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**The Images of Fāṭimah  
in  
Muslim Biographical Literature**

by

Rukhsana Ali

A thesis submitted to the Faculty  
of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfilment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

Institute of Islamic Studies  
McGill University  
Montreal

September 1988

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## ABSTRACT

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In the Islamic tradition, as in other religious traditions, female saints are relatively few and not much scholarly attention has been given to them. Fāṭimah, the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad, is one such example. It is, however, a point of interest in her case is that in the twentieth century she has captured the attention of writers of Muslim religious literature to such an extent that there now exist at least eleven fairly recent biographies of her in Urdu, English, Arabic and Persian. This is remarkable, given that the earliest sources of Islamic history contain only a minimal amount of information on her. These modern biographies present Fāṭimah in a manner which interweaves historical information with hagiographic accounts, thus reinforcing her status as a saint.

This thesis attempts to identify, from the earliest available sources, the details concerning Fāṭimah as a historical person but ultimately shows that there is little real evidence for her life and even what facts do exist are the subject of controversy. Following this it examines the growth of the hagiographical tradition which created out of her a true Muslim saint and discusses its significance particularly for the Shī'ah. Finally, the conclusion presents some of the possible reasons for Fāṭimah's exalted status and for the resurgence of interest in her in the context of the modern Islamic world.

## RÉSUMÉ

Auteur: Rukhsana Ali  
Titre: Les images de Fāṭimah dans la littérature biographique musulmane.  
Département: Institut des Etudes Islamiques Université McGill  
Diplôme: Maîtrise en Arts  
Date: Septembre 1988

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Il y a en tradition islamique, ainsi que dans d'autres traditions religieuses, peu de femmes saintes, les rares qui existent, ont par ailleurs, relativement peu retenu l'attention des chercheurs. Fāṭimah, fille du Prophète Muḥammad, en est un exemple. Mais ce qui est intéressant dans son cas est qu'elle ait au vingtième siècle, attiré l'attention de plusieurs auteurs de littérature musulmane. De cet intérêt sont nées, plus ou moins récemment, pas moins de onze biographies traitant d'elle, en ourdou, en anglais, en arabe. Ceci est d'autant plus remarquable que les sources premières d'histoire islamique ne contiennent qu'un minimum d'information à son sujet. Les biographies modernes présentent Fāṭimah d'une telle manière que l'information historique est tissée de données hagiographiques renforçant ainsi son statut de sainte.

Cette thèse tente d'identifier à partir des sources premières, les détails concernant Fāṭimah en tant que personnage historique, mais montre finalement qu'il y eut de sa vie que peu de réelles traces et que les faits qui ont vraiment eu lieu sont sujets à controverse. Elle examine ensuite le développement de la tradition hagiographique l'entourant et en discute la signification. Enfin en conclusion, elle présente les raisons qui peuvent expliquer le statut exalté de Fāṭimah et la resurgence de l'intérêt contemporain dans un contextemoderne.

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**N. B.** The transliteration system used in this thesis for Arabic, Persian and Urdu is the one employed by the Institute of Islamic Studies.

## CHAPTER I

### Sacred Biography and The Case of Fāṭimah

#### 1. Introduction

Modern biographies of Fāṭimah, the celebrated daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad, draw upon classical Islamic sources for their inspiration. However, the scantiness of data concerning the actual events in Fāṭimah's own life, coupled with her critical importance as the daughter of Muḥammad, the wife of ʿAlī, the mother of the Shīʿī Imāms Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, and perhaps, as a pious person idealizing womanhood in her own right, led quite early in Islamic history to the development of a hagiographical tradition surrounding her. The study of Fāṭimah's biography is therefore complicated by the difficulty in determining in the literature we encounter where the historic Fāṭimah ends and where the legendary one begins. Here a few remarks on the salient features of sacred biographies and Islamic biographies will not be amiss.

#### 2. Sacred Biography

A sacred biography is a written account of the life of a person deemed to be holy by the person or persons writing such accounts.<sup>1</sup> A holy person, or saint, could be described as one who is perceived by the adherents of that religious tradition as having attained spiritual perfection. This person then exemplifies the religion's highest values and thus functions as a model for others to follow.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the special holiness that is thought to inhere in such people often endows them with supernatural powers. Figures such as these may serve as wonderworkers, helpers, or intercessors, and as such they are considered as both subjects for imitation and objects of veneration.<sup>3</sup> Their exemplariness

and spiritual potency must transcend their deaths and be available to those who did not know them in the flesh. We thus have accounts of miracles taking place at their tombs or in connection with their relics, icons or statues.<sup>4</sup>

Given these traits of the holy personage, one can appreciate the difficulties encountered in the study of that person's sacred biography. By its very nature, sacred biography is a genre which mixes myth and biography; that is, a narrative which transposes supernatural events into the life of one who is otherwise an ordinary human being.<sup>5</sup> As a result the lives of such personalities often become highly mythologized, and particularly so if their sacred biographies are written long after their lifetime. In such a case the historical facts become of secondary importance while the supernatural elements of such narratives assume primary significance.

Consequently the problems faced by the students of such a genre are manifold. Besides the difficulty of separating historical facts from hagiographical additions and mythical elements, the student must remain constantly aware of the sensitivities of the venerated persons of the sacred person. For them, these additions and elements are after all the 'true' facts of history, an integral part of the life of their venerated personage.<sup>6</sup> To point out the dubiousness of miracles or the lack of reliable evidence signifies lack of faith or sympathy on the part of the critic and is to misunderstand the purpose of religious history. The claim that the biographer of a holy figure has not set out to write as a historian can be taken as an attack on the saint's integrity. Moreover, the holy personages are perceived to be too powerful to allow themselves to be compromised by indiscreet panegyrists.<sup>7</sup>

As far as holy figures from remote historical periods are concerned, the facts of their lives have usually come down via oral traditions over some centuries before being compiled in written form. A collection of oral traditions does not customarily give importance to

chronology, which is basic, of course, to history. While some indications may be made about the birth and death of the person, biographies relying on oral traditions generally rely only on the vaguest chronological notices to provide narrative transitions from one event to the next.<sup>8</sup> "Such transitional devices as 'once', 'after this', 'it is reported that', and the like, abound in these biographies."<sup>9</sup> The important thing for them is to recount the various events in the subjects' lives, their actions and words, by selecting or emphasizing those which in fact glorify and make them special. Stories and events which surround their lives are embellished so as to enhance these traits without affecting the personality or character of the saints. Their characters are perfect; they cannot and do not change. Such 'biographies' are popular with the faithful, for they serve to reinforce their faith both in the larger tradition and in the particular sacred personage as a model and intercessor.

Further, if the figures are significant holy personalities, the myths and legends surrounding their lives will almost certainly grow over the centuries and be enlarged by the different cultures and customs which come into the fold of the religion in question. Biographies or merely particular 'special events' in a saint's life are frequently retold in both prose and verse. Thus when we study sacred biographies of holy figures, we may expect to find a variety of variant stories, and as a result, the historical data on which they are founded may also vary. Facts are likely to be interpreted by biographers according to their own viewpoints.

However, in spite of the inconsistencies of a sacred biography, it is precisely through the numerous legends which "crystalized around a nucleus of factual material" that the charisma of a true religious person, such as Fāṭimah, can be better recognised.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Islamic Biography

It is important to discuss here Islamic biography since it is from this branch of literature that various biographies of Fāṭimah stem. Biographies have played a critically important part in the development of Islamic historiography. The reason for this is that the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad is what Franz Rosenthal calls "the quarry from which materials for the construction of the mighty edifice of Islam were derived."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, for many early Muslim scholars biographies were history. Al-Sakhāwī (d. 903/1497), one of the most eminent of later Arab biographers, says in his work, *Iʿlān*:

History as a technical term means the communication of time, whereby the circumstances are accurately registered of the birth of *transmitters* and *imāms*, and of their death, health, intelligence, bodily state, journeys, pilgrimages, powers of memory, accuracy, and reputation for trustworthiness or otherwise... *Subsidiary to this* is the record of contingent events and important occurrences relating to the rise of religious obligations, caliphs, viziers, raids, battles and so on.<sup>12</sup>

In any case, one of the earliest forms of recording history in Islamic literature is the biographical dictionary. These dictionaries, the earliest extant being Muḥammad ibn Saʿd's (d. 230/844-5) *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* (**Book of Classes**),<sup>13</sup> apart from recording the lives of political and military figures, strive to show that the history of the Islamic community is the history of its people, of individual men and women who may have contributed to the spread of Islam and to the formulation and transmission of its specific culture.<sup>14</sup> These dictionaries give detailed accounts of the religious and intellectual life of the times. Indeed these biographical works incidentally supply almost all the materials for the reconstruction of the status of women in early Muslim communities.<sup>15</sup>

The older biographies were composed almost solely from *ḥadīth*<sup>16</sup> (oral traditions) literature, and it is from such material that the various histories of Islam and its spread were

later written. The earliest histories resemble a mere presentation of *ḥadīth*, with each narrative preceded by a chain of oral transmitters (*isnād*). Then follow other recensions in the same form containing variant readings and the different, sometimes contradictory, versions of the same report.<sup>17</sup> The earliest biographical history based chiefly on these *ḥadīths* is the *Sīrat rasūl Allāh* of Muḥammad ibn Ishāq (d. 151/768).<sup>18</sup> This work was written almost one hundred years after the death of the Prophet but unfortunately has not survived in its original form. All we have of it is the abbreviated, annotated and sometimes altered text in the works of the Egyptian compiler ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Hishām (d. 218/833).<sup>19</sup> The first connected historical chronicle is the *Futūḥ al-Buldān* (henceforth cited as *Futūḥ*) of Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892).<sup>20</sup>

It may be asked why it was that the biography of Muḥammad and the earliest collections of the *ḥadīth* were written and compiled more than a century after the Prophet's death.<sup>21</sup> One of the reasons given by Margoliouth for this lapse of time is that "with the Arabs the natural seat of a book is the memory: it may or may not be committed to writing."<sup>22</sup> He further cites the Spanish scholar Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 436/1070) as having quoted certain Prophetic *ḥadīths* forbidding the writing down of anything except the Qurʾān, although he, ʿAbd al-Barr, presents other *ḥadīth* which commend writing.<sup>23</sup>

Consequently the biographer of early Islamic figures as well as the student of Islamic biography is faced with a number of problems. Besides the long passage of time before the compilation of early Islamic biographies, another problem which casts a shadow of doubt over the authenticity of the events that occurred is the discontinuity of the narrative. According to Jean Sauvaget, this discontinuity "results in the juxtaposition of short anecdotes with no link between them other than the central character or event and with no attempt at chronological order."<sup>24</sup> Massignon describes the early biographies as "nothing else but detached and fragmentary anecdotes."<sup>25</sup> The studies conducted by Goldziher,<sup>26</sup>

Schacht<sup>27</sup> and others on the reliability of the *ḥadīth* as a historical source, is too well known to be reviewed here. The consequence of this problem, however, is that it is almost impossible for biographers to resist the temptation of 'filling in the gaps' and thus imposing their own feelings and biases on the narrative.

This leads us to a third problem: the political and religious leanings of the authors. For example, the Umayyads<sup>28</sup> ordered that 'Alī, the Prophet's son-in-law, be cursed in the mosques, so that people were afraid even to name their sons 'Alī, or Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, his sons.<sup>29</sup> Thus *ḥadīths* from this period may reflect this Umayyad bias. The two main sects of Islam, the Sunnīs and the Shī'īs, do not necessarily accept the same *ḥadīths* as authentic. Some of the *ḥadīths* accepted by the former are rejected by the latter and vice versa. Differing opinions are also held with regard to various historical personages, the Prophet's closest Companions for example, and the members of his family. This difference of outlook has inevitably been reflected in the historical and biographical works of scholars of either school.

#### 4. Sectarian Tendencies: The status of 'Alī and his progeny

A major point of difference among Islamic authors is the status accorded by various schools to 'Alī. For most Shī'īs he had been designated by God to succeed the Prophet Muḥammad. In this capacity he is the first Imām for the Shī'īs, their spiritual guide, who should not have been deposed or even selected or elected by mere mortals. Furthermore, only 'Alī may designate the next Imām from amongst his children. The Sunnīs, however, do not consider him to have been chosen, either by God or by the Prophet, for this special Shī'ī status of Imām. According to the Sunnīs he is merely the fourth of the *khulafā' rāshidūn* (the rightly-guided caliphs) who ruled the Muslim community as temporal heads

in the period following the Prophet's death. Even though they might allot a special place to 'Alī in their hearts, their respect is vastly below that given him and his family by Shī'īs.

The Sunnīs also deeply venerate the Prophet's family especially the descendants of 'Alī and Fāṭimah, and the children of their son Ḥusayn in particular.<sup>30</sup> This is not because of their connection to 'Alī, but rather because of their relation to the Prophet through Fāṭimah, by virtue of which they are said to possess a special *barakah* (blessing).<sup>31</sup> For the Shī'īs, on the other hand, the concept of *ahl al-bayt* (people of the Prophet's house) and *ahl al-kisā'* (people of his mantle), which will be discussed in detail in a later chapter, take on paramount significance with respect to their ideology regarding the position of 'Alī as *imām*.

Thus the students of Islamic biography must be aware that this literature reflects the attitude of its authors. Scraps of conversations, bits of information about religious and political events have probably been edited for coherence, interest and above all relevance to later perceptions and demands.

## 5. The Case of Fāṭimah

Let us now turn to an examination of the case of Fāṭimah and pinpoint additional factors relevant to our study.

As a study of the sacred biography of a woman, this thesis confronts still another obstacle. The study of religions has unconsciously operated with a male-centered model of humanity. Until recently scholars have studied the world from the male point of view, and women have often been seen only as they appear to men. This has often meant that women do not appear as human beings at all, but "as objects, symbols, appendages to someone



else's enterprise, as problematic others to be assigned a neat place." <sup>32</sup> Although Christians, Jews, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists have all elevated women as

goddesses, virgins, mothers, symbols of purity, mercy and love, they have also denounced and degraded them as whores, witches, seducers, symbols of treachery, malice and lust.<sup>33</sup>

It is the latter image which has often been reinforced rather than the former. The traditional morning prayer of every Jewish man is: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe who has not made me a heathen, who has not made me a woman," followed by "I thank Thee, God, for having made me the Jew that I am."<sup>34</sup> Early Jewish tradition regarded women as evil,<sup>35</sup> and sons were considered more of a blessing than daughters: "Happy is he whose children are sons and woe to him whose children are daughters."<sup>36</sup> Women were not allowed to participate in communal prayers, read the Torah<sup>37</sup> or say grace at meals, these functions being the prerogative of the men in the family.<sup>38</sup> It is said that although the Buddha acknowledged the capabilities of women to become nuns (*arhants*), he is said to have predicted that if they were admitted to the monastic order, the religious law or the true Buddhist teaching (*dharma*) would last only five hundred years instead of a thousand.<sup>39</sup> In Hinduism although the Veda, the earliest scriptural corpus of the Hindus,<sup>40</sup> is ascribed to a poetess named Visvavara, and Sarasvati, the wife of Brahma, who has been credited with the invention of Sanskrit is the goddess of speech and is addressed as the "mother of Veda,"<sup>41</sup> women are kept from studying the Veda. In this they are equated with the Sudras, the lowest caste of the Hindus.<sup>42</sup> This is ironic because almost until the beginning of the Christian era, Hindu women were active members in religious ceremonies.<sup>43</sup> In fact no sacrifice could be performed without the presence of a woman; the gods were said not to accept a sacrifice offered by a bachelor, and a husband had to call upon his wife to accompany him in the symbolic ascent to heaven during the worship.<sup>44</sup> The presence of a wife was necessary for the presence of gods in the home.<sup>45</sup>

In Christian literature, the writings of Paul reveal that women were treated much the same as in the Jewish tradition,<sup>46</sup> although the later writings of Paul and those of Luke changed things for the better to a certain degree.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, in societies where women are not regarded as the equals of men and which stress the woman's role as daughter, wife and mother, it seems strange, at first sight, that women could be thought of as saints or holy persons. Indeed, there have been few recognised holy women or saints in the Islamic tradition. Those who come easily to mind are Rābī'a of Basra, the mystic; Sayyidah Zaynab, the granddaughter of the Prophet, and ʿĀ'ishah, the Prophet's youngest wife. But even among these few Rābī'a is not well known. In spite of the great influence she had on Islamic mysticism, not much has been written about her, either in her own tradition or by modern scholars of religious studies. Nor did Fāṭimah arouse much interest among early Muslim scholars. She is mentioned in various early biographies because she was the daughter of the Prophet and the wife of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Later, with the growing veneration for ʿAlī as the first Shīʿī Imām and for his sons and successors Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, Fāṭimah began to gain much more status and prestige. Yet she was hardly, if ever, recognized or studied as a person in her own right.

Consequently, there is a dearth of historical material specifically on her and it is very difficult to write about her in isolation from the dominant male figures in her life. The fact that Fāṭimah was the only child of the Prophet to survive him does not seem in itself important enough for the early scholars of *ḥadīth* literature, history and biography to have written in any great detail about her or to relate traditions on her authority. Apart from a few details, the earlier biographical and *ḥadīth* sources contain little information about her, and that, too, is confused and conflicting. Even among later Traditionists, she is rarely cited. For example in Ibn Ḥanbal's compilation, her *musnad* (lit: support; authority) occupies only one page as against the two hundred and fifty pages devoted to ʿĀ'ishah, the

Prophet's favourite wife.<sup>48</sup> Yet Fāṭimah is the only one of the Prophet's children now to enjoy wide renown, and she has become the object of great veneration by all Muslims, particularly the Shī'īs, for the reasons already explained. Even for the Sunnīs she is considered to be an inspired person and an extremely devout and pious woman. This could be because she was closest to her father, lived the longest of his offspring, and gave him "numerous descendants who spread throughout the Muslim world."<sup>49</sup> It may also be due to a reflection of her husband's and sons' greatness on her.

Be that as it may, with the rise of the Shī'ī school, Fāṭimah became more and more a special person, and biographies of her written in Arabic and Persian became more numerous. In these, her birth and life are increasingly embellished with anecdotes of miracles; her pre-ordained purity and her virtues are brought to light. She becomes the intercessor for genuinely repentant believers and she can be appealed to by people in trouble and sorrow. She is the perfect daughter, wife and mother -- a perfect and complete woman -- and finally she is depicted as the highest ideal to which a woman should aspire. In other words, she becomes a saint.

## 6. Biographical Sources

### 6.1. Classical Sources

These comprise mainly *ḥadīth* collections,<sup>50</sup> biographical dictionaries and chronicles, some of which have already been mentioned. Compiled quite some time after the Prophet's death, the *ḥadīth* collections tend to reflect the Shī'ī or Sunnī tendencies of their compilers. Accordingly, controversial *ḥadīths* have been omitted by some compilers and *ḥadīth* common to all are sometimes given a distinctive twist. For example, a *ḥadīth* in the collection of the Shī'ī Tirmidhī (d. 279/892-3), reports that the Prophet had said that Fāṭimah was the mistress of all the women of Paradise, except for Mary the daughter of ʿImrān;<sup>51</sup> this *ḥadīth* in the collection of the Sunnī Bukhārī (d. 256/870), reports only that

she is the mistress of the women of her time in this world.<sup>52</sup> There are very few *ḥadīths* about Fāṭimah, and these too are confined to a few scattered events in her life.

The earliest biographies and chronicles of Muḥammad are chiefly concerned with his activities as a prophet and his campaigns, and tell very little of his personal life and family. Consequently in such works as Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrat rasūl Allāh* and Wāqidī's *Kitāb al-maghāzī*<sup>53</sup> (d. 207/822), we find Fāṭimah mentioned only briefly as one of the Prophet's children. It is only in the later histories that Fāṭimah is given slightly more attention. In the works of Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/852), Ṭabarī (d. 309/925), Ya'qūbī (d. 284/897) and Balādhurī<sup>54</sup> more events involving Fāṭimah are related. But like the compilers of *ḥadīth*, most of the chroniclers and biographers show their Shī'ī or Sunnī bias in their presentation of events. For example, the Sunnī historian Balādhurī, in the *Futūḥ* describes the dispute over Fadak, a piece of property to which Fāṭimah had laid a claim, (to be discussed at length in Chapter Two) in a manner which shows Abū Bakr in the right and Fāṭimah as giving way to his decision.<sup>55</sup> In contrast Ya'qūbī, a Shī'ī historian, clearly believes that Abū Bakr did Fāṭimah an injustice in depriving her of the land which was rightfully hers.<sup>56</sup> Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-rusul wa'l mulūk* is a universal history. The work, regarded as relatively free of bias, relates only a little more about Fāṭimah than Ibn Ishāq's work. Besides her birth, Ṭabarī mentions the fact that she married 'Alī after the Battle of Badr, and gives the dates of the birth of their two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.<sup>57</sup>

Since modern biographies of Fāṭimah contain supernatural and hagiographical elements which are not found in the classical sources, these elements were presumably introduced later in time. Lammens in his article "Fāṭima" in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1st edition) (henceforth cited as EI<sup>1</sup>), assumes that "veneration for Fāṭima cannot be earlier than the tragedy of Karbalā (61/680)." <sup>58</sup> Over time scholarship (pre-eminently Shī'ī scholarship) exalted Fāṭimah further and 'made' her a divine personage. Vaglieri, in her

article in the second edition of *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (henceforth referred to as EI<sup>2</sup>) refers to three Shīʿī sources; ʿUyūn al-muʿjizāt of Ḥusayn bin ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (began writing about 448/1056-7), Dalāʾil al-imāma of Rustam al-Ṭabarī (lived in the 4th/10th century) and Ibn Shāhrashūb's (d. 588/1192) *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭalib*, for legends about Fāṭimah. These works, she writes, have devoted some chapters to the daughter of the Prophet. The dates of these writers further substantiate the point that legends and supernatural elements came to be part of Fāṭimah's biography much later.<sup>59</sup>

### 6.1. Modern Biographies

Attempts to survey all the modern biographies of Fāṭimah by Muslims revealed the fact that of the eleven biographies located five were written in Urdu two of which are translations from Arabic, three are in Arabic, of which two have been translated into Persian, one is in Persian and comprises a public lecture which has also been translated into English, and two were written in English.

It is interesting to note that even though all these biographies have relied upon much the same earlier sources, that is, the *ḥadīth* collections, older biographical dictionaries and the chronicles, their final analyses are quite dissimilar. The problem of Fāṭimah's age at her marriage provides an example. As will be discussed at length in the following chapter, there are writers who say that she was quite young, while others claim she was older than the customary age of an Arab girl at her marriage. Within each group we can find different explanations of the respective views.

These biographies of Fāṭimah range from attempts at a factual presentation of her life to hagiography and mythologization in accordance with her saintly status. The least tendentious biography is *al-Zahrāʾ* written by Abū Naṣr (first written 1947, translated

1962), a Lebanese Shī'ī scholar.<sup>60</sup> He is basically concerned with correcting the bias and errors of Henri Lammens' severely critical book *Fatima et les filles de Muḥammad* (1912).<sup>61</sup> Abū Naṣr presents the facts of Fāṭimah's life collected from various earlier sources and in the process exposes what he considers fallacies and weaknesses in Lammens' work. Although he is not always convincing in the latter, he is largely successful in compiling biographical details apparently without legend or myth.

Raīs Aḥmad Ja'fī has followed the same line in Urdu as Abū Naṣr has done in Arabic, that is, to try to answer the criticism of Western writers. In fact, his work *Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad* (1958) is, as he explains in the preface, a translation of Abū Naṣr's book, but he has supplemented it with dates and other details.<sup>62</sup> He has also added various *ḥadīths* concerning Fāṭimah and her sons from the collections of Abū Muslim and Bukhārī. Although Ja'fī is chiefly concerned with Lammens' work, he criticizes other Western writers as well, such as Reinhart Dozy (d. 1883), Theodor Nöldeke (d. 1930) and Aloys Sprenger (d. 1893).<sup>63</sup> His book shows some Shī'ī leanings.

Rāshid al-Khayrī shows neither Sunnī nor Shī'ī leanings. In *Al-Zahrā'* (1943),<sup>64</sup> he is concerned exclusively with presenting Fāṭimah's biography and not with refuting the criticisms of others.

By contrast, although concerned with history, the essay on Fāṭimah in the *Islamic Shī'ite Encyclopaedia* (henceforth referred to as ISE) by Ḥassan ul-Ameene (1973)<sup>65</sup>, shows very obviously the Shī'ī leanings of the writer by his attempt to disprove or play down any incident which would detract from Fāṭimah as the only daughter of the Prophet (as he believes her to be), and the ideal Muslim woman.

Works similar to Ameene's are *Fatimah: The Lady of the Light* (1939)<sup>66</sup> and *Biography of Lady of Light: Fatema Daughter of Prophet Muhammad* (1974),<sup>67</sup> (henceforth *Biography*), written by Muḥammad Salmin and an anonymous author respectively. The latter book was published by the Peermahomed Trust. Salmin readily acknowledges his Shī'ism and his Shī'ī beliefs are clearly evident throughout his book. Both books abound in anecdotes dealing with miraculous incidents from the time Fāṭimah was conceived and during her lifetime and after, even to the effect of her presence felt today by the descendants of those families who were devoted to her during her lifetime. These miracles and legends are presented as matters of fact, without any questioning of their credibility or authenticity on either historical or logical grounds.

Muḥammad al-Dīn's *Sīrat-i Fāṭimah* (1936)<sup>68</sup> and Fauq Bilgirāmī's *al-Zahrā': aḥwāl-i janāb Fāṭimah Zahrā'* (1924)<sup>69</sup> also mix legend with facts. The former describes a few miracles at the end in short poems, while the latter mentions those connected with important events in Fāṭimah's life, e.g. her conception, birth and pre-existence.

Amīn al-Ṭabarsī's biography, originally written in Arabic, has been translated into Persian under the title *Zindagāni Chahārdeh Ma'sūm* (1970).<sup>70</sup> It is a Shī'ī work drawing on classical sources, and contains a moderate amount of hagiographical literature about Fāṭimah.

ʿAlī Sharīʿatī's book *Fatima is Fatima* (1981),<sup>71</sup> is a written English translation of a public lecture, and is accordingly quite rhetorical. Sharīʿatī presents the life of Fāṭimah to provide an incentive and example for Iranian women, and tries to show that although she was the perfect daughter, wife and mother, she was also aware of what was happening outside her home. She was therefore politically and socially conscious, and knew her

rights and when to demand them. Sharī'atī does not resort to using miraculous stories, but using various factual incidents of her life, portrays Fāṭimah as he wants the people to see her. In Sharī'atī's view Fāṭimah was a strong woman who could endure suffering but could also assert herself when necessary.

In contrast, the more hagiographic books mentioned earlier use the life of Fāṭimah as an exemplar of the ideal Muslim woman but do not emphasize her political awareness. The message conveyed by these books, including Sharī'atī's, is that the lifestyle and teachings of Fāṭimah should be followed by all Muslims in general and women in particular.

These various approaches to the life of one and the same person have made my research interesting and challenging. To clarify the central issues in the specific case of Fāṭimah, it is most useful to try to disengage the objective historical person from the barrage of myth and legend. Thereafter the development and function of the hagiographical tradition can be elucidated and explained. Finally, the contrast in meaning and significance between the historical and hagiographical figures can be analysed, and the central question of why Fāṭimah was chosen for particular veneration answered.



## NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. William LaFleur, "Biography," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. II (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 220.
2. Robert L. Cohen, "Sainthood," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. XIII, 1.
3. Ibid.
4. Frederick H. Hatch, "Hagiology," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. X (Chicago: William Benton Publishers, 1970), 1111.
5. LaFleur, 220.
6. Jan Knappert, "Introduction," in *Islamic Legends: Histories of Heroes, Saints and Prophets of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill Ltd., 1985), 1.
7. Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of The Saints*, trans. V.W. Crawford (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), ix.
8. Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 55.
9. Ibid., 55-56.
10. Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 9.
11. Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* 2nd ed., (Leiden: E. J. Brill Ltd., 1968), 101.
12. Hamilton A. R. Gibb, "Islamic Biographical Literature" in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 55.
13. Muḥammad ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1905). (Both the original text in Arabic and the Urdu translation of the book have been consulted for this thesis. In the subsequent footnotes the Arabic or Urdu versions used will be indicated by 'A' or 'U' in parenthesis following the volume number).  
Urdu translation by ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿAmādī, *Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* (Hyderabad Deccan: Dar al-Tabaʿ Jāmiʿ Usmāniyya, 1944).
14. Gibb, 54.
15. Ibid., 58.
16. *Ḥadīth* is a narrative -- almost always short -- containing or thought to contain a statement or an action of the Prophet; his habits, his likes and dislikes, his

recommendations and prohibitions. It often contains historical facts. For the Shī'ī such traditions of their Imāms also forms part of the *ḥadīth* literature. The word *ḥadīth* is used both in the singular and collectively. There are six standard *ḥadīth* compilations used by Muslims today. See EI<sup>2</sup>, "*Ḥadīth*," vol. III (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 23-28.

17. Jean Sauvaget, *Introduction to the History of the Muslim East: A Bibliographical Guide*, trans. Near Eastern Centre, University of California, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 26.

18. Abū 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, trans. Alfred Guillaume, *Life of Muḥammad*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1955).

19. Guillaume, "Introduction," in *Life of Muḥammad*, xvii.

20. Aḥmad bin Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, trans. P. K. Hitti, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, (New York: Columbia University, 1916).

21. Annemarie Schimmel in *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 27, states that the most trustworthy *ḥadīth* were put together in the third century of the Islamic era and the middle of the ninth century of the Christian era. See also EI<sup>2</sup> "*Ḥadīth*," vol. III, 23-28.

22. David S. Margoliouth, *Lectures on Arabic Historians* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1930), 3.

23. Ibid., 42-43.

24. Sauvaget, 27.

25. Louis Massignon, *Salmān Pāk and the Spiritual Beginnings of Iranian Islam*, trans. by Jamshedji Maneckji Unvala (Bombay: The Translator, 1955), 2.

26. See Ignaz Goldziher's *Muslim Studies*, vol. II, ed. S. M. Stern, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971).

27. See Joseph Schacht's *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950).

28. The Umayyad Dynasty (40/661-128-29/750) ruled the Muslim world after the death of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the fourth *khalīfah* (d. 40/661).

29. Margoliouth, 86.

30. Schimmel, 21.

31. Ibid.

32. Nancy A. Falk and Rita M. Gross, eds., "Introduction," in *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1970), xiii.

33. Denise L. Carmody, **Women and World Religions** (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 17.
34. Anne Freemantle, **Woman's Way to God** (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), xiii; Carmody, "Judaism," in **Women in World Religions**, ed. Arvind Sharma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 206; Judith Baskin, "The Separation of Women in Rabbinic Judaism," in **Women, Religion and Social Change**, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 6.
35. Carmody, "Judaism," 193.
36. Ibid., 198.
37. Baskin, 8-9; Carmody, "Judaism," 194-195. The first century sage, Rabbi Eliezer, is quoted as having said "... May the words of Torah be burned rather than be given to women," Baskin, 11; Carmody, "Judaism," 197.
38. Carmody, "Judaism", 202.
39. Freemantle, xii; Nancy Schuster Barnes, "Buddhism," in **Women in World Religions**, 107; Janice D. Willis, "Nuns and Benefactresses: The Role of Women in the Development of Buddhism," in **Women, Religion and Social Change**, 62.
40. Katherine Young, "Hinduism," in **Women in World Religions**, 60.
41. Freemantle, xi.
42. Ibid.; Young, 66; A.S. Altekar, **The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day** (Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass, 1938), 10.
43. Young, 66; Ellison Banks Findly, "Gārgī at the King's Court: Women and Philosophic Innovation in Ancient India," in **Women, Religion and Social Change**, 38-40.
44. Findly, 38.
45. Young, 62.
46. Constance F. Parvey, "The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament," in **Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions**, ed. Rosemary R. Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 123-128.
47. Ibid.
48. Henri Lammens, "Fāṭima" in **EI<sup>1</sup>**, vol. II (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1927), 85.
49. Veccia Vaglieri, "Fāṭima" in **EI<sup>2</sup>**, vol. II (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 841.

50. See footnote 16.

51. a) The EI<sup>I</sup>, vol. IV:2, 796, gives various dates for Tirmidhī's death. Besides the one quoted above, the other dates suggested are 275/888-9, and 270/883-4.

b) Abū 'Isā Muḥammad ibn Sahl al-Tirmidhī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī* (Miṣr: al-Maṭba'ah al-'Amirah, 1857), vol. II, 320.

52. Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad bin Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. M. Ludolf Krehl (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1862), vol. IV, 181-182.

53. Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, translated into German by J. Welhausen, *Muhammad in Medina* (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von G. Reimer, 1882).

54. The works of these scholars are:

a) Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*.

b) Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa 'l mulūk*, translated into Urdu by Sayyid Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, *Tārīkh -i Ṭabarī* (Karachi: Nafis Academy, 1967).

c) Aḥmad bin Abī Ya'qūb ibn Ja'far al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, vol. I, translated into Persian by Dr. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Ālū, *Tārīkh-i Ya'qūbī* (Tehran: Bangah Tarjumah wa Nashar Kitāb, 1967).

d) Balādhurī, *Kitāb al-ansāb al-ashrāf* vol. I, edited by Dr. Muḥammad Ḥamīd Allāh. (Miṣr: Dar al-Ma'aref, 1959) (henceforth *Ansāb*) and *Futūh al-buldān*.

55. Balādhurī, *Futūh*, 52.

56. Ya'qūbī, 512, 527.

57. Ṭabarī, vol. I, 62, 153, 252.

58. Henri Lammens, "Fāṭima" in EI<sup>I</sup>, vol. II, 87.

59. It has not been possible for the author of this thesis to examine these works due to their inaccessibility, and furthermore, these works call for a detailed and in-depth analysis which is beyond the scope of this investigation.

60. 'Umar Abū Naṣr, *al-Zahrā'*, translated into Urdu by M.A.Pānīpatī, *al-Zahrā'* (Lahore: Meri Library, 1962).

61. Henri Lammens, *Fatima et les filles de Muhammad* (Rome: Sumptibus Pontificii Instituti Biblicii, 1912). This work is the only monograph on Fāṭimah in a European language. See Jane MacAuliffe's article "Fatima bint Muhammad" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Henri Lammens was a Jesuit priest known for his anti-Muslim attitude and his strict criticism of traditional sources. For further information on this see K.S. Salibi's article "Islam and Syria in the Writings of Henri Lammens," in *Historians of the Middle East*, 330 ff. Although Lammens used classical sources for his above-mentioned work, his prejudiced approach to the historical sources, especially *ḥadīth*,

resulted in a biased biography of Fāṭimah and her sisters. His article on Fāṭimah in the *EI*<sup>1</sup> also reflects his underlying attitude and conclusions.

The earliest challenge to this work was in French, in a number of articles written by Louis Massignon. Chief among these are "La Mubāhala de Medine et l'hyperdulie de Fatima" (1943), and "La Notion du voeu et la devotion musulmane à Fatima" (1956). (These were later reprinted in the *Opera Minora* (Beirut: Dar al- Maaref, 1963)). These may be considered the earliest Western scholarly work to bring out the special *faḍā'il* (virtues) of Fāṭimah.

62. Raīs Aḥmad Jaʿfrī, *Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad* (Lahore: Kitāb Manzil, 1958), 19-20.

63. Works of these orientalist are:

- a) Reinhart Dozy, *Histoire du Musulmane d' Espagne* (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1861).
- b) Noldeke, *Das Leben Muhammad* (Hanover: Carl Rümpler, 1863).
- c) Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad* (Berlin: Nicolai'sche Verlangsbuchhandlung, 1861-1865).

64. Rāshid al-Khayrī, *al-Zahrāʾ* (Dehli: ʿIsmat Book Depot, 1943).

65. Ḥassan ul-Ameene, "Fatima az-Zahrāʾ" in *Islamic Shiʿite Encyclopaedia*, vol. IV (Beirut: Slim Press, 1973), 97-111.

66. Muhammad Ali Salmin, *Fatima: the Lady of the Light* (Bombay: The Author, 1939).

67. Peermahomed Trust, *Biography of Lady of Light: Fatema, Daughter of Prophet Muhammad* (Karachi: Peermahomed Trust, 1974).

68. Malik Muḥammad al-Dīn, *Sīrat-i Fāṭimah* (Rawalpindi: Sufi Printing and Publishing Company, 1936).

69. Fauq Bilgirāmī, *al-Zahrāʾ: aḥwāl-i janāb Fāṭimah Zahrāʾ* (Dehli: Maqbūl Press, 1924).

70. Amīn al-Islam Ṭabarsī, *Iʿlām al-warā bi ʿalām al-hudā*, translated into Persian by ʿAzīz Allāh ʿAtārdī, *Zindagānī-i chahārdeh maʿšūm* (Tehran: Kitāb Furūshī Islamiyya, 1966).

71. ʿAlī Sharīʿatī, *Fāṭimah Fāṭimah ast*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar, *Fatima is Fatima* (Tehran: Shariati Foundation, 1981).

## CHAPTER II

### Biography of Fāṭimah

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter is an analysis of reports which deal with the purely historical facts of Fāṭimah's life and the modern biographical tradition which purports to be derived from them. From the differences these accounts reveal, we obtain a basic idea, first of the leanings and approaches of various writers whether Muslim or non-Muslim, and second, of the obviously serious problems all researchers have in trying to locate the historical person that was Fāṭimah.

To gather historical data on Fāṭimah, one should refer to documents which are as close to the actual events as possible -- in this case, those classical Islamic sources outlined in the previous chapter. An immediate problem here is that there are many controversies and conflicts in these very histories and biographies about even the most basic of facts. The sources available, moreover, are often biased in one way or the other, and as a direct consequence many contradictory claims come to light. On the other hand such controversies are frequently an integral part of historical literature, particularly early Islamic literature. Therefore even though it is incumbent upon the writer of a biography to gather all possible evidence, often, as in the case of Fāṭimah, adequate and complete evidence is simply not available.

Although the standard information about Fāṭimah's life is confusing and conflicting in both the classical and the modern sources, a historical presentation of her life follows here, such as it can be given.

## 2. The children of Muḥammad

Some of the only facts about which there is little conflict is that the Prophet Muḥammad was first married at the age of twenty-five and that his wife Khadījah was a widow (one source rejects even this fact)<sup>1</sup> of some forty years old. No other event, particularly if connected with his family life, remains undisputed by one or another writer.

Most of the biographers agree that Khadījah bore Muḥammad six children, two of whom (the first and the last born) were boys who died in their infancy.<sup>2</sup> The children were Qāsim, Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthūm, Fāṭimah and ʿAbd Allāh.<sup>3</sup> The classical accounts are divided on whether Fāṭimah, and hence ʿAbd Allāh, who was younger than Fāṭimah, were born after the Prophet received revelation or not.<sup>4</sup> All the other children from Qāsim to Umm Kulthūm were born before this.<sup>5</sup> However there are some reports which state that Khadījah and Muḥammad had from six to nine children.<sup>6</sup> Besides the two sons named above, some sources also mention al-Ṭāhir and al-Ṭayyib. Ibn Ishāq and Ṭabarī, for example, are among those who hold this view, although Ṭabarī does mention ʿAbd Allāh's name.<sup>7</sup> The majority of the authors, however, reject this opinion and explain that al-Ṭāhir and al-Ṭayyib were other names for ʿAbd Allāh, and were not two other sons.

Some authors, such as Ḥassan ul-Ameene, assert that the Prophet had only three children by Khadījah, two boys and one girl, Fāṭimah. They quote various sources to prove their point. Ameene claims that the three older girls, Zaynab, Ruqayyah, and Umm Kulthūm, were Khadījah's children from her previous marriage. Quoting from the *Kitāb*

al-ṭabaqāt of Ibn Saʿd, the Kitāb al-istīʿāb of Ibn Abd al-Barr, and Ṭabarī's works, Nihāyah al-ʿarab and Usd al-ghābah, Ameene argues that if these three older girls were, as claimed, the Prophet's own, then they would have been too young to be married, bear children, be divorced and remarried. For example, with regard to Ruqayyah he asks, "... knowing that her first husband ʿUtbah divorced her when she was seven years old -- [that is if she was born after Muḥammad's marriage with Khadījah] -- how old was she when she (first) got married?"<sup>8</sup> He gives the same argument for Umm Kulthūm, stating that according to this hypothesis, she was six years old when divorced. In these arguments Hassan ul-Ameene does not refer to any specific sources regarding their age at the time of their marriage and divorce to substantiate his point.<sup>9</sup>

The Shīʿī author of the **Biography** is not as logical in proving his case, although he holds a similar view. He claims that Khadījah had been a spinster before she married the Prophet and that the three girls were her sister's daughters. As her sister was a widow, Khadījah and the Prophet adopted the girls to give them a home. The biographer's argument is that since all three girls are claimed to have been born in the ten years preceding the first revelation, it is not possible for them to have attained puberty before the beginnings of Islam. Besides this argument, which is his only logical and historical claim, he resorts to others based on personal belief or those that are not well-supported at all. For example, he establishes his point that Khadījah had never been married before by stating that the Persian Shīʿī scholar Allāmah Muḥammad Mazandānī has quoted the Shīʿī writers Aḥmad Belazarī and Abūl Qāsim Kufī, who in turn have quoted other writers who share this opinion.<sup>10</sup> Significantly none of the other works I have consulted mentions this fact. The argument of direct relevance to Fāṭimah is his claim that if Zaynab, Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthūm had been the Prophet's own daughters, he would not have presented the farm of Fadak to Fāṭimah and given nothing to his other daughters. This point may be considered valid were it not disproved by chronological considerations. Fadak was given to the Prophet after the



Battle of Khaybar (7/628).<sup>11</sup> Ruqayyah had already died, shortly after the Battle of Badr (2/624).<sup>12</sup> Zaynab, the eldest daughter, was in Makkah with her husband, and Umm Kulthūm was married to ʿUthmān bin ʿAffān who could adequately support a wife.<sup>13</sup> It was his youngest daughter and her husband ʿAlī who were at the time in financial straits serious enough to warrant this gift.<sup>14</sup>

Another point which the same biographer puts forward in regard to Fāṭimah and her sisters can be easily set aside. He claims that the Prophet was more particular about choosing a husband for Fāṭimah than for any of his other daughters. Firstly, we do not have significant details about the marriages of the elder daughters, and secondly, all three girls were married to people of great repute and respect at the time. The eldest, Zaynab, was married to her cousin Abū al-ʿĀṣ, and Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthūm were also married to their cousins, sons of Abū Lahab;<sup>15</sup> after their divorces on accepting Islam, Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthūm were each married in succession to ʿUthmān bin ʿAffān, one of the closest Companions of the Prophet himself. Therefore one cannot say on these grounds that these three were not his own children. Yet another point this author makes to prove that Fāṭimah was the Prophet's only daughter is that her marriage was arranged by God and on her wedding day angels came down to earth and showered the couple with precious gems.<sup>16</sup> This type of argument, however, is clearly too mythical to serve as evidence.

### 3. The date of Fāṭimah's birth

The dates assigned to Fāṭimah's birth are so variable that it is impossible to ascertain a year. As mentioned above (on page 21 in note 4), there is no agreement on the exact date of her birth in the classical sources. Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Saʿd merely mention that she was born before the first revelation. Balādhurī states she was born at the time the Kaʿbah was rebuilt.<sup>17</sup> Yaʿqūbī and Masʿūdī both hold she was born after the first revelation, Masʿūdī

specifying that she was born eight years before the *hijrah*.. Ṭabarī states that she was born before the rise of Islam. It should be noted here that the two classical writers who dispute the general classical view that Fāṭimah was born after the inception of Islam are considered to have Shī'ite sympathies.<sup>18</sup>

Among modern scholars, Veccia Vaglieri states that most early Arabic sources maintain that Fāṭimah was born in the year the Ka'bah was rebuilt, and this is calculated as 605 A.D.<sup>19</sup> Many of her biographers discuss other possible dates but conclude that 605 A.D. seems the most likely. Bilgīrāmī, Abū Naṣr, and Rāshid al-Khayrī are among those who hold this view.<sup>20</sup> Henri Lammens implies that Fāṭimah was born between 598 and 610 A.D.<sup>21</sup> Abū Naṣr, whose book is a refutation of Lammens' work, explains that the French writer claims Fāṭimah was born before Islam in order to advance her age at the time of her marriage, which was quite old by Arab standards.<sup>22</sup> He further states that Lammens attributes this delay to Fāṭimah's unpleasant nature and lack of beauty.<sup>23</sup>

Although Fauq Bilgīrāmī acknowledges that many sources date Fāṭimah's birth to five years before the Prophet's mission, i.e. 605 A.D., he himself does not hold this same view.<sup>24</sup> He is not alone in his speculations. There are other biographers who reject this date. Ja'fī (citing Ṭabarī as his source) and Majid Ali Khan say that the Prophet's daughter was born after the first revelation was sent to Muḥammad.<sup>25</sup> Although they agree on this point, they nevertheless differ as to the exact year of her birth. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, as quoted in the ISE, says that Fāṭimah was born in the second year of the Prophet's mission, whereas the same work quotes al-Ḥākim and Ibn 'Abd al-Barr in support of the first year of prophecy, 611 A.D., as the correct date.<sup>26</sup> Others of the same opinion are Malik Muḥammad al-Dīn, and Khargoshī.<sup>27</sup> Ṭabarsī notes that many Sunnī writers hold this view. According to al-Kulaynī, the earliest compiler of Shī'ī *ḥadīth*, and Ibn Shāhrashūb, the birth of the Prophet's youngest daughter took place five years after Prophethood was

received by Muḥammad.<sup>28</sup> Ibn al-Kashāb's *Kashf al-ghummah*, quoting al-Bāqir, the Shī'ī Imam, (d.114/736), agrees with the year 615 A.D., that is five years after the first revelation. Bilgirāmī, using a *ḥadīth* of the Shī'ī Imām Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, (d.94 or 95/712-713) also picks 615 A.D. as the correct year of Fāṭimah's birth, and Ṭabarsī writes that most well-known Shī'ī *ḥadīths* agree on this date.<sup>29</sup>

Lammens speculates that perhaps the reason for dating her birth approximately at the time of the first revelation is the Shī'ī belief that she married young, to vie with ʿĀ'ishah's being married at the age of nine. He states that "the estimates of her age (at death) vary between twenty-three and thirty-five years, depending upon the date cited for her birth." He adds that an earlier date is ascribed to her birth in order to avoid the objection arising from the advanced years of her mother."<sup>30</sup> Bearing in mind that his critique is based primarily on the classical sources, it is interesting to note that most modern Shī'ī biographers writers do not subscribe to this view. Abū Naṣr, Salmin, and Jaʿfrī do not hesitate to place the date of Fāṭimah's birth before the first revelation, in contrast to the view supported by the ISE.

What emerges from our discussion of these various dates is that Fāṭimah could have been born in any time between 604 A.D. and 615 A.D. It should be noted that such a large degree of variation is not found for the birth of any prominent figure in early Islamic history -- the first four *khalīfahs*, for example. Does this perhaps suggest how little prominence Fāṭimah had in the earliest historical tradition?

#### 4. Fāṭimah's childhood and character

As she grew up, Fāṭimah presumably led a quiet life; at least there is no evidence to the contrary, and the modern biographers agree on this. However for them, her mildness

was not because she was insensitive to her surroundings or because she lacked the courage to do anything -- a view which has been aired by Lammens. Rather, the modern biographers strive to show otherwise, as will be discussed a little later. All the biographers write of her great love and devotion for her father and his cause. In spite of her young age she is said to have understood the gravity of his mission and his need for moral support from his family. After her mother's death, Fāṭimah took over her mother's role of being a tower of strength and encouragement to her father. Touched by the tender care and concern she bestowed on him, the Prophet is said to have given her the nickname of *umm abihā*' (mother of her father).<sup>31</sup>

As mentioned above, modern biographers cite a few incidents of her childhood and youth which show her as young and sensitive but also brave. Once the Prophet was praying in the mosque when some of his enemies threw the entrails of a camel on him. This incident was reported to Fāṭimah, who immediately ran to her father, cleared away the mess and cursed the culprits.<sup>32</sup> Some years later, during the Battle of Uḥud (3/625), where the Prophet was wounded, a rumour spread that he had been killed. When Fāṭimah hastened to the battlefield, she found the rumour was false. The Prophet had only been wounded, and she, with 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib's help, tended his wounds.<sup>33</sup> An examination of some of the classical sources proves quite interesting. For example, Ibn Ishāq does not mention this latter incident at all, save to report that after battle both the father and the husband asked Fāṭimah to clean their swords. Ibn Sa'd and Balādhurī mention that Fāṭimah wiped the blood from the Prophet's face with water brought by 'Alī. Ṭabarī does not mention Fāṭimah at all, saying only that 'Alī brought some water with which the Prophet proceeded to cleanse his wounds. Neither Ya'qūbī nor Mas'ūdī mentions this incident. Both Tirmidhī and Bukhārī say that 'Alī brought the water and Fāṭimah washed her father's wounds.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, we can see that the classical sources are not agreed upon Fāṭimah's presence at the battlefield. Ṭabarī in fact mentions that the Prophet's wounds were very slight. This reveals a marked difference from the manner in which modern sources have dealt with the incident, for they attempt to show not only the seriousness of the wounds but to use the incident as revealing Fāṭimah's devotion to her father, a brave woman who did not shy away from the sight of blood, or for that matter, entrails, when her father's welfare was at stake. In another incident, during the Battle of the Trench (*Khandaq*) (5/627), the Muslim army was besieged and went for days without food due to famine in the area. The moment Fāṭimah obtained food at home, she brought it to her father at the battlefield. This account is described in only two of the modern biographies; none of the classical sources mentions Fāṭimah in relation to this battle.<sup>35</sup>

These stories show her deep love and concern for her father. Except for these incidents, Fāṭimah is always present in the background, whenever needed, looking after her father's daily needs. Such love between father and daughter is held up as exemplary. His love and respect for her is portrayed as being as great as hers for him. ʿĀ'ishah is reported to have said -- and this tradition is quoted in all biographies -- that whenever Fāṭimah came to visit him after her marriage, the Prophet would rise from his seat, go to his daughter, kiss her hand or her forehead, and make her sit in his own seat.<sup>36</sup> Lammens is the only biographer who disagrees with this picture of a gentle, loving, sweet-natured daughter. On the contrary, he finds Fāṭimah "a woman devoid of attraction, of mediocre intelligence, completely insignificant, little esteemed by her father, ill-treated by her husband, anaemic, often ill, prone to tears...."<sup>37</sup> It is only in Lammens' work that such severely critical views about Fāṭimah are found. What makes his views interesting is the obvious fact that although the primary sources available to him and to the other writers are the same, he seems to have an extraordinarily harsh interpretation of the sources. Although none of the sources examined for this thesis portrays Fāṭimah with such a nature, it is possible that Lammens

may have interpreted harshly incidents such as the one which earned ‘Alī his nickname, Abū Turāb, of which Ibn Ishāq and Ṭabarī give more than one version. This incident is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

### 5. Fāṭimah’s marriage

The migration of the Muslims (*hijrah*) from Makkah to Madīnah is often considered the greatest event in the history of Islam. It took place between the years 622 A.D. and 624 A.D., although there is greater agreement on the earlier date. The persecution of the Muslims by the non-Muslims in Makkah had by this time become unbearable, and so the Prophet asked the Muslims to migrate to Madīnah (or Yathrib as it was then known). He had been assured a welcome for the Muslims there. After most of the Muslims had left Makkah, the Prophet received a revelation ordering him to depart and he did so in the company of Abū Bakr. Soon after he sent for his daughters Umm Kulthūm, Fāṭimah and his wife Sawdah. It was shortly after the migration that the Prophet married ‘Ā’ishah -- the nine-year old daughter of Abū Bakr -- and also soon after Fāṭimah was married to ‘Alī, the Prophet’s paternal first cousin.

Before Fāṭimah was married to ‘Alī, her father had apparently received and rejected proposals for her hand from both Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. These two then persuaded ‘Alī to ask for Fāṭimah’s hand, which he did after much hesitation. On this all the classical sources agree with the exception of Ibn Ishāq, Ṭabarī and Mas‘ūdī. Ibn Ishāq makes no mention of the marriage at all, while Ṭabarī and Mas‘ūdī do not mention the suits of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar.<sup>38</sup> Most of the modern biographies agree with Ya‘qūbī, Balādhurī, and Ibn Sa‘d, although Vaglieri, Lammens, Ḥassan ul-Ameene and the author of the *Biography*, like Ṭabarī and Mas‘ūdī, do not discuss any proposals other than ‘Alī’s.<sup>39</sup>

‘Alī’s offer was accepted, and the marriage took place. Shī‘ī legends make the refusal of the suits of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar into something especially meaningful. They say that the Prophet rejected the first two proposals because God had destined the marriage between ‘Alī and Fāṭimah.<sup>40</sup> But a less tendentious explanation can also be given for the Prophet’s action. Marriage within the family was an important part of the Arab tradition. Thus it is quite natural that the Prophet would prefer his cousin rather than his friends for his daughter. Besides, his older daughters too had been married within their own clan, that of Quraysh. Why should the situation be different for Fāṭimah?

Although the proposed dates of the marriage vary from five months to three years after arrival in Madīnah, that is, from 622 A.D. to 3 A.H./625, the year most widely accepted is 2/624.<sup>41</sup> The modern scholars who differ from the generally accepted date are Khayrī and the author of *Biography*, who state that Fāṭimah was married in 3 A.H. But the latter and Ḥassan ul-Ameene also suggest that the marriage could have taken place in 1, 2, or 3 A.H. Lammens does not give his own view but observes that in the sources the marriage is “not placed before Badr (that is, 2 A.H.), and some place it after Uḥud (i.e. 3/625).”<sup>42</sup>

What is more a matter of dispute, in view of the conflicting theories mentioned above, is Fāṭimah’s age at the time. The famous Shī‘ī jurist Majlisī (d.1110/1700), maintains that she was married in the year 1 A.H., when she was only nine years old.<sup>43</sup> ‘Alī Sharī‘atī, on the other hand, though agreeing with the majority on 2 A.H. as the year of her marriage, does not fix an age; he says she was either nine or nineteen years old.<sup>44</sup> The only classical source which gives Fāṭimah’s age at the time of her marriage is Ibn Sa‘d. He says that she was eighteen years old at the time.<sup>45</sup> According to the *ISE*, Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī (d. c.a. 347 /969) in *Kitāb al-aghānī*, and Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449) in *al-Iṣāba*, also calculate her age to be eighteen years at the time of her marriage. Abū Naṣr and Raīs

Aḥmad Jaʿfrī in their respective biographies hold the same view.<sup>46</sup> Although Ḥassan ul-Ameene, the author of the *ISE*, gives these opinions from various earlier biographers, he himself is uncertain. If one holds, he says, that Fāṭimah was married at eighteen or later, her age at her death would also increase, and that is not widely accepted by Muslims. So the only reason for historians to choose eighteen years or older as the correct age at the time of her marriage would be that there was a confusion between her age at her marriage and her age at death, and the latter was taken as the former.<sup>47</sup> Muhammad Salmin, an Indian biographer, writes that Fāṭimah was married at fifteen years of age, as do Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr in *al-Istīʿāb*, referred to in the *ISE*.<sup>48</sup> Vaglieri, on the other hand, states merely that Fāṭimah's age was somewhere between fifteen and twenty-one years.<sup>49</sup>

Lammens agrees with those biographers who say she was older than the general age of Arab girls at marriage, and is cited by Abū Naṣr as stating that Fāṭimah married late because of her unpleasing personality and looks.<sup>50</sup> In his article on Fāṭimah, Lammens states that the attempt to advance Fāṭimah's date of birth is

...inspired by the statement in the *Sīra* that ʿĀʾisha was married at the age of nine, (and hence) is an attempt to give Fāṭima the same advantage. In more than one respect Fāṭima is the Shīʿī counterpart of the very prominent figure of ʿĀʾisha.<sup>51</sup>

Be that as it may, it is remarkable to note that although the modern biographies under study are chiefly Shīʿīte, and with the exception of the *Biography*, they do not espouse the view of a youthful (in Arab terms) marriage. Rather they defend her age by saying that the Prophet loved her too much to have her part from him and thus he did not arrange her marriage earlier.<sup>52</sup> In fact Jaʿfrī goes on to say that this was the reason the Prophet rejected Abū Bakr's and ʿUmar's suits and accepted ʿAlī's. As ʿAlī's wife, his daughter would remain close to him.<sup>53</sup> This indicates their tacit agreement with Lammens on her age at marriage, even if not for the same reasons. Martin Lings, in his recent biography of the



Prophet, claimed to be based on the earliest sources, states that Fāṭimah was twenty years old when she married.<sup>54</sup> But this age is not suggested even by Ibn Sa'd, the only one of Ling's classical sources that specifies an age.

After accepting the proposal, the Prophet is said to have inquired whether 'Alī could meet the burden of the wedding arrangements. When 'Alī replied that he possessed nothing but a horse (some say a camel), a sword, and a coat of mail, the Prophet asked him to sell the last and bring him the money. With the money, the Prophet asked Umm Salamah to purchase the necessary things for the couple's new home.<sup>55</sup> Muḥammad himself sought out his daughter to inform her about 'Alī's proposal, desiring to know her own opinion. Fāṭimah remained silent and this was taken as consent (as had been the case with her older sisters),<sup>56</sup> and the wedding took place. Lammens, relying on *Ansāb* of Balādhurī, first states that Fāṭimah accepted the proposal because she felt she was too old to get many more offers, and then contradicts himself by saying that she screamed a refusal and cried, asking her father how she could be expected to marry such a poor man. Her father consoled her by saying 'Alī was the best among men and the best spouse for her.<sup>57</sup> Both Abū Naṣr and Ja'fī consider this account to be very unlikely and claim that the only Muslim source which mentions these details is Balādhurī.<sup>58</sup>

The only classical writer besides Balādhurī who gives any details about the marriage is Ibn Sa'd, and he notes only that Fāṭimah met the news of 'Alī's proposal with silence. Ibn Sa'd also observes that according to the custom of the Prophet's house, silence was taken as consent.<sup>59</sup> Curiously, Lammens chose to overlook Ibn Sa'd's rendition of the event, preferring instead Balādhurī, who was further away from the event than Ibn Sa'd.

Khayrī, Ja'fī and Bilgīrāmī report that Fāṭimah cried when she parted from her father after the wedding ceremonies, which is natural for any girl to do, particularly if she was as

close to her father as Fāṭimah is said to have been. Bilgīrāmī writes that after her marriage, Fāṭimah once complained to her father of the taunts of other women regarding her husband's poverty. In both the cases the Prophet is said to have consoled her by pointing out the superior qualities of ʿAlī.<sup>60</sup> Khayrī rejects the authenticity of this narrative because he feels that it was beyond Fāṭimah's exalted nature to complain about such a petty matter. Further he adds that Fāṭimah was already accustomed to a life of poverty with her father.<sup>61</sup>

After the marriage ceremony the bride was taken in a procession to the groom's house. There the Prophet sprinkled the couple with water which he had prayed over (or gargled with according to different sources) and invoked blessings upon them.<sup>62</sup> Thus Fāṭimah began her new life.

As far as financial matters were concerned, her early married life was no better than her single life; it was, if anything, worse. All the sources, including Lammens, agree that the couple had a hard, poverty-stricken life. The earliest sources referred to by Vaglieri state that the couple's bed was

... the fleece of an untanned sheepskin, which contained camel fodder during the day; for a covering, they used an old piece of striped Yemeni cloth, which was not large enough to cover both feet and head. The pillow was leather stuffed with *lif* (palm fibres).<sup>63</sup>

For her trousseau Fāṭimah had received a goatskin bottle, a sieve, duster, a cup and a handmill.<sup>64</sup> Husband and wife had to work very hard to make ends meet. Often ʿAlī and Fāṭimah went without food for two or three days consecutively, and when there was some food, it was barely enough. Yet the couple were always ready to feed a guest or a hungry beggar with whatever little they had.<sup>65</sup> It is reported that Fāṭimah would do all the household chores herself.<sup>66</sup> Once, when the Muslims had received a number of slaves as

booty, the couple, at 'Alī's insistence requested the Prophet for a slave to help with the work at home. The Prophet refused saying that there were many Muslims who were more in need of the money which would be got by the sale of the slaves, than they of a servant.<sup>67</sup>

Later the same day, the Prophet taught 'Alī and Fāṭimah a few phrases to recite in order to gain strength and peace. The phrases were: *Allāhu akbar* (God is great), *ṣubḥān Allāh* (God be praised), and *al-ḥamdu lillāh* (all praise is due to God). Though the sources are not unanimous, most agree that the phrases were to be recited before going to bed and that each one should be repeated thirty-three times with the exception of *Allāhu akbar* which was to be recited thirty-four times.<sup>68</sup> These phrases are recited by Shī'īs even today.

According to the *ḥadīths* used by Vaglieri the finances of 'Alī and Fāṭimah, and many other Muslims as well, improved greatly after the occupation of Khaybar (about 7/628).<sup>69</sup>

The married life of Fāṭimah and 'Alī has been variously described as idyllic, with never a difference of opinion between them;<sup>70</sup> as being like any other marriage, with its ups and downs;<sup>71</sup> and even as a most unhappy one.<sup>72</sup> While Vaglieri states that 'Alī treated Fāṭimah with "too much harshness" and that she often complained to her father,<sup>73</sup> Lammens makes Fāṭimah the responsible party. It was her constant recriminations which drove 'Alī to "maltreat his invalid wife."<sup>74</sup> Most of the classical sources reveal that there were differences between the couple and that 'Alī, to keep from quarrelling with his wife, sometimes left the house. These sources give varied accounts of this. One such account given by Ibn Ishāq relates that when such differences arose between them, 'Alī would go out of the house and put some dust on his head to help him control his temper. This action

earned him the nickname Abū Turāb (father of dust) from the Prophet.<sup>75</sup> The manner in which Ibn Ishāq recounts the origin of the nickname “Abū Turāb” raises some doubt as to whether he himself believes that Fāṭimah was its root cause. He gives as the primary origin of the name a narrative in which ‘Alī and one of his companions, at the time of the expedition of al-‘Ushayrah, went to sleep under a date palm while watching some farmers at work. The Prophet came along and, brushing the dust off his clothes, woke ‘Alī by this name, and went on to foretell the manner of his death. And then, almost with tongue in cheek, Ibn Ishāq mentions that some say that ‘Alī earned this nickname on Fāṭimah’s account, but immediately distances himself by saying “But God knows the truth of the matter.”<sup>76</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, Ṭabarī and Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal also attribute the nickname to the expedition. But Ṭabarī, Bukhārī and Abū Muslim cite still another tradition. Once when the Prophet asked Fāṭimah of ‘Alī’s whereabouts, she told him that they had had an argument and ‘Alī had left the house in anger for the mosque. The Prophet found ‘Alī sleeping in the mosque with dust on his clothes and woke him up by the name Abū Turāb as he rubbed the dust off him.<sup>77</sup> Significantly, some of the modern biographers suppress the role of Fāṭimah in this matter and mention only that ‘Alī received the nickname when he fell asleep in the mosque and was awakened by the Prophet. The reluctance of the modern writers to mention the quarrel with Fāṭimah speaks for itself.

Lammens goes on to say that the trying and unhappy conditions at home drove ‘Alī twice to decide to take a second wife. He chose daughters of Hishām bin Mughīrah and of Abū Lahab (this according to Lammens, others say Abū Jahl), one of the severest enemies of Islam.<sup>78</sup> Although some deny that such an incident ever occurred and insist that it was just a rumour spread by those who wanted to create a distance between ‘Alī and the Prophet, there are others who do accept it as authentic. The latter explain that ‘Alī had decided on such a step for no other reason than to improve relations between the Muslims and non-Muslims of Makkah.<sup>79</sup> Whatever the reasons given for ‘Alī’s decision, it is

commonly recounted that Fāṭimah reported it to her father. Those who say that the incident was a concoction of the evil-minded, report that ʿAlī denied the truth of the rumour, telling the Prophet he would never marry in Fāṭimah’s lifetime.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, biographers who believe that ʿAlī did intend to take Abū Jahl’s daughter as a second wife, say that the Prophet refused ʿAlī permission to marry, declaring that the daughter of God’s Prophet could not live under the same roof with the daughter of God’s enemy.<sup>81</sup> On hearing of ʿAlī’s plans to take Mughīrah’s daughter (a Muslim) for his wife, the Prophet said that Fāṭimah was a part of him and whoever hurt her, hurt him, and that if ʿAlī really wanted to marry another woman, he must divorce Fāṭimah first. ʿAlī then promised not to take a wife during Fāṭimah’s lifetime.<sup>82</sup>

The earliest classical sources to relate these accounts are Balādhurī and the *ḥadīth* collections.<sup>83</sup> However, none of these tries to justify ʿAlī’s decisions, as the modern writers do, perhaps because polygamy was a common practice in the early Islamic period, and it would have been quite acceptable for ʿAlī to have taken a second or third wife. Since the Prophet did not allow ʿAlī to marry while still wedded to his daughter, the later biographers may have felt the need to justify ʿAlī’s actions.

Louis Massignon considers this ‘choice’ given to ʿAlī as one of the *khaṣāʾiṣ* (special privileges) given to Fāṭimah by the Prophet. According to Massignon, the Prophet made for her an ideal marriage, the kind he had had with Fāṭimah’s mother, his first wife, Khadījah.<sup>84</sup> While this may explain the Prophet’s motives, we do not know from the classical sources whether or not this was an ideal marriage for both; we only know that ʿAlī did state his wishes to take another wife on perhaps more than one occasion.

### 6.1. Children

According to the majority of the biographies, Fāṭimah and ʿAlī had five children.<sup>85</sup> The eldest, Ḥasan, was born in 3/625; Ḥusayn was born in the following year in 4/626; Zaynab in 5/627; Umm Kulthūm in 9/631; and the youngest of them, a son called Muḥsin, was still-born in 11/633.<sup>86</sup> The eldest two were given their names by the Prophet, who named them Ḥasan and Ḥusayn respectively after rejecting their father's choice of Ḥarb at both times.<sup>87</sup> The Prophet took great pride and pleasure in his grandsons, who were for him like the sons he never had. Many of the Prophet's biographies abound in stories and incidents which show his great love for the little boys.<sup>88</sup>

The two girls, Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm, were married to two brothers. Zaynab's husband was ʿAbd Allāh bin Jaʿfar Ṭayār, while Umm Kulthūm married Muḥammad bin Jaʿfar Ṭayār,<sup>89</sup> although some modern scholars such as Nabia Abbott and Watt say she was wed to ʿUmar bin ʿAffān, the second *khalīfah*.<sup>90</sup> Bilgirāmī also discusses this view, but does not support it.<sup>91</sup>

### 6.2. The concept of *ahl al-bayt* or *ahl al-kisāʾ*

As mentioned earlier, for the Shīʿīs, ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, and their two children Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, have special status. They are identified by the Shīʿīs as the Prophet's *ahl al-bayt* or *ahl al-kisāʾ* (people of the mantle). There are two main versions in the modern biographies explaining how they came to be accorded this status.

In the first version,<sup>92</sup> in 9/631 a Christian delegation came to meet the Prophet. During their debate about prophethood, things came to such a pass that the two parties decided to meet the next day for a *mubāhala* (mutual cursing), accompanied by their respective supporters. The next day the Prophet brought with him only Fāṭimah, ʿAlī,



Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Taking them under his mantle he said that they were his *ahl al-bayt*. Following this incident the four came to be known as the *ahl al-kisāʾ*.

The second version is presented by both Bilgirāmī and Ṭabarsī on the basis of a tradition from Umm Salamah. She relates that one day when the Prophet was resting in her house, Fāṭimah, ʿAlī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn came to visit him. Seeing their grandfather lying down, the two boys asked if they could lie down with him under his mantle. The Prophet granted them permission. Soon Fāṭimah and ʿAlī too asked to be allowed to join the Prophet. With the four under his mantle, the Prophet prayed to God to keep impurities away from these, his *ahl al-bayt*. He then received a revelation accepting his prayer.<sup>93</sup> Umm Salamah asked if she too were not a member of his house and wished to be prayed for also. The Prophet answered that she was on the right path but could not be counted among them.<sup>94</sup> A slight variation in this account is found in the *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* of Tirmidhī, which states that while Fāṭimah and her family were with the Prophet at Umm Salamah's house the above verse was revealed and in response to it the Prophet had covered the four with his mantle and declared that these were his *ahl al-bayt*.<sup>95</sup>

Looking at the classical sources, we find that although Ibn Ishāq deals with the event of the *mubāhala* in great detail, he does not mention ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, or their two sons. Two other sources which describe this event, Yaʿqūbī and Mufīd, relate the first version and do mention the family. Both these works are sympathetic to the Shīʿah.<sup>96</sup> However Masʿūdī, also a sympathizer, does not mention this event at all.

## 7. The Prophet's death

Three years after the conquest of Makkah by the Muslims, in the tenth year after his migration to Madīnah (632 A.D.), the Prophet, along with a large number of his followers,



performed his last *hajj* (holy pilgrimage). After his return to Madīnah, the Prophet became ill. His health deteriorated day by day until on 28th Safar (according to the Shīʿīs) or 12th Rabī al-Awwal (according to the Sunnīs) he breathed his last. During these last days before his death he resided in ʿĀʾishah's house, where Fāṭimah stood constant vigil at his bedside. The following incident from his last days is related by both Shīʿīs and Sunnīs, as reported by ʿĀʾishah. One day, while Fāṭimah was sitting at his bedside, the Prophet whispered something to her and she began to cry. Then he whispered to her again and she began to smile. Later, when ʿĀʾishah asked the cause of her tears and smile in such quick succession, Fāṭimah refused to reveal the secret. After the death of her father, however, she spoke of it. She said that the first time he had whispered in her ear, the Prophet had told her of his imminent death. This had made her weep. Seeing her cry, he had whispered again, this time consoling her by telling her that she would be the first one to meet him in Paradise. This had made her smile. This further example of the special relationship said to exist between father and daughter is related by several classical and modern authors.<sup>97</sup>

## 8. Fāṭimah's role in the question of succession

The period following her father's death was the most active for Fāṭimah. She was no longer the quiet, submissive young girl always in the background. She was now a spirited woman, confident about the demands she made.

From this time onwards, the Muslim community was divided into two main groups: those who sided with the first *khalīfah* Abū Bakr, and those who supported the claim of ʿAlī to the leadership of the community. Shīʿī books relate that after the last pilgrimage, the Prophet at the pond of Khumm had proclaimed ʿAlī and his descendants as his successors.<sup>98</sup> Though the Sunnīs accept the general account of the incident at Khumm, they do not interpret the Prophet's words as proclamation of a successor, much less as



specifying one by name. For them, if the Prophet made any indication about the identity of his successor, it was during his illness, when he explicitly instructed Abū Bakr to lead the prayers in his place, even when he, the Prophet, was present in the mosque. This incident is interpreted by Sunnīs as a sign of the Prophet's choice of his successor, for they say he who leads the community in prayer is their leader.<sup>99</sup> Thus soon after the Prophet died and before he was buried, Abū Bakr was chosen by a group of Muslims as the *khalīfah*.

This outraged some of the Banī Hāshim (the Prophet's clan), who held that ʿAlī was the rightful heir. They were also disgusted by the fact that while the Prophet's body was still in the house and the last rites had not yet been given, some of his closest friends and companions argued about electing a successor. Consequently, ʿAlī's family, and their supporters refused to swear allegiance to Abū Bakr.<sup>100</sup> This was one of the issues which Fāṭimah took up. She believed that Abū Bakr and ʿUmar had usurped her husband's rights and had also shown disrespect to the Prophet. To establish their cause, ʿAlī and Fāṭimah would go to people's houses at night to try to convince them to support ʿAlī's cause. Many said they would have supported him, but claimed that they could not renege on their pledge of allegiance to Abū Bakr.<sup>101</sup>

In the meantime, Abū Bakr realised that the Banī Hāshim's refusal to accept him as the *khalīfah* would prove harmful to the Muslim community. The only way to secure their loyalty to him was to persuade ʿAlī and Fāṭimah to pledge theirs. To achieve this end, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar went to see the couple. Several versions of this visit are cited by Vaglieri and Abū Naṣr,<sup>102</sup> all of which show that whatever means they used, Abū Bakr and his companions were denied entry to the house. Later they went again to the couple's house, and once again Fāṭimah refused to give them permission to enter, but ʿAlī assented. When they came in and tried to talk to her, Fāṭimah refused to reply. When they insisted, she quoted the Prophet's well-known saying that whoever made Fāṭimah happy made him, the

Prophet, happy and whosoever displeased her, displeased him. When they admitted their knowledge of this statement, Fāṭimah said that both Abū Bakr and ʿUmar had displeased her and hence displeased the Prophet. The two men left her house. Abū Bakr was greatly disturbed and was ready to give up his position to ʿAlī, but was stopped by ʿUmar and his supporters.<sup>103</sup>

Fāṭimah did not accept Abū Bakr as the *khalīfah* and, as long as she was alive neither did ʿAlī. It was only some time after Fāṭimah's death that ʿAlī and his supporters swore allegiance to Abū Bakr. During the reign of the first three *khalīfahs*, ʿAlī did not take any active part in politics, but is said to have been always willing and ready whenever called upon for help or advice.<sup>104</sup>

### 9. The dispute over Fadak

The second issue in which Fāṭimah took a stand was that of Fadak. After being defeated at Khaybar in about 7/628, the Jews had given the Prophet Fadak, a date farm, as a token of good-will. Seeing the strained conditions of his daughter's family, the Prophet, it is said, gave this land to Fāṭimah, since it was his personal property and not war booty.<sup>105</sup> The Shīʿī author Salmin writes that the Prophet did this after the revelation of the verse which advises giving the near kin their due (4:11). Salmin quotes both Shīʿī and Sunnī sources regarding this point.<sup>106</sup>

This land was a means of sustenance for Fāṭimah's family until the Prophet died. After his death, Abū Bakr, the new *khalīfah*, added it to the state possessions. At this Fāṭimah asked that it be returned to her as was her right, since her father had willed it to her. Abū Bakr refused, saying he had heard the Prophet say that the prophets do not have heirs and their property is *ṣadaqa* (charity).<sup>107</sup> She asked Abū Bakr how it could be that

the Qur'ān allowed his own daughter to inherit from him and yet did not allow her, Fāṭimah, to inherit from her father?<sup>108</sup> Abū Bakr then asked Fāṭimah to provide witnesses who could vouch that the Prophet had indeed given Fadak to her. Fāṭimah brought her husband and Umm Ayman, the only witnesses she had. Abū Bakr did not accept their testimonies, claiming that the *sharī'ah* (Muslim law) requires two men or one man and two women to establish valid evidence.<sup>109</sup> Bilgirāmī and Ḥassan ul-Ameene write that when Fāṭimah was denied her father's legacy, she took her case before a large gathering at the mosque, where she pointed out logical and Qur'ānic proofs which gave her the right to inherit.<sup>110</sup> Fāṭimah's appeal has not been reported in any of the classical sources. As a variant version, Bilgirāmī relates that when Fāṭimah asked Abū Bakr to justify how his children could be his heirs whereas she could not claim the property her father left her, Abū Bakr, deeply moved, signed Fadak over to her. But 'Umar dissuaded him, saying it was the Prophet's *ṣadaqa* to the needy and should be used to feed the poor who had fought for Islam.<sup>111</sup> Again, there seems to be no evidence of this version in the classical sources.

This account of Abū Bakr's change of heart and of 'Umar's stopping him at the crucial moment is clearly reminiscent of the earlier conflict about the leadership question. It suggests that interpreters may have read more into the matter than the original facts warrant. In both cases, Abū Bakr seems to have been prevented from relenting by the hard line taken by 'Umar.

Muḥammad al-Dīn and Khayrī are the only two biographers who disagree with the generally accepted Shī'ī versions of the case. They claim that Fāṭimah did not demand Fadak on her own but rather that she was incited to do so by others. When she asked for possession of the land, Abū Bakr told her of the Prophet's saying regarding prophets not having heirs, and so she immediately withdrew her demand. These two biographers defend their view by claiming that the person (Abū Bakr) designated by the Prophet as *Ṣiddīq*

("the truthful one"), could not possibly have denied the rights of the Prophet's daughter. Furthermore, Abū Bakr had remained close to the Prophet all his life and must surely have heard the saying he quoted to Fāṭimah. As a person known for his honesty, Abū Bakr would not concoct a tradition on his own. The supporters of Fāṭimah, on the other hand, take a very similar stand, saying that Fāṭimah had been very close to her father and thus if anyone was aware of the sayings of the Prophet, it would be she. After giving this argument, Muḥammad al-Dīn and Khayrī conclude that the case of Fadak was not as serious as it has been made out to be by later Shī'ī and Sunnī biographers and historians.<sup>112</sup>

Margoliouth quite logically points out that there is a link between the two claims by Fāṭimah and 'Alī, that is, that the confiscation of Fadak may have resulted from the claim of succession by 'Alī and Fāṭimah.

If once the hereditary principles were granted, it would be difficult to determine the point at which it should stop. Hence the 'wrangling' on the subject of Fadak was not different from the 'wrangling' about the sovereignty.<sup>113</sup>

Thus the tradition quoted by Abū Bakr conveniently covered both affairs. Whatever may have been the case, these events portray Fāṭimah as a woman who is aware of her rights and willing to stand up for them.

#### 10. Fāṭimah's death

Fāṭimah did not survive the Prophet long. She is reported to have died sometime between thirty days and eight months after the Prophet's death. All the writers, early and

modern, give a variety of figures regarding the exact length of time she was alive after the death of her father, and no one readily accepts any particular figure.

According to the modern accounts, Fāṭimah took ill soon after her father's death.<sup>114</sup> Bilgīrāmī holds that the tension of the Fadak episode led to a miscarriage, and this accident took its toll on her health.<sup>115</sup> On the day of her death, she bathed herself, put on clean clothes, prayed and lay down. She asked Asmā' bint 'Amīs to call her after an hour and told her that if she did not answer, she would be dead. Asmā' did as she was asked, and receiving no reply, sent for 'Alī at the mosque.<sup>116</sup> None of the classical sources mentions any of these details apart from stating that she died soon after the Prophet's death.

Before her death, Fāṭimah had willed that no one except 'Alī, with Asmā's help, should give her body the ritual bath and that no member outside the family was to be present at her funeral, which should take place at night. Accordingly, she was buried at night with only close family members in attendance.<sup>117</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the exact date of her death and place of burial are not known. According to Margoliouth, the 'Abbāsīd *khalīfah* Maṣṣūr, (145/767) implied that Fāṭimah's death was intentionally concealed for a considerable time, so that the exact date was known only to family members.<sup>118</sup> Her age at her death is impossible to determine since the date of her birth is disputed. Ibn Sa'd and Ṭabarī state that she was twenty-nine years old when she died. Balādhurī, Ya'qūbī and Mas'ūdī agree but point out that she could also have been twenty-three, thirty, thirty-one or thirty-three years old! Mas'ūdī goes on to say that Shī'īs say she was even younger.<sup>119</sup> Ṭabarsī and Ibn Athīr say she was twenty-seven or twenty-nine; 'Abd al-Barr calculates her age to be thirty or thirty-five.<sup>120</sup> The modern biographers, Abū Naṣr and Ja'fūrī insist that twenty-eight years is the correct figure, although they admit that there are different opinions among earlier historians.

Hassan ul-Ameene is the only modern biographer who believes she was only eighteen when she died.<sup>121</sup> The other modern biographers remain silent.

There is also confusion about the place of her burial. Four places are considered possible: (1) The Prophet's mosque where there is a tombstone with an epitaph for her, and here both Shī'ī and Sunnī pilgrims pay homage, (2) between the Prophet's grave and the pulpit, (3) the garden of Baqī', (4) the *bayt al-ḥazn* (House of Sorrow), situated behind the Baqī', where Fāṭimah mourned her father after his death.<sup>122</sup> After her death, 'Alī is said to have built a mosque there to perpetuate her memory.<sup>123</sup> Mas'ūdī says: "La mort de la fille du Prophete jeta Ali dans un violent desespoir... ." <sup>124</sup>

## 11. Conclusions

Our attempts to summarize the events of Fāṭimah's life show how difficult it is to reconstruct her biography of with any degree of certitude. Ambiguity about such basic facts of her life as her date of birth and age at marriage point to the fact, that although Fāṭimah was in close relation to the Prophet Muḥammad himself, the early Muslim tradition did not focus on her at any great length. It might be possible to surmise from this that reverence for the house of the Prophet began at a much later date than the first century after the Prophet's death; however, we know that 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's youngest wife, is mentioned more frequently in, for example, the *Sīrat* of Ibn Ishāq. While it may be argued that the Prophet's wife was worthy of historical mention because of her later political role, while Fāṭimah was only a minor political figure, this argument does not explain the paucity of traditions related on her authority, considering her proximity to the Prophet. The only explanation which may be offered for this is the above-mentioned reluctance of sectarian traditionists to cite materials coming from Shī'ī figures, given the fact that by the time *ḥadīth* collections were compiled, Shī'ism was an established entity.

Thus scarcity and ambiguity of facts may be one of the reasons for the growth of hagiographic literature about her. Consequently, we find that many of the modern biographers, whether intentionally or unintentionally, have presented a more hagiographic than historical picture of Fāṭimah. Therefore as a result, in so far as the above exposition has been unable to keep hagiographical elements out, it reveals how hard it is to find a true historical image of Fāṭimah. Such elements have become so much a part of Fāṭimah's biographies that it is difficult to separate hagiography and history.

Such is the pitfall a biographer may fall into when writing about many a religious personality, but more so if it is a personality like Fāṭimah, whom the historians of and near her time did not consider important enough to collect facts about. One may thus easily end up writing a hagiography about such a figure.

It is now more common to study Fāṭimah as a model rather than a historical figure. As there is nothing about her life which could eternalize her in the annals of history, except the fact that she was the daughter of the Prophet of Islam, and wife and then mother of the first Shī'ī imāms, the Muslim community in general and the Shī'īs in particular, prefer to immortalize her as the perfect Muslim woman.

Almost all the modern biographers tend to bring out the qualities of an ideal woman in her. The best or even the only example of a perfect, complete woman for Muslims would be Fāṭimah. Here they may not be too far wrong, seeing that it is not easy to find a model historical woman in either Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism or even Islam, who has been all that Faṭimah was, that is, a daughter, a wife, and a mother (with the exception of perhaps Khadījah, her own mother). Christianity may hold up Mary, while some Muslims may choose 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's youngest wife, but, while the former was a mother, she was not a wife in the normal sense (that is, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke describe

her as betrothed to Joseph at the time of the Christ's birth and not yet married to him) and the latter was a daughter and a wife but not a mother. Taking advantage of this point, Muslims have taken every aspect of Fāṭimah's life and idealized it, making her the paradigm of the perfect daughter, the perfect wife and the perfect mother altogether. She is perceived as the model whom all Muslim women should try to emulate.

Thus while studying such literature one has to be cautious and aware of the tendencies of the biographers. And if we are concerned with only the historical biography of the personality, we must be able to separate the history, the hagiography, and the idealization or derogation of the person. It is almost always difficult to do this but more so when hagiography and idealization have become so closely woven in biographies written over hundreds of years.

Notwithstanding the difficulties in painting an accurate picture of her life, the figure of Fāṭimah rose to great eminence in subsequent centuries. Modern writers, however, are not limited to the earliest classical sources for their material, whatever the wishes of a scholar attempting to reconstruct Fāṭimah's biography might be. Rather they were able to draw upon later accounts of Fāṭimah which interspersed what little was known about her with hagiographical accounts, and it is here that she rises to her highly eminent status. It is this hagiographical literature to which we will turn our attention in the next chapter.



## NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. **Biography**, 153, claims that Khadījah was a spinster when she married the Prophet Muḥammad.
2. With the exception of Ibn Ishāq and Ṭabarī.
3. Ibn Saʿd, vol. I (U), 199, cites these names, while Ibn Ishāq, 83, omits ʿAbd Allāh and instead gives two other names, Ṭāhir and Ṭayyib.
4. For example, Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Saʿd, and Ṭabarī, vol. II, 62, state that Fāṭimah was born before the inception of Islam, whereas Balādhurī, Yaʿqūbī, 375, and Masʿūdī, **Kitāb murūj al-dhahab wa maʿādin al-jauhar**, Tome IV, translated into French by C. Barbier Meynard (Paris: Benjamin Dupret Librairie, 1865), 162, state she was born after.
5. Margoliouth deduces that the children were born before the inception of Islam from the standpoint that their names reveal that "their parents when they named them were idolators." **Mohammed and the Rise of Islam** (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), 69-70.
6. For example, Ibn Ishāq cites seven children, while Ṭabarī at different places cites seven and eight children. A modern source, Jaʿfrī, while affirming that there were six children, cites Ibn Kathīr (d.774/1373), **al-Bidāyah wa'l nihāyah** as giving the number of children as nine.
7. Ibn Ishāq, 83; Ṭabarī, vol. I, 62 and 491, where he mentions ʿAbd Allāh. See also A. J. Wensinck, **The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 241-242.
8. ISE.
9. Ibid., 97-98.
10. **Biography**, 153.
11. Ibn Ishāq, 523.
12. Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 18; Balādhurī, **Ansāb**; 289, Masʿūdī, 157; A. J. Wensinck, "Rukaiya," in **Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam**, ed. H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), 476.
13. G. Levi della Vida, "ʿUthmān," in **Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam**, 615.
14. Although other sources speak of ʿAlī and Fāṭimah's poverty, for example, Abū Naṣr, 67-68; Jaʿfrī, 111-112; Khayr, 23; Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), **Kitāb al-Irshād**, trans. I. K. A. Howard, **The Book of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imams** (England: Balagah Books in connection with The Muhammadi Trust, 1981), 22; this particular point is made only by Shariʿatī, 206.

15. Ibn Ishāq, 314, states that only one daughter, either Ruqayyah or Umm Kulthūm, was married to Abū Lahab's son and that the marriage was not consummated when they were divorced.
16. **Biography**, 158.
17. For the rebuilding of the Ka'bah, see "Ka'ba" in **EI<sup>2</sup>**, vol. IV, 317-322.
18. Ibn Ishāq, 83; Ibn Sa'd, vol. I (U), 199; Balādhurī, **Ansāb**, 403 ff.; Ya'qūbī, 573; Mas'ūdī, 156-157; Ṭabarī, vol. I, 62.
19. Veccia Vaglieri, **EI<sup>2</sup>**, vol. II, 841.
20. Abū Naṣr, 3; Khayrī, 7.
21. Henri Lammens says that the date of her death is placed at 11/632 and the estimates of her age vary between twenty-three and thirty-five years. "Fāṭima" in **EI<sup>1</sup>**, vol. II, 87.
22. Abū Naṣr, 47. See Lammens, **Fatima et les filles de Mahomet**, 8-14.
23. Abū Naṣr, 47; See Lammens, **Les filles**, 8-14 and 17.
24. Fauq Bilgirāmī, 13.
25. Rāis Aḥmad Ja'fī, 77; Mājīd 'Alī Khān, **Muhammad The Final Messenger** (Dehli: Idarah Adabiyāt i-Delli, 1980), 64.
26. **ISE**, 99.
27. Muḥammad al-Dīn, 44; Ṭabarsī, 221, quotes Khargoshī's work **Sharf al-Nabī**, 221.
28. **ISE**, 99.
29. See **ISE**, 99; Bilgirāmī, 13; Ṭabarsī, 221.
30. Lammens, "Fāṭima", in **EI<sup>1</sup>**, vol. II, 85, 87.
31. See for example, the tradition cited by Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal in **Musnad**, vol. V, (Misr: Dār al-Ma'āref, 1949), 204.
32. This is reported by Bukhārī, vol. II, 300.
33. See footnote 34; **ISE**, 100; Vaglieri, **EI<sup>2</sup>**, vol. II, 843; Abū Naṣr, 69; Ja'fī, 123; Khayrī, 45; Salmin, 41; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 143, Bilgirāmī, 66.
34. Ibn Ishāq, 389; Wāqidī, 118; Ibn Sa'd, vol. II (U), 60; Balādhurī, **Ansāb**, 324; Ṭabarī, vol. I, 238; Tirmidhī, vol. I, 392-393; Bukhārī, vol. III, 226, 255. He also mentions this incident in vol. I and IV of the same work.

35. Bilgirāmī, 69-71; Salmin, 59.

36. Ṭabarsī, 224.

37. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 841.

38. Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 12; Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 402; Yaʿqūbī, 400.

39. Martin Lings, *Muhammad His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (London: George Allen and Unwin and The Islamic Text Society, 1983), 163; Khayrī, 16; Bilgirāmī, 31; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 81; Abū Naṣr, 49; Salmin, 22.

40. Yaʿqūbī, 401; Muḥammad bin ʿAlī bin Musā ibn Bābawayhī al-Qummī (d. 381/991-2), *Risālatu'l I'tiqādāt*, trans. Asaf A. A. Fyzee, *A Shi'ite Creed* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press for the Islamic Research Association, 1942), 87; Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 846.

41. Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 13; Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 402; Ṭabarī, vol. I, 153; Yaʿqūbī, 400; Masʿūdī, Tome 4, 155-156.

42. Khayrī, 20; *Biography*, 35, 56; *ISE*, 100; Lammens, *EI*<sup>1</sup>, vol. II, 85.

43. Majlisī, *Ḥyāt ul-Kuloob*, trans. J. Merrick, *Life and Religion of Mohammed* (Boston: Philip Sampson and Co., 1850), 231.

44. ʿAlī Sharīʿatī, 155.

45. Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 13.

46. *ISE*, 101; Abū Naṣr, 49; Jaʿfrī, 112.

47. *ISE*, 101.

48. Salmin, 21; *ISE*, 101.

49. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 842.

50. Abū Naṣr, 47.

51. Lammens, "Fāṭima" *EI*<sup>1</sup>, vol. II, 85.

52. Abū Naṣr, 47-48; Jaʿfrī, 23.

53. Jaʿfrī, *ibid.*, 17.

54. Lings, 163.

55. Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 12-13; Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 403; Bilgirāmī, 31, 47; Khayrī, 19; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 87; Sharīʿatī, 156; Lammens, *Les filles*, 34.

56. Khayrī, 18; Jaʿfrī, 105; Abū Naṣr, 54; Ibn Ḥanbal, vol. II, 78.
57. Lammens, *Les filles*, 35. See also his article, "Fāṭima" in *EI*<sup>1</sup>, vol. II, 85-86.
58. Abū Naṣr, 54-55; Jaʿfrī, 106-107.
59. Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 12; Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 842.
60. Khayrī, 22; Jaʿfrī, 111-112; Bilgirāmī, 50; Shaykh al-Mufīd, 22, this book is the only early source which mentions Fāṭimah being taunted about ʿAlī's poverty.
61. Khayrī, 21-22; Jaʿfrī, 107.
62. Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 15, this is the only earlier source which recounts this event; Lings, 163; Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 843; Khayrī, 28; Bilgirāmī, 52 ff.; Abū Naṣr, 59; Jaʿfrī, 112; *Biography*, 32, 34.
63. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 843; Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 14.
64. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 843.
65. Khayrī, 34 ff.; Sharīʿatī, 157.
66. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 843; Irbilī, 46.
67. Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 16; Bukhārī, vol. II, 435; Sharīʿatī, 158-159; Khayrī, 30; Lings, 168; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 116-117; Jaʿfrī, 150.
68. Ibid.
69. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 843.
70. This view is propounded only by some of the modern biographers, for example: Bilgirāmī, 65; Abū Naṣr, 66; Salmin, 29.
71. Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 16; Khayrī, 31; Bilgirāmī, 110-111.
72. Lammens, *EI*<sup>1</sup>, vol. II, 86; Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 843.
73. Lammens, *EI*<sup>1</sup>, vol. II, 86; Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 843.
74. Lammens, *EI*<sup>1</sup>, vol. II, 86
75. Ibn Ishāq, 286.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibn Saʿd, vol. II (U), 7; Ṭabarī, v.I, 153; Bukhārī, vol. I, 122; Ibn Ḥanbal, vol. IV, 263.

78. Lammens, *EI*<sup>1</sup>, vol. II, 86. Every classical source says Abū Jahl, not Abū Lahab.
79. Ḥassan ul-Ameene rejects its authenticity and states that the story was concocted by the Umayyads; Balādhurī, vol. I, 403 ff.; Tirmidhī, vol. II, 403-404; Bukhārī, vol. II, 239-240.
80. Salmin, 38.
81. Abū Jahl, like Abū Lahab, was strongly anti-Muslim.
82. Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 404.
83. Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 403 ff.; Tirmidhī, vol. II, 403-404; Bukhārī, vol. II, 239-240.
84. Louis Massignon, "La Notion du voeu et la devotion musulmane à Fatima," 587.
85. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 843; Balādhurī, *Ansāb* 402; Abū Naṣr, 70; Ibn Sa'd, vol. VIII (A), 17, he says they had four children; Khayrī, 51, states there were six.
86. Mufid, 279; Maṣ'ūdī, 156; Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 403 ff.; Abū Naṣr, 70; Lammens doubts the existence of Muḥsin, *EI*<sup>1</sup>, vol. II, 86.
87. Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 404; Abū Naṣr, 71.
88. See Muḥammad al-Dīn, 176 ff.; Ja'fī, 127 ff.
89. Bilgirāmī, 214.
90. Nabia Abbott, *Aishah The Beloved of Muhammad* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942), 92; Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 287; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 172.
91. Bilgirāmī, 214-215.
92. Bilgirāmī, 78; Mufid, 116-117; and Ya'qūbī, 451, also report this.
93. The Qur'ān, verse 33: 33 translation and commentary by 'Abd Allāh Yūsuf 'Alī (Riyadh: Dār al-Liwaa Publishing and Distributing, 1965).
94. Bilgirāmī, 79.
95. Tirmidhī, vol. II, 37.
96. Ibn Ishāq, 270 ff.; Ya'qūbī, 451; Mufid, 116-117.
97. **Classical Sources:** Ibn Sa'd, vol. IV (U), 59 ff.; Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 552; Mufid, 133; Bukhārī, vol. II, 437; Tirmidhī, vol. II, 404-405. This is not mentioned by Ibn Ishāq. **Modern Sources:** Lings, 339 ff.; Salmin, 170; Abū Naṣr, 83; Khayrī, 54; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 147-148; Ja'fī, 142.

98. See "Ghadīr Khumm" in *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 993-994.
99. Ibn Ishāq, 680 ff.; Ibn Sa'd, vol. V (U), 12 ff.; Bukhārī, vol. II, 419 ff.; Tirmidhī, vol. II, 363 ff; Abbott, 83; Watt, "Abū Bakr" in *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. I, 110.
100. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 844; Ja'fī, 163, 165.
101. For example, see Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 844, regarding the Anṣār; Sharī'atī, 209-210; Abū Naṣr, 87-88.
102. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 844; Abū Naṣr, 88 ff.
103. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 844; Abū Naṣr, 90-91.
104. Mas'ūdī, 186; Vaglieri, "Alī bin Abū Ṭālib" *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. I, 382; Abū Naṣr, 91; Dwight Donaldson, *The Shi'ite Religion* (London: Luzac and Company, 1933), 16.
105. Ibn Ishāq, 23; Ibn Sa'd, vol. IV (U), 121 ff.; Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 51; Ṭabarī, vol. II, 535; Salmin, 61; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 189 ff; See also "Fadak" in *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 725-727.
106. Salmin, 66.
107. Ibn Sa'd, vol. IV (U), 121-122, and vol. VIII (A), 18. In this latter reference, it is stated that at Abū Bakr's refusal, Fāṭimah was greatly angered and vowed she would not talk to him for the rest of her life, and she did in fact fulfill her vow. Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 53; Ṭabarī, vol. II, 535; Tirmidhī, vol. I, 303; Bilgirāmī, 95; he states that Fāṭimah did not talk to Abū Bakr for the rest of her life; Sharī'atī, 205; Salmin, 65; "Fadak" in *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 725.
108. Ibn Sa'd, vol. IV (U), 121; Tirmidhī, vol. I, 303; Bilgirāmī, 99.
109. Ibn Sa'd, vol. IV (U), 123; Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 52; he states that on hearing this Fāṭimah departed; *ISE*, 101; Bilgirāmī, 97.
110. Bilgirāmī, 147 ff.; *ISE*, 101, 107.
111. Bilgirāmī, 99-100.
112. Muḥammad al-Dīn, 185-197; Khayrī, 69-83; Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm Shāhrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa'l-nihal*, trans. A. K. Kazi and Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984), 19-20.
113. Margoliouth, "Last Days of Fatimah" in *Melanges Hartwig Derenburg* (1844 - 1908) (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1909), 283.
114. Bilgirāmī, 87; Ja'fī, 177; Khayrī, 83 ff; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 200.

115. Bilgirāmī, 158; ISE, 107, although it does not mention the miscarriage, it does state that the tension of the struggle for her rights had a disastrous effect on her health.

116. Bilgirāmī, 159; Salmin, 69-70; Sharīʿatī, 221-222, does not mention the detail that Fāṭimah asked Asmāʾ to wake her up after an hour; Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 18.

117. Bilgirāmī, 160 ff.; Khayrī, 88; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 201; Salmin, 70; ISE, 107; Ṭabarī, vol. II, 56; Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 17-18; Yaʿqūbī, 512.s

118. Margoliouth, "Last Days of Fatimah", 382.

119. Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 18; Ṭabarī, vol. II, 40; Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, 402; Yaʿqūbī, 400; in the original text of his work, vol. II, 129, Fāṭimah's age is given as thirty-three years; Masʿūdī, 161.

120. Abū Naṣr, 94; Jaʿfrī, 178.

121. ISE, 103

122. Bilgirāmī, 215; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 210; Salmin, 82; Sharīʿatī, 222. Three of the modern biographers, Jaʿfrī, 178; Khayrī, 90, and Muḥammad al-Dīn, 203, give only Baqīʿ as her final resting place. Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 19, suggests either the Baqīʿ or Dar al-Aqīl.

123. Salmin, 82.

124. Masʿūdī, 161. The French translation is by C. Barbier Meynard.

## CHAPTER III

### Hagiography of Fāṭimah

#### 1. Introduction

It is evident from the material presented in the preceding chapter that we can gain only a sketchy view of Fāṭimah's life from the classical sources. There is very little agreement even on salient features, such as her date of birth, her age at marriage, and the date on which she died. We know with certainty only that she was the Prophet's daughter, that she was dear to him, that she was married to 'Alī and bore him, among other offspring, the two boys Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.

At least one conclusion may be drawn from the ambiguity surrounding the basic facts of her life. At the time when the history of the rise of Islam and its founder was being written down, Fāṭimah was not considered important or noteworthy enough for any accounts to have been collected and written down about her specifically. Later biographers therefore found it difficult to find enough trustworthy material to furnish an account of her life. This scarcity and ambiguity of information may have been one of the reasons for the development of hagiographic literature surrounding her.

Hagiography, as a 'religious' literature, has found a place in almost all religions. As discussed earlier in Chapter I, sacred biography is the biography of a religiously prominent person, but it differs from other biographies in that it relates stories of miracles and legends linked to a person who either founded a religion or played an important role in it. Hagiography has been characterized as follows:



Hagiography is a study of the history of the saints through documents that furnish information about their cults. They were written not to provide the historical background of a saint but to perpetuate his or her memory among the faithful, thereby inspiring others to emulate that particular saint's behaviour. Thus, to demand historical accuracy from these documents is to misunderstand their purpose. Although many historical insights can be gained indirectly from them, their major purpose was edification and emulation, not information.<sup>1</sup>

Hagiographic literature has grown out of the need for edification, which Margoliouth, a well-known modern Islamicist, considers a common need "deeply grounded in human nature."<sup>2</sup> It often leads to attributing words and actions to the person which historically or even logically may not be possible. According to Bryan Wilson this concept of a charismatic personage belonged to an earlier time when "a man could make the difference because moral solutions, solutions in terms of appropriate attitudes and behaviour might still work."<sup>3</sup> Wilson feels this is no longer the case because of the technical nature of the modern world. His point may be valid as far as the highly industrialized West is concerned. In the East, however, the Indian sub-continent for example, belief in charisma still exists, and not as Wilson says only in "limited peripheral areas of social activity."<sup>4</sup> We see, for example, the veneration by women of figures such as Ananda Māi Mā and Indira Gandhi, who are described as both *devī* (goddesses) and leaders.<sup>5</sup>

Max Weber understands a charismatic person to be one who is considered to be endowed with the gift of grace and supernatural power in any religious tradition, context or culture.<sup>6</sup>

The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are

regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader. ...It is often thought of as resting on magical powers.<sup>7</sup>

Weber considers the decisive factor in the charisma of individuals to be their position or status among their followers or disciples. As the charismatic personalities pass further and further away into the past, the longevity of their charisma depends wholly on their disciples. These disciples add or weave myths and miracles into their lives to exalt them.

Hagiographies centre on anecdotes of the actions of the person in question, and these anecdotes are the structures upon which the goals of the hagiographer are built. The stories in a personality's hagiography are used for a particular end: each story or anecdote illumines an aspect of the ideal that the person's life represents. These anecdotes serve to focus our attention on the "specialness" of the person, thus bringing out the ideal holy personage in him or her.<sup>8</sup>

Within the Muslim community, there are only a few people whose purity and piety are affirmed by all. One such personality, is Fāṭimah as the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad. Others, too, might fall into this category if proximity to Muḥammad is one of the major criteria for being elevated to sainthood; for example, ʿAlī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, the Prophet's wives and his closest companions Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān. However, none except Fāṭimah and ʿAlī and for a few years their two sons, had the privilege of being 'reared' by the Prophet from their childhood. Sunnīs claim this privilege for ʿĀʾishah, too, since she entered the Prophet's house as his wife when she was only nine, thereby qualifying for sainthood.<sup>9</sup> The privilege of proximity to the Prophet within his household suggests the possibility that these personages knew the Prophet in an intimate manner not accessible to the general public and hence had the opportunity to emulate some of his spiritual qualities.

Apart from her physical proximity to the Prophet, why, given the minimal historical data about Fāṭimah, did a hagiographical tradition develop specifically around her? This issue has already been touched upon above, in Chapter I (p. 9). The most obvious factor in her case seems to be that she was close to Muḥammad, by virtue of having been his favourite daughter. Consequently she was seized upon by the hagiographic imagination as a worthy instrument to propagate the ideals of Islam, especially the ideals of Muslim women. Another is that she was the wife of ʿAlī and mother of the two Shīʿī Imāms after ʿAlī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn; thus she became critically important for the Shīʿī tradition in particular. However what is now needed is a detailed examination of the hagiographical material itself to see, first, how it glorifies her and, second, why she was selected for this glorification. An analysis of the focal points of the hagiographical tradition surrounding her should suggest the contents which that tradition sought to highlight.

As pointed out earlier, religious communities are inclined to believe in the saintliness or holiness of certain persons and in the miraculous happenings attributed to them. It is noteworthy that specific myths are frequently the same for different saints and that they even cross boundaries of religious beliefs. The basic stories remain the same; the details may vary depending on which religion adopts it. As such, narratives in the lives of saints are filled with the miraculous:

Even before his birth, his greatness is foreshadowed, and his cradle is enveloped in visible signs of divine protection. Angels guard his footsteps, nature obeys him, wild beasts recognise his authority. In urgent péril he can always count on the celestial powers.<sup>10</sup>

It is quite 'natural' to have saints talk in their mothers' wombs and/or as soon as they are born.

Accordingly, in the hagiographic tradition miracles and supernatural occurrences begin to appear in Fāṭimah's life from the start, in fact even before her birth. The hagiographic biographers and some traditionists have left no opportunity unused, and one finds some legend attached to almost every event in her life.

Before outlining the hagiographical tradition which has developed around Fāṭimah, it is important to note that there is little hagiographical material for Fāṭimah in the classical sources.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, if one credits the increasing interest in Fāṭimah to her role as the wife of the first Shī'ī Imām, 'Alī, and the mother of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, it would seem logical to look for evidence of her heightened spiritual status in the works of early Shī'ī writers. A guide to what these writers say about Fāṭimah is found in Majlisī's (d.1110/1700) account in his *Biḥār al-Anwār*.<sup>12</sup> There he quotes from eighty-four different works, all of which must have been written before Majlisī's time, that is before the end of the seventeenth century. He quotes writers such as Muḥammad bin Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 328/939), al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d.363/974), Ibn Bābūyah al-Qummī (d.381/991), Shaykh al-Mufīd (d.413/1022), Ḥusayn bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb (circa 448/1056), Rustam al-Ṭabarī (lived in the 4th/10th century), Amīn al-dīn Ṭabarsī (d.548/1153), Ibn Shāhrashūb (d.588/1192) and 'Alī bin 'Isā Irbilī (d.692/1293). Here we draw upon Majlisī's work and modern biographies by Muslims to survey the hagiographical and mythical elements which came to form an intrinsic part of the modern perception of Fāṭimah as saint, intercessor and model for Muslim women.

## 2. Fāṭimah's names

Fāṭimah is known by many names, all of which represent a particular quality of hers. Rustam al-Ṭabarī gives nine: Fāṭimah (the weaner), al-Ṣiddīqah (the truthful), al-

Mubārakah (the blessed), al-Ṭāhirah (the pure), al-Raḍḍīyah (the contented), al-Rāḍīyah (the pleasing), al-Muḥaddatha (she who relates) and al-Zahrāʾ (the radiant).<sup>13</sup> These, along with al-Batūl (the pure, the chaste), are the most well-known. She is called al-Muḥaddatha either because she possessed special knowledge (Bilgīrāmī) or because the angels conversed with her (Rustam al-Ṭabarī).<sup>14</sup> Ibn Bābūyah says that there were sixteen names for Fāṭimah on earth and three in heaven, and Ibn Shāhrashūb gives a list of sixty-nine names and attributes.<sup>15</sup> According to ʿAbd al-Wahhāb her names are Fāṭim, Fāṭir (both in the masculine form), al-Zahrāʾ, al-Batūl, al-Ḥasān (the chaste), al-Hawrāʾ (the fair), al-Sayyidah (the chief), al-Ṣiddiqah and Maryam al-Kubrā.<sup>16</sup>

The Arabic word *fāṭimah* means “to wean” or “to separate”: the interpretation is that Fāṭimah was thus named because she, her descendants, and those who love them, have been separated or kept away from evil and hell-fire.<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that ʿAbd al-Wahhāb gives the masculine version of the name Fāṭimah. This form, *Fāṭim*, is common among the Nuṣayrīs, a sect of the Shīʿī. For them women have no souls, since their bodies, like those of animals, are places “where damnation materializes.” For them the fifth member of the *ahl al-bayt* is Fāṭim.<sup>18</sup> Thus they have found a means to revere Fāṭimah by using the masculine form of her name.

The other name listed by ʿAbd al-Wahhāb is again a masculine form, *Fāṭir* (Creator).<sup>19</sup> Massignon mentions that in the *Umm al-kitāb*, an esoteric Shīʿī work of possibly Ismāʿīlī provenance, Fāṭimah is constantly addressed as *Fāṭir*.<sup>20</sup> This name is also used by the Nuṣayrīs. Besides adding to her glorification, for the Shīʿī, Fāṭir would also explain Fāṭimah’s nickname *umm abihā* (mother of her father) since her descendant, the *Mahdī* (messiah) who is to come at the end of time, will be named Muḥammad.<sup>21</sup>

The reason for the name Maryam al-Kubrā will become clearer in the section dealing with Fāṭimah and Mary.

### 3. Fāṭimah's pre-existence in Paradise

There are various versions of basically the same story regarding Fāṭimah's existence before her worldly conception. Some sources assert that the Divine Essence was involved in Khadījah's conception of Fāṭimah and that Muḥammad was foretold of her birth. Vaglieri refers to Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī for this. Ṭabarī writes that when Fāṭimah was conceived, the Prophet told Khadījah that the archangel Jibrīl (Gabriel) had informed him that a daughter would be born who would be the ancestress of his posterity, that is, the Imāms, and they would be the leaders of his community after him.<sup>22</sup> Salmin, among our modern writers, narrates a tradition from the Shī'ī Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/736) as presented in 'Abd al-Wahhāb's 'Uyūn al-mu'jizāt (written ca. 448/1056). This tradition states that Fāṭimah, explained the truth of her essence to 'Alī, as follows: God had created her essence or light (*nūr*) before He created the world, and put it on a tree in Paradise (the Tree of Tūbā), which therefore shone because of its radiant splendour. On the night of the *mi'rāj*, when the Prophet ascended to Paradise, he was offered a fruit from this tree. Upon eating the fruit, the essence of Fāṭimah passed into Muḥammad and was transferred thenceforth to Khadījah when she conceived Fāṭimah. Bilgīrāmī relates the same story, using the same primary source. Vaglieri notes that the juice of the fruit which Muḥammad picked was caused by God to pass into the throat of 'Alī. The story of Muḥammad eating the heavenly fruit and being foretold by Jibrīl of the birth of a daughter also appears in *Biography*, which cites Allāma Nasfī as its source.<sup>23</sup>

A similar story is related by both Ṭabarsī and Ḥusayn bin 'Abd al-Wahhāb, the latter as cited by Vaglieri. They write that on being asked why he often kissed (Ṭabarsī) or

embraced Fāṭimah and not his other daughters (al-Wahhāb), the Prophet explained that on the night of the *mi'rāj* Jibrīl had presented him with an apple from the tree of Paradise which he, Muḥammad, proceeded to eat. The essence of the fruit (that is, the essence of Paradise) was then transferred to Khadījah when Fāṭimah was conceived and its fragrance remained with her throughout her pregnancy. When Fāṭimah was born the fragrance became part of her, and so whenever he wanted a scent of Paradise, he kissed or embraced Fāṭimah.<sup>24</sup> There are similar accounts in which the only difference is the kind of fruit mentioned. Some say it was a date which was offered to Muḥammad and not an apple, while others say it was one of each.<sup>25</sup>

It is not only Fāṭimah's essence which is present in Paradise, as in the story of the fruit, but she herself is there as a personality. Both Salmin and Bilgirāmī have drawn upon *Muwadat al-qurbā* of Sa'īd Ḥamdānī, a recent biographer, to relate this narrative, although with some differences. When Adam and Eve were created, they prided themselves on being the best of God's creatures until they saw a far more beautiful girl in the same Garden. She had a crown on her head and wore earrings. God informed them that she was Fāṭimah, the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad. The couple asked about her jewels and were told that the crown represented 'Alī, her husband (Bilgirāmī), or that it represented Muḥammad, her father, and the gem on it stood for her husband 'Alī (Salmin). The two earrings symbolised her two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Bilgirāmī continues that God then informed Adam and Eve that Fāṭimah's existence had been present in His hidden knowledge two thousand years before they (Adam and Eve) were created. This biographer names other sources which also contain this same legend.<sup>26</sup> The story is also related by Irbilī in *Kashf al-Ghummah* (vol.1), and Majlisī in *Biḥār al-Anwār* with slight variations. The point of difference between Irbilī and the writers discussed above is the number of years Fāṭimah existed in God's hidden knowledge, which for Irbilī is four thousand years. Majlisī writes that when once Adam and Eve were proud of being the best

of God's creations, He commanded them to be taken to the highest heaven (*'arsh al-'ulūwah*), (emphasis mine) where they encountered Fāṭimah.<sup>27</sup> This variation emphasizes Fāṭimah's exalted status.

According to the account of creation in *Umm al-kitāb*, the creation of Fāṭimah was manifested in Paradise after "the creation of primordial man." She is depicted as a figure 'adorned in thousands of colours,' with a crown on her head, earrings, and a sword in a shoulder belt. Here the crown represents Muḥammad, the earrings, her sons, and the sword, 'Alī.<sup>28</sup> This work also depicts God as being a person of light (*shakhṣ nūrānī*) before creation. He possessed five 'limbs': hearing, sight, smell, taste, and speech, which on earth were to become Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.<sup>29</sup> Irbilī, citing a tradition from Imām Bāqir, states that Fāṭimah was called al-Zahrā' because God had created her from his own Divine Light (*nur aẓmah*). Fāṭimah's light brightened up the heavens and the earth, so that the light of the eyes of the angels became useless; that is, they were blinded by it. When they asked God about it, He revealed to them that this was a light from His own Divine Light and would reside in Paradise until His last messenger Muḥammad brought it forth into the world, as Fāṭimah. Through her the Imāms would come forth.<sup>30</sup>

Closely linked and indeed using the same metaphor of light is the legend of the creation of the *ahl al-bayt* from the Divine Light. Here the Prophet's explanation for the preference he gave to the *ahl al-bayt*, (i.e. 'Alī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, and Fāṭimah) was that God created Muḥammad and 'Alī as light, and from these He separated the light of their descendants and the light of the Throne. From the light of their descendants was created the light of the sun and the moon. Then God created the light of Fāṭimah, and it is through her the heavens were illuminated. Fāṭimah was called al-Zahrā' because the horizon took its light from her. This account is related by al-Wahhāb.<sup>31</sup>



This 'event' makes Fāṭimah herself a divine person: her divinity is not dependent on either her father, her husband or her sons. She was created from God's own Light and was not merely separated from the light which was Muḥammad and ʿAlī, as their descendants were. Thus her progeny would be doubly blessed in as much as both ʿAlī and herself were divine in their own rights. Such a view would be held by those Shīʿīs who maintain that the only true Imāms were those from the progeny of ʿAlī and Fāṭimah.<sup>32</sup>

Irbilī supports this view and goes a little further. Using Ibn Bābūyah as his source he states that Muḥammad and his *ahl al-bayt* were created from the Divine light which was then 'squeezed.' From the essence, their *shīʿah* (party) was created.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. The birth

Throughout her pregnancy and even during her confinement, Khadījah felt no discomfort or pain.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Bilgirāmī maintains, on the authority of Majlisī's *Jilāl al-ʿuyūn*, that often the baby would speak to the mother from within the womb. She would comfort Khadījah when the latter was lonely or worried about Muḥammad.<sup>35</sup>

The tribe of Quraysh broke all connections with Khadījah when she married Muḥammad and later had little, if any, intercourse with Muḥammad. The ladies of the tribe refused to help Khadījah during her confinement. But she was helped by four heavenly female spirits who introduced themselves to Khadījah as Āsiyah, daughter of Maḥāzīm and wife of the Pharaoh; Sāra, mother of Ishāq and wife of Ibrāhīm; Mary, mother of Jesus; and Safura, wife of Moses; or, in another account, Kulthūm, sister of Moses. They assisted Khadījah, and when the baby was born she was bathed in the water of *kawthar* --

the heavenly stream -- brought to earth by ten *houris*. Fāṭimah was then draped in fine linen.<sup>36</sup>

Bilgīrāmī and Vaglieri cite further legendary details about the first moments of Fāṭimah's life. Immediately after her birth, the baby recited the *shahādah* (the profession of faith), acknowledged 'Alī as the Prophet's heir and the Imām, predicted the future, and recited the Qur'ān. She then greeted her mother. Bilgīrāmī adds Fāṭimah also prostrated as soon as she was born. The significance of the act of prostration, though not specified by any of our sources, is clearly that Fāṭimah was aware of the ritual of prayer and its attendant importance as acknowledging the message to be brought or already brought by the Prophet, calling for the Muslims' absolute submission to Allah. At the moment of Fāṭimah's birth the heavens and earth, indeed the entire world, was illuminated with a brilliant light.<sup>37</sup> Vaglieri cites 'Abd al-Wahhāb as reporting that just before the heavenly ladies departed, Fāṭimah greeted them by their names.<sup>38</sup>

A tradition of Imām Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (d. 94 or 95/712-13), quoted by Bilgīrāmī from *Jilāʾ al-ʿuyūn*, further amplifies the point that Fāṭimah was a special baby. She grew in one day as much as an ordinary baby grows in a week, and in seven days she was as big as a month-old baby, and at the end of a month she could be compared to a year-old child!<sup>39</sup>

## 5. Marriage

The next important event of her life, her marriage, is also marked by divine intervention. The historians tell us, as we have seen in the previous chapter, that 'Alī's proposal for Fāṭimah's hand was accepted after those of Abū Bakr and 'Umar had been rejected. All sources state that the Prophet declined the first two offers with the excuse that

he was awaiting God's wishes in the matter.<sup>40</sup> Almost all the sources report that following 'Alī's proposal the Prophet received a revelation that God had arranged the marriage of 'Alī and Fāṭimah, or that God had ordered the Prophet to marry Fāṭimah to 'Alī, or that God had already performed the nuptials in Paradise and now asked Muḥammad to do the same on earth.<sup>41</sup>

Bilgīrāmī goes into the details of the heavenly ceremony. His source is Majlisī, who has quoted Umm Salamah, one of the Prophet's later wives. When 'Alī made his proposal, the Prophet accepted it and told him that just before his arrival, Jibrīl had informed him that God had performed their marriage in Paradise and had now ordered the Prophet to do the same on earth. He went on to say that Jibrīl had described the ceremony which had taken place in God's presence. God had ordered the Tree of Tūbā (the Heavenly Tree) to grow gems, with which the angels adorned themselves. Then, in compliance with the Almighty's wishes, they gathered on the fourth Heaven near the *bayt al-ma'mūr*.<sup>42</sup> Next He ordered that the *minbar* (platform) from which Adam had taught the names to the angels and delivered a *khuṭbah* (sermon) was to be brought and placed near the *bayt al-ma'mūr*. Following this, one of the angels was asked to announce the good news of the marriage of Fāṭimah and 'Alī from this platform. Then Jibrīl was asked to draw up the marriage contract, which was written on a piece of silk with light (*nūr*), witnessed by the angels, and sealed with musk. Jibrīl was then ordered to reveal the news to the Prophet and show him the contract. At the nuptials, the Tree of Tūbā showered precious gems which the angels collected while praying for blessings on the couple.<sup>43</sup> Majlisī adds that besides the jewels, the tree also showered missives written in light (*nūr*) which were likewise collected by the angels. These missives would save those who love the *ahl al-bayt* of Muḥammad from the fire of hell.<sup>44</sup>

The report of the revelation ordering the Prophet to marry his daughter to ʿAlī has also been reported by Sunnī traditionists such as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal on the authority of Anas bin Mālīk. These traditionists are referred to by Bilgīrāmī as his Sunnī authorities. He presents many slightly varied accounts from different sources such as Abū Naṣr Ḥamdānī's *Kitāb al-Isbiʿiāt* and Rustam al-Ṭabarī's *Dhakhāʾir al-ʿUqbah*.<sup>45</sup> Salmin and the author of *Biography* also use these as their source for this event.<sup>46</sup>

About a month after the marriage, Fāṭimah went to her husband's home as was the custom.<sup>47</sup> Almost all the biographies report that when the wedding procession was ready to start, celestial entourage was sent down from heaven to accompany it. The Prophet led the bride's mount (either a camel or a horse). On her right was the archangel Jibrīl, on her left was the archangel Mikāʾīl, and following them were seventy thousand angels, praising the glory of God. Thus Fāṭimah went to her new home in a procession comprised of both heavenly and human members. Various sources are quoted for this account. *Biography* refers to Ibn Shāhrashūb, while Bilgīrāmī quotes Rustam al-Ṭabarī.<sup>58</sup> Salmin claims that all the children born on the day Fāṭimah was married held a piece of gold in each hand. This was a gift from God for the happy occasion.<sup>49</sup>

## 6. Other aspects of Fāṭimah's life

### 6.1. Apparel

There are several anecdotes involving Fāṭimah's clothing in which supernatural events save her from ridicule. The first one is related by both Salmin and the *Biography*. Salmin narrates the first anecdote from the works of Mulla Ḥusain Kashfī and Mulla ʿAbdur Rahmān Jāmī; *Biography* does not cite any sources. Before her marriage, Fāṭimah was once invited by some Qurayshī, non-Muslim women to attend a wedding. The Prophet agreed to send her, since Jibrīl had just revealed to him that God desired

Fāṭimah to attend the wedding as a miracle was to occur there. Though Fāṭimah was aware that the women's sole purpose in inviting her was to make fun of her and ridicule her for her poverty, she obeyed her father and went to the wedding in the old and simple clothes she had. The moment she entered the house it was illuminated not only by her beauty but also by the grandeur of her costume, miraculously transformed, complete with jewels. All the women present were taken aback as the tables had been turned. Then some of the women asked Fāṭimah to partake of the repast, but she declined and instead asked them to accept Islam, which some did.<sup>50</sup>

A similar tale is recounted by Salmin and Majlisī. This time, after Fāṭimah had married 'Alī, she was invited to a Jewish wedding. She was able to attend it elegantly dressed because Jibrīl brought her fine clothes and jewels. The effect of these was more or less the same as in the other story, as Majlisī claims that some of the guests converted to Islam.<sup>51</sup>

A third story involving Fāṭimah's miraculous clothes is given by Majlisī (on the authority of Ibn Shāhrashūb), by Muḥammad al-Dīn and Salmin. Once Fāṭimah sent her headdress to a Jew to pawn it for some barley. Later that night the pawnbroker and his wife noticed a glow of light issuing from the place where the headdress was kept, and on investigating they found that the light was actually coming from Fāṭimah's clothing. This so affected them that they accepted Islam, along with eighty other Jews to whom they recounted this strange phenomenon.<sup>52</sup>

## 6.2. Divine aid

Not only did miracles occur which converted people to Islam, but time and again Fāṭimah was 'helped' at critical moments by supernatural means. In an echo of the

previous theme, her clothes once served to illuminate the house when she and ʿAlī ran out of oil for the lamps. Often their family was miraculously provided food.<sup>53</sup>

The *Biography*, citing Majlisī's *Jilāʾ al-ʿuyūn*, reports that the Prophet, asked Fāṭimah for something to eat after he had gone hungry for several days. On being told the family had not eaten for two days, the Prophet consoled her and went away. Soon after he left, a neighbour sent Fāṭimah a little food: the quantity is recorded as one piece of meat and two pieces of bread. Immediately she sent for her father. When he arrived she offered him the food in a covered dish. When the Prophet removed the cover, they saw that the food had increased many fold. Consequently, the entire family including the wives of the Prophet and others could eat their fill.<sup>54</sup> The story does not make clear whether this was a miracle of the Prophet or a special heavenly favour to Fāṭimah herself. Nor do two other incidents cited by Salmin. In these, the children Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were hungry and there was no food at home. Suddenly Jibrīl appeared bearing food, which, he said, was a gift from God.<sup>55</sup> On another occasion, in a similar situation, there was a knock at the door and on opening it, ʿAlī found a tray of hot food on the doorstep.<sup>56</sup>

Other anecdotes refer to divine help directed more specifically to Fāṭimah. Once she took ill suddenly, with no one in the house to help her. Thereupon Jibrīl appeared to ʿAlī, in the mosque, and informed him of his wife's state. He immediately rushed home to tend to her needs.<sup>57</sup> In a similar story Salmin writes that Ḥasan once fell ill when he was a baby. ʿAlī was absent and the child's health took a turn for the worse. Alone in the house, Fāṭimah was at a loss as to what she should do, whereupon two women, unknown to her, came to her and helped her with the sick boy. They administered a potion which they had brought with them, and his condition soon stabilized. A little later ʿAlī returned, much sooner than expected; he reported that on his way he heard a voice, which repeated thrice that he should go home. He had obeyed it, terminating his journey.<sup>58</sup>

On another occasion, when Ḥasan was a little boy, he fell asleep in the mosque. His mother had to carry him home, but on picking him up found him to be as light as a feather.<sup>59</sup> When Ḥasan was a baby, Jibrīl is said to have rocked his cradle so that Fāṭimah could carry on with her household work.<sup>60</sup> It is commonly reported that Fāṭimah would do all the housework by herself. In this respect a well-known incident is narrated in several sources. The classical source cited for it in *Biography* and *Bilgīrāmī* is *Jilā' al-ʿuyūn*. Arthur Jeffery, who also recorded this anecdote in his book *Islam: Muhammad and his Religion*, refers to Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-ʿAdawī's tale *Qiṣṣat ar-raḥā li's-Sayyida Fāṭima az-Zahrā'*, which quotes Abū Ḥurayra. Salīmī narrates the story briefly, but gives no reference.<sup>61</sup>

*Biography* relates that Salmān Fārsī once found Fāṭimah working hard at a handmill. She was completely exhausted, and Ḥasan, a baby, was crying for her. Salmān offered to grind the grain while she attended to the child. Fāṭimah agreed only because Ḥasan needed her. Later, at the mosque, Salmān told ʿAlī how hard Fāṭimah was driving herself. When ʿAlī returned home, he found both mother and son fast asleep and the handmill working miraculously by itself. Majlisī relates this story in *Bihār*.<sup>62</sup> Another version is somewhat different. The Prophet himself found Fāṭimah working at the handmill and crying from sheer exhaustion. She requested her father to ask ʿAlī to get a slave to help lighten her burden. The Prophet then put a handful of grain in the mill, saying "In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate." Instantly the mill began grinding on its own. It stopped when the Prophet asked it to. Then he told his daughter that this could continue but each person must do his or her share of labour. He went on to say how highly a woman's work is rated by God, enumerating the various chores of a woman.<sup>63</sup> While this approach to the story focuses on Muḥammad's miracle, it nevertheless retains the element of heavenly assistance for Fāṭimah.

An incident described in the **Biography** and in the works of Muḥammad al-Dīn and Bilgīrāmī tells how Fāṭimah's prayers were heard almost instantly. For a religious holiday the two boys Ḥasan and Ḥusayn demanded new clothes from their mother. As she had none for them she tried to divert their attention, but to no avail. She then told them to bathe themselves and soon the tailor would bring their clothes. When the children left the room she began praying, and shortly a man arrived at their door and handed the children their new clothes.<sup>64</sup> On another occasion she gave away some warm cloth meant for the boys' jackets to a poor old woman. Later the same day the cloth was brought back stitched into two jackets for the boys.<sup>65</sup>

### 6.3. Divine Knowledge

As the daughter of the Prophet, the wife and then the mother of the Imāms, and most importantly, according to our later sources, divine in her own right, Fāṭimah is depicted as having Divine Knowledge. Some of the Shī'ī sources claim that God had endowed her with knowledge before she was born. Bilgīrāmī, supporting this claim on the authority of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, writes that once she offered to tell ʿAlī about past and future events.<sup>66</sup>

More well-known and widely accepted evidence of her knowledge of the unknown is seen in the account of Fāṭimah's book (*muṣṣhaf* Fāṭimah). This book is mentioned by many Shī'ī scholars, most of whom cite Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq as their source. After the Prophet's death, when Fāṭimah was lonely and in great sorrow, God sent Jibrīl to console her. She could hear the angel's voice speaking to her, and when she told ʿAlī about this strange event, he asked her to inform him whenever this occurred. She did so and ʿAlī wrote down all that the angel told her. The collection of these 'revelations' surpassed the Qurʾān in volume; it is said to have been three times its size. This *muṣṣhaf*, as it is called,



does not address matters already dealt with in the Qurʾān. It relates future events, and the names of all those who would rule the world. Along with some other possessions of the Prophet, the *muṣḥaf* is said to have been passed on from Imām to hereditary Imām.<sup>67</sup> The Shīʿīs believe that this book is the private possession of the Imāms which they consult in order to guide their followers; it is therefore not accessible to anyone else.

#### 6.4. Miracles ascribed to Fāṭimah

There are also a number of miracles ascribed to Fāṭimah herself. Salmin, however, is the only biographer who records these in detail. Other biographers simply mention them in passing. Most of these miracles concern the healing power of Fāṭimah: her prayers and her touch seems to have healed the sick. For example, a blind boy's sight was restored when Fāṭimah touched his eyes.<sup>68</sup> A leper was cured when he washed with the water Fāṭimah gave him;<sup>69</sup> a lame boy began to walk after Fāṭimah prayed for him;<sup>70</sup> a whole community of people at Makkah cured of a fever epidemic when Fāṭimah taught them a prayer.<sup>71</sup>

Other miracles show her ability to know the future and the past. A woman came to Fāṭimah for help, complaining that her husband had not returned from a business trip as expected. Fāṭimah told her that on his return journey the man had been attacked and robbed by thieves, and that he was lying injured at a particular place. She then gave some water to the woman, asking her to sprinkle it on his injuries. The woman, following Fāṭimah's instructions, found her husband, and the water healed his injuries.<sup>72</sup> On another occasion, she is known to have apprised some traders of the dangers they were to meet on a trip and instructed them to avoid them. When the traders had left she prayed that the danger they were to face be revealed to them in a dream. This indeed happened, and as a result they faced no difficulty.<sup>73</sup> Yet another time some unbelievers promised to accept Islam if Fāṭimah performed a miracle. They brought her some boiled eggs and asked her to

change them into chickens. After Fāṭimah prayed over the eggs, they cracked open and a chicken came out of each.<sup>74</sup>

The most remarkable miracles are those in which Fāṭimah brought dead people back to life. One such account relates that at the time when she attended a marriage in clothes brought by Jibrīl, the bride died of jealousy at Fāṭimah's beauty and was restored to life by her.<sup>75</sup> Even more spectacular, a boatload of people who had been drowned and dead for fifteen years came back to life as a result of Fāṭimah's prayers, just as they were at the time of their death.<sup>76</sup>

#### 6.5. Fāṭimah and Mary

In Christianity Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a special woman who was divinely chosen. She is the only woman who is mentioned by name in the Qur'ān (Chapters III "*Āl 'Imrān*" and XIX "*Maryam*"). The effect of this Christian influence may have helped in making Fāṭimah, in her semi-divine status, an emulation of Mary. She is thus positioned among the four outstanding women mentioned by the Prophet,<sup>77</sup> and is the leader or chief of women in Paradise. The figure of Mary seems to have impressed Muslims to such an extent (one can easily understand why; it is only Mary's story which is described in any sort of detail in the Qur'ān), that some tend to glorify Fāṭimah on a similar basis, and consequently many similarities between the two emerge over time in the popular imagination.

One of the first points raised whenever a comparison of the two is attempted, is the virginity of Mary. Neither of the two faiths deny the fact that Mary was a virgin mother. The Muslims believe that like Mary, Fāṭimah was free from menstruation and bleeding at the time of confinement<sup>78</sup> and thus equate Mary's virginity with this characteristic of

Fāṭimah.<sup>79</sup> Fāṭimah has the title of *al-Batūl* (the Pure or Chaste). Physical purity enabled both women to pray constantly (it is said that Fāṭimah never missed a prayer in her life), and thus become closer to God than would be possible for an ordinary woman.

Jane McAuliffe has compared Mary and Fāṭimah through the writings of various Shīʿī and Sunnī exegetes. Although neither the Shīʿī nor the Sunnī scholars accept a status lower than Mary for Fāṭimah, the Sunnīs are satisfied with equating the two: both talked at birth; both were virgins; both gave birth through their thighs (Mary gave birth through the right thigh while Fāṭimah gave birth through her left thigh and her pregnancies lasted only nine hours);<sup>80</sup> both sacrificed a son for God's cause; both conversed with angels; and both were chosen and purified by God. At the times when Fāṭimah and ʿAlī received food miraculously, the Prophet is said to have compared Fāṭimah to Mary, who was given heavenly sustenance during her pregnancy. He also compared ʿAlī to Zakarīyah.<sup>81</sup> The Shīʿīs of course, go a step further. They claim the superiority of Fāṭimah by saying that the *ḥadīth* which names her chief of women specifies that she is the chief of women of all times, whereas Mary was made chief of women of her time only.<sup>82</sup> Fāṭimah's role as an intercessor on Judgement Day and her marriage to the best of men in this world and in Paradise are further points in her favour. The last, but not the least, significant point is the fact that while Mary sacrificed only one son, Fāṭimah gave up two sons to the cause of Islam. As a result she is often referred to as *Maryam al-Kubrā* (the Greater Maryam or Mary).

## 7. Fāṭimah's death

In view of the legendary elements surrounding Fāṭimah's birth, marriage, and life in general, one would expect the same of her death, but surprisingly enough this is not the case. Some authors claim that after her father's death, Fāṭimah's own health steadily

deteriorated, resulting in her death within seventy-five days of the Prophet's.<sup>83</sup> Others assert that after a premonition of her death she made her last wishes known to a friend, prepared herself and waited for the end. Only Salmin and Bilgirāmī record a supernatural element.<sup>84</sup>

These biographers report that when Fāṭimah's funeral procession went to the garden of Baqī', the participants heard the ground speak at a certain spot, asking them to bring her there. When the bier was taken to the spot, the funeral party found a freshly dug grave. After they had buried Fāṭimah in it, 'Alī requested the earth to be gentle with her as she was the Prophet's daughter. The earth replied that 'Alī need not worry or feel sad as it would be kinder to her than the world had been. The grave was then levelled so that no one could locate it.<sup>85</sup>

#### 8. Fāṭimah as intercessor and saint

It is not only the Prophet and the Imāms who are the intercessors and mediators on the Day of Judgement. The figure of Fāṭimah on this day will be radiantly beautiful when she leads the believing women across the *ṣīrat* (Bridge), with seven thousand angels on each side, seven thousand before her and seven thousand behind her.<sup>86</sup> On this day all mankind will be gathered on the earth, which will have turned into a desert. Muḥammad, Fāṭimah and the Imāms will appear. Fāṭimah will be the saviour of all women "who had wept for her son Ḥusayn and preserved their tears."<sup>87</sup> These, having secured special merit, will go to heaven. Fāṭimah will lead the way across with the women clinging to the magnificent fringe of her garment. They will cross as quick as lightning.<sup>88</sup> In another version Fāṭimah will be adorned with a jewelled crown as she crosses the *ṣīrat* on a she-camel. At God's throne she will demand judgement on those who killed her son Ḥusayn. God will grant her leave to judge them.<sup>89</sup> Here there is no mention of believing women

crossing the *ṣīrat* with her. Another belief is that all those named after Fāṭimah's sons will be told by her that their sins are forgiven.<sup>90</sup>

Her intercession for the *shī'ah* of the *ahl al-bayt* also forms part of the Shī'ī tradition. On the Day of Judgement, each person will be marked either *mu'min* (believer) or *kāfir* (unbeliever). Those who have committed many sins will be sent to hell, even though they may be *muḥibbs* (lovers) of the *ahl al-bayt*. Fāṭimah will read on their foreheads that they had been lovers of the *ahl al-bayt* and will ask God to fulfill His promise to save all those from hell who had loved Fāṭimah and her progeny. At this God will confirm His promise and reveal that He had wanted Fāṭimah to intercede so that His angels, prophets and apostles and "the people of the gathering" might see her status with Him. She will then be asked to release such believers as she saw fit out of hell and into Paradise.<sup>91</sup>

Kulaynī records that Adam and Eve were forgiven for their disobedience when, following Jibrīl's advice, they asked for pardon in the name of Muḥammad, Fāṭimah, 'Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.<sup>92</sup>

Shī'īs also relate a tradition whereby the Prophet said that Iblīs (Satan) hopes to receive pardon from God when he requests it in the names of the *ahl al-bayt* which he had seen written on the throne of God before he was evicted from Paradise.<sup>93</sup>

The *tasbīḥ* given by the Prophet to Fāṭimah (mentioned above, in Chapter II, p. 35), which has come to be known as Bibī Fāṭimah's *tasbīḥ*, is recited congregationally by the Nizārī Ismā'īlī Shī'īs at the beginning of every lunar month to invoke spiritual blessings and divine aid in the resolution of difficulties. It can also be recited privately at any other time for the same purpose. Biography mentions that Fāṭimah taught Salmān Fārsī, a

Companion of the Prophet, a prayer known as *duʿā-i nūr*,<sup>94</sup> to be recited privately when one is afflicted with fever. There is also a prayer attributed to her, known as *namāz-i istaghsār*, which is to be recited when desiring God's help.<sup>95</sup> Beside seeking her intercession on the Day of Judgement, Shīʿīs believe that her help can be sought in the resolution of worldly difficulties. Many Shīʿīs make a pledge to Fāṭimah, invoking her in their particular troubles and promising to feed the poor and orphans.<sup>96</sup>

A similar ritual is practised by Shīʿīs of the Indian sub-continent. It is known as the *Rot of Fāṭimah* ('rot' is the diminutive of 'roti' which means bread or food). This is an event for women exclusively. A woman pledges to Fāṭimah that if her particular prayer is granted, she will hold a *rot* of Fāṭimah. In order to fulfill the pledge, the women of the family hold a luncheon where only women (both married and unmarried) are invited. No male members, even of the hostess' family, attend the function. At the gathering some hymns concerning Fāṭimah are recited, followed by certain prayers. After this the food is served. The menu of the meal is one particular to this event. Here we see Fāṭimah not only as a female saint but also as a saint who is appealed to only by women.

All Muslims, whether Shīʿī or Sunnī, pay a visit to the sites associated with Fāṭimah in Madīnah, especially those mentioned in connection with her burial (See above, Chapter II, p. 47). This is quite in keeping with the devotional tradition of paying homage to the venerated at their tombs.

There are many traditions which show Fāṭimah's blessings after her death on those who had loved her and had been loyal to her. Her spirit is said to help the descendants of those who had served her. Majlisī and Irbilī write that when Umm Ayman left Madīnah for Makkah after Fāṭimah's death, she became thirsty on the way. There was no water around, so in extreme thirst and utter desperation she asked God to help her -- she who had

served Fāṭimah all her life. Immediately from the sky a container of water came down and she quenched her thirst. She said for seven years after that she never felt thirsty or hungry.<sup>97</sup> Salmin relates how an unknown person (by implication an angel) gave a bag of coins to a poor child because his ancestress had been Fāṭimah's maid.<sup>98</sup>

## 9. Summary

The hagiographic literature studied above has succeeded in creating a different image of Fāṭimah. Although there are some historical facts on which the hagiography is based, the Fāṭimah which emerges does not hold much resemblance, if any, to the daughter of the Prophet as depicted in the previous Chapter. This only goes to show that the hagiographers are not concerned with facts per se. Rather facts are important to them only in so far as they assist in their primary task, which is the edification of the reader through the life of the subject. The aim of such writers is to combine simple facts, some probable events, a knowledge of legends of past prophets and saints, and a lot of pious imagination, to build a perfect holy figure.

Fāṭimah the mystic and the saint is a different person altogether. Her hagiographical make-up reveals her to be a unique person. She is pure and pious and not just another woman whose piety has raised her to extreme spiritual heights. Her elevated state has made it possible for her not only to have angels converse with her and reveal to her past and future events, but also to be able to view for herself the place allotted to her in Paradise. Having her prayers answered for things like food and clothes for her children is but a minor sign of divine grace. Although she lived like any other Muslim woman of her times, she was far above any ordinary Muslim man or woman in her spiritual life and significance.

Such is the picture the hagiographers have tried to draw of Fāṭimah and such is the image which has persisted over the ages. The cults developed around her have only added and strengthened this image of Fāṭimah as the pure chaste one, specially favoured by God, and hence a source of inspiration and aid to all who appeal to her in their own tribulations.



## NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. Margot H. King, "Hagiography," in **Dictionary of the Middle Ages**, vol. VI (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), 65
2. Margoliouth, **Mohammedanism** (London: Williams and Norgate, 1921), 196.
3. Bryan Wilson, **The Noble Savage: The Primitive Origins of Charisma and its Contemporary Survival** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), ix-x.
4. Ibid.
5. Katherine K. Young, "Hinduism," in **Women in World Religions**, 99 ff.
6. Wilson, 4.
7. Max Weber, **Theory of Social and Economic Organisation**, trans. by A. R. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (Edinburgh: Hodge, 1947), 329.
8. Cox, 58.
9. W. Montgomery Watt, "ʿĀʾisha bint Abī Bakr," in **EI<sup>2</sup>**, vol. I, 308.
10. Delehay, 50.
11. Ibn Ishāq; Ibn Saʿd; Ṭabarī; Balādhurī; Maʿsūdī.
12. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, **Biḥār al-anwār**, vol. XLIII (Berut: Muʾassasat al-wafā, 1963).
13. Vaglieri, **EI<sup>2</sup>**, vol. II, 847-848.
14. Vaglieri, **EI<sup>2</sup>**, vol. II, 847-848; Bilgirāmī, 3; A. J. Wensinck, **The Muslim Creed**, 241, explains that Fāṭimah received the epithet al-Batūl, the virgin, "because of her standing aloof from the women of her age as to excellence, rank and genealogy" or "because of her standing aloof from the world."
15. Vaglieri, **EI<sup>2</sup>**, vol. II, 848.
16. Ibid.
17. Majlisī, 13 ; Irbilī, 20; Vaglieri, **EI<sup>2</sup>**, vol. II, 847; Bilgirāmī, 1.
18. Massignon, "Nusayrī," in **EI<sup>1</sup>**, vol. III:2, 964-965; Shāhrastānī, 152; Abū Maṣṣūr ʿAbd al-Qāhir ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī (d.415/1037), **Al farq bayn al-firāq**, trans. Abraham S. Halkin, **Muslim Schisms and Divisions** (Tel Aviv: Palestine Publishing Company, 1935) 70 and 74, describe another group, the Shuraiʿiyya, who held that God was embodied in five corporeal beings, that is, the Prophet, ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, also referred to Fāṭimah by this masculine form of her name.

19. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 848.
20. Louis Massignon, "L'Hyperdulie de Fatima ses origines historiques et dogmatiques," 568.
21. Henry Corbin, "From Gnosis of Antiquity to Ismaili Gnosis," trans. James W. Morris in *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London: Kegan Paul International in association with Islamic Publications, 1983), 182.
22. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 845; Bilgirāmī, 6; Majlisī, 1.
23. Salmin, 10; Majlisī, 4,5 and 8; Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 847; Bilgirāmī, 3; **Biography**, 6-7, 136.
24. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 847; Ṭabarsī, 224; see also Muḥammad al-Dīn, 45; Bilgirāmī, 4 and 194; Majlisī, 5; **Biography**, 16 and 136.
25. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 847, refers to three scholars: Ghullābī, who states that an apple was offered, Shāhrashūb, who says it was a date, while ʿAbd al-Wahhāb suggests it was one of each.
26. Bilgirāmī, 4.
27. Bilgirāmī, 4; Salmin, 9-10; Irbilī, 12-13; Majlisī, 52.
28. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 849.
29. Ibid.
30. Irbilī, 21; Majlisī, 12.
31. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 847. See also Ayoub, **Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of ʿAshurā in Twelver Shiʿism** (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 56; Baghdādī, 51, note 2.
32. The *Kasaniyyah* are a group of Shīʿī who consider Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafiyyah, ʿAlī's son by a wife other than Fāṭimah, as the rightful heir to the imamate.
33. Irbilī, 14.
34. Muḥammad al-Dīn, 40.
35. Bilgirāmī, 3 and 6; Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 845; Salmin, 8; Majlisī, 1.
36. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 845; Bilgirāmī, 7; Majlisī, 2-3. The last two writers identify the fourth lady as Kulthūm, the sister of Moses.
37. Bilgirāmī, 7-8; Majlisī, 3; Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 846.

38. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 846; see also Majlisī, 3.
39. Bilgirāmī, 14; Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 846; Majlisī, 3.
40. Ibn Saʿd, vol. VIII (A), 11; Majlisī, 92; Bilgirāmī, 31; Abū Naṣr, 49; **Biography**, 18. Lings states that Muḥammad had already decided on ʿAlī but put off the two suitors by saying that he was waiting for the right time, 163.
41. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 846; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 88; Majlisī, 93-94; Salmin, 23.
42. *Bayt al-maʿmūr* is the mosque which, during the deluge of Noah's time, was brought from the earth to the fourth heaven (some sources say to the seventh) and placed near the *kaʿbah*. At all times large numbers of angels perform a pilgrimage to it. The idea of an archetype of the *kaʿbah* being present in Paradise is very much a Shīʿī view.
43. Bilgirāmī, 32-33; Majlisī, 127-128, 102-103; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 88.
44. Majlisī, 44-45; Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 846.
45. Bilgirāmī, 34.
46. Salmin, 23-24; **Biography**, 20-21.
47. Bilgirāmī, 46-47; Salmin, 27.
48. Majlisī, 92; Bilgirāmī, 51; **Biography**, 29; Ṭabarsī, 225.
49. Salmin, 143.
50. *Ibid.*, 76-77; **Biography**, 85-86, 90 ff.
51. Salmin, 87 ff; Majlisī, 30.
52. Majlisī, 30; Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 847; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 156-157; Salmin, 87.
53. Salmin, 87.
54. **Biography**, 82-83; Majlisī, 68-69; Ayoub, 42.
55. Salmin, 95.
56. *Ibid.*, 97.
57. *Ibid.*, 89.
58. *Ibid.*, 132.
59. *Ibid.*, 96.

60. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 847.

61. Arthur Jeffery, *Islam: Muhammad and his Religion* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958), 217-222; Salmin, 95.

62. *Biography*, 66-67; Majlisī, 28; Salmin, 95; see also Bilgirāmī, 168.

63. Jeffery, 217-222.

64. *Biography*, 92-95; Muḥammad al-Dīn, 150-152; Bilgirāmī, 179-180.

65. Salmin, 96-97.

66. Bilgirāmī, 3.

67. Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1981), 22; Ayoub, 63; Mufid, 414; Momen, 150; Salmin, 126-127. Besides the *muṣḥaf*, the Imāms also inherit two leather vessels, the red *jafr* and the white *jafr*. The red *jafr* contains the Prophet's weapons and the white *jafr* is inscribed with the tablets of Abraham, Moses, the Psalms of David and the Gospel of Jesus, the knowledge of all prophets and their vicegerents, and that of all the learned persons among the Israelites. Thus the red *jafr* is a symbol of temporal authority while the white is that of prophetic gifts. The *jāmi'a* is a scroll which contains the esoteric knowledge that the Prophet possessed but did not communicate to the community. This knowledge was dictated by him to 'Alī. The final thing which the Imāms inherit is the copy of the Qur'ān compiled by 'Alī with his commentary.

68. Salmin, 151.

69. *Ibid.*, 152.

70. *Ibid.*, 154.

71. *Ibid.*, 151.

72. *Ibid.*, 153-154.

73. *Ibid.*, 156-157.

74. *Ibid.*, 154-155.

75. Vaglieri, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, vol. II, 848.

76. Salmin, 157-158.

77. Jane McAuliffe, "Chosen of All Women: Mary and Fāṭima in Qur'ānic Exegesis," in *Islamochristianity*, vol. VII, 1981, 17, refers to a Prophetic *ḥadīth*.

78. Ibid. One of the Sunnī commentators, Rashīd Riḍā, also accepts that Fāṭimah was free from menstruation, 22; see also Ṭabarī, 222; Irbilī, 19; Majlisī, 7 and 21; Vaglieri, **EI<sup>2</sup>**, vol. II, 841.

79. McAuliffe, 22, 23.

80. Majlisī, 47; Vaglieri, **EI<sup>2</sup>**, vol. II, 847.

81. Majlisī, 73 and 77.

82. McAuliffe, 23.

83. The number of days she survived the death of the Prophet varies in different traditions as has been discussed in Chapter II.

84. Their accounts are identical; they claim to have taken it from a Sunnī source but do not name it. They write that the same account may also be found in Majlisī's **Jilāʾ al-ʿuyūn**. Salmin, 71; Bilgirāmī, 160.

85. Salmin, 71; Ayoub, 51.

86. Majlisī, 24; Irbilī, 13.

87. Bess Allen Donaldson, **The Wild Rue: A Study of Muhammadan Magic and Folklore in Iran** (London: Luzac and Co., 1938), 77.

88. Ibid.

89. Ayoub, 213 and 215.

90. Donaldson, 109.

91. Irbilī, 20; Ayoub, 214.

92. Irbilī, 22; Ayoub, 60.

93. Irbilī, 22-23.

94. **Biography**, 142-143.

95. Ibid., 143-144

96. Momen, 243.

97. Majlisī, 28 and 46.

98. Salmin, 88.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Role of Fāṭimah in Shī'ism

As we have shown, the information given on Fāṭimah in the earliest Islamic sources is scant. Such is the case, for example, in one of the earliest sources, the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, compiled in the second/eighth century by Ibn Ishāq. It was sometime later (in the 3rd and 4th Islamic centuries at the earliest), as we have seen in Chapter II, that more substantial material referring to her comes to light in historical works and in *ḥadīth* collections. Yet in spite of this later literature, the amount of material on Fāṭimah is not extensive, so that it would be difficult to add to the bare outline of her life presented in Chapter II. The possible reasons for the dearth of such materials were discussed in Chapter I. Summarizing these, it can be said that the 'early' histories were actually compiled a century or more after the events in question. Furthermore, these were concerned primarily with the spread of Islam and those persons who accomplished it. Fāṭimah apparently played no active role in this since she died so soon after her father. Whatever role she did have may also be hidden behind the tendentious nature of the sources. It is possible that the compilation of *ḥadīth* was affected by sectarian tendencies to such an extent that the traditionists were reluctant to quote early figures who were obviously pro-Shī'ī. This bias can also be detected in the chronicles of the classical historians.

If there is very little historical information on Fāṭimah, there is also almost no hagiographic material in these earliest Islamic works. This is not to say that hagiography per se became a feature of Islamic literature later in time. Ibn Ishāq includes such material about the Prophet in the *Sīra*. He narrates supernatural and miraculous happenings dating

before the Prophet's birth and continuing to the time of his death. For example, when Muḥammad's mother was pregnant with him she heard a voice foretelling her son's glorious future.<sup>1</sup> Then at the time of his passing, he was not only foretold of his death, and the angel of death awaited his pleasure and did not take his life until Muḥammad gave him leave to do so.<sup>2</sup> Other early histories contain similar stories of miracles surrounding the Prophet's life. Nevertheless, this literature contains no hagiographical material relating to Fāṭimah. Her elevation to sainthood obviously came later.

At this juncture two questions arise. Why was Fāṭimah made into a saint at all, since what we know of her personal life is no more exceptional than that of her sisters and other close female members of the Prophet's household. The most that can be said is that she was what may be considered to be a model daughter, wife and mother. Secondly, why has the interest in Fāṭimah in the twentieth century escalated to the point that at least eleven biographies of her have appeared?

There can be little doubt that the hagiographical literature about Fāṭimah begins about the late ninth, early tenth century. This in itself is a significant factor. It was at this time that Kulaynī (d. 328/939 or 329/940), the first Shī'ī traditionist, compiled his collection of *ḥadīth*, well after the establishment of Shī'ism in both its ideological and political manifestations. The occultation of the twelfth Imām had already taken place in 260/874, and the Ithnā 'Asharī Shī'ī tradition was feeling the need for a body of traditions stemming from the Imāms to provide a basis for legal exegesis. At the same period the Fāṭimids, whose very name points to their religious interest in Fāṭimah, were beginning to make their own political and ideological presence felt in their North African state and in the writings of their *dā'īs*. The Qarmatians had established a state in Bahrayn, and the Zaydis had established centres of influence in Daylam and Khurāsān. For all of these 'Alī was the focal point for the issue of sovereignty over the community, and his progeny through

Fāṭimah were regarded by them as his legitimate successors. Political and doctrinal developments in this century were to have a tremendous impact on the future of Shī'ism.

An important corollary to these developments was the idea that Shī'ism embodied the true expression of Islam, and further that this expression lay in that particular branch of Shī'ism connected to both 'Alī and Fāṭimah, and not that connected to Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyah, 'Alī's progeny by another wife (whose claim to the imamate, according to some, had been transferred to the 'Abbāsīd caliphs). Thus Fāṭimah's importance lies in her position as the link from the Prophet to 'Alī and to the line of Imāms coming from the descendants of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. In the light of this crucial link, two features of the hagiographical tradition are critical to the growth of Fāṭimah's importance for the Shī'ite vision of Islam. These are (a) the development of her independent status and (b) her role as the fountainhead and fulfilment of Shī'ism.

#### **a) The development of Fāṭimah's independent status**

Many of the hagiographical stories surrounding Fāṭimah focus on her having a special status which is substantially independent and unrelated to that of the prominent male figures in her life. This is a remarkable fact, for we see here a dual paradox. Firstly, Fāṭimah is crucial to the Shī'ite vision as the link among religiously significant personages, namely the Prophet, 'Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Yet, the hagiographical tradition does its utmost to depict her as a person who was important in her own right, not borrowing in any significant or necessary way the glory attending her male relatives. The second paradox lies in the importance given by the hagiographical tradition to a woman. This is not insignificant given the male-centred nature of the Shī'ī tradition which is reflected, for example, in the notion that only a male can be an Imām.



The hagiographical traditions strive to establish Fāṭimah's independence of the Imāms in several ways, all of which have been outlined in the previous chapter. We have seen that she is exalted to a degree by being equated with Mary, the "chief of the women of her time." Both Shī'īs and Sunnīs do this, but the former tend to exalt her status above that of Mary.<sup>3</sup> Shī'ī tradition has emphasized Fāṭimah's virtues to such an extent that she has become an extraordinary woman. Like Mary, she was free from menstruation, and from bleeding at childbirth. During her lifetime Fāṭimah was time and again given divine aid, and she herself performed miracles. The very idea of comparing her with Mary puts her in the category of special women. Further, by being free from the implied impurity connected with bleeding, Fāṭimah is rendered pure and consequently close to God.<sup>4</sup> She is thus capable of receiving divine knowledge. The idea of purity as a prerequisite state for knowledge of the divine is expressed in the Islamic tradition in many ways. One example is the well-known account in which angels opened Muḥammad's chest and cleansed his heart.<sup>5</sup> This they did to make it pure and thus prepare it for the Divine Knowledge which was to be revealed to him. In emphasizing that Fāṭimah was not stained by the impurity of bleeding, she is rendered receptive to the knowledge of divine things.

Another example of her independent status is found in the Shī'ī belief that divine knowledge was revealed to her through Jibrīl after her father's death, and that this revelation is preserved to this day in the possession of the Imām.<sup>6</sup> This is significant in its implications. It implies that revelation was brought by Jibrīl, not only to Muḥammad, but also to Fāṭimah, although her was "hidden" knowledge, that is, something written in a book accessible only to 'Alī and the subsequent Imāms. While the revelation to Muḥammad was openly intended to be communicated to all who would listen to it and could thus be construed as the "external" revelation, that communicated to Fāṭimah would be construed as something hidden, which only the hearer, that is 'Alī, could understand.

Miracles and divine intervention are generally accepted as part of a saint's life. Venerated personages are capable of performing miracles. For example, Rabī'a of Basra is said to have once cast her prayer mat in the air and said her prayers there;<sup>7</sup> she once received food when she had not enough to feed some guests at a meal.<sup>8</sup> Dhu'l-Nūn Miṣrī, another mystic, gave a stone that he had picked up from the street, to a man to sell in the bazaar. The credulousness of the man turned into astonishment when he realised that the stone had turned into an emerald and he thus was able to fetch a good price for it.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Fāṭimah at the various moments of crisis in her life received divine help, as for example when she received food and clothing for herself and her family when they most needed them. She is also claimed to have performed miracles as discussed in the preceding chapter.

Another characteristic which has been attributed to Fāṭimah's independent status is her role as an intercessor for true believers and repentants. Not only is she expected to save the true believers from hell-fire on the Judgement Day, but she will be allowed a special privilege to pass judgement on the murderers of her son Ḥusayn.

#### **b) Fāṭimah as the fountainhead and the fulfilment of the Shī'ī vision of Islam**

The crucial role of Fāṭimah for the Shī'ī tradition is to be found in her being portrayed as a divine source in the fulfilment of God's purpose for mankind through the manifestation of the Imāms. The creation of Fāṭimah from God's own Light and her pre-existence in Paradise before the creation of Adam and Eve have been discussed in Chapter III. These legends have a deeper meaning at the gnostic level. The fact that Fāṭimah existed before Adam and Eve, who represent the beginning of humanity, implies that she pre-exists mankind. In other words it can be inferred that she is the initiator, as *Fāṭir*

(Creator), one of her names in the masculine gender, indicates. Further “one may connect with it (i.e. the appellation, *Fāṭir* ) certain aspects, ...of the Prophet’s own designation of his daughter as ‘mother of her father’ (*umm abīhā*).”<sup>10</sup> Since she is the initiator, the fullest expression of humanity is reached in her heirs, that is, the Imāms.

Not only is her presence in Paradise significant, but her adornments are also important. The crown on her head represents Muḥammad; its gem, ‘Alī; the two earrings, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. But these adornments derive their glory and splendour from being placed on Fāṭimah: she is their support. In other words, this symbolizes the fact that she is the base, the support on which rests the mission of the Prophet, and its propagators, the Imāms.

This image of Fāṭimah also reveals that she was created prior to Muḥammad, who himself is often said to have been created before Adam and Eve. Muḥammad’s elevated position and his association with the Divine Light is generally accepted by Muslims, particularly those inclined to mysticism. For instance, Sahl al-Ṭusṭarī (283/896), a mystic and *mufasssīr*, in his interpretation of the verse of Light, the Ṣurah Nūr (24:35) of the Qur’ān, writes that “when God willed to create Muḥammad, He made appear a light from His Light.”<sup>11</sup> This was done in pre-existence, and the light remained in Paradise for “a hundred thousand years,”<sup>12</sup> and here Muḥammad received the True Knowledge. As Ṭusṭarī puts it “... and was unveiled the mystery by Mystery Itself.”<sup>13</sup> By such an explanation Ṭusṭarī implies that Muḥammad is at the peak of the spiritual hierarchy, above the saints and prophets,<sup>14</sup> for God created Adam from the light of Muḥammad.<sup>15</sup> In fact

the light of the prophets (*nūr al-anbiyāʾ*) is from his (Muḥammad’s) light and the light of the heavenly kingdom (*malakūt*) is from his light, and the light of this world (*dunyā*) and the light of the world to come (*ākhirā*) is from his light.<sup>16</sup>

Given such an exalted status for Muḥammad, it is all the more remarkable that the hagiographical literature has raised Fāṭimah to a position more elevated in terms of priority of existence than that of the Prophet. She is prior to Muḥammad in the state of pre-existence. When Adam and Eve see her, there is no mention of Muḥammad. Rather his 'essence' rests on her in the symbol of the crown. She is also superior to him in that she is the genesis of his Divine Knowledge. The Light of God, from which she is created,<sup>17</sup> also symbolises the *ḥaqīqah* (Truth), and the light of revelation. Thus she is the

typification of the gnosis (*ʿilm al-bāṭin*, *ʿilm al-ḥaqīqa*), of the initiation into this gnosis, and of the Life which this gnosis breathes into the 'dead,' i.e., into those who are unknowing and unconscious.<sup>18</sup>

The significance of this aspect of Fāṭimah's being is to be found primarily in Ṣūfī works and to some extent in those Shīʿī works which can be described as gnostic texts. For what is attempted there is to explain the whole *raison d'être* of creation as such, and to trace the means and manner by which the human soul may return to its state of unveiled spiritual knowledge. However the scanty information given in the biographies of Fāṭimah makes it difficult to understand the significance of all the allusions portraying her as a pre-existent luminous being with divine knowledge. The present study suggests the need to examine this aspect of her hagiography specifically in the light of the Ṣūfī and gnostic Shīʿī tradition, though such an examination falls outside the scope of the present work.

However on basis of the material presented above and the preceding chapter, we can conclude that Fāṭimah is viewed as the originator of the source of knowledge which is the preserve traditionally of the Prophet, ʿAlī and the subsequent Imāms. Put in Shīʿī terminology, she is the *fāṭir* of the divine knowledge held by the *nāṭiq* (Muḥammad), the

*asās* (‘Alī), <sup>19</sup> and the *Imāms*. Their light is her light, the establishment of Islam and its messianic and eschatological promise depend on the propagation of her divine light in Muḥammad and the Imāms. The interplay between the spiritual (that is, her pre-existence, her essence as light, and her knowledge) and the physical (her birth as the Prophet’s child, her marriage to ‘Alī, and her subsequent motherhood of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn) is reflected in the interplay of the historical and the hagiographical. In the hagiography we see a further interplay of relationships: Muḥammad’s daughter becomes the creator of her father’s light and the originator of his essence. ‘Alī’s bride and the mother of his children becomes the seat of his, and their own splendour (he is the jewel in her crown); his children are her earrings.

In response to the second question -- why in the twentieth century the contemporary, largely Shī‘ite interest in her has risen to such an extent that we have at least eleven modern biographies of her, I would like to offer some possible reasons although it is beyond the scope of the thesis to investigate these further at this time. Significantly, all these works are by men. Their interest could be a possible outcome of (a) the current attention given to the status of women in general, within both the Western and Islamic worlds, (b) the role of women in the Iranian revolution of 1979.

#### a) The current interest in the status of women

One of the main points the modern writers of Fāṭimah’s biography make when discussing the status of women is the idea of equal participation in social and political life. Clearly they use her life as a model for emulation.

Seen in the wider Muslim context, the daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad, the wife of the fourth *khalīfah* and the first Imām ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib, and the mother of the Prophet’s grandchildren and subsequent Shī‘ī Imāms, Fāṭimah can be used as an effective

exemplar for a woman's domestic life. In addition, her involvements in public disputes can serve as an incentive for women to demand their rights when they are denied. Fāṭimah represents the brave, politically aware woman in the incident over the land of Fadak. In this affair she not only requested the Caliph to return her inheritance but also addressed a gathering in the mosque on the matter. She also stood up for what she considered to be the right of her husband to the Caliphate.

Just as her historical life can serve as a model which impels women to take part in the world outside their homes and to be aware of and share their husband's non-domestic problems, her hagiography gives women the hope that spirituality is not denied to them on account of their sex. Fāṭimah had ascended to such spiritual heights that not only did she receive divine help at times of crises, but she was also visited by the archangel Jibrīl who came down to console her after her father's death. Fāṭimah is the model of a woman who surmounted all the trials and tribulations in her life and strengthened her faith in God because of these. The impact of such a model might be that since women have a greater influence in the formative years of their children, their own religiosity would contribute to better and happier homes and consequently, taking Fāṭimah as a model, brings women, and as a result the family, to religion.

#### b) The role of women as active participants in political movements

A recent event which has affected the social and political lives of Muslim women is the Iranian revolution. To encourage women to participate in it many means were used. 'Alī Shari'atī (d. 1977), the Iranian social reformer and scholar, who was generally seen as one of the most important intellectual sources of the revolution,<sup>20</sup> used the biographies of Fāṭimah and her daughter Zaynab as the exemplars of his ideal type of women.<sup>21</sup> He did not want women to accept the roles assigned to them by men but to define their own. In

**Fatima is Fatima**, Shari'atī portrays Fāṭimah as a representative “of active struggle against oppression, demonstrating her activist dimension.”<sup>22</sup> In the confrontation with Abū Bakr and ʿUmar she becomes an exemplar for a rising generation of socially conscious women (and a good Shīʿī).<sup>23</sup> This event also reveals her sense of social responsibility, and her protest against the increasingly materialistic trend which Shari'atī perceived Islamic society to be following:<sup>24</sup>

She is not someone who sits at home aware of nothing which is going on. ... she is a Moslem woman: a woman whose ethical purity does not prohibit her from social responsibility.<sup>25</sup>

All of these can be seen as relevant traits in the context of Shīʿite Iran in the 1970s without the specific connection having to be made by the author.<sup>26</sup> Although he offered the ideal to be aspired to, Shari'atī did not suggest any specific plan of action which women could follow in order to reach such a status. His Fāṭimah is the ideal woman, a good daughter, wife and mother, as well as the brave and courageous politically aware woman, “the woman that Islam wants a woman to be.”<sup>27</sup>

One can easily see why Shari'atī used Fāṭimah as the means to achieving his end, that is, to awaken the women of Iran to the events of the times, while safeguarding simultaneously the Islamic faith. As Shīʿīs the Iranians already venerate Fāṭimah, not only as a saint but, as perfect daughter, wife and mother. To awaken Iranian women to political awareness and activity, what better means than to present Fāṭimah as a politically conscious woman?

In the modern world, veneration of Fāṭimah is not necessarily restricted to the Shīʿah, but it is primarily among the Shīʿī that various biographers, hoping to address the rising consciousness of women who expect to participate fully in society, both inside and outside

the home, have created a resurgence of interest in her. The person of Fāṭimah lends itself to this role-model orientation precisely due to her intimate connection with four of the most significant persons in the development of Islam. Because she had already been elevated to a high status in the late classical period of Shī'ism, the modern biographers are able to draw upon a person for whom veneration is well-established for their own purposes. Thus while the classical and modern authors seem motivated by different aims in their narrations of Fāṭimah, her unique position of proximity to the key figures during a time of dynamic changes and social and political upheavals makes her an ideal symbol for every age.

Starting from a little information about her, Fāṭimah's image has grown to become a complete model for the perfect Muslim woman. The facts of her life and character are few and scattered, and the earliest sources, whether Sunnī or Shī'ī, generally disagree on these. Modern biographers of Fāṭimah, who want nevertheless to present factual accounts of her life draw on this data according to their own inclinations and motives. In doing so they emphasize certain characteristics or events of her life to convey points which have special and particular meaning in the context of their own times. One such writer is 'Alī Sharī'atī, who employed the figure of Fāṭimah to arouse the women of Iran to political awareness and activity. Other biographers while not sharing his emphasis on the active period of her life after her father's death, have brought to the forefront a Fāṭimah who was the loving and faithful daughter, the good wife and mother, and the religious and devout Muslim. Their objective is clearly to encourage women to follow Fāṭimah and to fulfill their domestic duties in her tradition.

In the more purely hagiographic literature we encounter a different Fāṭimah. Hagiographic accounts were used by the early scholars and even modern biographers not only to advance the Shī'ah cause, but also to epitomize Fāṭimah's spiritual qualities. They bring to view, among other things, her ability to perform miracles and intercede for a true



believer. One of the reasons for writing such literature is to show that it is not necessary for Muslims to cut themselves away from the worldly life to be able to enhance themselves spiritually. Fāṭimah fulfilled all her duties and obligations as a daughter, wife and mother, and while she even rose up to demand her rights, she nonetheless led a pure, chaste and pious life. Although one cannot expect to attain her spiritual status, one can make her the ideal and attempt to reach the limits of one's perfection.

Over centuries, in spite of considerable Western influence, technical and cultural, and in spite of efforts to remove the practice of the veneration of saints, the latter has remained a powerful force in the private and personal lives of countless Muslims. Reliance on assistance of patron saints with the problems of life still plays a crucial role.<sup>28</sup> Many Muslims do not doubt the authenticity of the miraculous stories attached to such figures; rather these miraculous deeds are what makes them a saint.<sup>29</sup> Thus one finds millions of Muslims travelling great distances to visit the shrines of their chosen saints, and among these, the shrines associated with Fāṭimah rank high on their lists.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. Ibn Ishāq, 69.
2. Majlisī, *Hyāt ul-Kuloob*, 374-376.
3. Chapter III, 105 ff.
4. Ibid., 106. Women in Islam are generally considered unclean for prayers during menstruation. Thus, if Fāṭimah did not menstruate, she never missed a prayer during her lifetime, and accordingly was closer to God.
5. Ibn Ishāq, 71-72; Ibn Sa'd, v.I, 158; Majlisī, *Hyāt ul-Kuloob*, 51; Lings, 25-26.
6. Chapter III, 103.
7. Farīd al-dīn Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirāt al-Auliya'* trans. A. J. Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 43-44.
8. Ibid., 45.
9. Ibid., 97.
10. Corbin, *Cyclical Time*, 182. In his book *Temple and Contemplation*, trans. Philip Sherrad (London: Kegan Paul International in association with Islamic Publications, 1986), 110, Corbin discussing the work of an 8th/14th century Iranian Shī'ī thinker, Ḥaydar Amūlī, writes "because Fāṭimah was called the 'mother of her father' (*umm abihā*), she is the origin both of the Prophet's ancestors and his descendants."
11. Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'ānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣufi Sahl at-Ṭustarī*, (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1980), 149.
12. Ibid., 150.
13. Ibid., 151.
14. Ibid., 152.
15. Ibid., 153.
16. Ibid.; U. Rubin in "Pre-existence and Light: Aspects of the concept of Nūr Muḥammad" in *Israel Oriental Studies*, v.V (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1975), 96-97.
17. Chapter III,
18. Corbin, *Cyclical Time*, 183.

19. The words *nātiq* and *asās* literally mean 'speaker' and 'foundation' respectively, thus in Shī'ī terminology Muḥammad is the the speaker, that is he revealed the words of God to men, whereas 'Alī is the foundation of the faith.

20. William R. Darrow, "Woman's Place and the Place of Women in the Iranian Revolution," in **Women, Religion, and Social Change**, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 311.

21. Juan R. I. Cole, Review of *Fatima is Fatima* in **Middle East Journal**, 38 (1984), 158.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Marcia K. Hermansen, "Fatimeh as a role model in the works of Ali Shari'ati" in **Women and Revolution in Iran**, ed. Guity Nashat (Colorado: Westview Press, 1983), 92.

25. Shari'atī, 201-202.

26. Hermansen, 92.

27. Shari'atī, 22.

28. Jane I. Smith, "Islam," in **Women in World Religions**, 245.

29. Ibid., 244.

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