic scholar, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad al-Marmūrī, states that there is no difference between *ahl al-sunna* and Ibādīs in terms of Islamic jurisprudential methodology: "Uṣūl al-Sharī'a al-Islāmiyya wa Taṭbīqātuhā 'inda al-Ibādīyya," in *Nadwat al-Fiqh al-Islāmī* (Muscat: Wizārat al-'Adl wa al-Awqāf wa al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1990), p.798.

Moreover, while commenting on 4/al-Nisā':155, Aṭṭfayyash reveals his great respect for and approval of Islamic scholars' methods of *ijmā'* and *ijtihād* by saying that "Consensus (*ijmā'*), solitary report (*khābar wāḥid*), and analogy (*qiyās*) are the criteria determined by the Qur'an."<sup>42</sup> We can discern the sensitivity of Aṭṭfayyash about the Sunna when he comments on 5/al-Mā'ida:5, specifically the instruction to wash the feet in ablution. He argues that the expression *arjulakum* (your feet) includes *wujūhakum* and *aydiyakum* (your faces and your hands) in its meaning and concludes thus: "As indicated in the Sunna and in the application of the Sunna by the companions, and the general consensus, feet should be washed as well as hands and face (in ablution)."<sup>43</sup> The following words further illustrate high status he grants to the Sunna and its application by the first generations of Muslims: "Even though the verse refers to wiping the feet with wet palms (*mash*) like wiping the head with wet palms in ablution, we derive from the Sunna that this verse was abrogated", because 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ says, "I have never seen anybody among the companions who wipes his feet with wet palms."<sup>44</sup>

There are numerous other examples of polemical misrepresentations of Khārijī jurisprudence by Sunni scholars. According to al-Qurṭubī, "all scholars of the *umma* agree that a woman cannot pray in her menstrual period" but, he maintains, one group refused to be part of this agreement, namely the Khārijīs.<sup>45</sup> Al-Ālūsī makes the following claim about the Khārijīs: "The Khārijīs do not accept *taqiyya* (dissimulation) and (therefore) even if it costs one's property or life, they perceive the omission of a prescribed prayer as illicit."<sup>46</sup> Describing them as people who are harsh by

<sup>42</sup> Aṭṭfayyash, *Himyān*, v.6, p.78.

<sup>43</sup> Aṭṭfayyash, *Taysīr*, v.3, p.36.

<sup>44</sup> Aṭṭfayyash, *Taysīr*, v.3, pp.36-37. This approach contradicts al-Dhahabī's claim that "Ibādīs do not believe that the Sunna can abrogate a verse of the Qur'an" (*al-Taḥfīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, v.2, p.313). Aṭṭfayyash's sensitivity about the Sunna is also apparent in his approach to the issue of *mu'ā* (temporary marriage), see Aṭṭfayyash, *Taysīr*, v.2, pp.301-303.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, v.3, p.85. Al-Qurṭubī bases this information on a tradition about 'Ā'isha that is also contained in al-Bukhārī's collection, according to which a woman came to 'Ā'isha and asked, "Should a woman make up for the prayers that she could not perform in her menstrual period?" 'Ā'isha replies that woman: "Are you from the Harūriyya [sect] that [you ask such a question]? When we [the wives of the Prophet] had our menstrual period when the Messenger of God was present, he did not use to command us to pray during our period. ..." (al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Salafiyya, 1400), v.1, p.120). Ibādī scholars share this position; after conveying a similar hadith, Hūd b. Muḥakkam and Aṭṭfayyash state that a woman may never pray during her menstrual period (Hūd b. Muḥakkam, *Tafsīr Kūtāb Allāh al-'Azīz*, v.1, pp.210-211; Aṭṭfayyash, *Taysīr*, v.1, pp.333-341).

<sup>46</sup> With respect to 4/al-Nisā':77 "... When fighting was decreed for them, they feared the people as much as they feared God, or even more. They said, "Our Lord, why did You force this fighting on us? If only You grant us respite for a while!" Al-Dhahabī says that Nāfi' b. Azraq asserts that *taqiyya* is not

nature and fond of creating hardness for believers in their interpretation of religion, al-Ālūsī makes the following comment about the above-mentioned report: “They take a very strict stance on the issue, which is very strange indeed.”<sup>47</sup> Al-Qurṭubī also notes the following when explaining Mālik’s (d.179/795) approach to the times of prayer: Abū al-Faraj al-Mālikī al-Baghdādī narrates from Mālik that except the time of noon prayer, the best time for each prayer is the first moments of the prayer. Ibn Abī Uways also states that Mālik did not like to perform the noon prayer in its first moments (in the summer); but later on, saying that “this is like the Khārijīs’ praying”, he started to pray in the first moments of the noon prayer.<sup>48</sup> In sum, Sunni Qur’anic commentators found neither the Khārijīs’ way of worship nor their judicial rulings to be correct.

We see an even more hostile approach to the Khārijīs in Shi‘i sources. According to a tradition mentioned in *Tahdhīb*, there are two groups who oppose *ahl al-bayt*, the family of the Prophet: The first do not feel any enmity towards the *ahl al-bayt* although they oppose them. The meat of an animal they slaughter in the name of God is edible. As for the second group, the animals they slaughter in the name of God are inedible for a Muslim. This second group are the Khārijīs.<sup>49</sup> The Khārijīs are thus not even counted among the *ahl al-kitāb* (The People of the Book) and are marginalised to the extreme.

### 1.3. The Critique of the Khārijīs’ *Kalām* (theology)

One of the most frequently criticised points regarding the Khārijīs is their specific approach to some *kalāmī* (theological) issues. In this context, it has to be noted that the Khārijīs’ tendency of “otherising” the other Muslim

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permissible. Al-Dhahabī also adds that, contrary to Nāfi’s judgement, Najda b. ‘Āmir claims that *taqiyya* is permissible on the basis of 40/al-Mu’min:28 “A believing man among Pharaoh’s people, who was concealing his belief, said: “How can you kill a man just for saying, ‘My Lord is God,’ and he has shown you clear proofs from your Lord?” (al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, v.2, p.308; also see al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, v.1, p.144).

<sup>47</sup> Al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, v.3, p.122.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, v.2, p.166. Asserting that Khārijīs did not hold respect towards prayer, the mosque, or the companions, al-Ṭabarī narrates a report from ‘Alī b. Rabī‘a: “While ‘Alī was praying the sunrise prayer, a Khārijī loudly recited the following verse: It has been revealed to you, and to those before you, that if you ever commit idol worship, all your works will be nullified, and you will be with the losers” (39/al-Zumar:65). ‘Alī responded to him in his prayer by reciting the following verse: “Therefore, you shall steadfastly persevere – for God’s promise is the truth– and do not be intimidated by those who have not attained certainty” (30/al-Rūm:60).

<sup>49</sup> Al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* (Qum: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1986), v.9, p.71 (Bāb al-dhabā’ih wa al-aṭ‘ima).



groups influenced the way in which the Khārijīs were themselves viewed. The most effective tool in “otherising” other Muslims was the Khārijīs’ attitude towards those who committed major sins. Al-Naḥḥās mentions Abū ‘Ubayda’s interpretation of the verse “O People of the Scripture, do not transgress the limits of your religion beyond the truth” (5/al-Mā’ida:77) as “like the Khārijīs; the extremism of the Khārijīs led them much further in regarding sinners as infidels.”<sup>50</sup> Al-Ṭabarī also points to the extremism of the Khārijīs; while commenting on 25/al-Furqān:23, he quotes this couplet:

Khārijīs attributed heresy to the servants of God  
And said that their blood is licit for us.<sup>51</sup>

Al-Qurtubī also rejects the Khārijīs’ perception of grave sinners as infidels while commenting on the verse “God does not forgive idol worship (if maintained until death), and He forgives other offences for whomever He wills” (4/al-Nisā’:16).<sup>52</sup> Likewise, al-Rāzī (d.606/1209) states that the Khārijīs manipulated the verse “Those who do not rule in accordance with God’s revelations are the disbelievers” in 5/al-Mā’ida:44–45, 47 in order to attribute infidelity to Muslims, although this verse actually concerns non-Muslims.<sup>53</sup> Like al-Rāzī, al-Ālūsī also explains that the Khārijīs caused incurable wounds among Muslims by categorising *fāsiqs* and liars as infidels.<sup>54</sup>

Under the subject item “Ibāḍiyya”, al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d.816/1413) describes the Ibāḍī approach to grave sins as identical with the one that has become a trademark of the Khārijīs:

They are the followers of ‘Abd Allāh b. Ibād. They label those who oppose them as infidels although they pray towards the Ka’ba. Because they count *īmān* (faith) together with *‘amal* (action), they accept them as *muwahḥhid* (unitarian), but do not see them as *mu’min* (believers). They accuse ‘Alī and many other companions of the Prophet of *kufr* (unbelief).<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Abū Ja’far al-Naḥḥās, *Ma’ānī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm* (Mecca: Maṭba’at Jāmi’at Umm al-Qurā, 1988), v.2, p.344.

<sup>51</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, v.11, p.3.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi’*, v.5, p.386.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), v.12, pp.6-7.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma’ānī*, v.6, p145, v.18, p.111.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Jurjānī, *al-Ta’rīfāt* (Cairo: Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī wa Awlādih, 1938), p.3.

One can sense the strict detachment of al-Jurjānī from the Khārijīs even when describing the least controversial group among them, the Ibādīs. When reading the same scholar's definition of the term "Khārijism", a similar attitude is apparent: "The people who gather *ʿushr* (tithe) without the permission of the sultan are called Khārijīs."<sup>56</sup> Clearly, while the Khārijīs were being "otherised" by the mainstream, the mainstream was also feeling "otherised" by the Khārijīs via the institution of tithe. Al-Jurjānī stresses that "they are not interested in the *kharāj*, which is collected from the non-Muslims; however, they are quite interested in the *ʿushr* which is collected from the Muslims."

While commenting on the verse "O you who believe, do not befriend outsiders who never cease to wish you harm ... " (3/Āl 'Imrān:118), which is usually understood as referring to the People of the Book, al-Qurṭubī mentions the Khārijīs by quoting Abū Umāma (d.81/700): "The Prophet has determined that the people who are mentioned in the verse of the Qur'an are actually the Khārijīs."<sup>57</sup> Due to the departure of the Khārijīs from the rest regarding the notion of grave sin, they were severely censured by the other groups. According to al-Qurṭubī, the Khārijīs' approach to grave sins disturbs unity and peace among Muslims. Their doing so, he believes, sowed the first seeds of faction.<sup>58</sup>

The Khārijīs are generally associated with the notion of *fīsq* (sinfulness, aberration). For example, Ibn Kathīr, while analysing the semantics of the word *al-fāsiq* mentioned in 2/al-Baqara:25 –a verse he does not otherwise explicitly relate to the Khārijīs– notes its applicability to this group. He states that the word *fāsiq* means "one who departs from obedience" and adds that a mouse who departs from his hole for malice is also called *fusayqa*. Accordingly, he reports a hadith from 'Ā'isha about five animals that should

<sup>56</sup> Al-Jurjānī, *al-Ta'rifāt*, p.93. During the years in which the Umayyads struggled with 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr (d.71/692), the central authority was not very successful in controlling the inner areas of Iran. Therefore, the Khārijīs seem to have gained control of some areas from time to time. Abū 'Ubayd's narrative sheds light on the issue: Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān narrated from Ibn Mubārak, Sa'īd b. Abī Ayyūb and Nāfi' that "a group of people from the *anṣār* posed the subject of offering tithe to 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar (d.72/693), and when he said to deliver the tithe to the authorities, they told him that sometimes the people from Damascus [i.e. the Umayyads] and at other times the Khārijīs are victorious. Thereupon, Ibn 'Umar said: "Deliver the alms tax (*zakāt*) to the victors" (Aycan & Söylemez, *İdeolojik Tarih Okumaları*, p.54). Ibn 'Umar's statement suggests that the person who gathers the alms is regarded as the legitimate ruler. Probably because of this and similar traditions, al-Jurjānī defines the Khārijīs as an anarchist group that collects *ʿushr* (agricultural tax) without the permission of the Sultan. It is reported that Oman's Ibādīs collected this tax in Yemen and Ḥaḍramawt until the 3rd century AH. (Najdat Ḥammāsh, "Ibādīyya," *al-Mawsū'a al-'Arabīyya* (Damascus), v.1, p.32).

<sup>57</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, v.4, p.179.

<sup>58</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, v.1, p.419.

be killed in the *ḥill* and *ḥaram* regions.<sup>59</sup> Without mentioning them by name, Ibn Kathīr thus introduces the Khārijīs as a destructive group that emerged from among the Muslim community.

Al-Qurtubī uses the same analogy with a mouse in his commentary on 2/al-Baqara:190. Without making any distinction among Khārijī groups, he asserts that Muslims should fight against Khārijīs until they convert to truth. The reason he gives for this is that they rebelled against a just imam like a mouse that departs from its hole for malice. Therefore, they should be forced to recognise the truth.<sup>60</sup>

Al-Māturīdī (d.333/944) also emphasises the necessity of combatting with the Khārijīs, as ‘Alī did when they rebelled against him. The reason he gives is quite simple: Because Muslims of every era have fought them. In addition, he provides several sayings from the Prophet to support this approach. The subject of the verse that al-Māturīdī uses to prove the legitimacy of killing the Khārijīs is worthy of note.<sup>61</sup> He refers to them in his commentary on 5/al-Mā’ida:26, in which the story of Adam’s two sons is narrated; God approves of the animal sacrifice of the one and disapproves of the sacrifice of the other. Interestingly, immediately prior to this story, the Qur’an narrates the story of the Prophet Moses’ tribe (5/al-Mā’ida:24-25) and concludes this section with the word *al-fāsiqīn*, which makes al-Māturīdī’s association of *al-fāsiqīn* with the Khārijīs look more meaningful.

The Khārijīs’ attribution of *kufr* to Muslims, which according to al-Qaḍī ‘Iyād (d.544/1149) is “the toughest issue that scholars of *kalām* have faced”, has preoccupied many scholars.<sup>62</sup> The possibility of counting an infidel within the circle of Islam while keeping a Muslim out of this circle greatly

<sup>59</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Mukhtaṣar Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr*, v.1, p.46.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi’*, v.2, p.350. Ibn Ḥajar summarises the thought of the mainstream scholars of Sunnism as follows: Because the Khārijīs uttered the *shahāda* and continued to adhere to the basic tenets of Islam, they are considered Muslims. However, since they relied on a misinterpretation of the scriptures and made the seizing of Muslims’ property and the killing of Muslims licit for themselves by declaring them infidels, they fell into the trap of *fiṣq* (wickedness) In sum, Khārijīs are *fāsiqs* but Muslims. Regardless of their heresy, many Muslim scholars agree that they are the followers of a school in Islam. Thus the animals that they slaughter are edible and intermarrying with them is permissible. When ‘Alī was asked whether those who gathered at Nahrawān were infidels, he responded thus: “They [the Khārijīs] escape from *kufr* (unbelief).” ‘Alī’s response acknowledges that even if they fight against him, they remain within the circle of Islam; see Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī* (Cairo: Dār al-Rayān, 1987), v.12, p.314. In his *Mufradāt*, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī states under the rubric “Khārijīs” that they are called Khārijīs because “they have disobeyed the legitimate *imām*”; see *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawqīfiyya, nd.), p.152. As we have seen, the main aspect that shapes the great scholar al-Iṣfahānī’s perspective on Khārijīs is what he perceives as an attempt at disrupting peace and order in the early years of Islam.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 2004), v.3, p.30.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, v.12, p.313.

troubled Sunni scholars. One group regarded the Khārijīs indirectly as an objectionable group, whereas another directly criticised them, especially for harming the basic foundations of Islamic society. Thus, the second group considers it permissible to fight with the Khārijīs and kill them. The proofs they present to support the idea of fighting with and killing Khārijīs are noteworthy in terms of understanding this group's method of "otherising" the Kharijis. They generally support their claims with partial and non-contextual arguments that ignore the general picture and the historical background of the sources. For instance, Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī (d.543/1148) associates the words of the Prophet Muḥammad concerning the chaotic incidents that will occur within the *umma* with the Khārijīs and declares that the Khārijīs are infidels.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, Ibn Hubayra (d.560/1165) explains, "Fighting with the Khārijīs is more favourable than fighting with infidels, because in the former case one is motivated by the aim of protecting capital whereas the other [the fight with infidels] is motivated by the aim of gaining [extra] money. In fact, the protection of capital is much more important."<sup>64</sup> Many scholars who want to situate the Khārijīs outside Islam cite the hadith reported by Ibn Masʿūd (d.33/653) concerning the legitimacy of killing those who depart from Islam and the Islamic community. According to al-Qurṭubī, the essence of this hadith supports the infidelity of the Khārijīs.<sup>65</sup>

The main concern of the Sunni Islamic tradition is to prevent any action that might cause corruption (*fasād*).<sup>66</sup> Hence, al-Qurṭubī notes that most of the scholars find that "obeying an undutiful ruler is preferable to rebellion." Al-Qurṭubī interprets this approach as follows: "At the stage of rebellion and anarchy, trust and safety turn to fear and bloodshed" and he adds in no

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<sup>63</sup> Addressing the Prophet's hadiths "They depart from the religion as an arrow departs from a bow" and "They are the most wicked people of the earth", Ibn al-ʿArabī asserts that these words can be applicable only to infidels, and he implies that the Khārijīs are among those infidels (Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, v.12, p.313).

<sup>64</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, v.12, p.314.

<sup>65</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, v.12, p.313.

<sup>66</sup> Needless to say, with respect to the issue of *fitna* (sedition), there are numerous hadiths encouraging peaceful coexistence and unity in the Muslim community. In addition to the disapproval of anarchy and terrorism that is prevalent in the Sunni tradition, these hadiths carry a pedagogic value. The section on "Prohibition of involving in *fitna*" in Abū Dāwūd's *Sunan* contains an anecdote that exemplifies this approach: The father of Muslim b. Abī Bakra reports from the Prophet that "There will be some *fitnas* soon. At that time, the sitting one will be more beneficial than the standing one; the standing one will be more beneficial than the walking one, and likewise, the walking one will be more beneficial than the running one." After listening to this hadith, when one asked the Prophet "What if one enters in my home and raises his hands to kill me; what should I do then?", the Prophet responded to that with the verse from the Qur'an "Be as the son of Adam" (5/al-Mā'ida:28), see Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan* (Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1992), v.4, pp.455-6.

unclear terms that the Khārijīs are those who caused bloodshed.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, when interpreting 49/al-Ḥujurāt:9, he quotes the Prophet's words informing 'Ammār b. Yāsir (d.36/657) that "A furious group will kill you", and he specifies that this group are the Khārijīs.<sup>68</sup> While the Khārijīs' discriminatory approach to the committers of a major sin caused friction among the *umma*, Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d.150/767) reports from 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ (d.114/732) an account that emphasises the Sunni tradition's approval of diversity within the *umma* as follows: "If you do not pray the funeral prayers for the committers of major sins, you are going to perceive them as people who are outside of your religion and belonging to another religion!" Elsewhere he states that "Three traits originate from the basics of the Sunna: joining jihad under the rule of all the caliphs, praying behind all the rulers, and praying in the funerals of all Muslims."<sup>69</sup> Muqātil's approach obviously coincides with al-Māturīdī's interpretation that reveals the latter's priorities: for the sake of peaceful stability within the *umma*, a firm barrier should be erected against rebellions. One can understand the sensitivity of Muqātil and al-Māturīdī who witnessed, or lived in the time of those who witnessed, the harm done by Khārijī rebellions in the first centuries of Islam. These rebellions were, however, depicted in just as lively a manner in the exegesis of the later centuries, when most of the Khārijī groups had lost their power or had perished. Theoretically, this might be due to the fact that the later commentators on the Qur'an may have regarded the Khārijīs as a potential power; it is, however, evident that they did neither have such power nor the potential to gain it, given their actual situation. Rather, it is likely that the Sunni scholars attributed a negative meaning to everything connected with Khārijīsm in order to demonstrate their complete rejection of even the possibility of disorder in the community.

Criticism of Khārijī theology is not limited to the issue of the status of grave sinners. Muslim scholars also claim that the Khārijīs do not accept important tenets of faith like intercession, punishment and suffering in the grave, or the existence of *al-dajjāl* (the anti-Christ),<sup>70</sup> and that some groups of them do not accept the sinless nature of the prophets.<sup>71</sup> Al-Qurṭubī relates a further peculiarity that supposedly characterises the Khārijīs in an

<sup>67</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, v.2, p.109.

<sup>68</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, v.16, pp.316-317.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted from Mevlüt Güngör, *Kur'an Tefsirinde Fikhi Tefsir Hareketi ve İlk Tefsir* (İstanbul: Kur'an Kitaplığı, 1996), pp.114-115.

<sup>70</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, v.7, p.145.

<sup>71</sup> Al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, v.16, p.274.

anecdote: When ‘Alī set out to meet with the Khārijīs, he was asked, “Are you going to meet us when the moon is in the sign of the scorpion?” by some Khārijīs, and he was expected to wait till the moon returned; otherwise he would face a calamity. However, ‘Alī replied to those baseless warnings with the following words: “The Prophet did not have an astrologer, so we do not need astrologers either.”<sup>72</sup> Based on this anecdote, al-Qurṭubī accuses the Khārijīs of tending toward non-Islamic behaviour.

Such stereotypes about the Khārijīs, most of which were produced by the *milal wa niḥal* literature and were continuously reproduced without ever taking Khārijī sources into account, match the mentality evident in the assessment and “otherising” of Khārijī jurisprudence described above. Especially for the field of *kalām*, it is a serious problem that no debate is taking place on the degree to which the conventional stereotypes about the Khārijīs have a basis in the actual beliefs of Ibādīs, who have been the only remaining sect of Khārijism for centuries.

For example, in contrast to Sunni and Shi‘i allegations, I have not encountered any refutation of the sinless nature of the Prophets in the works of Ibādī scholars that I have analysed so far. Another case in point is the Ibādī attitude towards life in the grave. First of all, al-Rabī b. Ḥabīb’s (d.171/787) *Musnad*,<sup>73</sup> which Ibādīs perceive to be superior to al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, contains several hadiths on the Prophet concerning punishment in the grave and typical situations that unbelievers as well as believers will face in the grave. Some of those hadiths are also mentioned in the collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Nasaī, Ibn Mājah and in Mālik’s *Muwatta’*.<sup>74</sup> The contents of these hadiths are as follows: The appearance of the place, by day and by night, in which the deceased person stays until Judgement Day to which the dead person will proceed after the period in the grave; an anecdote on the Prophet Muḥammad concerning two graves that he saw while walking; the information he conveyed about suffering in the grave; and some questions that angels will pose to buried persons.

Hūd b. Muḥakkam explains the condition of people in the grave in detail in connection with 14/Ibrāhīm:27 and 20/Ṭā-Hā:124: their first meeting,

<sup>72</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, v.19, pp.28-29.

<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, al-Shahrastānī does not mention al-Rabī among the list of Khārijī scholars (al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, v.1, p.160).

<sup>74</sup> See related reports in al-Rabī b. Ḥabīb’s *Musnad*, *al-Jāmi’ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (Muscat: Maktabat al-Istiḳāma, 1995), pp.196-197, 373-374 (hadith nos.484, 487, 488, 982).

questions, suffering, dreadful angels, etc.<sup>75</sup> A century ago, the Ibādī exegete Muḥammad b. Yūsuf Aṭṭāyash stated that one of the meanings of “twice death and twice resurrection”, mentioned in 40/al-Mu’min:11, is resurrection for questioning by angels in the grave.<sup>76</sup> Aṭṭāyash also cites 71/Nūḥ:25 to prove the existence of suffering and happiness in the grave.<sup>77</sup> Although there is little evidence in the Qur’an for happiness or suffering in the grave, most Ibādīs accept these beliefs due to the existence of relevant hadiths. Only a few Ibādī scholars maintain that it is impossible to investigate the full nature of this issue because suffering in the grave is not one of the basics of faith and is quite obscure.<sup>78</sup>

Sunni and other non-Ibādī sources unvaryingly claim that Khārijīs, including Ibādīs, reject the possibility of intercession. In doing so, they completely disregard Ibādī teachings concerning the matter. For example, in al-Rabī’s *Musnad*, hadith no. 1004 touches upon the question of intercession. Subsequent to a saying of the Prophet, which contains the phrase “Those who commit grave sins do not have intercession”, it is stated that a believer who has died in battle for Islam will be able to intercede for 70 people in his family. It is also specified in hadith no. 1001, which was reported by Jābir b. Zayd (d.93?/711), that no one will be able to enter paradise on the basis of acts alone; he will only be able to do so by virtue of sincere deeds, God’s compassion, and the Prophet’s intercession.<sup>79</sup> Hūd b. Muḥakkam states that some people will practice intercession with God’s permission due to evidence in 10/Yūnus:3 and 21/al-Anbiyā’:28, which essentially read “Except for those who are allowed to intercede, nobody can intercede.”<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, even though Hūd b. Muḥakkam, in his commentary on 34/Saba’:23, states that those who have committed grave sins will not receive intercession, he also says that angels, prophets, and other believers will intercede for believers.<sup>81</sup> Aṭṭāyash points out that intercession will not be performed for those who attribute partners to God, but in support of the approach of Hūd b. Muḥakkam he states that angels,

<sup>75</sup> Hūd b. Muḥakkam, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-‘Azīz*, v.2, pp.328-331; v.3, pp.57-58.

<sup>76</sup> Aṭṭāyash, *Taysīr*, v.11, pp.328-331; see also idem, v.8, p.254.

<sup>77</sup> Aṭṭāyash, *Taysīr*, v.14, p.181.

<sup>78</sup> Farḥāt al-Ja’bīrī, *al-Bu’d al-Ḥaḍārī lil-‘Aqīda al-Ibādīyya* (Tunis: Maktabat al-‘Awān, 1987), pp.638-9, 653. Some sources claim that the Mu’tazilis and the Ibādīs from the Nukkār branch did not believe in punishment in the grave (See al-Ja’bīrī, *al-Bu’d al-Ḥaḍārī*, p.639).

<sup>79</sup> Al-Rabī b. Ḥabīb, *al-Jāmi’ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, pp.378-381.

<sup>80</sup> Hūd b. Muḥakkam, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-‘Azīz*, v.2, p.182, v.3, p.68.

<sup>81</sup> Hūd b. Muḥakkam, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-‘Azīz*, v.3, p.397.

prophets and saints will intercede.<sup>82</sup> In sum, intercession, according to the Ibādīs, is the prerogative of devout believers; there is no intercession for people who commit the worst sins. Therefore, the claim that Ibādīs entirely reject intercession is not correct.

### Conclusion

I have endeavoured to summarise the situation of a group that has always been “otherised” in terms of religion, politics, and morals after having itself “otherised” non-Khārijī Muslims religiously, politically, morally, culturally, and hermeneutically. It should be emphasised that the Sunni and Shi‘i literature of the pre-modern period presents a wide range of views about the Khārijīs. While the approaches of scholars are similar in general terms, they differ on specific points. Some of them did not completely exclude the Khārijīs from Islam, owing to a shared methodology (*uṣūl*), even if there were differences in detail (*furūʿ*). Such interpreters generally followed Abū Ḥanīfa’s (d.150/767) view and thus, even though they were critical of the Khārijīs, strove to reduce the requirements for being a Muslim to a minimum and not to exclude anybody from the circle of Islam if at all possible. They perceived every place under Muslim rule as *dār al-īmān*, “the land of faith”, and did not practice *takfīr* (charging someone with kufr) on those who committed dreadful sins or adhered to minority beliefs, as long as they recognised the Ka’ba as the only holy direction for believers.<sup>83</sup>

Others, however, display an extremely negative assessment of Khārijism that is based solely on their awareness of the crises in the Islamic community that occurred as a result of the early Khārijī rebellions.

The negative perception of the Khārijīs in many Islamic sources has even influenced some Muslims’ thinking and attitudes towards other potential outsiders. For instance, many mainstream Muslim sources contain detailed criticism of the storytellers (*quṣṣāṣ*) and preachers, who have played an important role in the Islamic community by teaching the Qur’an, *tafsīr*, Islamic jurisprudence, and the life of the Prophet. Although the existence of preachers dates back to the early years of Islam, the sources especially point to their inappropriate behaviour during the fifth/eleventh to sixth/twelfth centuries. Interestingly, we observe that the harshest criticism raised against the *quṣṣāṣ* was based on the argument that their emergence was connected to the Khārijīs. On the authority of Ibn Sīrīn (d.110/728), it is emphasised that

<sup>82</sup> Atfayyash, *Taysīr*, v.10, p.372.

<sup>83</sup> Sönmez Kutlu, “İslam Düşüncesinde Tarihsel Din Söylemleri Olgusu,” *İslâmiyât* 4 (2001), p.23.



the profession of storytelling originated when the Khārijīs first appeared among Muslims, so there is no value in this profession.<sup>84</sup>

When examining the attitude of Muslim scholars towards the Khārijīyya, a crucial question has generally not received serious scholarly attention so far: What are the reasons for the continuous negative judgement about the Khārijīs, even in times in which they had long ceased to exist? It is true that some Ibādī communities have survived, but those generally do not consider themselves Khārijīs and are actually rather close to Sunni Islam in their beliefs. However, the negative approach to both, Khārijīs and Ibādīs, has remained unchanged even to this day. Why do outside sources repeatedly discuss the Khārijīs even though there were no longer a significant number of people who conformed to Khārijī stereotypes at the time these sources were written? Stereotypes about Khārijīs are connected to theological, legal and moral extremes, but extreme forms of Khārijism only existed in the early centuries of Islam. Still, later authors have always taken these extreme forms as representative of Khārijism as a whole.

The analysis of the representation of Khārijism in *tafsīr* literature shows that commentators who emphasise exclusion and sectarian boundaries engage in historical anachronism. Only one type of Khārijī, namely the extremist type, is described from the time of Muqātil b. Sulaymān, a commentator of the second/eighth century, to the twelfth/nineteenth century. The same approach is evident in literature from recent decades, the authors of which ought to have had many opportunities for a critical reassessment. It will suffice to point out the late Egyptian scholar al-Dhahabī's *al-Tafsīr wa'l-Mufasssīrūn*,<sup>85</sup> which surveys the history of both Sunni and non-Sunni Qur'anic commentaries. In the thirty-page section in which he claims to discuss Khārijī, including Ibādī, commentaries, he hardly takes into account the Khārijī sources, and with regard to the few Ibādī sources he mentions, he does not perform any kind of analysis. Instead, he relies on information allegedly presented to him by an Ibādī when they met on the road. Despite the limited number of sources he uses and the insufficiency of research he conducted, al-Dhahabī does not hesitate to pass negative judgment on Ibādī *tafsīr*.<sup>86</sup> This wide-spread approach, which is closely tied to negative

<sup>84</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa al-Mudhakkirīn*, ed. Merlin L. Swartz (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1986), p.211.

<sup>85</sup> Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, v.2, pp.305-336.

<sup>86</sup> After al-Dhahabī, almost every author who has written a book on the history of the Muslim exegetical tradition repeats his misrepresentations. İsmail Cerrahoğlu's two-volume work is a good illustration. See İsmail Cerrahoğlu, *Tefsir Tarihi* (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 1988), v.1, pp.526-552.

conceptions of the Khārijīs that have been reinforced throughout history, can only result in the unequivocal rejection of Khārijism as a whole without any distinction between its branches. It is not even clear whether any of the information about the legal and theological approaches of the Khārijīs transmitted by non-Khārijī commentators conforms to truth, or reflects local and individual forms of Khārijism appearing in an early period, or is little more than imagination.

Did non-Khārijī scholars try to keep the Khārijīs' negative reputation alive throughout the centuries because they continued to consider them a potential danger? Or did they desire to record a history of Khārijism for the sake of peace within Islamic community because they believed that the Khārijīs exhibited symptoms which might recur?

The following statement about Ibn Taymiyya indicates where the answer to these questions might lie: According to Ibn Taymiyya, some groups such as Khurramīs, Qarmaṭians and Nuṣayrīs are worse than the Khārijīs. Ibn Taymiyya presents Khārijism as a set of deviant and heretical ideas.<sup>87</sup> He defines Khārijism as a social phenomenon that may appear in any situation and at any time, rather than as the name of a specific group which existed in a specific historical period.

The position of Ibn Taymiyya provides a clue to understanding the often-cited words of the Prophet that had a significant impact on the later Sunni tradition's portrayal of the Khārijīs. As is known, the Prophet warned the companions about the seditions that would arise in the future. Subsequently, the companions witnessed the emergence of Khārijism and the disruptions it caused. Therefore, the companions identified those of whom the Prophet had warned them as the Khārijīs. Thus, a phenomenon that might appear in any situation and at any time was labelled with the name of a specific group that existed in a specific period of time. The term Khārijism came to be used more as a generic term than as the name of a specific community.

Evidence for this can be found in the report of the Ottoman statesman Cevdet Pasha about the appearance of Wahhābism:<sup>88</sup> He poses the question "why Wahhābism is regarded as one type of Khārijism" and gives the following answer: because the founder, Shaykh Najdī (Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb), claims that many believers are in depravity, and he wastes their

<sup>87</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā* (al-Manṣūra: Dār al-Wafā', 2005), v.6, pp.416-417. For the Khārijī opinion on the notion of *kufr* (unbelief) see details in Yunus Ekin, *Kur'an'a Göre İnançsızlık* (İzmir: Işık Yay., 2001), pp.236-246.

<sup>88</sup> Cevdet Pasha, *Tarih-i Cevdet* (Ankara: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1966), v.7, pp.259-60.

blood and provokes his supporters by declaring permissible the seizure of the goods of other Muslims.<sup>89</sup>

The news that the “Khārijīs are again among us”, broadcast on the internet in recent years about an attack in which 14 people were killed in a small mosque belonging to the moderate Sufi group Anṣār al-Sunna in Sudan, demonstrates that the term Khārijism has become an ideological weapon which is used to denote excessive *takfīr*. The historical Khārijīs, or some of them, exhibited specific symptoms, and whenever these symptoms recur they are labelled according to old stereotypes.<sup>90</sup>

The problem remains that today’s Ibādīs, who no longer adhere to any of the real or alleged Khārijī beliefs, are usually labelled as Khārijīs in an ahistorical manner. The beliefs, legal norms and practices that are ascribed to them are largely unfounded and contradict the explicit teachings of their religious literature. However, the Ibādīs continue to be “otherised” in Sunni and Shi’i Qur’anic exegesis through the reproduction of Khārijī stereotypes, without taking into account the actual Ibādī literature that is widely available nowadays.

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<sup>89</sup> Cevdet Pasha, *Tarih-i Cevdet*, v.7, p.229.

<sup>90</sup> www.masud.co.uk/Islam/ahm/millan.htm; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1062277.stm>.

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