

statements behind choosing Abū Bakr and dismissing Sa'd and 'Alī. Tribal issues and a desire for power seem to have driven the decision, according to the sources. While *sunni* Muslims advocate for Abū Bakr and *shī'ī* for 'Alī, the traditions are ambiguous, and what took place at the *saqīfa* points to the uncertainty of both claims. If we consider the case for appointing Abū Bakr, the early accounts do not support a religious decision, but rather a tribal one. It is obvious, however, that secondary *sunni* studies have adopted a religious interpretation to support elevating Abū Bakr.³¹

When considering the case against Abū Bakr, mostly maintained by the Shi'ites, the matter is equally complex. While the supporters of 'Alī insist on Muhammad's clear designation of 'Alī at Ghadīr Khumm, there does not seem to be enough evidence to support the claim that many Muslims were aware of this incident and were willing to defend 'Alī's position. If the incident of appointing 'Alī was widely known among the Muslims, why did Alī's supporters not speak up and why was there a severe dissonance between the Muslims regarding Muhammad's successor?³² It is safe to conclude that after Muhammad's death, discord broke out among the Believers, and that lust for power, tribal considerations, and political concerns were the driving force behind the decisions.

The Ridda Wars

This internal conflict continued after the appointment of Abū Bakr. The *Ridda* Wars is a term, which refers to the wars during Abū Bakr's caliphate and under his orders (11–13/632–634), commonly called the "apostasy wars." These wars were against those who, after the death of the Prophet, renounced Islam and refrained from paying the *zakāt* (charitable almsgiving, hereafter *zakat*) as well as those who falsely proclaimed their own prophethood. Whether these wars targeted those who abandoned Islam after Muhammad's death or those who remained Muslims yet refused to pay the *zakat* (or against both groups) appears ambiguous in the tradition. Also ambiguous is whether the wars were waged for religious or political reasons—to preserve Islam and its creeds, or to secure the newly founded Muslim community under Abū Bakr's leadership. In what follows, I will begin by exploring the different views of various *sunni* and *shī'ī* Muslims on the *Ridda* Wars, followed by a brief analysis of recent scholars' arguments, before concluding with a critical analysis of the primary Muslim historical accounts on the *Ridda*.

The common traditional *sunni* Muslim interpretation argues that *hurūb al-ridda* (the *Ridda* Wars) were religiously driven. They were legitimate wars against those who abandoned Islam by committing one or more of the following three wrongdoings: (1) refusing Islam altogether, (2) claiming prophethood, (3) or refusing (and prohibiting) the paying of the *zakat*.³³ Fighting the apostates, according to traditionalists, was necessary in order to preserve Islam. Apostates

were given three options: submission, exile, or the sword.³⁴ For Muslim traditionalists, there is no difference between *al-dīn wa-l-dunyā wa-l-siyāsa* (religion, life affairs, and politics) in Islam, as the religion is the *marjī'iyya* (standard reference) for communal life and politics; consequently, the *saḥāba* (companions) did not distinguish between apostates, self-claimed prophets, or those prohibiting the *zakat*.³⁵ Still, some traditionalists do not deny that the *Ridda* Wars had some political dimension to them. For them, the *Ridda* Wars were "religious and political at the same time"—religious, because the apostates denied Islam or one of its tenets, and political, because of the importance and urgency of confronting every person or threat that sought to shake *nizām al-dawla al-islāmiyya* (the structure of the Islamic State).³⁶ Thus, the *sunni* argument portrays *hurūb al-ridda* as primarily religiously motivated wars, legitimately fought in order to preserve the faith.

The common *shī'ī* Muslim perspective on *hurūb al-ridda* differs from the *sunni* perspective in several ways. In a work on 'Alī's life, Ja'far Murtaḍā wonders whether the *sunni* Muslims use the term *hurūb al-ridda* to mean the "wars of apostasy" or "wars against those who refused the *zakat*," and affirms that there is a great misconception among Muslims regarding these wars. He argues that Muslims need to distinguish between these two possibilities. In his opinion, these wars "were in reality the wars fought by Abū Bakr against his opponents."³⁷ He points out that the Arabs were expecting 'Alī to succeed the Prophet, because they knew of *ḥadīth al-ghadīr*. When things went differently and Abū Bakr took over, they were not ready to accept him. Abū Bakr, aware of their disapproval of him, desired to ensure there would not be a revolt. He proceeded to secure his power as Caliph by launching these wars to subdue them before they could attack.³⁸

According to this *shī'ī* assessment, therefore, Abū Bakr was not fighting those who abandoned Islam, but those who refused his leadership and rebelled against him. He fought true Muslims and not apostates. They were in defiance against his seizing the caliphate rule, which was, according to their beliefs, supposed to be given to 'Alī. Another *shī'ī* perspective states that the so-called *hurūb al-ridda*, commissioned by Abū Bakr and achieved mostly by 'Ikrima ibn Abī Jahl and Khālid ibn al-Walīd, targeted Muslim believers who did not actually deny the concept of the *zakat*, but rather denied giving it to an illegitimate leader, as they believed 'Alī to be Muhammad's legitimate successor: "the fighting [of Abū Bakr] against these tribes was motivated by [his desire to] suppress the opposing movements to his rule, and to avoid any upcoming possible movements that might rise claiming that he was not a legitimate Caliph."³⁹

Non-Muslim modern scholarship on *hurūb al-ridda* adopts the *sunni*'s general perspectives;⁴⁰ consequently, they view the *Ridda* Wars as wars targeting three groups: apostates, self-proclaimed prophets, and tax-rejecters. Examining some of these non-Muslim works, specifically in the Western scholarship, will suffice to

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