ABSTRACT

IMAGES OF CIVIL CONFLICT: ONE EARLY MUSLIM HISTORIAN’S REPRESENTATION OF THE UMAYYAD CIVIL WAR CALIPHS

by Kathryn Ann Rose

This thesis examines the ninth-century Baghdadi scholar al-Tabari and his narrative representation of the three civil war caliphs of the Umayyad era (661-750 CE). It explores this important early Muslim historian’s methodological approach to writing narrative history as a way of understanding his own religio-political world rather than a factual recounting. It argues that al-Tabari’s narrative discussion of the first and last Umayyad civil war caliphs differ from that of the second. This study reveals that al-Tabari was less concerned with generating caliphal histories as he was with pointing out the lack of stability within the Islamic Empire and associating that instability with the reigning caliph of the time. This study contributes to a more systemized model of source analysis by which modern scholars fruitfully use the historiography of early Arabic/Islamic sources.
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Chapter One
Introduction

This thesis is a source-critical study of the ninth-century Baghdadi scholar Abu Ja`far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923 CE) and his representation of the three rulers, all members of the Umayyad Dynasty, responsible for the first, second, and third fitan\(^1\) of early Islamic history - Mu`awiya b. Abi Sufyan (r. 661 – 680 CE), `Abd al-Malik b. Marwan (r. 685 – 705 CE), and Marwan b. Muhammad b. Marwan (r. 744 – 750 CE), also known as Marwan II or Marwan al-Himaar. It utilizes Khalid Keshk’s narrative-based analysis of three distinct time periods in the life of the caliph Mu`awiya b. Abi Sufyan (r. 661-680 CE). By applying Keshk’s technique to the final two, yet equally important, civil war caliphs of the Umayyad era, this thesis will contribute to a more systemized model of source analysis by which modern scholars can overcome the historiographical concerns of using early Arabic/Islamic sources to discuss a period as early as the Umayyad Dynasty and its involvement in periods of great civil conflict.

Early Islamic history is typically categorized into three periods – pre-Islam, also known as the *Jahiliya period* or the time of ignorance (before c. 620 CE), formative (c. 600-949 CE) and classical (c. 950-1500 CE).\(^2\) To obtain information regarding these three periods, historically, modern scholars of Islamic history have had to rely heavily on early Muslim historiographical sources. The majority of the commentaries that survive today were generated in the aftermath of the turbulent and controversial period known as the Umayyad era (r. 661 – 750 CE). The Islamic Empire under Umayyad rule had been stricken by three civil wars – the first of which initiated Umayyad control, and the last of which ended it. Works generated in the years following their collapse were the result of a new kind of scholarship filled with pro-`Abbasid and anti-Umayyad themes. These works have become the topic of copious scholarly debate concerning historical accuracy, objectivity, and authenticity. Modern scholarship has covered this ground effectively and continues to produce a number of valid and thought provoking conclusions.\(^3\) Where they have fallen short, however, is in making a connection

\(^1\) *Fitan* is plural for *fitna* – the Arabic word most commonly used for civil war.

\(^2\) This thesis has made use of Chase Robinson’s categorization of the early Islamic periods, Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xiv – xv. While the years following 1500 CE are crucial to the field of Islamic History, they will not be discussed in the present study.

between the fresh memories of civil war, and the debates surrounding historical accuracy, objectivity, and authenticity.

There is a general consensus amongst modern scholars that an authentic historical reconstruction of a period as early as the Umayyad Dynasty is difficult due to a lack of surviving source material generated during the Umayyad era. Although modern scholars have produced a number of historiographical works concerning top Umayyad caliphs, they have been forced to rely upon Muslim commentaries generated during the succeeding dynasty – the `Abbasid Caliphate (r. 750-1258 CE), a period marked by widespread opposition to Umayyad rule. Following the `Abbasid Revolution of 750 CE, early Muslim historians were intent on portraying the Umayyads in as negative a manner as possible. In response to this movement, a number of modern scholars have discussed the methodological concerns of using `Abbasid era commentaries to reconstruct this particularly turbulent and controversial period in Islamic history – many deeming it virtually impossible. Some modern scholars believe the early sources had an overwhelming anti-Umayyad bias, but the majority are collectively concerned with the issue that these early sources were produced so much later than the actual events or people being discussed. As years passed, the works became subject to changes in transmission of information. According to Chase Robinson, many of our earliest titles seem to have originated as scholars’ and students’ notebooks and copybooks, which were initially circulated privately among fellow students, scholars, and friends. Having been subject to nearly all manners of altering, these works would then slip (intentionally or unintentionally) into broader circulation, oftentimes only emerging as “books” sometime well after their reputed “authors” had died. As a result, their coherence, historicity, and authenticity have become a major topic of debate in modern scholarship. This issue will be discussed more extensively in a section below on modern source criticisms.

While the majority of modern scholarship focuses solely on the inability of `Abbasid era commentators to remain objective and unbiased, Dr. Khalid Keshk has discussed, in particular, the ability of these early authors to provide us with useful insight when discussing a dynasty as early as the Umayyad Caliphate. It is for this reason that Keshk claims to have devoted his entire unpublished doctoral dissertation to understanding and correctly interpreting the commentaries

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4 According to Chase Robinson, there are only two Muslim commentators credited to the Umayyad period in which partial original remnants still remain - `Urwa b. al-Zubayr (Medina; c. 712 CE) and al-Zuhri (Medina; c. 742 CE).
5 Robinson, Islamic Historiography, 37.
of the early Muslim scholars. Rather than viewing these sources as untrustworthy and biased accounts, which provide nothing more than a skewed and negative portrayal of Islam’s first dynasty, Keshk embraces their ability to provide the modern historian with a first-hand account of how a number of Arabic/Islamic scholars viewed the turbulent world in which they lived and worked.

He does this by examining their views and discussions of Islam’s first Umayyad caliph - Mu’awiya b. Abi Sufyan. Mu’awiya, whom the present study will refer to as the first civil war caliph, is generally depicted by early Muslim commentators as an unholy and illegitimate usurper who took the caliphate by force. According to Keshk, the depictions of Mu’awiya in the early Arabic/Islamic narrative is very much dependent on which events from Mu’awiya’s life are being discussed. His work focuses on three distinct timeframes in Mu’awiya’s life – pre-civil war (his governorship), civil war (the usurping of the caliphate), and post-civil war (his reign as caliph). During the pre-civil war stage, Mu’awiya is depicted in a positive manner. With the onset of the civil war, however, his character very suddenly takes on a negative image. But during the post-civil war stage of his life, his depiction becomes very anecdotal in which his portrayal depends on the episode taking place. Keshk concludes that the varying depictions are a reflection of the attitudes of the narrators to the events of those periods.

The present study, using Keshk’s model of analysis, has uncovered an important and noteworthy trend in al-Tabari’s monumental work entitled Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk, popularly known Tarikh al-Tabari or History. A close examination of Keshk’s emphasis on the importance of time and place when discussing the pre-civil war, civil war, and post-civil war periods in Mu’awiya’s life has permitted my own study of the lives (or careers) of ’Abd al-Malik and Marwan II a more detailed understanding of how and why al-Tabari’s approach varies in his discourse on the three civil war caliphs. This ultimately contributes to a better understanding of early Muslim historiography on the Umayyad Dynasty, a dynasty so often defined by the three civil wars that developed and destroyed it. Such a contribution in turn permits the historian of

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6 Khalid Keshk, "Depictions of Mu’awiya in Early Islamic Sources." Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 2002. Dr. Keshk is an Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at DePaul University.

7 A number of modern scholars consider ’Uthman b. ’Affan (r. 644-656 CE) to be the first Umayyad caliph. For the purposes of the present study, Mu’awiya will be referred to as the first Umayyad caliph because it was his reign that began the Umayyad Dynasty that lasted from 661 – 750 CE.

8 Keshk, Depictions of Mu’awiya, ix.
formative and classical Islam a viable alternative to the general consensus that historical
reconstruction of this early period is simply too difficult.

**The Shift from Oral to Written Tradition: The Origins of `Abbasid Sources**

It is during the `Abbasid era that we begin to see the emergence of Arabic/Islamic
historiography. The Umayyad caliphs had neither the means nor the interest to support the
newly emerging Arabic/Islamic intellectual community. Therefore, up until the `Abbasid
Revolution, oral tradition continued to be the mainstay of Arab historical memory. The new
`Abbasid caliphate needed to legitimize its religious and secular authority and did this by
providing patronage to the intellectual community. It is a concern among modern scholars that
this need resulted in `Abbasid influence on Muslim scholars such as al-Tabari, and their choice
in content and structure when discussing the Umayyad caliphs. It is possible that such funding
and support resulted in a skewed and biased view, not only of Umayyad history (an antagonistic
undertone), but of `Abbasid history (a positive undertone). Because modern historians are forced
to heavily rely upon sources generated during the `Abbasid period, it is important to understand
the history behind this shift from oral to written tradition.

Oral tradition in early Islam was an important component of identity and affiliation. It
was the means by which early Muslims drew lessons, quarreled with one another, swore oaths,
offered praise and blame, and interacted in cultural transactions. At a time when there was a
general lack of writing in the Islamic community, oral tradition functioned as a means by which early Muslims conceptualized their history.

Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE, Muslim commentators began to “preserve for the community a record, normative,
didactic or homiletic, of Muhammad and the drama of the early years of the community’s
history.” These foundational years became the topic of Islam’s earliest written histories. This
Umayyad historiography laid the groundwork for Muslim historiography of the `Abbasid period.

With the rise of Islam, social change was inevitable. According to Chase Robinson, a
relatively accurate oral history is predicated on a more or less stable social system – in societies

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10 As compared to other developed cultures at this time, one example being the Jewish community who had both an
oral tradition and a written tradition.
undergoing rapid social and political change, oral history tends to become much less reliable. Oral tradition during the time of the Prophet continued to give direction and provide a model way of life – it was exemplary material to live by. Following the Prophet’s death, these oral traditions were falling short of keeping up with the ever-developing “Islamic” concept of “community.” Therefore, early Muslim scholars set about writing down, and editing, these oral traditions. The result was their written version of what they believed to be the Prophet’s core components for a Muslim to live a truly Islamic lifestyle. But as the early formative period in Islam became unstable with the onset of the succession crisis, early scholars became greatly concerned with generating works that supported, in a number of ways, the various claimants to the caliphate (Sunni, Shi’ite, and Kharjite claims).

In the earliest years of the Arab/Islamic intellectual community, Muslims scholars were telling the story of Muhammad’s “divine mission.” There appeared in Medina, particularly under the Umayyad regime, a number of pious and learned men whose sole responsibility was to relate traditions about the Prophet and his life. As Fred Donner explains, it is of no surprise that this should have happened in Medina. It was here that the Prophet had first established the “community of Believers.” Medina is where the greatest number of people lived who remembered the Prophet or had, in their youth, known people who remembered him. As time progressed, Muslim society became further removed from the Prophet himself and this material became an undifferentiated mass of individual reports. Dealing with legal injunctions, ritual, the virtues of individuals or tribes, ethical conduct, biographical fragments, the Prophet’s expeditions, and correct manners, these early reports were used by Muslim scholars to rapidly

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13 In the years of the Prophet Muhammad, Arab society was encouraged to move away from the concept of individualism and tribalism (the *Jahiliya period*) and toward a concept of one unified brotherhood – a unified Arab/Muslim community. Oral tradition, having been the mainstay of an Arab tribal society, fell short of keeping up with this change. Historical memory was so often preserved through each individual tribe’s oral tradition. When the Prophet sought this move away from tribalism, this individual tribal oral tradition fell short of keeping up with the newly unified Islamic concept of “community.” “Community” now meant a conglomeration of communities who once lived on a very individual and tribal basis.
14 The “succession crisis” refers to the crisis that arose in the Islamic community immediately following the Prophet’s death as to whom would succeed him as the leader of the growing Islamic world. A good portion of the community believed the Prophet’s wishes were to appoint his closest companion and father-in-law ‘Abu Bakr (d. 634 CE). The other portion of the community believed the Prophet’s son-in-law and first cousin ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661 CE) should succeed him. Followers of ‘Abu Bakr are known as the Sunni sect in Islam. Followers of ‘Ali are known as the Shi’ite sect in Islam.
15 Kharjites were sectarian rebels against Umayyad rule who initially supported the Rashidun caliph ‘Ali b. Abi Talib and later rejected his rule.
assert their authority as a repository of the community’s early religious and historical experiences.\textsuperscript{17}

Muslim scholars during the later Umayyad and `Abbasid eras devoted most of their attention to the current themes at hand: civil war (fitna), administration, and stories of the caliphs (sirat al-khulafa).\textsuperscript{18} “This perspective on historical writing arose from persistent tendencies and antecedent foundations, which in Islam found new incentive, new horizons, and a new structural framework that was motivated primarily by social, political, and administrative factors.”\textsuperscript{19}

Influenced by political and tribal affiliations, early Muslim scholars were by the tenth century “contributing to a new, more locally defined, more secular, and less universal approach to historical writing.”\textsuperscript{20} “Islamic” values of the classical historiographical tradition, the historical justification for the Islamicate’s universal religious and political claims, were now of little concern. Dynastic and tribal genealogical histories were in highest demand at a time when caliphal legitimacy and authority were the topic of communal debate. Histories were being made to conform to the present issues at hand. Stories of the Prophet were in less demand in comparison to histories that served clear social and political functions. These new dynamic histories could instruct, moralize, edify, enthuse and entertain a reader or an audience. More so, they could legitimize or criticize a social order, a ruler, or a state.\textsuperscript{21}

Robinson provides a detailed chronological history of three phases in Islamic written tradition that took place over the course of nearly three and a half centuries. The first phase dates between c. 610 - 730 CE. Oral tradition, during these years, was still a significant custom in this newly developing Islamic \textit{umma}.\textsuperscript{22} As the ancient concept of tribalism and nomadic tendencies began to fade, the emerging culture of documentation was triggered principally by new ideas of statehood. Functions such as levying taxes, paying the army, and building public works grew in complexity during the seventh and eighth centuries.\textsuperscript{23}

It is the second phase – c. 730 - 830 CE that Robinson sees as the era in which we can begin to speak of Islamic historiography. By 830 CE, biography, prosopography and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Khalidi, \textit{Arabic Historical Thought}, 18-19.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Donner, \textit{Narratives of Islamic Origins}, 222.
\item \textsuperscript{19} A.A. Duri, \textit{The Rise of Historical Writing} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 47.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Donner, \textit{Narratives of Islamic Origins}, 292.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Robinson, \textit{Islamic Historiography}, 13.
\item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{Umma} is the Arabic word for “community” or “nation” – in the early years of the Islamic Empire, \textit{umma} generally referred to the emergence of a new kind of elite or ruling class.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Robinson, \textit{Islamic Historiography}, 13.
\end{itemize}
chronography had all emerged in forms that would remain recognizable throughout the classical period. It comes as no surprise that these branches exploded as part of the `Abbasid boom in learned culture.\textsuperscript{24} `Abbasid rulers, following their swift and violent defeat of Marwan II and the Umayyad house, were faced with the need to establish the cultural credentials of their new caliphate. `Abbasid patronage of the new and quickly emerging institutions of learning was crucial in these regards. “The deepest roots of the historiographic tradition may have lain in Umayyad soil, but this was far too rocky for it to have flourished.”\textsuperscript{25} The `Abbasids provided the means and stability for the systematization of written tradition. According to Chase Robinson, the tradition itself suggests that early `Abbasid patronage was a crucial factor in this boom, describing how early caliphs directed that Greek and Persian sources be translated into Arabic, that various stories and tales be transcribed into writing, and that Prophetic biographies be written.\textsuperscript{26} Thus, it is during their reign that written tradition became professionalized in a variety of regions across the Near East, developing what some scholars refer to as local schools of historical tradition.

During the `Abbasid era, court historians became more prevalent. “The court historian…became a fixed institution whether…he proceeded more or less on his own in his historical production, or…wrote on explicit or implicit official orders.”\textsuperscript{27} In fact, as Franz Rosenthal points out, historical scholarship became highly politicized and highly regarded by all levels in the profession. “It would have been difficult to say whether a man…wrote his great history as an amateur work, or as part of his official duties. Then, as now, the inside information of a high government official added prestige to his work.”\textsuperscript{28} This high prestige, however, should not be confused with historical accuracy or objectivity. Simply because an early scholar held a high position at court and might have had access to inside information, does not mean his work should be held to a higher status historically and objectively speaking.

It is during the third phase, c. 830 - 925 CE, in which the methodology behind Arabic/Islamic written tradition becomes more relaxed, and thus more criticized by modern scholars. In this phase, “we have left behind the age of relatively brief and single topic

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[25] Ibid., 27.
\item[26] Ibid., 26.
\item[28] Ibid., 55.
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‘monographs’ and have entered into the age of the large-scale and synthetic collections.” By now, written tradition has been an established institution for over two hundred years. The once revered works of late Umayyad/early `Abbasid era historians, have now been edited and rearranged by the standards of a new kind of commentator. “It is during this period that the ninth- and tenth-century compilers impressed their vision upon the material not merely by selecting and arranging pre-existing akhbar, but by breaking them up, by rephrasing, supplementing and composing anew.” It is during this period that crucial early works were recast, edited, and passed from one compiler to the next – many times, leaving no recognizable evidence of the original work. As Robinson explains, “Not all historians of this period aimed to compile comprehensive works, and contrary to conventional wisdom, our historians were not only transmitting and reordering, but recasting – indeed even inventing.”

“Old Arabic manuscripts are occasionally discovered, and the occasional fragment can come to light, but we do not possess anything like the spread of evidence required to see how Islamic historiography formed in the seventh and eighth centuries.” On the one hand, the sources used by the later “classical” historians of the `Abbasid era are not always easy to identify. `Abbasid era historians made a habit of reorganizing, reordering, and even redacting much of the information and transmissions credited to the scholars who preceded them. Eventually, after about 900 CE, Arabic/Islamic historiography has relatively little to do with Arabs, and even less to do with Arab tribes and kinship. It becomes much more preoccupied with the political and social currents of the time – `Abbasid connections to Persians, Turks and many other non-Arab ethnic groups. The later `Abbasid era historians were now preoccupied with newer, more contemporary issues at hand.

So what, then, was the Muslim community’s need for a written tradition when oral tradition has dominated for so long? The rise of Muslim historiographic tradition is certainly related to the rise of Islam. “In the short space of two long generations – the blink of an eye in the slow-moving world of ancient empires and tightly held traditions – the political and religious landscape of the Mediterranean world was redrawn by Arab Muslims who were responding to

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30 Ibid., 36. Akhbar is plural for Khabar - the Arabic word for news, information, or a story/account of some sort.
31 Ibid., 16.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
what God had ordered them to do.”

Historical studies among the Arabs began with two independent schools – the Iraqi Schools in Kufa and Basra and the Hijaz School in Medina. For each there were factors contributing to its rise and growth, and both had their own views of history. “The Iraqi Schools began to have an interest in the exploits and splendid military achievements of the tribes…there emerged a partisan spirit for the province in which they had settled, loyalty to the centers.”

There was also the question of the caliphate, the emergence of political factions, and the concept of the state. In the Hijaz School, Arabs became aware of their own importance and a realization that they had a natural part to play in Islamisation – a universal mission that included an establishment of the Arab-Islamic Empire.

**Modern Developments in the Study of and Attitudes Toward Early Muslim Sources**

A number of modern scholars claim that all written historiographical works generated during the `Abbasid period in Islam are untrustworthy for a multitude of reasons. Chase Robinson claims that not all historians of this early period aimed to compile comprehensive works, and that some recent scholarship has shown just how difficult it is to distinguish between fictional and non-fictional styles of storytelling. Personal interests and political agendas were clearly at play. Early commentators were transmitting, reordering, and inventing stories and accounts to support these interests and agendas. Some, if not most, were partial to political partisanship or religious currents taking place after the decline and ultimate massacre of the remaining Umayyad family members. Others were obviously influenced by storytellers and religious influences, which led to potentially biased or untrustworthy accounts. For these reasons, certain modern historians have questioned or simply abandoned the works created by some of the best-known early Muslim scholars.

Other modern historians claim that Muslim historiography of the `Abbasid period does in fact leave us with pivotal information about the past that becomes very apparent when approached on its own terms. R. Stephen Humphreys claims that “if our goal is to comprehend the way in which Muslims of the eighth and ninth centuries understood the origins of their

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36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 153.
38 Ibid., 154.
society, then we are well off indeed; but if our goal is to find out what really happened, then we are in trouble.”\textsuperscript{40} This view is shared by a number of historians who support or agree on some level. Early Muslim sources, and their value to modern scholars, have been the topic of copious scholarly debate since the mid-twentieth century.

According to Tarif Khalidi, there was in fact an awareness of history-in-the-making by Islam’s earliest scholars. Whether historical memory was recorded in an oral or written fashion, the many theological, social and political debates and controversies of the early period left their stamp on Arabic/Islamic history writing. Several strands of historical works arose which show bald or subtle bias in favor of one party or another.\textsuperscript{41} Khalidi believes the authors knew very well what they were doing. It is of greatest importance, then, for the modern historian to understand the influences that led to the stages of collecting, finalizing, redacting, and deleting. Only then can we understand where social and administrative factors and political partisanship played a dominant role in influencing these early scholars’ choices on content and structure. By analyzing divergent accounts of events, the modern historian can assess the different historiographical traditions and reconstruct the emergent views of various politico-religious parties and movements.\textsuperscript{42} Much of this early material was meant to edify or to propagate a sectarian viewpoint, and with this in mind, modern historians might begin to see the material in a new light, and thus perhaps find themselves one step closer to understanding the motivations of these early Muslim scholars.\textsuperscript{43}

Where Khalidi is interested in taking political contexts into account, Konrad Hirschler is more concerned with the issue of social contexts. He aims at examining what the authors’ degrees of agency were in composing the works. He analyzes terms of social context in which they acted, the learned tradition in which they stood, and the textual environment in which they composed their work.\textsuperscript{44} In examining Muslim historiography written during the medieval period, Hirschler seeks to understand how medieval works were largely determined by “external” factors. As Hirschler explains, “These factors were the circumscribed social environment, the stagnating intellectual context of the ‘post-classical’ age, and the authors’ close reliance on

\textsuperscript{40} R. Stephen Humphreys, \textit{Islamic History} (New York: Princeton University Press, 1991), 69.
\textsuperscript{41} Khalidi, \textit{Arabic Historical Thought}, 80.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 81-82.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{44} Konrad Hirschler, \textit{Medieval Arabic Historiography} (New York: Routledge, 2006), 19.
previous historical narratives, which were supposedly merely reproduced in more or less elaborate ways.”

In an attempt to understand these factors more fully, Hirschler examines two very similar texts with distinctive versions of an immediate past: the narratives of Abu Shama (d. 1268 CE) and Ibn Wasil (d. 1298 CE). Hirschler finds that Ibn Wasil was influenced by his dependency on his royal patronage, and that Abu Shama was immersed in the field of religious sciences. In his view, they are ideal examples of the unique diversity and complexity of pre-modern Arabic/Islamic historical writing, making them ideal examples of the obstacles faced by modern Islamic historians in using early Muslim sources. In Hirschler’s view modern historians should continue to use early sources when examining a particular period. With a combination of approaches to the field of Arabic medieval historical writing, Hirschler attempts to bridge the gap between the recent trends in the field and the discrepancies that come along with them. He therefore assumes that medieval scholars were active interpreters of their own society — as was every single generation, back to the oral tridents in the first generation after the Prophet. These authors sought to make sense out of the past, which they presented in coherent narratives — the narratives we are left with today. The early scholar’s agency influenced his conscious decisions on the organization and structure of his work. It must be kept in mind, however, while the authors were, in Hirschler’s opinion, able to shape the narratives to a greater degree than previously assumed, this control clearly had its limits. Therefore, early and medieval sources can be used to study the past, but only when used cautiously.

In contrast to Hirschler, Fred Donner acknowledges that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to know much about the origins, and for that matter, any political or social context of early Islamic historiography. It is even more difficult to use early Muslim sources to reconstruct the history of Islam. In lieu of true documentary evidence, Donner claims that modern historians have resorted to placing emphasis on the use of chronicles and other written accounts produced by the Islamic tradition. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, in their book entitled Hagarism, have gone so far as to rely entirely on non-Muslim/Arab sources. These accounts, according to Donner, present information that is clearly anachronistic, while others present overly

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45 Hirschler, Medieval Arabic Historiography 2.
46 Ibid., 3.
47 Ibid., 5.
exaggerated outright falsifications. Donner sees two approaches to early Muslim historiography that has led to the total abandonment of early Muslim sources by a number of modern historians.

The “traditional-critical” approach readily admits that a sizable portion of Muslim tradition from the historical point of view is false. Though this may be so, Donner believes there does exist a “kernel of historical fact” lodged deep inside the accumulated traditional material. With the traditional-critical approach, however, a number of modern historians have attempted to locate this “kernel of historical fact” only to find they are right back where they started. “The realization that the narratives of Islamic origins may have undergone a long period of oral or partly oral transmission implicitly undermines the relatively simple method of source-critical analysis which has developed as the basis for evaluating historical accounts.” This, of course, cast doubt on the ability to reconstruct early Islamic history or to find that “kernel of historical fact.” It is no surprise, then, why many have abandoned the attempt all together and maintain their critical view towards early Muslim sources.

The “source-critical” approach began in the middle of the nineteenth century, and sought to explain away the patent contradictions and logical absurdities in the sources through a careful comparative source criticism. Rather than attempting to use the sources as historical fact, these nineteenth-century historians simply tried to explain the reasons for inconsistencies in the accounts by careful source comparisons.

Because of the shortcomings and ultimate failures of both approaches, Donner believes modern historians have resorted to what he calls the “skeptical” approach. This approach claims that there are successive layers of repeatedly reshaped and redacted material; we must therefore disregard early sources in total. This approach asks us to accept on faith (because there is no real evidence) that the information found within our sources is actually the opposite of what tradition has passed down to us. Donner refutes this argument and views it as weak and unlikely for four distinct reasons:

1. At no time has the Islamic community been free of religious, political, and social tensions and disagreements, and although the Islamic community at

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48 Donner, Narratives of Islamic Origins, 2-4.
49 Ibid., 15.
50 Ibid., 17-18.
51 Ibid., 9.
large might best be described as having multiple orthodoxies, they show marked agreement – something the skeptical school never addresses.

2. There existed in the community of Believers no “authorities” who have the power to impose a uniform dogmatic view.

3. The skeptics ask us to believe that unnamed authorities hunted down every manuscript in the Islamic world to guarantee only the standard orthodox view was allowed to survive and this is simply unbelievable.

4. Although the skeptics claim that the whole tradition has been redacted to fit later orthodox positions, many accounts survive in the Islamic tradition that appear to retain vestiges of very early theological and historical matters, some of which do not square well with later orthodox positions.\(^{52}\)

Donner uses these four refutations as justification for the modern historian to reject the “skeptical view.” Historians must continue the tiring task of interpreting the tradition on particular points of history and doctrine. With time, modern scholarship will rise above the skepticism and doubt and come to a greater consensus on the usefulness of these early sources.

While Lawrence Conrad and Albrecht Noth maintain a more critical view than Khalidi and Hirschler (being primarily concerned with the construction of these early sources), their argument in many areas mirrors that of Donner’s. They are on common ground with the view that early Muslim sources provide modern historians with some form of pivotal information. The “skeptical” approach and utter abandonment will do the modern historian little justice. Conrad and Noth attribute the obstacles modern historians face in using early Muslim sources to the generation of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modern scholars. This generation of scholars was naive enough to trust that the compilations as we now have them are representative of the original individual reports in an unadulterated form. Furthermore, Conrad and Noth undermine their predecessors’ views that the modern historian must first understand Muslim historiography as a self-contained intellectual unit by only rarely comparing and contrasting various Arabic/Islamic works.\(^{53}\) It is their view that in any one compilation, the modern historian can frequently identify conceptions of history that are at odds with one another. With Conrad and Noth’s approach, it is possible for the modern historian to identify parallels in other Arabic/Islamic collections.

\(^{52}\) Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 26-29.

\(^{53}\) This contrasts Franz Rosenthal’s argument in *A History of Muslim Historiography*. 
In general, they claim that the transmitters and collectors of these early sources are guilty of inventing and circulating reports on a large scale.\textsuperscript{54} The concept of “falsification” refers to the results of the work of the transmitters, and not to their motives. In Conrad and Noth’s view, the process of falsification was a lengthy one. The long-term result of the ways in which these early authors handled their material makes for a highly distorted or even entirely erroneous picture of historical events.\textsuperscript{55} Modern historians who have tried to use early Muslim sources to reconstruct Islamic history have no doubt found it difficult to do so. These early medieval Muslim scholars did not adhere to a dogmatic set of methods and principles.

Modern trends in the debates surrounding the use of the early Muslim sources in the reconstruction of early Islamic history have varied over the past century. Whereas earlier scholarship places emphasis on the use of these sources for understanding the history of historiography, more recent scholarship questions its use entirely. Some have simply found it more useful to abandon the texts altogether since we are unable to clearly and efficiently separate myth from fact. The modern historians discussed above have varied in distinct ways from one another in their approaches to these early Muslim sources. All of them, however, do agree on some level that the early texts provide us with some sort of pivotal information. In light of the many controversies surrounding these early sources, this thesis recommends that a first step for the modern historian would be to understand the social and political motivations behind these authors’ works.

\textit{Khalid Keshk: The Depiction of Mu`awiya in Early Islamic Sources}

By examining a number of well-known commentators of the formative and classical Islamic periods, Keshk claims to have uncovered the paradigms utilized by early Muslim historians in their depictions of “Islamic history’s most misrepresented, misunderstood, and misconstrued figure.”\textsuperscript{56} In Keshk’s view, Mu`awiyah’s depiction is very much dependent on the period of his life which these accounts are discussing and reflect the narrators’ attitudes toward the events of those periods.\textsuperscript{57} His work is meant to provide modern scholars with a model by

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{55} Conrad and Noth, \textit{Early Arabic Historical Tradition}, 6.
Mu`awiyah was the first ruling caliph of the Umayyad Dynasty from 661-680 CE.
\textsuperscript{57} Keshk, \textit{Depictions of Mu`awiya}, ix.
\end{footnotesize}
which they can understand and correctly interpret the commentaries of early Muslim historians – therefore claiming that, so far, modern scholarship has yet to understand and correctly interpret them, let alone understand their value. Whereas current scholarship continues to discuss these sources’ ability to provide critical insight into the past, Keshk stresses their ability to enhance our understanding of how these early narrators viewed the central personalities of their own Islamic history.

Mu‘awiya, as a central controversial figure in Islamic history, is depicted by early Muslim narrators in both a positive and negative light. Keshk’s dissertation is divided according to the number of different, sometimes diametrically opposed depictions, which happen to fall into three different narrative time periods in Mu‘awiya’s life: pre-civil war, civil war, and post-civil war. Depictions of Mu‘awiya’s character vary greatly in early Muslim accounts of these three distinct narrative sequences. By examining ten different episodes from the period of Mu‘awiya’s governorship (pre-civil war) leading up to period of his caliphate (post-civil war), Keshk has come to the conclusion that each of the three narrative periods has dissimilar depictions in relation to the others based on which period and event of his life is being discussed. He has concluded that these dissimilarities are not unforeseen due to the natural outcome of the historical reality of the first civil war, and they are illustrated in the representation of Mu‘awiya’s character – showing the greatest manipulation in the narrative years dealing with the civil war period of his life and the least in those dealing with the pre-civil war.

Keshk’s work, as with the current study, is an exercise in source criticism. Source criticism is a well-established approach in the field of Islamic history. Keshk’s work differs from that already established within the field in his combination of the practice of source criticism and a creative reading of the different layers of historical texts. As demonstrated above, questions surrounding the authenticity, historicity, and value of early Muslim historiography have been the topic of debate for a number of modern scholars. Keshk, while discussing much of these same issues, provides us with a model that, if utilized, will enhance our understanding of other central personalities in early Islamic history. In his view, this would be a more ambitious project that would involve the analysis of multiple personalities in the classical Islamic sources. Doing so on a whole, however, would allow for an effort to systematize his

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58 Keshk, *Depictions of Mu‘awiya*, ix.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 183.
model. “If we use the above methodology our results will be a greater understanding of Islamic
historiography which is a prerequisite for us to gain a better understanding of Islamic history.”61
It is quite possible to extract critical information from our sources – if not for use in historical
reconstruction, then for the identification of the influences made upon our narrators’ choice in
content.

Such is the purpose of the present study. In Keshk’s view, “We might never come to a
definitive understanding of what occurred in the first two centuries of Islamic civilization
(probably due to our own skepticism as much as from the lack of contemporary sources) but we
will begin to understand how and what shaped early Muslim historians’ opinions on these two
centuries. Once we determine what is historically accurate, and what is mere opinion, we can
then begin to get a much clearer picture of our subject.”62 Keshk has already mastered a
significant body of early Muslim narrators’ views of Islam’s first civil war caliph. The present
study has taken his analytical methods a step further, toward the development of a systemized
model of source analysis by examining one particular Baghdadi scholar, al-Tabari, and his
discussion of the Umayyad era’s final two civil war caliphs - `Abd al-Malik and Marwan II.

Keshk’s Methodological Approach

“If we are lucky we get an isnad63 and if we are even luckier, many of those transmitters
included in the isnad are scholars of Prophetic hadith64, which enables us to get more
information about them from the Islamic biographical dictionaries of scholars.”65 In Keshk’s
view, while this may not be the case with all of the narratives, we are still able to understand the
author’s methodology - and this alone is very telling. While we may never be able to come to a
complete understanding of Islamic history “as it really happened,” understanding the
methodology of an early Muslim narrator can uncover the many political and religious
motivations behind his choice in content and structure. This alone gives the modern scholar a
better understanding of who or what was influencing the intellectual community, and why (i.e. a
caliph or family looking to justify or undermine someone’s political campaign, succession,

61 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiya, 183
62 Ibid., 186.
63 A chain of transmission linking the most recent transmitter with the original person who witnessed the event or
saying. An isnad can be as short as two persons or as long as the narrator chooses to make it (depending on his level
of commitment to complete disclosure of the entire transmission line).
64 Prophetic hadith is the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.
65 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiya, 10.
administration, etc.). Keshk has used a number of different early accounts, and has divided their authors into three categories:

1. Story-tellers
2. The Compilers – of which are three subcategories:
   a. “Khabar compilers”
   b. “Khabar editors”
   c. “Unique Khabar”
3. The Historians

Of the three sub-categories, Keshk places al-Tabari within the first as a “Khabar compiler.” Furthermore, he was a well-renowned and highly regarded scholar of Prophetic hadith. As a compiler narrator, al-Tabari tends to rely exclusively on the khabar to tell the story, with little or no intervention on his part – perhaps a technique filtered over from his many works on hadith. In Keshk’s view, al-Tabari is considered a compiler because his work is characterized by personal selection, arrangement, and omission. Al-Tabari states in the introduction to his history that he has relied entirely on transmitters for his account, and that in fact he has rarely used “rational arguments” in his writing of History. Although he admits that much of what he has transmitted is open to doubt, or simply incorrect, he claims to have merely reported it as it was transmitted to him. It is commonly believed that al-Tabari intentionally provided many divergent versions of episodes from Islamic history in an attempt to be representative of all views, and his personal opinion is seldom disclosed. As Keshk points out, he does not even tell which version, from the numerous ones he has for each story, is the most reliable in his own opinion. He merely compiled various transmissions on a number of events. In fact, this is the reason a number of modern scholars prize al-Tabari’s works as the most reliable of early Arabic/Islamic sources. By providing his readers with a variety of transmissions and a number of similar, and many times conflicting accounts, it seems as if al-Tabari has left it to the reader’s discretion as to what is accurate and what is not. As Keshk explains, however, this technique does not provide his readers with a well-rounded representation of the various Arabic/Islamic views; and while sources such as al-Tabari’s History are important to understanding how early commentators viewed their world, it is important to know what the

66 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiya, 11.
67 Ibid., 13.
68 Ibid.
opinions of these early authors were and what influenced their choices in content and representation.

While Keshk does not focus solely on the techniques and opinions of al-Tabari, his research does conclude that the Baghdadi historian’s writing style is congruent with ninth- and tenth-century scholarly trends when discussing the first civil war caliph Mu’awiya. When discussing the caliph during the narrative sequence of the pre-civil war years, Keshk concludes that early Muslim historians portrayed Mu’awiya in three ways:

1. As a neutral/incidental character in which his part in the event(s) taking place makes no difference on its outcome.
2. As an obedient governor of the province of Syria. It is here where we begin to see references to his great strategy, bravery, loyalty, and piety.
3. As the eloquent/obedient governor in which his character is in fact very much a positive Islamic one.\(^6\)

It is during the narrative years dealing with the first civil war, however, where we begin to see a sharp contrast in the representations of Mu’awiya’s character. He begins to assume a very negative role. Again, Keshk concludes that early Muslim historians portrayed Mu’awiya in three ways when discussing his life during this point:

1. As an incidental/negative character in which his role in the event(s) taking place makes no difference to its outcome.
2. As a coward.
3. As an ineloquent/insubordinate governor.\(^7\)

And finally, it is during the narrative sequence of Mu’awiya’s post-civil war period, his reign as caliph, in which we see yet another change in early commentators’ views. Here he is portrayed as leading two very anecdotal roles, both very dependent upon the event that is taking place:

1. As a proverbial Arab shaykh who is interested in pre-Islamic stories about the Arabs.
2. As an enlightened despot in whose presence differing opinions are exchanged.\(^8\)

The present study focuses not only on depictions of the first civil war caliph Mu’awiya, but also on the depictions of the second civil war caliph ‘Abd al-Malik and the third civil war caliph Marwan II. When discussing ‘Abd al-Malik, al-Tabari strays significantly from the narrative

\(^6\) Keshk, *Depictions of Mu`awiya*, 6.
\(^7\) Ibid., 6-9.
\(^8\) Ibid., 8-9.
trends outlined above – many times not even discussing the caliph at all. When discussing Marwan II, however, al-Tabari’s writing style begins to mirror that of his work on Mu’awiya – perhaps not a coincidence given both caliphs were responsible for a period of great unrest while `Abd al-Malik is generally credited with innovation and prosperity. Examining al-Tabari’s discussion of the final two Umayyad civil war caliphs in comparison to his discussion of the first Umayyad civil war caliph has allowed us to determine that Keshk’s emphasis on time and place is applicable to a later timeframe in the Umayyad Dynasty.

Al-Tabari treats Mu’awiya as the controversial figure he is, writing about him in both a negative and positive light. Marwan II is also a very controversial and disliked figure of Umayyad history and is written about as such. ‘Abd al-Malik, on the other hand, remains untouched by certain distinguishable trends which al-Tabari seems to follow. The present following examination permits an even greater understanding of how `Abbasid era historians viewed three of the most significant Umayyad caliphs. This study abides by the conviction that there are a number of methodological concerns when using Islamic sources, but does not claim to make a decision on source worthiness for historical reconstruction. It does, however, attempt to contribute to modern scholarship on the issue by generating a greater understanding of one important and influential `Abbasid era historian and how he saw and viewed his ever-changing and quickly developing world – a useful step in itself. It is at this point in which the present study will now turn to a discussion of al-Tabari’s monumental work History, and his representation of the three Umayyad civil war caliphs, Mu’awiya (r. 661-680 CE), `Abd al-Malik (r. 685-705 CE), and Marwan II (r. 688-750 CE).
Chapter Two

Foundations of an Uprising

Abu Ja`far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (839 - 923 CE) is a ninth century Baghdadi historian and Qur`an commentator whose work is ranked among the most respected of early Islamic scholarship. His best-known works are Tar`ikh al-Rasul wa al-Muluk (The History of the Prophet and the Kings or History) and his Tafsir (commentary) on the Qur`an. His monumental History has recently been translated into English, comprising a total of forty volumes each of which is well over two hundred pages. Born in Tabaristan (modern Iran) to a landowning father, al-Tabari had financial privileges that allowed him to pursue a life of scholarship without the need to seek employment or patronage from the `Abbasid Caliphate. He was educated in Rayy, a northern Iranian city, but resided most of his adult life in Baghdad where he devoted most of his time to teaching and writing. Though his most significant works were written in Baghdad at the height of the `Abbasid Caliphate, al-Tabari, as far was we know, was not a court historian and his work contrasts with that of other prominent contemporaries. He “stayed clear of politics and is reported to have declined several official appointments.”

But because al-Tabari himself was a scholarly product of the intellectual community in which he lived, his work was just as susceptible to freely mixing prescription and description, polemics and facts, myth, legend, and stereotype. While we may never truly know the historical facts concerning the three civil war caliphs of the Umayyad era, comparing al-Tabari’s depictions of them will give modern scholars a greater understanding of how this very prominent, and influential, `Abbasid era historian viewed such a turbulent and religio-politically stricken distant past.

According to Tarif Khalidi, al-Tabari is virtually unwilling to reveal his innermost feelings and experience in his works; as scholars, “We should be content…with his private thoughts and turn our attention to his scholarship.” In doing so, however, the modern scholar means to utilize these early works as evidence of Islamic history – “as it really happened.” The present study maintains the view that al-Tabari’s scholarship, on the other hand, is indeed an

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73 Ibid., 112.
indication of his private thoughts and opinions – but on contemporary history and politics. While he may not disclose these thoughts openly, his choices in content, structure, and approach are all clues to how al-Tabari saw and viewed the history of the religio-political Islamic world in which he lived and worked.

Franz Rosenthal refers to al-Tabari as a Muslim historian, but in the weakest sense. “A man like al-Tabari was much more important and famous in his day as a theologian than as a historian.” In reality, al-Tabari was not a historian as we understand the profession today. Rather, he was a narrator of self-chosen versions of major historical events from Creation to 915 CE. He is and will continue to be of great importance to modern historians. But according to A.A. Duri, when examining early Islamic historiographical sources, it will not help us to place our faith in the high reputations that some historians enjoy. It is true that al-Tabari’s History forms the foundation for many modern works on Islamic history today, just as it has been the foundation of all other works on the early history of Islam. But in a modern age of source-critical studies, the once highly prized ninth-century Baghdadi historian and his work may increasingly be found under scrutiny for historicity, accuracy, and authenticity. It is the purpose of the present study, by utilizing the work of Khalid Keshk, to remove al-Tabari’s work (and in time, other Muslim scholarship) from its present location under the critical lens of the modern historian looking to rate a historical source’s ability to provide historical facts. Instead, the focus should be on the early authors themselves and the context of their religio-political society. The task of this thesis is to examine al-Tabari’s discussion of the three civil war caliphs of the Umayyad era in an attempt to understand and correctly interpret the commentary of this particular important early Muslim historian. We focus here, not on his content, but on his unique ability as an early Muslim historian to provide modern scholars with a critical lens into the past. This is done, not through his historiographical work and the potential facts found within it, but through an analysis of his choices in content, structure, and approach when discussing core events and people.

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The First Islamic Civil War

The death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE quickly thrust the newly developing Islamic Empire into a succession crisis – a crisis that resulted in a clear division within the Muslim umma. Islam, as a religious and political entity, had by this point begun to assert its influence on the greater part of the Arabian Peninsula, known as the Hijaz region, and the other communities of the Near East – namely Jewish, Christian, and polytheistic societies. But the difficulty this religio-political community faced in dealing with the confusion surrounding a successor “speaks volumes about the absence at this stage of a fully formed religious identity, or at least of the failure of that identity to claim the unremitting allegiance of many of those who had joined it.” Nothing proved of more importance, or as critical, after the Prophet’s death than the question of leadership. Although the community would see a period of general stability and growth for nearly twenty-five years following the Prophet’s death, the inability of the Muslim umma to remain unified in the succession issue would eventually lead to the first Islamic civil war (656-661 CE).

Muhammad became ill shortly before he was to begin a major pilgrimage to Mecca. His illness became so severe that he was incapable of leading the community in prayers – a responsibility he entrusted to Abu Bakr, namely his oldest companion and the father of perhaps his favorite wife A`isha. The Sunni tradition, as we have it today, indicates that Muhammad left behind a model spiritual path for the Muslim community but remained silent as to who should lead it in the event of his death. “He left behind devoted followers, revelations that would subsequently be assembled into the Qur’an, clear views on matters of belief and action, and several wives and daughters; but no sons, successors, or clear plan of succession.”

Early Sunnis believed that Muhammad, holding to traditional tribal practices, thought it unwise that a position such as the Commander of the Faithful (caliph) be inherited or transferred. Rather, in their opinion, the position should be given to a member of the Muslim umma selected by an electoral conclave (shura) based on criteria of piety, religious devotion, and degree of proximity

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79 According to Hugh Kennedy, “Religious excellence rather than wealth or breeding was going to decide membership of the new ruling class.” See Hugh Kennedy, The Prophet and the Age of the Calipha (Great Britain: Pearson Education Unlimited, 2004), 7.
81 Hugh Kennedy The Prophet and the Age of the Calipha (Great Britain: Pearson Education Unlimited, 2004), 46.
82 Robinson, New Cambridge History, 193.
to the Prophet himself. Early Shi`a, on the other hand, put forth a number of arguments claiming that Muhammad had in fact appointed a successor – his first cousin and son-in-law `Ali b. Abi Talib (c. 598-661 CE). To the Shi`ite way of thinking, kinship dictated a person’s value as a successor. Shi`ite tradition maintains that Muhammad presented `Ali as his successor to assemblies of Muslims but that such an appointment is said to have been suppressed by the vast Sunni tradition of the time.83 `Ali, however, would not actually begin his reign as caliph until twenty-four years after the Prophet’s death.

The Muslim umma’s decision to appoint Abu Bakr as successor to the Prophet marks the beginning of the era of the Rashidun Caliphs or the “rightly-guided caliphs.” Following a short reign of only two years, Abu Bakr was succeeded by three other companions of the Prophet each one selected through the consensus of the leaders of the community: first `Umar (r. 634-644 CE), then `Uthman (r. 644-656 CE), and finally, though controversially, `Ali (r. 656-661 CE).84 During this period, however, Sunnis and Shi`a, failed to reconcile their differences. Until `Ali’s succession Shi`a, with the support of the fundamentalist Kharijite sect, engaged in a number of rebellions and political demonstrations. Political trends in ninth- and tenth-century Muslim historiography became especially concerned with the period of about five years between the controversial succession of `Ali and his eventual overthrow by Syrian governor and Umayyad clan member, Mu`awiya b. Abi Sufyan in 661 CE. “Muslim tradition knows this period as the Fitna (‘time of trial’), or Great Fitna to distinguish it from other, later periods of internecine conflict between Muslims.”85 The first Islamic civil war came to be known as a period of crucial importance – to the majority of early Muslim historians these five years signified the end of the Golden Age in the history of Islam and the rise of the “anti-Islamic” Umayyad Caliphate led by the “usurper” Mu`awiya.

As the sources describe it, the confrontation between `Ali and Mu`awiya began immediately following the murder of the third Rashidun caliph `Uthman by a mutinous soldier. Mu`awiya, a second cousin of `Uthman, campaigned against `Ali, accusing him of allowing the caliph’s murder. The confrontation heightened when `Ali thrust himself into the position of reigning caliph in 656 CE. Mu`awiya refused to swear allegiance and demanded that `Ali

83 Robinson, New Cambridge History, 194.
84 Berkey, Formation of Islam, 71.
identify those responsible for `Uthman’s death. In the early months of 657 CE, `Ali set out from Kufa leading his army up the Euphrates where they came into confrontation with Mu`awiyah’s Syrian followers at Siffin. `Ali’s plan was to force Mu`awiyah to acknowledge his authority and take the bay`a (oath of allegiance). “It was not at this stage a struggle for the caliphate since Mu`awiyah had made no claims to this office; he wanted the punishment of the murderers of `Uthman and the acceptance of his right to continue as governor of Syria.” Over time, however, Mu`awiyah’s motivations would change – leading him toward a bid for the caliphate.

As the tradition has it, the battle lasted only a few months. It is commonly written that both sides agreed that any further bloodshed of fellow Muslims should be avoided and agreed to arbitration. The arbitration was set to take place within one year’s time – what actually took place during the arbitration, however, is of some debate. “There is general agreement among the sources that the arbitration was inconclusive and that it broke up in disarray.” The fact that the arbitration was even agreed to by `Ali and his followers was a significant factor in weakening his position – he had abandoned his unchallenged right to lead the community and many began to have doubts about his leadership qualities. Meanwhile, Mu`awiyah succeeded in gaining the support of those who once supported `Ali, offering them guarantees of status in return for their support. Mu`awiyah continued to gain support for his cause, all the while keeping his focus, not on claims to the caliphate, but on the undermining of `Ali’s claim to rule. Within a short time Mu`awiyah had gained enough support from a number of regions. In the years following the arbitration, he openly asserted his claims to the caliphate and reached agreements with many of the tribal leaders who now supported him. In 661 CE, however, `Ali was unexpectedly assassinated, not by supporters of Mu`awiyah, but by a Kharijite – a former disgruntled supporter of `Ali and the Shi`ite rebellion. Because Shi`a placed such emphasis on kinship, many looked toward `Ali’s son al-Hasan as his successor. He was, however, soon persuaded to abandon any claim to the caliphate and Mu`awiyah, with the support of the Iraqis, was able to occupy Iraq without serious resistance. It was in this year that Mu`awiyah had himself militarily declared as

86 Humphreys, Islamic History, 65-77.
87 The plains of Siffin are located close to the modern day city of Allepo in Syria.
88 Kennedy, The Prophet, 78.
90 Kennedy, The Prophet, 79.
91 Ibid., 80.
ruling caliph. The year 661 CE marked, not only the end of the first Islamic civil war, but also the beginning of what would become known as Islam’s first dynasty – the Umayyad Caliphate (r. 661-750 CE).

The conflict between `Ali and Mu`awiya is a central example of an event around which early scholars took sides, and their views and opinions become transparent when examining their depiction of the event and its main characters. Sunnis and Shi`a took their respective sides and narrated contrasting accounts. “For many Muslims of this and later periods, the fitna marked a decisive break: before it, the short but inspired moment of the time of the Prophet, the conquests, just rule and political unity; after it came the altogether more ambivalent and controversial periods of Umayyad and `Abbasid rule.”92 Virtually all of the early narrators believed that the office of the caliphate combined religious and political authority – for most, the age of the prophets had come to an end, succeeded by the age of the caliphs, whose status was equal (and according to some, superior) to that of the prophets.93 In the time of the Umayyad caliphs, the title of Commander of the Faithful would come to mean God’s religious authority on earth and political authority over the whole of the Islamic Empire. It is therefore of no surprise that the first Islamic civil war, and those that followed, were about succession to the office of the caliphate.

**Keshk’s “Pre-Civil War Mu`awiya”**

As stated in Chapter One, Keshk’s dissertation is a complex project. He focuses on a number of early Muslim historians and their depictions of Mu`awiya in three distinct narrative sequences of the caliph’s life – pre-civil war (governorship), civil war (the years leading up to his rule as caliph), and post-civil war (his reign as caliph). The present study, however, focuses solely on the ninth century Baghdadi historian al-Tabari. For this reason, this chapter will discuss Keshk’s analysis of al-Tabari’s depiction of Mu`awiya, solely, with only brief comparative references to other early commentators when relevant.

Keshk has already mastered the paradigms utilized by early Muslim historians in their depictions of “Islamic history’s most misrepresented, misunderstood, and misconstrued figure” –

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93 Ibid., 203.
Mu`awiya. With each of the three Umayyad civil war caliphs, al-Tabari seldom disclosed his own opinion openly within his narrative. He gives his readers, in most cases, various versions of the same event but does not choose one particular version himself. According to Keshk, al-Tabari, in the case of Mu`awiya, had recourse to Syrian transmitters but chose not to use them – even though they were probably better informed about Mu`awiya as both a governor and caliph. Al-Tabari’s decision to use Iraqi sources, in Keshk’s view, gives the modern historian an indication as to his point of view. While it is generally agreed upon that he was not an `Abbasid court historian, his discussion of Mu`awiya contains pro-`Abbasid/pro-Iraqi connotations while at the same time expressing a number of anti-Umayyad/anti-Syrian undertones.

Keshk, in his analysis of “pre-civil war Mu`awiya,” has chosen three incidents from early Muslim accounts that take place prior to the narrative years dealing with first civil war. Each of the events took place at various stages of the caliph’s pre-civil war life, and he does this to show how Mu`awiya’s character, throughout the narrative, remains in a constant state of flux during the pre-civil war stage of his life. A number of early Muslim historians, al-Tabari included, depict “pre-civil war Mu`awiya” in a very positive light: Mu`awiya begins as a neutral/incidental character who then transforms later into the brave commander and eventually into an eloquent/obedient governor. The narrative years dealing with Mu`awiya’s pre-civil war life have no framework and subsequently, no agenda. His presence at an event occurred merely as a result of the individual historians’ choices of narrators. Keshk argues, “The reason for such a positive characterization…is that here the stories and the persona of Mu`awiya are not yet touched by the historical tragedy of the first civil war.” Therefore, Mu`awiya’s actions toward his opposition are neither characterized as positive or negative. There is no obvious attempt by al-Tabari to create a negative portrayal of Mu`awiya, as there is no need for it at this point. This, however, does occurs in later episodes when we see Mu`awiya’s character taking on a drastic change.

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95 Mu`awiya was the governor of Syria before becoming caliph. It is under his reign that the capital of the Islamic Empire was transferred to Damascus, Syria. It is only natural that Syrian transmitters would have had more information (accurate or not) about him.
The “Incidental/Neutral” Depiction

The first narrative episode examined by Keshk is the earliest mention of Mu`awiya in our sources. The timeframe is set during a period when Mu`awiya’s family were leading opponents against the Prophet Muhammad. The story deals with Mu`awiya’s recollection in the narrative year of 625 CE of the execution of Khubayb b. `Adi in Mecca. After being driven out by the Quraysh, Muhammad decided to send six spies, including Khubayb, to Mecca. They were caught just outside of town and were offered amnesty by the Banu Lihiyan (a polytheistic tribe of Mecca). He and two other spies were betrayed and brought into town to be executed as revenge for those Qurashis who were slain at the Battle of Badr in 624 CE.

When Khubayb was about to be executed, he cursed his executioners and all those present saying that they should all be killed one by one. Among those at the execution were Abu Sufyan and his son Mu`awiya who at the time of the actual execution would have been only a child. Abu Sufyan, fearing the curse would fall upon his son, threw him to the ground.

The story can be found in five Muslim historical sources to illustrate a “neutral” depiction of Mu`awiya in which his presence or absence has no impact on the story or outcome of the event taking place. These sources are The Sira of Ibn Ishaq, the Maghazi of al-Waqidi, Ibn Sa`d’s Tabaqat, al-Tabari’s History, and the Tarikh of Khalifa b. Khayyat. According to Keshk, “Mu`awiya’s name is only present as a result of the sources the historian is using and is not a purposeful insertion or deletion by the historian.” In his analysis, Keshk notes that two out of three historians (Ibn Ishaq and al-Waqidi) chose to include Mu`awiya’s personal recollection of the incident, while the other three did not. Al-Tabari, in his own narrative, relied on a different version that removed Mu`awiya from the picture entirely. “A group of Quraysh, among whom was Abu Sufyan b. Harb, gathered around…and when he [Khubayb] was brought forward to be killed Abu Sufyan said to him, ‘I call on you in God’s name to tell me the truth’…Finally Nistas killed him.” At first glance, this omission may seem deliberate – al-Tabari has left out

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97 The tribe to which Muhammad belonged and the dominant polytheistic tribe of Mecca during the rise of Islam.
98 The Battle of Badr was the first large-scale engagement between Qurayshi Meccans, who initially opposed Muhammad and his teachings, and the Muslim forces.
99 David Cook, Martyrdom in Islam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 21-22
100 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiya, 21.
101 Ibid., 20-25.
102 Ibid., 20.
103 Ibid.
certain details from the execution section of the narrative that forms important contexts for other early Muslim historians. But in Keshk’s view, “the neutral nature of this story indicates that its [Mu’awia’s name] inclusion or absence within a particular text only reflects the choice in narrators rather than a purposeful critical move by the historian in question.” In al-Tabari’s case, his omission can be understood as a personal choice in transmitters – Iraqi vs. Syrian. His isnad is, for the most part, identical to the other four historians’ versions. Whether al-Tabari’s decision to omit Mu’awia’s name was or was not a deliberate choice, the absence does not seem to have an impact on the outcome of events which took place – Khubayb b. ’Adi was still executed by the Meccan peoples making him a martyr in the eyes of Muhammad and his followers. As Keshk explains, this episode can certainly qualify as “neutral/incidental” in that Mu’awia’s actions and presence at the execution of Khubayb were neither symbolic, nor an attempt to associate him with an objectionable act.

The “Brave Commander” Depiction

The second narrative episode from the pre-civil war stage of Mu’awia’s life portrays him as the brave commander with references to his great military strategy, bravery, loyalty, and piety. Keshk’s reasoning “for choosing this story is that it illustrates an aspect of Mu’awia that many of the early sources seem to completely forget when they talk about him in his war with ’Ali: his experience as a brave and strategically competent general.” The narrative timeframe is set in 638 CE when the Arabs, under the reign of `Umar took Antioch and enslaved the peoples of the surrounding villages. It was at this point, both historically and textually speaking, that Mu’awiya was appointed governor over Syria. According to Robert E. Hoyland, in 648 CE, the patrician Gregory rebelled in Africa. As a result, the Arabs, under command of Mu’awiya, raided Africa and defeated Gregory who upon defeat went to Constantinople seeking refuge with the emperor. The following year, Mu’awiya launched a naval campaign against Cyprus and Arwad. It was not until 649 CE that Mu’awiya again attacked and at this time successfully captured the two islands.

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105 Keshk, Depictions of Mu’awiya, 24-25.
106 Ibid., 184.
107 Ibid., 6; 30-38.
“In the time of `Umar b. al-Khattab, Mu`awiya pleaded with him about naval campaigns (ghazw al-bahr) and the closeness of the Byzantines to Hims…So `Umar wrote to `Amr b. al-`As [saying,] ‘Describe the sea and the seafarer to me, for I am uneasy about it.’…When (`Umar) informed him of the benefits for the Muslims and the damage to the Polytheists to be derived from (naval warfare), `Amr wrote back to him…When `Umar read (this letter), he wrote to Mu`awiyah [as follows]: ‘No, by Him who sent Muhammad and the Truth, I shall never send any Muslim there.’”

Al-Tabari goes on to provide his readers with four other versions of the conquest. In three of the versions it is Mu`awiya himself who leads the naval campaign, and in the fourth one Mu`awiya appoints `Abdallah b. Qays al-Jasi to lead the naval campaign. Al-Tabari most likely chose to incorporate Mu`awiya’s request to go to sea because `Umar was unenthusiastic about the armies of the Islamic Empire raiding by sea. `Umar never permitted anyone to raid by sea – it was never done during the time of the Prophet and continued that way through `Umar’s reign. Mu`awiya’s great military strategy and bravery is depicted through al-Tabari’s rendition of his request for an unusual, daring, and brave method of battle – sea-raiding. “The first to conduct naval warfare was Mu`awiyah b. Abi Sufyan in the time of `Uthman b. `Affan. He had sought `Umar’s permission for this but did not obtain it. When `Uthman took office, Mu`awiyah persisted until at last `Uthman decided to grant permission.” His loyalty and piety is of great importance when he abides by `Umar’s decision to deny his request to go to sea – waiting, rather, until the appropriate time to make the request with the succeeding caliph `Uthman.

The “Eloquent/Obedient Governor” Depiction

In Keshk’s analysis of the third pre-civil war narrative episode, he finds that Mu`awiya is depicted as an eloquent/obedient governor whose character is very much a positive Islamic one. The story takes place in the narrative dealing with the year 654 CE when there was much opposition to `Uthman’s policies and appointees. In the following episode Mu`awiya, as governor of Syria, verbally deals with an opposition group of Kufan exiles two years before `Uthman’s assassination. This incident starts in Kufa when the head of the police (al-shurta)

111 Ibid., 26-32.
112 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiyah, 30-31
113 Al-Tabari, Crisis of the Early Caliphate, 28.
114 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiyah, 6; 38-47.
agrees that all the sawad\textsuperscript{115} lands are indeed in the hands of the governor. As a result, a number of unnamed men attack the head of police until the point where he fainted. Afterwards the governor, Sa`id b. al-`As, writes to the caliph `Uthman, who instructs him to send the culprits to Syria where they are to be dealt with by Mu`awiyah.\textsuperscript{116} “(The Kufan notables) having written about this to `Uthman, he wrote to Mu`awiyah [as follows]: ‘The Kufans have expelled...keep close watch on them. If you observe right conduct in them, then receive them hospitably. But if they are burdensome to you, them send them back (to the Kufans).’”\textsuperscript{117} In al-Tabari’s account, Mu`awiyah treats the Kufan exiles with respect, giving them noon and evening meals in accordance with `Uthman’s orders.

As Keshk explains, al-Tabari provides his reader with two versions – one transmitted from Sayf b. `Umar through al-Sari and another version from al-Sha`bi through al-Waqidi. Al-Tabari makes frequent use of the Sayf version where Mu`awiyah begins by telling the Kufan exiles that it was only through the graces of Islam that they were able to defeat other nations. He continues by explaining that God singled out the Quraysh tribe in pre-Islamic and Islamic times, thrusting them into a position of leadership. “But were it not for Quraysh you would again be abject and despised, just as you used to be.”\textsuperscript{118} It is for this reason, as Mu`awiyah’s character explains, that the Kufan exiles should obey their leaders – for they are from the Quraysh tribe. Leaving the exiles ashamed of themselves, Mu`awiyah returns shortly only to add that he has been appointed to administrative positions by the Prophet, Abu Bakr, `Umar, and `Uthman (which seems at first glance very odd and out of place).\textsuperscript{119} “When they had gone, (Mu`awiyah) called them back and said, ‘I reiterate to you that the Messenger of God was protected [from sin], and he bestowed authority upon me and brought me into his affairs. Then Abu Bakr was named his successor, and he bestowed authority upon me. `Umar and `Uthman did the same upon their succession.’”\textsuperscript{120} It can be assumed, however, that al-Tabari’s decision to insert such a random statement is a reference to a more or less “divinely guided appointment.” This is meant to encourage the exiles to obey what Mu`awiyah has requested of them.

\textsuperscript{115} Modern day western central Yemen
\textsuperscript{116} Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiyah, 39-40.
\textsuperscript{117} Al-Tabari, Crisis of the Early Caliphate, 114-115.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 115.
\textsuperscript{119} Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiyah, 42-43.
\textsuperscript{120} Al-Tabari, Crisis of the Early Caliphate, 118.
Al-Tabari’s second version of the story is borrowed from al-Waqidi.\textsuperscript{121} It differs greatly in the subject matter of Mu’awiya’s discussion with the exiles, but the overall intent remains the same – Mu’awiya’s religiously inspired words are meant to encourage obedience to him due to his stature amongst the “rightly guided” caliphs. In disobeying him, they will be obeying the devil and in turn disobeying God. In both accounts, al-Tabari portrays Mu’awiya as relying heavily on Qur’anic exegesis – more so than in any other situation. In doing so, he is portrayed as presenting a sound and logical argument for the reasons that members of the Quraysh are occupying positions of leadership.\textsuperscript{122}

Each of the three pre-civil war depictions – Mu’awiya the neutral/incidental figure, the brave commander, and the eloquent/obedient governor, disappear during the narrative years dealing with the civil war stage of his life. “No where during the civil war is Mu’awiya able to argue a point as well as he has done here and he never utilizes Qur’anic imagery to the same extent as he does above, if at all.”\textsuperscript{123} While Mu’awiya is portrayed in a positive light during the narrative years dealing with the pre-civil war stage of his life, once the civil war begins his character suddenly takes on a negative image.

\textit{Keshk’s “Civil War Mu’awiya”}

The first Islamic civil war began in 656 CE and lasted five years. Mu’awiya, during this period, campaigned against `Ali and his claim to the caliphate all the while seeking revenge for the murder of his kinsman and the former caliph `Uthman. The first Islamic civil war, for Mu’awiya, was not about a personal claim to the caliphate – though he would, in the years to come, make a successful bid for it. He remained in a constant state of warfare with `Ali and his troops throughout the five years, successfully weakening `Ali’s position.

When examining Mu’awiya’s character as portrayed during the civil war period of his life, Keshk uses the same methodology outlined in the above analysis. He has chosen three events during this narrative sequence to determine how early Muslim historians intended to portray him. The three depictions discussed are similar to those above, only during this period they take on a very negative tone. The first depiction, as before, is an incidental one in form -

\textsuperscript{122} Keshk, \textit{Depictions of Mu’awiya}, 45-47.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 48-50.
that is, Mu`awiya’s presence or absence, again, appears to have no impact on the story or the outcome of the event. This depiction, however, differs from the “pre-civil war neutral/incidental depiction” above in that it harbors extremely negative undertones. The second depiction, as before, portrays Mu`awiya as a commander – only this time, he is depicted as a coward rather than a brave, loyal, and pious leader. And finally, the third depiction, as above, situates Mu`awiya in an argument with the opposition – only this time, he comes across as inarticulate. His statements are narrow and lack focus, and his arguments are confined to seeking “revenge for the blood of `Uthman.”\textsuperscript{124}

As Keshk notes, it would seem that early Muslim scholarship on “civil war Mu`awiya” does not stray too far from this “aggressor blueprint” – not even al-Tabari’s work. The early narrators used quotes from the \textit{sira}\textsuperscript{125} and Qur’anic imagery to make the civil war stage of Mu`awiya’s life resonate with the Islamic community. “No longer is Mu`awiya the brave, maverick governor of the province of Syria; instead he is a cowardly and sheepish usurper. This characterization is made more evident by the stories that repeatedly hammer into the reader’s mind the same theme: that Mu`awiya is a disloyal usurper with no right to the caliphate or even the governorship of Syria; and that he is a worldly, conniving coward whose indecisiveness is clearly manifest.”\textsuperscript{126} The conflict between `Ali and Mu`awiya did not resonate well with the Sunni or Shi’a intellectual community. It must be kept in mind that the first Islamic civil war ended with Mu`awiya’s taking of the caliphate – this alone did not resonate well within the Islamic community. It therefore seems as if our early sources intended to depict Mu`awiya in this fashion to weave for us the sad saga of the transformation from pristine Islam during the Rashidun period to imperial Islam during the Umayyad period (kingship period).\textsuperscript{127}

Each of the stories which take place during the civil war years of the narrative seem to rely on a particular depiction of Mu`awiya – as the aggressor. This can be understood as an effort by early narrators to “create parallels between Mu`awiya’s struggle against `Ali and Abu Sufyan’s struggle against the Prophet.”\textsuperscript{128} In a sense, it was a struggle between good and evil that goes back to the time of the Prophet – the Umayyad house vs. the house of the Prophet. A

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Keshk, \textit{Depictions of Mu`awiya}, 52.
  \item \textsuperscript{125} Stories of the life of the Prophet Muhammad.
  \item \textsuperscript{126} Keshk, \textit{Depictions of Mu`awiya}, 53.
  \item \textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 8. Abu Sufyan is Mu`awiya’s father. During the time of the Prophet, Abu Sufyan and the Umayyad family were leaders in the opposition against Muhammad and his teachings.
\end{itemize}
significant body within the Arabic/Islamic intellectual community when discussing the narrative years prior to the first Islamic civil war, does not portray Mu‘awiya’s character as an aggressor. There was no reason for them to portray him in any other manner – he had not yet offended the Islamic community. This thesis argues that al-Tabari is less concerned with generating an entire caliphal history as he is with demonstrating lack of stability within the Muslim community. “Pre-civil war Mu‘awiya” is not associated with a lack of stability but rather with bravery, confidence and piety. In describing the narrative sequence of the civil war years, however, narrative trends among many of the Arabic/Islamic intellectual community transform (al-Tabari included) and Mu‘awiya is portrayed as the aggressor who thrust the Islamic community back into disarray just like his father had done during the time of the Prophet – therefore resulting in a negative portrayal. Even though ‘Ali’s succession to the caliphate was controversial, he was the grandson of the Prophet and the community remained free of civil conflict. As the sources portray it, it was only when Mu‘awiya sought revenge for ‘Uthman’s blood and eventually the caliphate, that the first Islamic civil war began. It is therefore of no surprise that it is precisely this period in which our early Muslim sources’ narrative trends transform.

The “Incidental/Negative” Depiction

In the narrative years dealing with the civil war period, Mu‘awiya is referred to by the early narrators as an `ahzab. According to Keshk, “The term itself was first used in the Qur’an to describe the coalition of forces that came together to attack the Prophet at Medina in 5 A.H. [627 CE]…Its use to describe Mu‘awiya is an effective way of not only denouncing him but also all those who follow him.”129 This is the first moment in “narrative time” in which we begin to see Mu‘awiya’s character take on a negative image in Arabic/Islamic sources. The story takes place at the Battle of the Trench during the narrative year 627 CE in which a number of Meccan (Mu‘awiya’s family included) tribes laid siege to Medina. Mu‘awiya’s presence in the following story does not have any outcome on the event itself; it is simply an opportunity for the early authors to begin portraying him in a negative light. Al-Tabari, and others like him, lifted this story from many years earlier in Mu‘awiya’s life and inserted it into a discussion of the battle between `Ali and Mu‘awiya at Siffin. He did this simply to create a likeliness between those who opposed the Prophet, and Mu‘awiya (`ahzab) and his troops opposing `Ali (a relative of the

129 Keshk, Depictions of Mu‘awiya, 66.
Prophet, both by blood and by marriage). Mu’awiya, and by association the Umayyad house, now become associated with the concept of being “anti-Islamic.” According to Keshk, Mu’awiya is attached to this negative incident in order to mark him with a historical ‘blackmark’ in the future.\footnote{Keshk, Depictions of Mu’awiya, 67.}

“During the battle of the Trench on a very windy and cold night the Prophet asks Hudhayfa b. al-Yaman to go and spy on the besiegers…Abu Sufyan senses that something is amiss so he asks everyone to make sure they know who they are sitting next to. Hudhayfa, cleverly, decides to take the initiative and ask first, and he thus asks, ‘Who are you?’ to the person on his right and the same of the person on his left…Abu Sufyan got up and said: ‘Be careful of the spies; every man must be aware of who he is sitting next to.’ He (Hudhayfa) said, ‘I turned to ‘Amr ibn al-‘As who was on my right side and said, ‘Who are you?’ And he said, ‘‘Amr ibn al-‘As.’ And I turned to ‘Mu’awiya ibn Abi Sufyan and said, ‘Who are you?’ And he said, ‘Mu’awiya ibn Abi Sufyan.’”\footnote{For al-Tabari’s account on this episode, see: Keshk, Depictions of Mu’awiya, 67-69.}

At first glance, the story itself seems insignificant – which fits with the theme that Mu’awiya’s presence has no outcome on the event taking place. Keshk, after further analysis, finds an interesting trend. The isnad used by al-Tabari is the same isnad used by Ibn Ishaq (original transmission: Muhammad b. Ishaq -- Yazid b. Ziyad – Muhammad b. Ka’b al-Qurzi). The original transmission does not mention Mu’awiya or ‘Amr; instead the original Arabic has it as ‘fulan bin ‘fulan which is simply a reference to a person without specifically mentioning his name or lineage – “So and So is the son of So and So.”\footnote{Ibid., 69-70.} Mu’awiya and ‘Amr’s names were inserted at a later date by al-Tabari and other early narrators as an attempt to attach Mu’awiya’s name to a negative incident in the history of the Prophet. “The insertion of Mu’awiya in the story greatly enhances and cements the parallelism that is to be drawn between the ‘ahzab fighting the Prophet at the Battle of the Trench and those fighting ‘Ali at Siffin.”\footnote{Ibid., 73.} According to Keshk, once the narrators have created this parallelism, it does not seem so outlandish to the reader that Mu’awiya is being called an ‘ahzab, especially since the story being used portrays Mu’awiya as being part of the original ‘ahzab during the time of the Prophet.
The “Coward” Depiction

“Civil war Mu`awiya” is portrayed as the cowardly commander in the narrative description of the Battle of Siffin at the height of the war. “Not only is he stylized so but the sources have him even admitting to being afraid and wanting to flee in the heat of battle.”

In the spring and summer of 657 CE, `Ali led his forces up the Euphrates against his opponent Mu`awiya and his followers in what has become known as the Battle of Siffin. The armies faced each other for sometime before fighting commenced. Once the battle begins, `Ali’s men move closer to the center of the Syrian army, where Mu`awiya is standing. As the Iraqi forces move closer Mu`awiya, fearing defeat, decides to flee. “He [`Ali’s commander] attacked the Syrians and defeated them until he had driven them back to the lines of Mu`awiyah, during the time between the afternoon and evening prayers…he brought down the first four lines (they were bound together with turbans), and they reached the fifth line around Mu`awiyah. Mu`awiyah called for a horse and mounted…”

Just as Mu`awiya mounts his horse he remembers the verses of one `Amr b. al-Itnaba, which gives him enough courage to stand his ground.

According to Keshk, a number of sources do not even mention the incident. When discussing the incident, most early authors use the book of Nasr b. Muzahim who does not leave this section out. Al-Tabari’s version mirrors that of Nasr’s but his isnad differs. The result is not an omission of the incident but rather a difference in core characters – both going back to the participant in the battle who was responsible for frightening Mu`awiya into fleeing. “Al-Tabari has it be al-Ashtar instead of `Ali…al-Ashtar keeps advancing, breaking through one column after another, four in all, until he reaches the fifth, which is the last one before Mu`awiyah.”

It is at this point that Mu`awiya mounts his horse and prepares to flee only to change his mind at the last minute after remembering an encouraging poem. We are not told the outcome of Mu`awiya’s decision to stay and al-Tabari quickly finishes the story, moving onto his next topic. According to Keshk, these bits of information are superfluous, as illustrated by the two versions found in our earliest source, Waq` at Siffin, thus, this information could be placed anywhere in the narrative without affecting the overall picture of the battle. For al-Tabari, the importance of

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134 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiya, 73.
135 G.R. Hawting, First Dynasty, 28.
137 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiya, 74-76.
138 Ibid., 78.
the incident does not lay with the circumstances surrounding the decision to flee but the fact that he wanted to flee, therefore, resulting in a negative and cowardly depiction of him.

**The “Ineloquent/Insubordinate Governor” Depiction**

Mu`awiya’s character, in the pre-civil war narrative sequence of his life, engaged in a very articulate and well-argued discussion with the Kufan exiles (those Kufans who rose up in rebellion against the policies of the caliph `Uthman in 654 CE). He was eloquent and well-spoken and his authority was backed by the great names of Islamic history. In the following episode, Mu`awiya’s character is also engaging in a discussion with the opposition – only this time, he is not as convincing nor as well-spoken and eloquent. In fact, this discussion does not even qualify as a conversation but rather a lecture by `Ali’s men. Mu`awiya’s character does not answer any of their questions but rather responds only by throwing the men out.

The incident takes place before the above one in the chronology of the narrative traditions of the battle at Siffin. `Ali sends a number of his men to negotiate with Mu`awiya, calling him to obedience and unity in hopes of avoiding battle with him – the exact historical date of this negotiation is unknown. As with the Kufan exile story there are many personalities confronting Mu`awiya’s character. In the ensuing meeting the argument turns into a lecture by the three messengers. Mu`awiya is reminded of the so-called “framework” of the civil war and that he should be aware that his deeds in this world will be judged by God in the next.\(^{139}\) “But Mu`awiyah cut him off, saying, ‘Have you not recommended that to your master?’ [Bashir b. `Amr`] replied, ‘My master is not like you. Of all of creation, he has the most right to this position of authority by virtue of his merit, his religion (\textit{din}), his precedence in Islam, and his relationship with the Messenger of God.’” Mu`awiya did not answer him and only asked: ‘What exactly are you saying?’”\(^{140}\)

As Keshk relates, the immediate answer given by Bashir differs from one narrative to the next. In al-Tabari’s account, Bashir tells Mu`awiya “…to fear God and to respond to your cousin in acknowledging the truth to which he calls you. It is safer for you regarding your life in this world and better for you regarding your final end.”\(^ {141} \) Mu`awiya, in response to Bashir, only refers to his concern of what will happen to `Uthman’s killers. “Mu`awiyah said, ‘And are

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\(^{139}\) Keshk, \textit{Depictions of Mu`awiya}, 87-89.
\(^{140}\) Al-Tabari, \textit{The First Civil War}, 17.
\(^{141}\) Ibid.
we to make the blood of `Uthman count for naught?  No, by God, never!’” It is at this point when al-Tabari makes his first reference to Mu`awiyah’s potential part in the murder of `Uthman. One of `Ali’s men broke in and began a speech in which Mu`awiyah is being accused of a number of things, most importantly that he was the person who wanted `Uthman dead in order to gain the position of the caliph for himself. “Mu`awiyah…the only way you could find to misguide the people, pervert their desires, and get from them their obedience was by saying, ‘Your Imam was killed unjustly, and we seek revenge for his blood!’ Some stupid riffraff responded to it, but we know that you delayed in giving `Uthman help and that you desired his killing so that you might obtain this position that you now seek.” 142

Not only does this incident portray to the reader that Mu`awiyah was unable to defend his own position as he had done in the episode from the pre-civil war narrative sequence of his life, but it also plants the idea that his “cause” was unjust. Al-Tabari has now caused his reader to question whether Mu`awiyah did want to be caliph, and whether it was Mu`awiyah who wanted `Uthman dead and not `Ali. The first Islamic civil war was, and continues to be, a very important and vivid memory for Muslims. Perhaps it was not a coincidence that al-Tabari succeeded at building Mu`awiyah up in his narrative concerning the pre-civil war stage, only to tear him down during his discussion of one of the darkest points of Islamic history – the first Islamic civil war.

**Keshk’s “Post-Civil War Mu`awiyah”**

By the end of the first Islamic civil war, `Ali had been assassinated and Mu`awiyah had militarily thrust himself into the position of reigning caliph. While al-Tabari could not change the known facts – that Mu`awiyah did become caliph and reigned for nineteen years – he was able to continuously undermine his position, leadership abilities, decisions, and his standing as a true Muslim. It is in the narrative of the post-civil war stage of Mu`awiyah’s life when we see his character assume two very different characterizations - the Arab-shaykh and tyrannical despot. Only this time, according to Keshk, these depictions occur side-by-side in the stories - they do not evolve from one incident to the next as has been demonstrated in the previous stages of his

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142 Al-Tabari, *The First Civil War*, 17.
life. Mu`awiya’s character moves from one depiction to the next in the same event and his character changes according to the various versions of the story.\textsuperscript{143}

To demonstrate this, Keshk chooses two important events from the post-civil war narrative dealing with the years of Mu`awiya’s reign as caliph – the execution of the Kharijite leader Hujr b. `Adi and the appointment of his son Yazid b. Mu`awiya b. Abi Sufyan as heir apparent. Mu`awiya’s change from the Arab-shaykh to the despotic ruler “…not only changes the tone of the story but changes the perception of the history of this period.”\textsuperscript{144} For Keshk, the post-civil war narrative of Mu`awiya’s life holds precedence over the pre-civil war and civil war periods. His reasoning is that it is “post-civil war Mu`awiya” from whom modern scholars, using sources such as al-Tabari, make their personal decisions as to how they believe Mu`awiya really was as a ruler. “There are those who believe he was a great centralizer (despot) and those who believe that his rule was greatly decentralized (Arab-shaykh).”\textsuperscript{145}

\textbf{The Killing of Hujr b. `Adi}

In narrative year of 665 CE, Mu`awiya appointed a man by the name of Ziyad over the whole of Iraq. He would rule from garrison town of Basra where he “warned the Basrans of his determination to impose order: ‘We have brought a punishment to fit every crime.’”\textsuperscript{146} Apart from his reorganization of Kufa and his rule over Khurasan, Ziyad’s governorship is associated with the suppression of the revolt of the Kharijite leader Hujr b. `Adi in Kufa in 671 CE.

“When he [Ziyad] returned to al-Basrah, he heard that the partisans of `Ali had gathered to Hujr and had openly cursed and disavowed Mu`awiyah…At that, he set out for al-Kufah and, upon arriving there, he entered the citadel…while Hujr was sitting in the mosque…Ziyad said, ‘Now then, injustice and transgression have fatal consequences…I swear by God, if you do not straighten out, I shall curse you with your [own] medicine…I shall have accomplished nothing if I don’t protect the plaza of al-Kufah from Hujr and make him an example for whoever should come after him.’”\textsuperscript{147}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{143} Keshk, \textit{Depictions of Mu`awiya}, 101.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{146} G.R. Hawting, \textit{First Dynasty}, 40-41.
\end{flushright}
Hujr’s revolt was the first movement openly in support of the claims of the descendants of ʿAli since the end of the first civil war. Ziyad easily suppressed the revolt and sent Hujr and other ringleaders of the Kufan soldiers to Damascus where Muʿawiyah had them executed.⁴⁴⁸

According to Keshk, Hujr’s story is shaped by the desires of the sources from which medieval Muslim historians chose to include material in their narratives. Most of our sources carry the depiction of Hujr as a martyr but a number of them refer to him as a dissident. Others are more interested in establishing tribal affiliations through the Hujr story, while some simply consider him a rebel. Regardless of the various “views” of the Hujr story, each version concludes with Muʿawiyah’s orders for his execution and each carries the connotation that Hujr’s life ended in martyrdom. As for al-Tabari, Keshk does not discuss, in detail, his versions of the Hujr story. Rather, he groups al-Tabari’s various versions based on his choice of isnad, resulting in two portrayals of Hujr - both as a martyr and as a dissident.⁴⁴⁹ Either of these depictions can be negative or positive but in al-Tabari’s versions, both the Hujr/martyr and Hujr/dissident stories maintain the most negative undertones.

Al-Tabari’s portrayal of Muʿawiyah’s character in the Hujr story transforms him from the Arab-shaykh to the despotic ruler. In all versions, he is the Arab-shaykh willing to spare lives. His character, however, moves into his despotic stage when he adds a stipulation – those who wish to have their lives spared must curse ʿAli openly. “Hujr stood up before him [Ziyad], shackled with chains, saying, ‘O ʿAmir, listen to me. Tell Muʿawiyah that my blood is forbidden to him, and inform him that we were given a guarantee of safe-conduct and that we have become reconciled to him. Tell him also to fear God and examine our case.’”⁴⁵⁰ His message is passed onto Muʿawiyah who then gives a number of the men the option to disavow ʿAli and live. Hujr, however, is not given this option and Muʿawiyah orders his head to be cut off. The reader is left with a highly negative understanding of how Muʿawiyah dealt with Hujr. Al-Tabari has provided an account portraying Hujr as the martyr who was willing to reconcile with Muʿawiyah only to be killed in the end by the tyrannical and despotic ruler.

⁴⁴⁸ G.R. Hawting, First Dynasty, 41.
⁴⁵⁰ Al-Tabari, Between Civil Wars, 147.
The Appointment of Yazid b. Mu’awiya b. Abi Sufyan as Heir Apparent

In this episode, as with the Hujr story, Keshk explains that the depiction of Yazid’s appointment as heir apparent is shaped by the desires of each source from which particular historians chose to include material in their narratives. Prior to his death in 680 CE, Mu’awiya appointed his son, Yazid b. Mu’awiya, as his successor to the caliphate. This decision marks the first time in Islamic history that a caliph has named his successor on a hereditary basis. As Matthew Gordon explains, the Arabic/Islamic sources roundly condemn the decision and it is clearly an unpopular decision with many in the Arab-Islamic society. “Unlike the Hujr story, in which each narrative’s source carried a different point of view, in the appointment of Yazid, within each narrative’s source there are several point of views.” There are a number of points in his account of this story where al-Tabari’s choice in transmissions gives the reader an indication of his point of view. Mu’awiya was given the idea to appoint his son by a conniving former governor of his, al-Mughira. After becoming jealous at the reactions of his people to the idea of a new governor, al-Mughira devises a plan that is sure to push Mu’awiya into bloodshed – the appointment of his son as heir apparent. After the suggestion is made, Mu’awiya reinstates al-Mughira and tells him that he should continue the work which he began, which is to convince the Kufans to accept Yazid as the next caliph. Al-Mughira is recorded as saying, “I have put both of Mu’awiya’s feet in a stirrup that is long in its misguidance to Muhammad’s community.” This line, however, is missing from al-Tabari’s account.

In another element of the story, Mu’awiya writes to his governor of Basra, Ziyad, asking him to get the Basrans to give the oath of allegiance to his son Yazid. According to Keshk, al-Yaqubi includes a conversation between Ziyad and an unnamed person in which this person is questioning Mu’awiya’s choice to appoint his son as heir apparent. The purpose of this version is to show that even the closest friends of the Umayyad governors knew and felt that there were better people than Yazid and did not fear stating it out loud.

151 Keshk, Depictions of Mu’awiya, 142.
152 Gordon, Rise of Islam, 37.
153 Keshk, Depictions of Mu’awiya, 142.
154 Ibid., 146-147.
155 Ibid., 147.
156 According to Keshk, al-Tabari probably understood the negative implication of al-Mughira’s words, and left this line out of the story altogether.
“How can we appoint someone like Yazid who plays with monkeys and dogs and is addicted to alcohol? The idea of his being caliph is even harder to accept when there are better people than him…”  

Al-Tabari’s account differs greatly from this version. In his narrative, the person whom Ziyad asks for advice is named and he is a little less forward than the unnamed person in al-Yaqubi’s version above in stating his opinion of Yazid. “When Mu`awiyah wanted to acknowledge Yazid (as his successor) he wrote to Ziyad, asking him for advice. Ziyad then sent for `Ubayd b. Ka`b al-Numayri, saying ‘Everyone who asks advice has trust, and every secret has a place to put it…”’ As Keshk explains, this named person does not mention monkeys or wine; he simply gives his opinion - pointing out that Yazid is neglectful and given to hunting. “‘So meet the Commander of the Faithful, acting on my behalf, and inform him about Yazid’s actions. Tell him, ‘Go slowly in this matter, for it would be more appropriate in order to accomplish what you want. Don’t hurry, because attainment with delay is better than haste without success.’”

There is also notion that given time he can be reformed – meaning he can be trained, in a sense, to be a good and pious leader. It is this aspect of the story, only in combination with Mu’awiya’s next move (which is to not tread lightly in his appointment of Yazid), that reflects negatively on him. When he called for a document about appointing Yazid as his successor and read it to the people, only five of them chose not to acknowledge it – al-Husayn b. `Ali, Ibn `Umar, Ibn al-Zubayr, `Abd al-Rahman b. Abi Bakr, and Ibn `Abbas.

According to Keshk, al-Tabari’s version of the remaining half of the story is structurally and contextually very similar to his contemporaries. Mu`awiyah approaches Mecca for a pilgrimage. Here, he has a conversation with each of the Qurayshi sons. He speaks to each of them, praising them individually by pointing out their honorable heritage. According to Keshk, during his conversation with the five men, Mu`awiyah speaks to them about the succession, not as a despot or even a caliph, but as an Arab-shaykh. He tells them that his son Yazid is equal, through kinship, with the rest of them. The Umayyad family, as were their own families, is a very prominent part of the original Quraysh tribe. He assures them that if they support Yazid in his succession to the caliphate, their self-government, which they have enjoyed all of these years,

157 This is an excerpt from al-Yaqubi borrowed from Keshk’s work. See: Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiyah, 147.
158 Al-Tabari, Between Civil Wars, 185.
159 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiyah, 148.
160 Four of these men are sons of the Rashidun caliphs – the recalcitrant four. Ibn Zubayr is not the son of a Rashidun caliph, but very important to this story. They are referred to as the sons of the Quraysh.
would not be interfered with. After Mu`awiya had spoken with each of the men individually, he did not receive the answer he was hoping for. They would not support the succession of Yazid to Mu`awiya’s caliphate and would not give him the oath of allegiance should he make a bid for office. Immediately, Mu`awiya’s character changes; he is now portrayed as conjuring two very important schemes: to show that the people of the Hijaz, especially the five sons of the Quraysh, are essential in the election of the caliph; and to persuade the general public in Mecca to believe that the five Qurayshi sons gave the oath of allegiance to Yazid even though they had not.

It is at this point where the reader witnesses the transformation of Mu`awiya’s character from the Arab-shaykh so concerned with due treatment of the Qurayshi sons to the despot who has no reservations in undermining these five men’s decision. “This is essentially a Machiavellian move on the part of Mu`awiya the despot, to get the people of the Hijaz to accept the bay`a.” Mu`awiya ascends the pulpit in Mecca and gives a speech in which he assures the people of the Hijaz that the five men have in fact given the oath of allegiance to Yazid. In response to Mu`awiya’s speech, the people demanded that the five men come in front of them and affirm that they have in fact given the bay’a and if they had not, the people would reprimand them. Mu`awiya, knowing this cannot happen, told them he will not tolerate such distrust of the sons of the Quraysh. The men were present at this speech, but fearing for their lives while in the midst of the people, chose not to come forward in argument.

Al-Tabari differs from his contemporaries in this story in his version of the happenings after the speech. Each of the men had already told Mu`awiya they would not support Yazid’s succession to the office of the caliphate. But following the speech, three out of the five men tell him they will eventually give the oath of allegiance to his son should the other two do so as well. At this point, we are not actually told whether this takes place, but the reader may very well assume that it did. But as al-Tabari has it, following Mu`awiya’s death, one of Yazid’s first acts was to finally get the oath of allegiance from these three men who had, after all, made this promise to his father. This, therefore, gives the impression that these three men never actually gave the original bay’a to Yazid when Mu`awiya was alive.

161 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiya, 152.
162 Ibid., 157-158.
163 Ibid., 158.
164 Al-Tabari, Between Civil Wars, 186-187.
“And there was nothing more important for Yazid than getting the bay`a from those who refused to answer Mu`awiya on the request for the bay`a to Yazid when he called the people to give him the bay`a, and that he (Yazid) was his heir apparent.”

According to Keshk, this is a clear indication that at least in al-Tabari’s narrative Yazid believed that his father never got the bay`a from the five Qurayshi sons. Although al-Tabari gives the notion that the oath of allegiance did take place after the speech, he sets the record straight by the end of the story by giving the impression that it in fact never took place during Mu`awiya’s time.

Afterward

The purpose throughout Keshk’s dissertation has been to understand the objective and approach of early Muslim historians in their depictions of Mu`awiya. He has done this by examining three narrative stages of Mu`awiya’s life and ten incidents which take place during these three periods – pre-civil war (governorship), civil war (leading up to his reign as caliph), and post-civil war (his reign as caliph). Mu`awiya’s depiction in each of these three narrative periods has been dissimilar - showing the greatest manipulation when it is a depiction during the civil war, and the least when it is during the pre-civil war; a natural outcome of the historical reality of the civil war and all the controversies that disseminated out of that period. It is the purpose of the present study to utilize Keshk’s model of source analysis on the first Umayyad civil war caliph – Mu`awiya, and apply it to the final two Umayyad civil war caliphs. Keshk’s dissertation is extremely complex in his analysis of multiple commentators and depictions of Mu`awiya. For this reason, Chapter Three and Chapter Four of the present thesis focus solely on al-Tabari’s depiction of `Abd al-Malik and Marwan II. Both chapters examine al-Tabari’s characterization of these two Umayyad era civil war caliphs by comparing the similarities and differences to Keshk’s analysis of al-Tabari’s depiction of Mu`awiya. The remainder of this study, therefore, contributes to a more systemized model by which modern historians can better understand early Muslim historiography on the Umayyad Dynasty, which is so often defined by these three civil wars.

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166 Keshk, *Depictions of Mu`awiya*, 183.
Chapter Three

The Continuation of a Succession Crisis

Al-Tabari has left us with a complex textual tradition that consists of many separate accounts, thus in fact, many separate narratives. These narratives agree on some details but have different aims, goals, and agendas. In the following chapter, the present study, using Keshk’s model of textual analysis, will put a number of discrepancies under the microscope in al-Tabari’s treatment of the second Islamic civil war caliph of the Umayyad era - `Abd al-Malik b. Marwan. When discussing the narrative timeframe of `Abd al-Malik’s pre-civil war, civil war, and post-civil war life, al-Tabari strays significantly from the narrative trends outlined in Chapter One. Al-Tabari presents his readers with a tripartite narrative of `Abd al-Malik’s career which is similar to that of his narrative on Mu`awiyah. Where he differs, though, is in his direct discourse on the two individual caliphs. Mu`awiyah’s character, in the greater part of his career, directly takes part in a number of negative and positive episodes. `Abd al-Malik’s character, at the height of his career, is rarely discussed at all.

The parallel narrative years of `Abd al-Malik’s pre-civil war life are the only narrative years in which al-Tabari’s trends even remotely reflect that of his treatment of the first civil war caliph - Mu`awiyah. `Abd al-Malik is depicted in much the same way as Mu`awiyah, only there is no obvious attempt at portraying him in a glorious light. While Mu`awiyah is portrayed in three distinct ways: as the “neutral/incidental” bystander, as the “brave commander” and as the “eloquent/obedient” governor, al-Tabari places `Abd al-Malik’s character only within the context of a “neutral/incidental” episode, and as with his treatment of “pre-civil war Mu`awiyah,” this again is most likely the result of a choice in transmitters. In two seemingly neutral/incidental appearances, `Abd al-Malik’s presence in the narrative has no direct impact on the episode taking place. It is during the narrative sequence of the second civil war in which al-Tabari associates `Abd al-Malik with the image of a “rescuer” of the Islamic community. Mu`awiyah, during these parallel narrative years, becomes associated with anti-Islamic ideals and the usurping of the caliphate. As a result he is depicted as the negative instigator of the first civil war. `Abd al-Malik’s character, on the other hand, remains untouched by the negativity surrounding the second civil war and during the narrative post-civil war years of his life, he is rarely discussed by al-Tabari at all.
The Second Islamic Civil War

The second Islamic civil war lasted from 680 – 692 CE and can be broken down into three parts. While each of the three events is deeply significant to Islamic History, they will only be discussed as they relate to al-Tabari’s representation of the second Umayyad civil war caliph `Abd al-Malik.


2. The revolt of `Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr (c. 680-692 CE).

3. The collapse of the Sufyanid house/coming of the Marwanids – the caliphate of `Abd al-Malik b. Marwan (r. 685-705 CE)

Mu`awiya b. Abu Sufyan died in 680 CE and was succeeded by his son Yazid b. Mu`awiya (r. 680-683 CE). As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Yazid’s appointment as heir apparent did not sit well with most of the elite of the Islamic community and he encountered much opposition very early on in his reign. “Everyone understood that the acceptance of Yazid would mean the maintenance of the sort of Syrian-based regime which his father had set up and the idea was bitterly opposed therefore, not just by the Iraqis but also by those Umayyads and other Qurashis in the Hijaz who had been effectively excluded from power by Mu`awiya.”

During his short three year reign as caliph, Yazid’s two most important Qurashi opponents were `Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr – grandson of the first caliph Abu Bakr, and Husayn b. `Ali – grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and son of the fourth Rashidun caliph and Mu`awiya’s greatest opponent `Ali b. Abi Talib. Both would play a large role in ending the Sufyanid branch of Umayyad authority.

Husayn was now the champion of the pro-Alid grouping, the movement that was to emerge as the Shi`ite branch of Islam. He presented a brief but major threat to Yazid’s caliphate, and “when his family’s followers in Kufa called on him to assert his family’s claim to leadership, al-Husayn (unlike his brother) decided to act.” He led a small force from Medina to southern Iraq in hopes of claiming what was considered rightfully his – in other words, the leadership of the nascent Islamic community. But his campaign against Yazid never succeeded.

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169 Shi`ite Islam is the branch of Islam in which its followers support the claims of the `Alid family – that is, those family members descending from the Prophet’s first cousin and son-in-law `Ali b. Abi Talib.
Husayn’s caravan was attacked by Yazid’s troops just outside the town of Karbala on October 10, 680 CE. Husayn’s head was delivered to Yazid in Damascus and the rest of the `Alid following were either killed or imprisoned. The killing of Husayn at the Battle of Karbala added to the ever-developing distaste for the Umayyad house. “Many felt that the grandson of the Prophet, a man whom Muhammad loved and had played with on his knee, had been brutally done to death by the forces of godless oppression.” His death played an important role in the attachment of people’s hopes and political aspirations to the family of `Ali in undermining and forever deposing the Umayyad family. Over the next three years, Yazid continued to face a number of movements aimed at ending Umayyad rule altogether. Aside from the ever-increasing pro-Shi’ite opposition, Yazid was faced with strong opposition from Ibn al-Zubayr and his followers. “The close kinship which linked him to the family of the Prophet on both sides was a factor which contributed to building up his reputation against the Umayyads.” During Mu`awiya’s reign, Ibn al-Zubayr remained, for the most part, in the political background, only surfacing to refuse to swear allegiance to Yazid as heir apparent. Following Mu`awiya’s death in 680 CE, Ibn al-Zubayr again refused to swear allegiance to Yazid’s succession to the caliphate and fled to Mecca where his revolt was welcomed by a number of parties who opposed the Umayyads. The ensuing succession confusion in Syria and the outbreak of second civil war gave Ibn al-Zubayr his chance. He proclaimed himself caliph, and the opponents of the Umayyads in Syria, Egypt, southern Arabia, and Kufa recognized him as such. “An austere and determined figure, he held that the caliphate should not be the plaything of the Sufyanids but that the ruler should be chosen from all the Quraysh.” He gained widespread support from many who were simply looking for a return to the pristine Islam that existed prior to the reign of the Umayyad family. Yazid had effectively lost the support of the Muslim community, especially in the two holiest

171 Kennedy, The Prophet, 89.
172 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
175 Kennedy, The Prophet, 89.
cities – Mecca and Medina. But after only three short years as caliph, Yazid passed away suddenly in 683 CE.\textsuperscript{176}

Mu`awiya II, son of Yazid, succeeded his father upon his death only to die shortly thereafter. “Other possibilities from among the Sufyanid branch of the family were deemed unsuitable.”\textsuperscript{177} Not only was the Umayyad name now tainted with the murder of the Prophet’s grandson, the Sufyanid branch of the original Quraysh tribe had little, if any, supporters. The `Alid movement was in a similar state. The majority of `Ali’s descendents had died along with Husayn at Karbala. Those still living were in no position to take advantage of the succession situation. There was, however, another line of descent from `Ali, and it was on behalf of a representative of this line that the second major `Alid movement of the second civil war developed.\textsuperscript{178} This revolt was led by al-Mukhtar (d. 687 CE) on behalf of Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya, a third son of `Ali. Focused on Kufa between the years of 685 to 687 CE, this revolt was quickly crushed by forces sent by Ibn al-Zubayr.

Upon Yazid’s death, Ibn al-Zubayr, successfully stationed in Mecca, claimed the caliphate for himself. While the conflict between the Umayyads and Ibn al-Zubayr is of great importance, it does not mark the most significant consequence of the second civil war. “The most obvious result, of course, was the change from Sufyanid to Marwanid rule.”\textsuperscript{179} The Marwanids were another branch of the Umayyad clan descending from the line of Abu`l-`As.\textsuperscript{180} Marwan b. al-Hakam (Marwan I) was proclaimed caliph in Damascus in 684 CE, but would see a reign of barely one year dying shortly thereafter, possibly from the plague.\textsuperscript{181} He was succeeded by his second son `Abd al-Malik b. Marwan in 685 CE. `Abd al-Malik’s grip on power was initially very weak.\textsuperscript{182} His forces began to take initiative against the rival caliph Ibn al-Zubayr who had by now consolidated his power in the Hijaz. In order to consolidate and secure his own power in Syria, `Abd al-Malik needed to confront the widely supported caliph Ibn al-Zubayr. The second civil war ended with Ibn al-Zubayr’s final destruction at the hands of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{176} Modern scholars are unsure as to the cause of Yazid’s death. According to the G.R. Hawting’s article in the \textit{Encyclopedia of Islam Second Edition}, he was only forty at the time of his death, and our sources are mixed as to what he died of.
\item\textsuperscript{177} Hawting, \textit{First Dynasty}, 47.
\item\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 52.
\item\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 55.
\item\textsuperscript{180} The Sufyanid branch of the Umayyad clan descended from the line of Harb. Both Harb and Abu`l-`As are the original two families of the Umayyad clan.
\item\textsuperscript{181} Gordon, \textit{Rise of Islam}, 41.
\item\textsuperscript{182} Chase Robinson, `Abd al-Malik (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2007), 31.
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`Abd al-Malik’s forces in 692 CE fighting around the Ka`ba. `Abd al-Malik, the second Umayyad civil war caliph, began his career as caliph in a state of rebellion, as had the first Umayyad civil war caliph – Mu`awiya; only his representation would not be depicted as such in our early sources.

In the twenty-four years between Mu`awiya’s succession to the caliphate and `Abd al-Malik’s reign in 685 CE, the debate over the authority of the caliphate had taken on tremendous weight.183 `Abd al-Malik, an Umayyad himself, would continue to face significant forces throughout the empire from those who remained in opposition to the Umayyad family. According to elites across the empire, the Umayyads were illegitimate and anti-Islamic rulers. Unlike the Umayyads, Ibn al-Zubayr, possessing direct knowledge and participation in the making of a glorious Islamic past, was not viewed as a usurper.184 His claim was widely supported and considered legitimate by Muslims across the Hijaz. In the eyes of their many opponents, `Abd al-Malik and his family simply did not have a rightful and legitimate claim to the office of the caliphate. It was for this reason that `Abd al-Malik would immediately thrust himself and his patronage behind the building of a new-style state, based on Islamic principles and Arab ethnic claims, the likes of which had not been seen in the Arab Peninsula. His image, as a ruler, would eventually come to be defined by his innovation and justice. His Umayyad lineage did not seem to play an important part in the way our later authors depict him. Sunni tradition, which comprises the bulk of our sources today, creates an image of `Abd al-Malik as merciful and pious. “Those otherwise bitterly hostile to the Umayyads, such as the Shi’ites, spare him their worst, often reporting how he received descendants of `Ali with respect, and that he restored an inheritance that had been stolen from them.”185

According to G.R. Hawting, Muslim tradition is sometimes ambiguous when it comes to writing about `Abd al-Malik; the `Abbasids, for instance, are said to have expressed admiration for his administrative and political capabilities. Although his succession to the office of the caliphate takes place during an act of rebellion, he is credited with ending the second civil war and rescuing the community from a period of internal dissension.186 Al-Tabari’s own

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185 Ibid., 56.
representation of `Abd al-Malik is much the same – depicting him not as a rebellious usurper, but as a “rescuer” of some sort.

In keeping with Keshk’s model of analysis, the following pages will examine al-Tabari’s representation of `Abd al-Malik in three distinct narrative time-frames of his life - pre-civil war, civil war, and post-civil war. In each of the three stages al-Tabari’s characterization of `Abd al-Malik is a positive one. Quite often, however, al-Tabari chooses to keep `Abd al-Malik absent from many core events leading up to the civil war and spanning many years at a time, lacks discussion of him entirely. This suggests, perhaps, that al-Tabari was less concerned with generating a complete history of `Abd al-Malik and the years leading up to his reign as caliph, and more concerned with particular pre-civil war events which demonstrated the divisions or lack of stability of the Muslim community.

“Pre-Civil War `Abd al-Malik” : The “Neutral/Incidental” and “Bystander” Depictions

There is very little modern scholarship on `Abd al-Malik’s life prior to the second Islamic civil war and before his reign as caliph in 685 CE with which to compare or add to our understanding of al-Tabari’s work. This is mostly due to the lack of information concerning the early part of `Abd al-Malik’s life in our early Muslim sources. In al-Tabari’s History `Abd al-Malik makes his first appearance during the narrative timeframe of Mu’awiya’s caliphate. According to Keshk, al-Tabari’s treatment of Mu’awiya during his pre-civil war life places him within the context of a “neutral/incidental” episode – meaning, his presence or absence within the narrative has no direct impact on the outcome of the event taking place, this being mostly likely the result of al-Tabari’s choice in transmitters. Using Keshk’s model of analysis, the present study has discovered that al-Tabari also places `Abd al-Malik within the context of a “neutral/incidental” episode that takes place during the narrative timeframe of the pre-civil war stage of his life. This, again, is most likely the result of a choice in transmitters.

Al-Tabari provides his reader with three versions of what we will refer to as “the pulpit story.” The historical context for this story is from 670 to 671 CE in which the caliph Mu’awiya has given orders for the Prophet Muhammad’s pulpit to be moved from Medina to Syria. `Abd al-Malik, however, only makes an appearance in one of the three versions. In all three versions, however, the act of moving the pulpit is considered a great sin and the consequences of such an action are plainly laid out. The first version is directed at Mu’awiya’s decision to have it moved.
“When it was moved, the sun was eclipsed so that the stars were seen plainly that day.”187 Mu`awiya, fearing what had just happened, refrained from the act and left the pulpit where it sat. In the second version, Mu`awiya explains to the people of Medina that they are the enemies and murderers of the caliph `Uthman, a great companion of the Prophet Muhammad, and therefore, the pulpit should be removed from their care. He is quickly reminded, however, that such an act would bring the wrath of God upon him. “O Commander of the Faithful, we remind you of God, Almighty and Great. Do not do this. For it is not right for the pulpit of the Messenger of God to be removed from the place where he put it, nor for his staff to be removed to Syria.”188 `Abd al-Malik does not make an appearance in either of these two versions, but the overall outcome remains the same - that Mu`awiya, after witnessing the consequences of moving the pulpit, decides to leave it.

Al-Tabari’s third version of the pulpit story differs greatly from the previous two. Here, `Abd al-Malik is mentioned by name in what seems to be a random and incidental appearance. At first read, this version may seem to be al-Tabari’s attempt to give another example of the consequences of moving the Prophet’s pulpit. `Abd al-Malik’s presence in this version, however, does not match the narrative timeframe of the previous two; this version takes place not amidst the narrative of Mu`awiya’s reign, but rather in that of `Abd al-Malik’s reign as caliph. All the same, he has decided, as did Mu`awiya, to have the pulpit moved from Medina to Syria. `Abd al-Malik received the oath of allegiance in Damascus, the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate. It can be assumed from this version, then, that he wanted the Prophet’s pulpit moved to Syria for this ceremony – perhaps to strengthen his already controversial authority.189 In this version, `Abd al-Malik’s character is reminded of the time when Mu`awiya attempted to move the pulpit and the consequences of his actions. “Indeed, when the Commander of the Faithful, Mu`awiyah, moved it, the sun was eclipsed. The Messenger of God said, ‘Whoever swears an oath upon my pulpit sinfully, his resting place shall be in the fire.’”190 As a result, `Abd al-Malik also refrained from moving the pulpit.

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188 Ibid.
189 His controversial authority stems from the fact that `Abd al-Malik had fought his way to power, and as Chase Robinson reminds us, his claim to the caliphate was hotly contested. See: Chase Robinson, `Abd al-Malik, 39-48.
This third version subsequently lists a number of later Umayyad caliphs who over the years also considered removing the pulpit from Medina to Syria. The outcome remains the same; in each case they are reminded of the consequences and decide against moving it. The final Umayyad caliph in this version, Sulayman, son of `Abd al-Malik, makes direct reference to his father: “I did not like for that to be mentioned about `Abd al-Malik or about al-Walid.\(^{191}\) This is arrogance, and is not in our hands, and we want to support one of the symbols of Islam sent to it by transporting it to our presence. This is not righteous.”\(^{192}\) The difference between the first two versions and the third is that now questions that were formerly attached to Mu`awiya are now connected not only to `Abd al-Malik, but to a number of Umayyad caliphs. Most of the later Umayyad caliphs were sons or relatives of `Abd al-Malik – so often, the sources are making that association in episodes such as the one above.

Returning to Keshk’s analysis of “pre-civil war Mu`awiya,” we recall that al-Tabari’s “neutral/incidental” depiction omits Mu`awiya from the execution story entirely. According to Keshk, this decision to leave Mu`awiya out of the story, whether deliberate or not, had no direct impact on the outcome of events which took place – it was merely al-Tabari’s personal choice and most likely due to his choice in transmitters.\(^{193}\) The inclusion of `Abd al-Malik’s character in the pulpit story, as with the absence of Mu`awiya’s character in the execution of Khubayb b. `Adi in Mecca, has no impact on the outcome of the events which took place – the pulpit was not removed from Medina and the caliph attempting to make the move understood clearly why it should remain untouched. But the fact that `Abd al-Malik is being attached to such a negative episode certainly raises some questions. Why is it that al-Tabari, in this version, has `Abd al-Malik making a textual appearance as a caliph fifteen years before he historically becomes caliph? At first glance, it may seem that his inclusion in this story was meant to cast doubt upon his credibility as a future caliph by associating him with an objectionable act very early on in the narrative sequence of his life. In my view, however, this episode should be read for its simplicity. `Abd al-Malik’s inclusion in this version should be viewed as “incidental.” The objection to moving the pulpit is not directed at `Abd al-Malik alone, but rather at the Umayyad Dynasty in general; a number of the Umayyad caliphs wanted the same thing – to have the pulpit removed and transported to Syria. The outcome, though, remains “neutral” in that the pulpit is

\(^{191}\) Son of `Abd al-Malik and his successor in 705 CE.


\(^{193}\) Keshk, *Depictions of Mu`awiya*, 24-25.
never removed and remains in Medina forever. `Abd al-Malik’s presence, therefore, can be classified as “neutral/incidental” in that al-Tabari had no specific motivation for including `Abd al-Malik’s character in this particular episode. He is simply another name amongst a number of Umayyad rulers who took part in this particular event.

Let us examine another episode in which `Abd al-Malik’s presence seems to retain a “neutral/incidental” nature. In this story, al-Tabari constructs `Abd al-Malik’s character merely as a bystander. Al-Tabari has provided his reader with three versions which, as with the pulpit story, take place amid his description of Mu`awiya’s reign as caliph. In this story, Mu`awiya is attempting to turn his newly appointed governor of Medina, Marwan b. al-Hakam, and his former governor Sa`id b. al-`As against one another. The historical context for the story is some point between 673 and 674 CE. Al-Tabari includes `Abd al-Malik’s name in only one of the versions – again, a personal decision that is most likely due to a choice in transmitters.

In all three versions of this story, Mu`awiya is attempting to incite discord between the two men by ordering Sa`id to demolish the house of Marwan. In each of the passages, both of the men are astonished at the conduct of the Commander of the Faithful. But it is only in the first version where `Abd al-Malik makes an appearance – again, an “incidental” and seemingly unimportant appearance. Sa`id refuses Mu`awiya’s orders and is subsequently dismissed from his duty as governor. Mu`awiya then appoints Marwan as governor and orders him to do the same. “When Sa`id b. al-`As was dismissed from al-Madinah and Marwan became its governor, Mu`awiyah wrote to Marwan b. al-Hakam ordering him to seize the property of Sa`id b. al-`As in the Hijaz, sending the letter to him with (Marwan’s) son `Abd al-Malik.”¹⁹⁴ In this first version, ‘Abd al-Malik is merely referred to as a messenger sent by the Commander of the Faithful, Mu`awiya, to deliver a letter to his father Marwan. As with the pulpit story above, al-Tabari’s decision to include `Abd al-Malik in the first version is incidental. The outcome in each version of this story remains the same – both men decide against demolishing one another’s homes and seizing each other’s property. They both complained to Mu`awiya that his conduct was unbecoming of a Commander of the Faithful. The only difference between the three passages is that in the first version, a specific person delivers the letter to Marwan, and this person is his son `Abd al-Malik. This appearance, however, has no impact on the outcome of the event itself; his role as messenger does not change either of the men’s decision to disobey Mu`awiya’s orders.

¹⁹⁴ Al-Tabari, Between Civil Wars, 173-175.
Therefore, as with the pulpit story, `Abd al-Malik’s role can be classified as “neutral/incidental” and is most likely a result of al-Tabari’s choice in transmitters.

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Keshk concludes that “pre-civil war Mu`awiya” is portrayed in three ways – as the “neutral/incidental character,” as the “brave commander,” and as the “eloquent/obedient governor.” “Pre-civil war `Abd al-Malik,” on the other hand, is not. He is characterized solely as a “neutral/incidental bystander.” There is no attempt by al-Tabari to represent `Abd al-Malik as a brave commander or as an eloquent/obedient figure. As Keshk explains, Mu’awiya’s extreme positive characterization during the pre-civil war stage of his life is most likely due to the fact that some of the earliest Muslim historians had not yet been touched by the devastating memories of the first Islamic civil war. The case is the same for `Abd al-Malik. He is depicted much the same way as Mu’awiya during the pre-civil war stage of his life, only there is no obvious attempt at portraying him in a glorious light. Where al-Tabari’s depictions of the two civil war caliphs differs the most, however, is in the civil war and post-civil war stages of their lives.

`Abd al-Malik, later in his life, would become associated with the image of a “rescuer” of some sort. Mu’awiya, during the civil war stage of his life, becomes associated with anti-Islamic ideals and the usurping of the caliphate. As a result, al-Tabari’s depiction of Mu’awiya transforms him into the negative instigator of the first civil war. `Abd al-Malik’s character, however, remains untouched by the negativity surrounding the second civil war despite the fact that we know that he engaged directly in conflict with Ibn al-Zubayr and `Alid supporters.

“Civil War `Abd al-Malik” : The “Rescuer” Depiction

In the early years of the second Islamic civil war, `Abd al-Malik remained in Medina until the outbreak of the rebellion against Yazid in 682 CE. When the Umayyads were expelled by the Medinan rebel forces, `Abd al-Malik left town with his father to attend a meeting with the Syrian army led by Muslim b. `Ukba. `Abd al-Malik played a major part in Muslim’s retaking of Medina by giving him information concerning the town and its defenses. This led to the Battle of Harrah in 683 CE and resulted in the total defeat of the Medinan rebels. Once Medina was successfully regained, `Abd al-Malik returned to the holy city with his father and Muslim b. `Ukba.
Al-Tabari’s accounts of the civil war stage of `Abd al-Malik’s life do not reflect the narrative trends utilized in his accounts of the “civil war Mu’awiya.” `Abd al-Malik disappears from al-Tabari’s accounts for a nearly ten-year narrative period following the bystander episode discussed above. His name resurfaces in 682 CE during the caliphate of Yazid b. Mu`awiya, but this time, his presence is not incidental. By this point in history, the second civil war had been raging for over two years and Yazid had faced much opposition to his rule – especially in Medina. In al-Tabari’s account of the civil war period of `Abd al-Malik’s life, his presence becomes very important to the outcome of the events taking place. It is because of `Abd al-Malik’s crucial information that Muslim and Syrian forces are able to defeat the Medinan rebels and regain the holy city.

Al-Tabari provides his readers with multiple versions of the siege of Medina. Though there are multiple versions, the theme remains the same throughout – `Abd al-Malik plays the role of a “rescuer.” The general account goes as follows. In the year of 682 CE, the people of Medina publicly repudiated Yazid and laid siege against those members of the Umayyad family still living in Medina. `Abd al-Malik’s father Marwan wrote a letter to Yazid informing him of what was taking place and requested immediate assistance. `Abd al-Malik, entrusted with making sure the letter reached Yazid, gave the letter to a messenger who had twenty-four nights to return. Upon his return, the messenger informed `Abd al-Malik that Yazid was sending assistance. Based on this information, Muslim advanced upon Medina with the Syrian army. When the people of Medina heard of his coming, they attacked the remaining Umayyad family members still in the city. The victims fled and when they reached Muslim, they were asked to give up information about the situation they had left behind. One of the members of the Umayyad family refused saying, “I cannot give you any information, for covenants and sworn testimonies were made by us that we would not reveal gaps in their positions or help an enemy.”

Frustrated with this answer, Muslim looked to Marwan b. al-Hakam for assistance in dealing with the escapees. Marwan, fearing Muslim would be unsatisfied with his results, decided to send `Abd al-Malik in before him. `Abd al-Malik gave Muslim a very detailed and good plan of how to defeat the people of Medina:

“‘Yes, I think that you should go with those who are with you and avoid this road to Medina. When you come to the palms lower down, stop there. Your army will

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be shaded by their shade, and they can eat from the palm dates... As long as you are coming from the east, they will see the dazzling brightness of your helmets, javelins, spears, swords, breastplates, and armlets... then fight them and ask for God’s help against them.”

What followed was the Battle of al-Harrah on Wednesday August 27, 683 CE in which Muslim and his forces defeated the Medinan rebels.

In each version, al-Tabari ensures that `Abd al-Malik’s character is essential to this significant event of Umayyad history. Had `Abd al-Malik been unable to provide Muslim b. `Ukba with critical information on how to defeat the Medinan rebels, the holy city of Medina might never have been regained, thus erasing a major Syrian foothold in the Hijaz. Consequently, modern scholarship devotes much discussion to `Abd al-Malik’s part in this story. The Medinan rebellion is considered one of the most critical challenges, in terms of armed opposition, faced by the Umayyad family in the second Islamic civil war. Their success in undermining this rebellion shows early signs of `Abd al-Malik’s, and by association, the Umayyad house’s, ability to assist in ending the second Islamic civil war. `Abd al-Malik’s character at this point in the narrative timeframe of the civil war assumes the image of a “rescuer.” He provided Muslim with critical intelligence when no other Umayyad family member would – portraying him in a brave and obedient light. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, we recall that al-Tabari’s depiction of Mu’awiya during the narrative timeframe of the first civil war left the reader with a negative image of him. He is shown not only as a coward, but also as an ineloquent and insubordinate governor. One must keep in mind that according to our early sources, Mu’awiya - and by association, the Umayyad name - was then in the process of “usurping” the caliphate for himself. This was not received well by a significant body of the Arabic/Islamic intellectual community. `Abd al-Malik, on the other hand, had not yet made any claims to the caliphate, and would not do so for another couple of years following this episode. Thus, there was no reason for Arabic/Islamic scholars to portray him in a negative light as they had done with Mu’awiya in the past, and this demonstrates for modern scholars the mentality of our early authors.

Let us examine another episode from al-Tabari in which “civil war `Abd al-Malik” is portrayed in a very positive manner. This story, again, is representative of the difference in al-

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197 Ibid., 201-217.
Tabari’s depictions of Mu’awiya and ‘Abd al-Malik in this same parallel period of each of these civil war caliph’s lives. The above episode took place in al-Tabari’s account of “civil war ‘Abd al-Malik’s” life prior to historical dates of his reign as caliph. Our next narrative episode takes place seven years later in the text - after his succession to the caliphate. By this point, both historically and textually speaking, ‘Abd al-Malik had been in conflict with the rival caliph Ibn al-Zubayr for many years. Before he could establish the Islamic state, which both early Muslim and modern scholarship gives him credit for, he needed to secure his own power in Syria and regain the provinces of Iraq and the Hijaz, which by this point supported Zubayrid rule. ‘Abd al-Malik by 690 CE had begun to make headway into northern Iraq. But it was not until late 691 CE that his armies defeated Mus‘ab b. al-Zubayr,\(^\text{198}\) opening the way for a final assault on Mecca and the subsequent death of Ibn al-Zubayr at the hands of ‘Abd al-Malik’s general al-Hajjaj b. Yusuf.\(^\text{199}\)

Al-Tabari’s account of the narrative timeframe of 682 to 685 CE does not devote any attention to the civil conflict between ‘Abd al-Malik and Ibn al-Zubayr. In fact, ‘Abd al-Malik is rarely discussed in al-Tabari’s narrative up until his account of the first half of the year 686 CE when he begins to make a number of significant references to ‘Abd al-Malik’s rebellion against Ibn al-Zubayr. He provides us with seven conflict episodes between ‘Abd al-Malik and Ibn al-Zubayr, both indirect and direct. The present study, however, focuses on the most significant, and consequently the most detailed episode – the death of Ibn al-Zubayr.\(^\text{200}\) Al-Tabari provides his reader with ten versions of the description of Ibn al-Zubayr’s death. Of the ten versions, numbers three, four, and five give us the most unique detail of the event and will be the three versions we focus on here.

Version three differs the most from the others; here, al-Tabari provides his reader with a theatrical backdrop of the battle between al-Hajjaj and the Syrian army and Ibn al-Zubayr’s men:

“During the morning a thunderbolt struck and was followed by a second, killing twelve of his [al-Hajjaj’s] men. The Syrians became discouraged…The next day, there was lightning, and a number of Ibn al-Zubayr’s men were struck. Al-Hajjaj said, ‘Don’t you see that they are being hit? You are in a state of obedience; they are in a state of disobedience.’ Thus, the war between Ibn al-Zubayr and al-Hajjaj

\(^{198}\) Mus‘ab b. al-Zubayr was the brother of Abdallah b. al-Zubayr and governor of Iraq.

\(^{199}\) Robinson, ’Abd al-Malik, 38-40.

continued until shortly after Ibn al-Zubayr’s death, by which time the latter’s companions had separated themselves from him and most of the people of Mecca had gone out to al-Hajjaj under a promise of safety.”\textsuperscript{201}

In this version, the Syrian army feared that the lightning bolt was a sign from God and nearly gave up their fight. When another lightning bolt struck, this time killing Ibn al-Zubayr’s men, the reader is given the impression that al-Hajjaj is an opportunist, using the event of the lightning strike as a way to motivate the Syrian army insinuating that God has bestowed his good graces upon the Syrians. Al-Tabari’s decision to include this version, which focuses not on the death of Ibn al-Zubayr but on an event demonstrating God’s direct involvement, represents the importance of foreordained destiny to Arabic/Islamic scholars. In this case, it seemed important enough to include an account that demonstrated God’s blessing upon the Syrians. Furthermore, the fact that al-Hajjaj offered safe conduct to those people of Mecca willing to separate themselves from Ibn al-Zubayr demonstrates integrity and civility on part of `Abd al-Malik and his reign.

The fourth version of this episode depicts the death of Ibn al-Zubayr in a neutral manner; it deals with the narrative moment when the majority of Ibn al-Zubayr’s companions, including his two sons, have abandoned him and he has barricaded himself within the holy city:

“When he saw how his people were forsaking him, Ibn al-Zubayr went to see his mother…she said, ‘You, my son, know yourself best. If you know you are right and have been advocating what is right, persevere for it, for your companions have been killed while in the right’…Ibn al-Zubayr approached and kissed her head, saying, ‘…I have not inclined to the present world or loved life in it. Only indignation on behalf of God, that His sacred territory not be profaned, moved me to come out [to do what I did.]’”\textsuperscript{202}

The reader has been made aware thus far that `Abd al-Malik is not only winning the battle, but doing so in a just manner. This version presents Ibn al-Zubayr and his campaign against `Abd al-Malik in a neutral light – meaning, al-Tabari has provided his reader with what appears to be an unbiased representation of Ibn al-Zubayr. He has attempted to refrain from taking sides and has simply shown that one side persevered over the other. In this version, Ibn al-Zubayr himself is content with his demise and welcomes it, knowing he has done nothing in the eyes of God that would put a stain upon him or his family’s name. “Behold, mother, I shall be killed this very

\textsuperscript{201} Al-Tabari, \textit{Victory of the Marwanids}, 225-226.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 226-227.
day. Let your grief not be great. Submit to God’s command. For your son intended to do nothing dishonorable or indecent: he did not act unjustly in applying God’s ordinance, he betrayed no trust, and he intended to wrong no Muslim or confederate…” Ibn al-Zubayr is admitting that his defeat is decreed by God and he is supporting God’s decision by willingly accepting his death at the hand of his rival `Abd al-Malik and the Syrian army.

Finally, the seventh version is very telling as to the regional support that `Abd al-Malik had in his rebellion against Ibn al-Zubayr. By this point in the narrative, Ibn al-Zubayr had accepted his demise and went out to meet the Syrians alone and instructed his men to give up the watch stations. “The enemy outnumbered them and set men, a commander, and troops from one country at every gate: troops from Hims held the gate facing the door of the Ka’bah; troops from Damascus held the Banu Shaybah Gate; troops from the Jordan held the Safa Gate; troops from Palestine held the Banu Jumah Gate; and troops from Qinnasrin held the Banu Sahm Gate.” At first glance, this kind of detailed information may seem to be unnecessary. But al-Tabari has included this account for a reason. It so eagerly points out the vast regional support which `Abd al-Malik enjoyed. Five of the most important regions in the Arab/Islamic Empire now supported `Abd al-Malik’s rebellion against the rival/anti-caliph Ibn al-Zubayr. This is significant in deciphering who, between the two contested caliphs, held the most support. Ibn al-Zubayr may have enjoyed the support of the Hijaz and Iraqi regions during the early years of the civil war, but `Abd al-Malik succeeded, over the years, in consolidating widespread regional support throughout the whole of the Islamic Empire. The conflict between Ibn al-Zubayr and `Abd al-Malik ended on October 4, 692 CE when a brick was hurled and struck Ibn al-Zubayr in the face. Besieged for nearly seven months, he had little to no defensive trenches, no fortress, and no stronghold. In the end, al-Hajjaj sent Ibn al-Zubayr’s head to `Abd al-

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204 A city in western Syria.
205 Syrian capital and the largest support center of `Abd al-Malik and the Umayyad caliphate.
206 The heartland of the Arab/Islamic Empire during the various caliphal stages – Rashidun, Umayyad, and later `Abbasid.
207 Palestine joined the Islamic Empire following the Battle of Yarmouk in 636 CE during the Muslim conquest of Syria. It continued to play an important role in the support of the Umayyad family until the demise of the caliphate in 750 CE.
208 Following the Muslim conquests of the seventh century, this town became a military outpost for Arab/Islamic armies.
209 Al-Tabari, *Victory of the Marwanids*, 229.
And so, with the death of Ibn al-Zubayr, the second Islamic civil war came to an end; and though this caliph began his career in rebellion, it was a rebellion that resonated well with a significant body of Arabic/Islamic scholars—a sharp contrast from Mu`awiya and the first Islamic civil war.

We notice a drastic change in al-Tabari’s representation of `Abd al-Malik during the narrative years of the second civil war in comparison to his representation of Mu`awiya during the parallel years of the first civil war. Returning to the civil war stage of Mu`awiya’s life, we recall that al-Tabari portrayed Mu`awiya as the aggressor who thrust the Islamic community into disarray. There is a noticeable attempt on al-Tabari’s part to cast him as a coward and an ineloquent/insubordinate governor. According to Keshk, the sources purposely depict Mu`awiya in a negative manner so as to weave for the reader the sad saga of the transformation of the pristine Islam of the Rashidun period, to the imperial Islam it became during the Umayyad period (kingship period). Among many scholars of the Arabic/Islamic intellectual community, the second Islamic civil war was yet another sad period in Islamic history. Only this time, the caliph in question, `Abd al-Malik, plays a major role in ending this sad period. The rival/anti-caliph Ibn al-Zubayr is killed at the hands of the “rescuer” of the Islamic Empire—`Abd al-Malik. It is worth noting, however, that unlike the earlier treatment of `Abd al-Malik, here he is nowhere mentioned explicitly by name. Rather, the text is particularly focused on his general al-Hajjaj. In keeping with the “rescuer” theme with which al-Tabari seems to be portraying `Abd al-Malik, he has explicitly left his character out of the events leading up to and during Ibn al-Zubayr’s downfall. The death, though portrayed in an honorable fashion, is nevertheless a killing—thus a negative event by definition. The reader, however, is perfectly aware by this point in the narrative that al-Hajjaj is `Abd al-Malik’s general, and therefore, `Abd al-Malik obviously had a part in organizing Ibn al-Zubayr’s downfall. The decision to exclude `Abd al-Malik from having a direct “hands-on” role in the death, however, can be understood as an attempt by al-Tabari to disassociate `Abd al-Malik’s name from the negative event. It was, however, his masterful leadership qualities in combination with al-Hajjaj’s capabilities as his Syrian army commander that helped “rescue” the Muslim community from the rival/anti-caliph Ibn al-Zubayr. Both Islamic civil wars are defined by rebellion and death, but among many of

\[210\] Al-Tabari, *Victory of the Marwanids*, 232.
\[211\] Keshk, *Depictions of Mu`awiya*, 6.
the Arabic/Islamic scholars, the end of the second Islamic civil war brought about a period of innovation and prosperity, whereas the end of the first war brought a period of anti-Islamic ideals. Therefore, the above episode represents one important event that has resonated well within the Islamic community.

Through the death of Ibn al-Zubayr, al-Tabari has portrayed ʿAbd al-Malik in a very positive light. This thesis argues that al-Tabari does not seem to have had any need to portray him otherwise. Rather, it is possible that he saw it as more important to portray the caliph, not as a usurper, but as a sort of “rescuer” from yet another turbulent civil war. ʿAbd al-Malik’s character is associated with great triumph and plays an essential part in ending conflict. His presence within al-Tabari’s narrative, however, begins to fade greatly during the accounts of his post-civil war years and his name is left untainted and in a positive light throughout the next seven years of his caliphate. He makes brief textual appearances in the post-civil war period, but these appearances are only in the final years before his death in 705 CE.

“Post-Civil War ʿAbd al-Malik”: The “Deputy of God” Depiction

ʿAbd al-Malik is most credited, both by modern and early scholars, with innovation and empire building during the post-civil war stage of his life. The civil war ended in Mecca with the death of Ibn al-Zubayr in 692 CE. ʿAbd al-Malik “realized that the rule of the Omayyads was not yet firmly established. He also saw that nothing satisfied the people more than glory and the hope of profit. He bent his mind to both these things.”212 To consolidate his hold on the caliphate, ʿAbd al-Malik pursued broad new policies of Arabisation and Islamisation. Through his process of Arabisation, the Arabic language became the lingua franca of North Africa, Egypt, and the Fertile Crescent, replacing and/or complementing a number of other local and regional languages.213 And through his process of Islamisation, he asserted Umayyad imperial authority as the political language of rule over both the Islamic and non-Islamic communities living under Umayyad control.214 Both processes are associated with the Umayyads in general and, in the view of some modern historians at least, Arabisation and Islamisation are the reason why the dynasty is so significant to Islamic history.

213 Robinson, ʿAbd al-Malik, 124.
214 Gordon, Rise of Islam, 41-42.
“`Abd al-Malik and his supporters worked to sharpen the definition of the caliph as the ‘Deputy of God’ through innovations in the Arabic script, coinage, speeches and sermons.”²¹⁵ He wished to have himself presented, in the years following the end of the second civil war, as a warrior-caliph. According to Patricia Crone, down to the mid-Umayyad period, the caliphs are presented as being addressed and regarded in much the same way as everyone else. But under `Abd al-Malik and his processes of Arabisation and Islamisation outlined above, special rules regarding one’s conversation with, or being in the presence of, the caliph are said to have been laid down.²¹⁶ By the time of his death in 705 CE, `Abd al-Malik, through a number of building projects and administrative changes, had reformed the whole of the Islamic Empire and its administration, paving the way for a new kind of Islamic Empire and Islamic Caliphate that would last for many centuries to come.

`Abd al-Malik’s appearances in the post-civil war narrative of al-Tabari’s History, covering the years 693 to 701 CE, are comparatively, light and incidental. This is cause for some surprise given that it was at this time that `Abd al-Malik made the most significant changes to the Islamic Empire’s bureaucracy. This is perhaps because the end of the second civil war in 692 CE and the restoration of the Marwanid period in 693 CE were accompanied by years of stability and growth. Ibn al-Zubayr was the last major rival to `Abd al-Malik and the Marwanid family for years to come. With his death and the restoration of the Marwanid line, the Umayyad Caliphate saw a period of general stability and growth until the end of the dynasty in 750 CE with the fall of the last Umayyad caliph Marwan II. This contrasts with the Sufyanid period of the Umayyad Dynasty where the end of the first civil war in 680 CE was accompanied by the succession of Mu`awiya who has been associated with anti-Islamic ideals and constant conflict. The sources remember Mu`awiya’s reign, for the most part, as a time of unending upheaval.

“Unending social upheaval” is generally associated with bad morals and not so much pessimistic economic indicators. In other words, if the social and economic times during Mu`awiya’s reign had been good, perhaps he would have been seen as a moral king. Because they were not, the sources credit the general disparity within the empire with the usurpation of the caliphate at the hands of an “anti-Islamic” caliph – Mu`awiya. Al-Tabari, however, in dealing with `Abd al-Malik, does not appear to have had any motivation to depict him in any particular way.

²¹⁵ Gordon, Rise of Islam, 41-42.
years of his caliphate, in sum, were stable, just, and prosperous. There was no reason to associate him with any negative, or anti-Islamic, incidents. Therefore, his incidental appearances in the narrative post-civil years is merely a result of stability within the empire brought about by `Abd al-Malik himself. These “incidental appearances,” however, might tell us something important about al-Tabari - that he was mainly interested in events that reflected on the divisions or lack of stability of the Muslim community. In other words, he did not set out to provide a full history of `Abd al-Malik and his reign, and since his caliphate is not associated with lack of stability, there was no need to focus on it entirely.

`Abd al-Malik’s character reappears in al-Tabari’s History in the narrative sequence that correlates with April of 696 CE when there is a sudden but brief focus on `Abd al-Malik’s reform in coinage. Al-Tabari provides his reader with three neutral versions of the coinage reform. The accounts are very limited and the inclusion of `Abd al-Malik’s name remains virtually incidental to the reader. In the first version it is simply stated that “`Abd al-Malik b. Marwan ordered dinars and dirhams inscribed.”

According to Chase Robinson, coins were struck from about 693 to 697 CE, in gold, copper and even the occasional silver, in mints located in present-day Palestine/Israel, Jordan, Syria, and southeast Turkey. `Abd al-Malik is the first caliph to have included his image on the coin itself – this is one of many conventions taken from the Byzantines and Sassanians. “The Arabic words that circle the figure along the edges of the coin read ‘For the Servant of God, `Abd al-Malik, Commander of the Believers’ or ‘Caliph of God, Commander for God.’”

The second version simply states that “`Abd al-Malik struck dirhams and dinars that year; he was the first to initiate the striking of them.” According to Hugh Kennedy, up until `Abd al-Malik’s caliphate, the coinage had been essentially regional. While `Abd al-Malik was certainly not the first caliph or governor to issue minted dirhams bearing his own name, he was the first caliph to issue gold and silver minted coins in Syria. “This probably reflects the slower development of systems of military pay in Syria and the absence of any centralized diwan.”

The fact that this account states that `Abd al-Malik was the first to initiate striking of the coinage

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218 Chase Robinson, Abd al-Malik, 50.
219 Ibid., 51.
220 Al-Tabari, Marwanid Restoration, 91.
221 Hugh Kennedy, The Prophet, 98. A diwan was a process of record keeping in the Arab/Islamic armies.
shows us that al-Tabari was most likely relying on Syrian sources. While this assumption may not be so with many other episodes, it does contrast with Keshk’s statement that al-Tabari relied, for the most part, on non-Syrian transmitters.

In al-Tabari’s accounts of `Abd al-Malik’s coinage reform, his depiction trends again differ in comparison to that of his parallel narrative depiction of “post-civil war Mu`awiya.” Mu`awiya’s character following the end of the first civil war is represented in two very specific ways – as the Arab-shaykh and the tyrannical despot. In each of the coinage versions above, `Abd al-Malik’s presence is very incidental – almost unnecessary. Whereas modern scholarship places great emphasis on `Abd al-Malik’s coinage reform, al-Tabari merely mentions it in passing. `Abd al-Malik is directly referred to by name in these two versions, but in a third version he is simply referred to as “the Syrian,” making reference to the foreign-ness of such a change to those living outside of direct Umayyad imperial rule.222 He does make two other appearances in the narrative sequence dealing with the years of 696 to 701 CE, but again, these accounts are extremely incidental and his appearance is seemingly unimportant.223 In the view of most modern Umayyad historians, during this period of `Abd al-Malik’s reign, historically speaking, the caliph was attempting to create a uniform coinage for the entire empire. His coinage reform was one step in centralizing and stabilizing the empire. It is possible that al-Tabari, in reality, viewed this time period as positive in that `Abd al-Malik was taking further steps in improving conditions in the Muslim community. Again, however, `Abd al-Malik’s presence is very light and incidental in this seemingly unnecessary episode most likely due to the fact that al-Tabari was primarily interested in highlighting instability with the Islamic Empire. His lack of narrative appearance in a time period that modern scholars place such emphasis on is further evidence that al-Tabari viewed `Abd al-Malik as a stable and innovative ruler.

It is only in the post-civil war period specifically during `Abd al-Malik’s last years that we see his character return for one more important event – the question of succession to his caliphate. In our second post-civil war episode `Abd al-Malik’s presence is no longer depicted in a “neutral/incidental” manner. Rather, his presence is essential to the outcome of the event just as it was during the civil war stage of his life. In this story, `Abd al-Malik desires to remove his brother from the succession line. Prior to his death, Marwan b. al-Hakam had the oath of

222 Al-Tabari, Marwanid Restoration, 92.
223 These two appearances can be found in: Al-Tabari, Marwanid Restoration, 135-56; 145-46.
allegiance given to both of his sons - `Abd al-Malik and `Abd al-Aziz. In this episode, `Abd al-Malik becomes aware of his advancing age and desires to have his son al-Walid succeed him as caliph. Al-Tabari presents his reader with three versions that depict `Abd al-Malik’s struggle with his brother `Abd al-Aziz in regards to the decision to have him removed from the line of succession.

In the first version, `Abd al-Aziz refuses such a request. `Abd al-Malik, then, steps aside from the matter until his brother passes away – which in this version is very soon after the request is made. “God has sufficed us...with what we wanted and what we had decided on...the right opinion always lies in patience.”224 In this version, `Abd al-Malik’s character is uncomplaining and patient. Even though `Abd al-Aziz has decided to disagree with his removal, `Abd al-Malik shows no disdain for him and merely waits until God ordains it.

In the second version, `Abd al-Malik writes to his brother, “‘If you think it right to make this matter over to your nephew…’ [`Abd al-Aziz] refused and [`Abd al-Malik] wrote to him, ‘Well, let [the caliphate] be his after you, for he is the dearest of creation to the Commander of the Faithful.’”225 `Abd al-Malik decides, then, to sever his relationship with his brother until the latter’s death. He requests that `Abd al-Aziz send all the revenues from Egypt and deposes him as their governor. Fearing this decision, `Abd al-Aziz writes to `Abd al-Malik:

> “O Commander of the Faithful, you and I have both reached an age that no one in our family has reached without having only a little time left. Neither of us knows which of us will be reached by death first. If you are minded to make the rest of my life unpleasant for me, [by all means] do [so, but I would prefer otherwise]. [At this,] `Abd al-Malik became gentle and said, ‘By my life, I shall not make the rest of his life unpleasant for him.’”226

`Abd al-Malik explains to his two sons that God will give them the caliphate when he sees fit. They must, therefore, withhold their desires to become caliph when/if God decrees it. In this version, `Abd al-Malik loses his patience and temper, only to regain composure. This is the first time in al-Tabari’s accounts where we see `Abd al-Malik’s character assume an impatient and imperious attitude. Perhaps al-Tabari’s decision to include this version is not incidental. Throughout all of his accounts of `Abd al-Malik the reader has only been introduced to stories and episodes surrounding bravery, piety, and strong leadership. In this account, just

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225 Ibid., 108-112.
226 Ibid.
when it seems that `Abd al-Malik is submitting to negativity, he regains his composure and once again becomes the model of forbearance we have all come to know.

The third version is similar to the second in that it states that `Abd al-Aziz refused to acquiesce in what `Abd al-Malik wanted. Only in this version, `Abd al-Aziz is the one cutting his relationship with `Abd al-Malik. “`Abd al-Malik said, ‘O God, `Abd al-Aziz has cut his relationship with me, and I shall cut mine with him.’”227 But when `Abd al-Aziz died, the Syrians said, “`Abd al-Aziz has returned the Commander of the Faithful’s affair to him, he made an invocation against him, and his call was answered.”228 In this version, `Abd al-Malik has prayed for God to agree with his decision to remove his brother from the succession line. God has answered this prayer with `Abd al-Aziz’s death.

In all three passages, al-Tabari depicts `Abd al-Malik as being flexible and moderate. In each version, `Abd al-Aziz never agrees to step down from the line of succession; at the same time, `Abd al-Malik never compels him to. With this post-civil war episode, we have a sharp contrast to “post-civil war Mu’awiya.” To review Keshk’s analysis of the parallel moment in Mu’awiya’s life we notice just how much the two events differ; the narrators of the Yazid I story not only allow their edited sequence of events to transmit to us a certain point of view, but they also have each main character represent, in direct discourse, different political views on Yazid’s appointment.229 There are also a number of points in this traditional narrative where al-Tabari’s choice in transmissions gives the reader an indication of his point of view. Al-Tabari, along with the majority of Arabic/Islamic scholars, seems to have greatly condemned Mu`awiya’s decision to appoint Yazid as heir apparent. As we saw in Chapter Two, however, Mu`awiya chose to disregard his advisors opinions and tricked the Meccan community and the five Qurayshi sons into supporting Yazid – which as we see subsequently in that particular event, never fully develops in the way he intended it to.

The succession crisis during the time of Mu’awiya and Yazid is an event around which early Muslim historians became highly opinionated. It is the point at which the Islamic Empire became connected with the concept of “kingship.” According to G.R. Hawting, this event, more than anything else, seems to be behind the accusation that Mu`awiya perverted the caliphate into

\[228\] Ibid.
\[229\] Keshk, *Depictions of Mu`awiya*, 142.
a kingship.\textsuperscript{230} In other words, according to a number of Arabic/Islamic scholars, the problem was that in Mu`awiya’s appointment of Yazid as heir apparent, one man took it upon himself to choose who would be caliph next, without the consultation of the representatives of Islam, whoever they may have been at the time.\textsuperscript{231}  `Abd al-Malik’s story is similar in that he is attempting to appoint his son as heir apparent. However, though the theme of the event is the same, the depictions are vastly different; in `Abd al-Malik’s case, al-Tabari ensures that every version ends with the caliph’s patience in the matter. In all versions, al-Walid is not considered for the caliphate until God ordains it with `Abd al-Aziz’s death. And in each version, `Abd al-Malik steps aside until his brother passes away. He is not forcing his brother to step down from the line of succession, nor is he choosing, independently of the representatives of Islam, who will be caliph next – as Mu`awiya did. God, in this case, has decided, and this is how al-Tabari has portrayed it.

\textsuperscript{230} G.R. Hawting, \textit{First Dynasty}, 13-14.
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 14.
Chapter Four

The Demise of a Dynasty

The present study has discovered that al-Tabari returns to the familiar style of narrative structure noticed by Keshk with his discussion of the third Islamic civil war caliph of the Umayyad era – Marwan b. Muhammad b. Marwan, also known as Marwan II. Marwan II’s caliphate, as with Mu’awiya’s caliphate, has been discussed at great length by our early Muslim historians. While Mu’awiya’s reign marks the beginning of the dynasty, Marwan II’s reign marks its end. Both caliphates were stricken with great internal and external civil conflict and it comes as no surprise that al-Tabari’s narrative approach when discussing Marwan II in a number of ways mirrors that of his discussion of Mu’awiya. This chapter will examine the narrative years dealing with the pre-civil war and civil war periods of Marwan II’s life as well as al-Tabari’s parallel descriptions of Mu’awiya’s career with the goal of leading modern scholars to a better understanding of what al-Tabari’s motives were in generating this distinctive type of caliphal histories. It must be noted, however, that al-Tabari and other early Muslim historians likely viewed Mu’awiya as a much more significant actor since he was involved in the early and most vital events of early Islamic history. Marwan II is also viewed as very important to Islamic history but more so by modern scholars who emphasize in particular, and more directly than early Muslim historians, his role in the demise of the dynasty.

The Third Islamic Civil War

The third Islamic civil war is the last of the three Umayyad civil wars and ended with the demise of the Umayyad Dynasty at the hands of the `Abbasid family. The `Abbasids were descended from Abbas b. Abd al-Muttalib (566-662 CE), one of the youngest uncles of the Prophet Muhammad and claimed authority on the basis of their line of descent. Each of the three Umayyad civil wars are similar in that they each ended with a new line of succession – the first ended with the rise of the Sufyanid branch of the Umayyad family, the second ended with the rise of the Marwanid branch of the Umayyad family, and the third ended with the `Abbasid family in power. There are a number of similarities and differences between each of the three civil wars, and as G.R. Hawting states:

“As in the second civil war, the Arabs of Syria were divided into ‘northern’ and ‘southern’ factions supporting different contenders for the caliphate, again the Umayyad family was split by internal divisions and Kharijite and Shi`ite
movements were able to take advantage of the situation to establish temporary control over fairly large expanses of territory, and again religious issues were entwined with the struggles between rival contenders for power. In spite of these superficial similarities, however, it is clear that the third civil war was not merely a rerun of the second and that is why Marwan II, on emerging from it, was unable to establish his rule in the same way as had Mu`awiya and `Abd al-Malik when they reestablished rule in 661 and 692.”

Marwan II, nephew of `Abd al-Malik, assumed the position of caliph in 744 CE following a decade of unsuccessful and unpopular caliphs. As the former governor of Armenia and Adharbayjan, he witnessed the rapid succession of rulers within the Umayyad Dynasty while managing to keep his own power base intact. He was a tough military veteran, who might have been able to restore the position of the caliphate had there not been so many factors working against his success – most of them self-inflicted. His caliphate was stricken with constant warfare. He had come to power with the support of only a small part of the Syrian elite and seized the capital by force. “He was a capable man, a good organizer, and a man of action, but he was obstinate and had fixed views…he did not reorganize the central army which had been a powerful weapon in the hands of Muawiyah and Abdul Malik, and he did not take effective measures to put down the internal factions and feuds.” Of the many reasons he is responsible for the ultimate demise of the Umayyad Dynasty, perhaps the most significant is his role in the devastating break-up of the Syrian army – the largest and most effective force behind the Umayyad line’s secular authority. A second reason is that he completely excluded the Muslims of Iraq. “This restricted nature of support for the regime was made more serious because neither Syria nor the Jazira was as rich, or had such a large Muslim population as Iraq. Revenues in the alluvial plains in Iraq surpassed those from Egypt four times and almost five times the revenues from the whole of Syria and Palestine.”

The third Islamic civil war differs from the previous two in that it is the only one which was a result of dissension among of the outlying peoples of the Umayyad Caliphate, namely, the Iraqis, Shi’a, and non-Arab Muslims, known as mawali - these were people such as Egyptians and Persians who remained outside the kinship-based society of the Arabs living within the Hijaz

232 G.R. Hawting, First Dynasty, 90.
233 Hugh Kennedy, The Prophet, 114.
234 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiya, 14.
235 Mahmud, Short History, 69.
region of the Islamic Empire and were perceived as lower class citizens. The rebellion broke out against the Umayyads in 747 CE among these outlying peoples who felt that Marwan II and his governors were distant and corrupt. Meanwhile, he continuously alienated members of the Umayyad elite, which played a significant role when the `Abbasids pursued upon Damascus and launched their revolution in 750 CE. “Marwan’s policies had spread disaffection, not just among elements traditionally hostile to the regime but among people who had previously been loyal servants…in these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the Umayyad state was swept away.”237 Within three years, Marwan II and the Umayyad Dynasty were completely destroyed. In January of 750 CE, Marwan II came down to Mosul, Iraq from Harran in Syria with an army to take the field in person against the rebels.238 A battle took place on the banks of the Great Zab River in what is now Iraq. His army, though, had little support for him. He escaped the battlefield and fled to a small village in Egypt on the Nile Delta called Busir where a few months later he and his small group of followers were cut down.

The fourteenth and final Umayyad caliph, and all of the remaining Umayyad family members were massacred in the months following the battle.239 The `Abbasid caliph Abu al-Abbas as-Saffah, also known as Abdallah, was in the process of consolidating the Islamic Empire under `Abbasid rule. After their victory, the `Abbasids continued to express their wrath toward the symbols of Umayyad memory. They proceeded to the tombs of the Umayyad caliphs and destroyed them, opening up graves and examining the state of the human remains within.240 According to Steven C. Judd, the fall of the Umayyads marked an eastward shift in ethnic dominance away from the Arabs. The capital of the Islamic Empire was moved from Damascus to Baghdad and the Islamic community would come to witness a period of general stability. It was during this period of general stability that historical tradition came to be stabilized. As G.R. Hawting explains, “In the period when the `Abbasids were ruling as caliphs, the views of the new rulers and their relationship with Islam began to change, making necessary a certain reformulation of the traditions about their rise to power and the basis of their legitimacy.”241

238 Rahman, Chronology of Islamic History, 82.
239 That is, with the exception of one Umayyad family member who fled to Spain and initiated a new Umayyad Dynasty.
240 The `Abbasids were selective in their destruction and some of the tombs were left untouched. Other tombs were desecrated or destroyed and their remains scattered to the wind. See: Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb, Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories From Syria to Spain (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1.
241 Hawting, First Dynasty, 104.
We have previously seen how al-Tabari did not conform to one particular narrative trend when discussing the first Umayyad civil war caliph Mu’awiya in comparison to the second Umayyad civil war caliph ‘Abd al-Malik. In the analysis below, however, we will witness al-Tabari’s return to a familiar form of writing when it comes to the depiction of our third and final Umayyad civil war caliph – Marwan II. In both the pre-civil war stage (governorship) and civil war stage (reign as caliph) of Marwan II’s life, al-Tabari’s approach mirrors in many ways that of his work on Mu’awiya. During the narrative years dealing with the pre-civil war stage of his life, Marwan II, as in the parallel description of Mu’awiya, is depicted in three ways: as a “neutral/incidental character,” as a “brave commander,” and as an “eloquent/obedient governor.” The trend continues into the narrative sequence of the civil war stage of Marwan II’s life, where al-Tabari’s representation again resembles that of his representation of Mu’awiya. Marwan II is depicted in various negative ways, and in particular, as a coward.

“Pre-Civil War Marwan II” : The “Neutral/Incidental” Depiction

Marwan II’s character makes his first appearance in al-Tabari’s History during the pre-civil war years of 732-733 CE. These appearances, however, are merely to establish his service as governor of Armenia and Adharbayjan under the caliphate of Hisham b. ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 723-747 CE). These appearances do not merit transcription here because they are all of the same nature and are transmitted using the same wording - “In charge of Armenia and Adharbayjan was Marwan b. Muhammad.”242 In addition, Marwan II’s name appears a number of times in the narrative dealing with the years of 723 to 737 CE, when he launched a campaign against the Turks. There is no indication as to how he performed against the Turks and there is no description of his actions or his decision-making that merit discussion here. In lock-step with al-Tabari’s pre-civil war approach as outlined in Keshk’s analysis, these two episodes retain a “neutral/incidental” tone and Marwan II’s presence does not have any effect on the outcome of events taking place.

Our second pre-civil war episode again follows the model of al-Tabari’s representation of Mu’awiya – as an “eloquent/obedient governor.” Al-Tabari provides his readers with only one version of this story in which Marwan II attempts to thwart a rebellion against the caliph al-

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Walid b. Yazid (al-Walid II) in a narrative dealing with the year 743 CE. Marwan II heard while in Armenia that Yazid III was fomenting discord amongst the people and inciting them to depose al-Walid II. “He [Yazid] can no longer endure what he has heard of al-Walid’s treatment of the sons of Hisham and the sons of al-Walid [b. `Abd al-Malik] and of the caliph’s flippant and contemptuous attitude toward religion.” According to Hugh Kennedy, al-Walid II was viewed as the playboy of the Umayyads. He was a talented poet, an enthusiast for architecture (palaces, not mosques) and a heavy drinker. Marwan II, however, is an obedient and loyal governor under al-Walid II. He writes to the governor of Palestine, Sa`id b. `Abd al-Malik b. Marwan, forbidding the people to take such action and requests that Sa`id put a stop to the rebellion:

“‘Verily, God has created for the benefit of all the members of a family pillars on which they may lean and by which they may guard themselves against dangers. By the grace of your Lord, you are one of those pillars of [the members of] your family. I have heard that a group of fools in your household have set into motion a certain matter. If they achieve their aim in this matter, having agreed to abrogate their oath of allegiance, they will open a door which God will not shut for them until much blood of theirs has been shed…”

He explains to Sa`id that the strength of a group will only ever be destroyed if they fall into disagreement amongst themselves. In other words, he has asked Sa`id to confuse the enemy and seek to overcome them. Because Sa`id is closer to the people than Marwan II, he tells him to use deceit to find out what they are plotting by pretending to be on their side.

In this episode, Marwan II is depicted as the obedient and loyal governor who has attempted and succeeded at thwarting a rebellion by Yazid III against the reigning caliph al-Walid II. His character is, as was Mu`awiya’s, very much a positive Islamic one speaking in an eloquent manner with references to God’s forgiveness of such wrong-doings. “‘If I could get hold of these people, I would put their wrong-doings to rights with my own hand and with my own words. I would, moreover, fear God if I did not act in this way because I know what

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243 Yazid b. al-Walid b. Abd al-Malik was the grandson of `Abd al-Malik through `Abd al-Malik’s son al-Walid b. `Abd al-Malik.
244 Upon the caliph Hisham b. `Abd al-Malik’s death, the succession was to pass to Yazid II’s son al-Walid rather than to his own children. This incited much disdain amongst the cousins.
245 These men would be the caliph al-Walid’s first cousins.
247 Hugh Kennedy, The Prophet, 111.
248 Al-Tabari, Waning of the Umayyad Caliphate, 139.
249 Ibid., 137-140.
mischief is caused to religion and to this earthly life as a consequence of schism.” In this episode, as with the parallel pre-civil war depiction of Mu’awiya, al-Tabari is attempting to show how Marwan II, as an Umayyad governor, dealt with the growing opposition within the caliphate. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, “pre-civil war Mu’awiya” was engaged in a confrontation with Kufan exiles who had attacked an Umayyad government official. The point of the episode was to demonstrate how Mu’awiya verbally dealt with the opposition to the caliph ‘Uthman’s policies and appointees. Mu’awiya’s religiously inspired words were meant to encourage obedience to him due to his stature amongst the “rightly guided” caliphs. In disobeying him, they will be obeying the devil and in turn disobeying God.

In Marwan II’s case, he too is devoting much of his letter to the stature that the Umayyad family holds. “We, the people of this family, have received a prolonged series of blessings and this has caused distress to all nations, to those who are hostile to such blessings and who envy those that possess them…Every family has ill-fated individuals because of whom God removes his favor.” There seems to be a mix of religious and practical/political advice being given in this letter. This gives us an indication of some of the elements at work in both “pre-civil war Mu’awiya” and “pre-civil war Marwan II’s” words and deeds. In al-Tabari’s episodes of both “pre-civil war Mu’awiya” and “pre-civil war Marwan II,” the reader is introduced to a governor who is loyal and obedient to his caliph regardless of the situation or what truth may lie in what is being said of him. This governor then takes it upon himself to deal with the opposition and in both cases he succeeds in thwarting rebellion and hostile aggression towards the caliphate.

Our third pre-civil war episode again demonstrates al-Tabari’s return to a familiar approach utilized in his depiction of “pre-civil war Mu’awiya” – as the “brave commander.” The story takes place in the narrative dealing with the years 743 to 744 CE when Marwan II’s son returns from his summer raiding campaign to Harran and finds that al-Walid II had been killed. Marwan II, accusing Yazid III of the murder, decides to rebel and leaves his post in Armenia for the Jazirah, on the pretext that he was seeking vengeance for the blood of al-Walid II. Suddenly,

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250 Al-Tabari, *Waning of the Umayyad Caliphate*, 140
251 Ibid.
252 Modern scholarship tends to agree across the board that al-Walid’s known status was as the sources describe him to have been.
however, and quite unexpectedly, it seems, upon his arrival in Harran,\(^{253}\) he gave the oath of allegiance to Yazid III.

Al-Tabari provides his readers with one very long and detailed version of this story. Marwan II’s son attacked Harran and the [other] cities of the Jazirah and he held on to them until his father was able to join him. Marwan II made his preparations for the journey and announced publicly that he was seeking vengeance for the blood of al-Walid II. He wanted to leave to go on the journey to Harran where his son had seized the city but he did not want to leave his frontier unguarded so he sent a couple of his army commanders, including a man named Thabit (whom he had released from the former caliph Hisham’s prison), to tell the army in Armenia to remain in their posts. He gave them stipends and appointed a commander over them upon which the people agreed to stand firm on their frontier and to remain in their posts. The news then reached Marwan II that Thabit had been plotting with the local commanders to leave their frontier posts.

“Marwan proclaimed the following announcement to them: ‘People of Syria, what has prompted you to defect and for what conduct on my part have you conceived a dislike for me? Did I not rule you in a way that won your approval and behave correctly toward you and govern you well? What is it that has prompted you into shedding your own blood?’ The rebels gave Marwan the following reply: ‘We were obedient to you because of our obedience to our caliph. Then our caliph was killed and the Syrians gave the oath of allegiance to Yazid b. al-Walid.’ Then Marwan gave orders to his herald to proclaim: ‘ Truly you have lied! You do not want what you have said you want. Your sole desire has been to act rashly and to seize wrongfully the possessions, food, and fodder of any *dhimmis* whom you pass. The only thing between you and me will be the sword until such time as you submit to me…’”\(^{254}\)

When the rebels saw how serious Marwan II’s intentions were, they submitted to his requests. He kept a tight rein on them during the journey back to Harran, so that none of them were able to attack or act tyrannically. Then Marwan II ordered the rebel Syrians to rejoin their *junds*,\(^{255}\) but he kept Thabit under his own eye in prison. He then invited the people of the Jazirah to mobilize and he paid them stipends. Marwan II was finally able to make preparations to march against Yazid III. But Yazid III, after hearing of Marwan II’s rebellion against him, wrote to him saying that if he gave him the oath of allegiance, he would appoint Marwan II as

\(^{253}\) Modern day southeastern Anatolia.
\(^{255}\) A military district.
governor of the lands in the Jazirah, Armenia, al-Mawsil, and Adharbayjan. With this, Marwan II duly gave the oath of allegiance to him.\textsuperscript{256}

In Chapter Two we saw that al-Tabari depicts “pre-civil war Mu`awiya” as the brave commander with references to his great military strategy, bravery, loyalty, and piety.\textsuperscript{257} While al-Tabari does not take this approach in `Abd al-Malik’s pre-civil war life, he does tend to abide by it in his account of Marwan II. This narrative strategy is revealed in the kind of decisions Marwan II makes. In the beginning of this story, Marwan II does not support Yazid III’s claim to the caliphate. His bravery and loyalty to al-Walid II is depicted with his decision to leave his post as governor and seek out revenge for the murder. Al-Tabari makes reference to Marwan II’s strategic military maneuvering by mentioning the fact that Thabit’s following was twice the size of Marwan II – yet through his warnings of a swift and heavy sword, the rebels stood down.

Until the end of the story, narratively speaking, it is quite clear what Marwan II’s motivating factors were in staging a rebellion against Yazid III. Al-Walid II was not only the reigning caliph at the time of his death; he was also Marwan II’s second cousin. In an Arab/Muslim community, much emphasis is placed on kinship, and in this story, Marwan II views it as his duty to seek vengeance for his kinsman’s murder. One must question, though, given Marwan II’s great disdain for Yazid III, what his motivating factors were in subsequently giving the oath of allegiance to him.

The text simply states that Marwan II gave the oath of allegiance\textit{ only} after receiving a letter from Yazid III promising to make him governor over the Jazirah, Armenia, al-Mawsil, and Adharbayjan. It is at this point in which the episode ends and al-Tabari moves onto another subject. The reader, therefore, is left to decipher the meaning of this rash and unforeseen decision. At first glimpse, it may seem to the reader that Marwan II had been bribed with an expanded governorship and accepted Yazid III’s bait willingly. Yazid III, however, died quite unexpectedly in 744 CE after a short reign of only six months. According to Hugh Kennedy, his place was briefly taken by his unconvincing brother, Ibrahim b. al-Walid, but he was unable to withstand the new strong man of the northern Arab regions: Marwan II. “Marwan had remained governor of Armenia and Adharbayjan, grudgingly accepting the changing rulers, but keeping his power base intact. He now proclaimed himself the avenger of al-Walid II and came south

\textsuperscript{256} Al-Tabari, \textit{Waning of the Umayyad Caliphate}, 242.
\textsuperscript{257} Keshk, \textit{Depictions of Mu`awiya}, 6; 30-38.
with his seasoned troops...he was proclaimed caliph in the mosque in Damascus.”

This thesis argues, therefore, that Marwan II’s decision to give the oath of allegiance to Yazid III could also be understood as an ingenious move to bide his time and gather resources rather than a rash and greedy decision just to receive more land to govern.

Marwan II is widely understood to have been a smart and cunning man. He took the six months between his oath of allegiance to Yazid III and the latter’s death to gather support, season his troops, and silently prepare for another rebellion against Yazid III. His initial rebellion against Yazid III was strong, but he only had the support of the one province that he governed – Armenia. Having been offered the provinces of the Jazirah, Armenia, al-Mawsil, and Adharbayjan, Marwan II saw an opportunity to more than double his army. It is my opinion that his decision to give the oath of allegiance to Yazid III, then, should be understood as an intentional move on his part to take the appropriate time needed and prepare for the vengeance of al-Walid II’s murder. With Yazid III’s unexpected death, however, there was no longer a need for rebellion; thanks to Yazid III’s generous offer of an extended governorship, Marwan II now possessed a massive army and from this position of strength made his claim to the caliphate. Therefore, al-Tabari’s portrayal of Marwan II in this episode is overwhelmingly positive. The reader is introduced to a very smart, cunning, brave, and obedient man who knew when to act and when to lay low so as to take advantage of the situation which presented itself.

As Keshk states, the pre-civil war stage is the period in which we are “almost able to build a biography of the person with little or no effort spent in the shedding of layers upon layers of religio-political point of views.”

The next stage of Marwan II’s life however (as we have already seen in the parallel stage of Mu’awiya’s career), is very different. After introducing us to a smart and brave Marwan II, al-Tabari will now transform his character, as he did with Mu’awiya, depicting instead a man of very negative and cowardly disposition.

“Civil War Marwan II” : The “Negative” and “Cowardly” Depictions
According to Martin Sicker, during the reign of Marwan II the Islamic Empire witnessed serious internal convulsions resulting from sectarian differences, tribal rivalries, ethnic distinctions, and

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258 Kennedy, The Prophet, 114.
259 Keshk, Depictions of Mu’awiya, 49.
the ongoing competition between the Umayyads and the Hashemites\textsuperscript{260} for preeminence.\textsuperscript{261} It was out of these internal and external conflicts that the third Islamic civil war erupted. It was not only the outlying peoples under Umayyad authority who were feeling the distance of Marwan II’s caliphate; his own Syrian people did as well. “Marwan II...had committed the fatal mistake of transferring not only his residence but also the state bureaucracy to Harran in Mesopotamia, thus alienating the sympathies of all Syrians. Besides the Syrians...the Kharijites of al-Iraq – ever the deadly enemy of established order – were now in open rebellion.”\textsuperscript{262} Early on in the third civil war, the ’Abbasids, wishing to gain the support of the ’Alid followers, decided to make use of a talented propagandist and organizer from Khurasan named Abu Muslim. “He realized there was a considerable pro-Alid feeling among the people, especially in Persia, where people had always believed in hereditary succession...with his help...the ’Abbasids sent out secret workers and began to win over the people for the cause of ’Ali.”\textsuperscript{263}

In our first episode from al-Tabari dealing with the narrative years of 746 to 747 CE during the third Islamic civil war, Abu Muslim has launched a revolution against Marwan II and, by extension, Umayyad rule. In this story, we begin to see Marwan II’s character portrayed in a negative light. Marwan II’s governor of Khurasan, Nasr, was unable to prevent the rebellion and called upon Marwan II to send help. “He told him of the multitude that were with Abu Muslim and his following, and that he was proclaiming a summons to Ibrahim b. Muhammad...But Marwan II wrote him, ‘The witness sees what the absent cannot see; cauterize the wart according to your own lights.’”\textsuperscript{264} In other words, Marwan has alienated Nasr and Khurasan by telling him to deal with the problem as he sees fit. Nasr expressed his concern over Marwan II’s lack of assistance and looked toward the governor of Iraq, Yazid b. ’Umar, for help. But Yazid, having little military support, was unable to help Nasr. After another attempt by Nasr at requesting assistance from Marwan II, the caliph wrote to al-Walid b. Mu’awiyah b. ’Abd al-Malik, his governor over Damascus, ordering him to write to the administrator of Balqa’ to go to

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\textsuperscript{260} Hashemite is another name for the ’Abbasids.
\textsuperscript{263} Mahmud, \textit{Short History}, 68.
\end{flushright}
Humaymah Wells, and seize Ibrahim b. Muhammad. After Ibrahim was seized, matters grew critical for Nasr, and he fought until Abu Muslim drove him from his governor’s palace.\textsuperscript{265}

In this episode, al-Tabari portrays Marwan II in a very negative manner and he thus becomes the “myopic strategist.” He makes a fatal strategic error by becoming so self-focused that he could not see the situation for what it really was. Because Marwan II was initially unwilling to send assistance when needed, Abu Muslim was able to advance to a position midway between Nasr’s military camps and his own. Nasr continued to write to Marwan II imploring him for help only to be told to deal with the problem as he saw fit. Marwan II’s only attempt at helping Nasr was a strategic move aimed at deposing any threat to his own rule as caliph. The governor of Damascus was ordered to seize Ibrahim, “‘bind him securely and send him to him [Marwan] with a mounted escort’ …he came upon Ibrahim at the mosque in the village. He seized him, tied his hands behind his back, and brought him…”\textsuperscript{266} The reader might question, though, why Marwan II was all of a sudden so eager to assist Nasr by having Ibrahim seized, as the decision to assist in this manner would not have helped Nasr’s situation at all. Instead, Marwan II was making sure that the person whom the `Abbasids meant to claim the caliphate from him, could not do so. “It is nevertheless clear from all Marwan’s reactions that he did not attach serious importance to Nasr’s appeals for help, convinced that Nasr, with the help of his followers in Khurasan, could easily overcome the ‘wart’ of his internal problems while leaving him – Marwan – free to operate on what seemed to him to be the central and most vital front.”\textsuperscript{267} Marwan II was wrong; the taking of Khurasan from Nasr would prove to be a major threat to the rest of the caliph’s domains across the Islamic Empire. Soon, Abu Muslim, with the help of the Kharijites, would take Iraq as well – leading the `Abbasids one step closer to the complete destruction of the Umayyad Caliphate.

Our second civil war depiction of Marwan II deals with his death and the fall of the dynasty. Here, al-Tabari’s portrayal of Marwan II as a coward, as with his parallel description of Mu`awiya, is very noticeable. By this point, Marwan II had lost the majority of his domains across the empire. He had little support from his army and he had entirely alienated the elite members of the Umayyad family. In this episode, Marwan II is fleeing the pursuing `Abbasids.

\textsuperscript{265} Al-Tabari, \textit{The `Abbasid Revolution}, 82-85.
\textsuperscript{266} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{267} Moshe Sharon, \textit{The Social and Military Aspects of the `Abbasid Revolution} (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1990), 150.
In each place which Marwan II seeks refuge, the `Abbasids have already taken over or the people do not support him anymore. Al-Tabari has provided his reader with multiple versions of Marwan II’s death beginning in the narrative years of 749 to 750 CE.

In the first version, Marwan II fled from the Great Zab.\footnote{The Great Zab is a long river flowing through modern day Turkey and Iraq. It is the historical site for the Battle of the Zab that ended the Umayyad Caliphate in 750 CE.} Marwan II’s forces fled to Harran where his nephew was governor. He stayed there for more than twenty days. When the `Abbasids drew near, he packed up his people, children, and family and fled to Qinnasrin. From there he went to Hims where the people met him in the markets ready to hear and obey. He stayed there for two or three days, and then set out. When the people of Hims saw how few people and soldiers supported Marwan II, they became hostile against him, saying, “He’s a coward, running away.”\footnote{Al-Tabari, \textit{The `Abbasid Revolution}, 168-170.} In another version, emphasis is again placed on the fact that Marwan II was fleeing rather than fighting. “Marwan fled until he came to the city of Mosul which was governed by Hisham b. `Amr al-Taghlibi and Bishr b. Khuzaymah al-Asadi, and they cut the pontoon bridge. The Syrians shouted, ‘It’s Marwan!’ But they replied, ‘You lie’ the Commander of the Faithful doesn’t run away!’\footnote{Ibid., 171.}

In both versions above, al-Tabari repeatedly hammers into his reader’s mind the same theme – that Marwan II’s people viewed him as a coward fleeing from the `Abbasids. Al-Tabari’s earlier parallel portrayal of Mu`awiya as the cowardly commander takes place during the Battle of Siffin at the height of the first civil war: “Not only is he stylized so but the sources have him even admitting to being afraid and wanting to flee in the heat of battle.”\footnote{Keshk, \textit{Depictions of Mu`awiya}, 73.} The first version of the story of Marwan II’s demise is our most complete and detailed version in which al-Tabari makes his point clear. The comprehensive details in this version make the reader aware that no longer did any of Marwan II’s domains or people support him. In the eyes of his people, he fled, as a coward, from every city just as quickly as he entered it.

Let us look at another element at work in this episode. In another version, al-Tabari seems to be expressing very pro-`Abbasid views in referring to the `Abbasids as the Banu Musliyyah\footnote{The Banu Musliyyah is the original tribe from which the `Abbasids are descended.} and the prediction that they would be the end of Marwan II. “I used to hear our shaykhs at Kufah say, ‘The Banu Musliyyah will be the death of Marwan…Hisham b.
Muhammad asserts that his mother was a Kurdish concubine.”

In yet another version al-Tabari continues to expose hints of pro-`Abbasid tendencies, in a manner that relates the `Abbasid family to the paternal uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. “Praise be to God, who has exchanged for us the ass of the Jazirah and the son of the slaughtered man’s bondmaid with a descendant of the paternal uncle of God’s Messenger and son of `Abd al-Muttalib.”

In both of these versions, there is an attempt to undermine Marwan II’s authority and legitimacy through his mother who is referred to both as a Kurdish concubine and a slaughtered man’s bondmaid. This by itself reveals a very interesting narrative strategy of al-Tabari; while there are a number of, mostly directly explicit, references to Marwan II’s illegitimacy based on his mother’s class/ethnic standing, it is worth pointing out that all of the `Abbasids, except two, were also the sons of concubines, which is what Marwan II is being “accused” of here.

While Keshk examines three depictions of “civil war Mu`awiya,” there is no need here for an analysis of a third episode in the civil war stage of Marwan II’s life. This is for two reasons. First, during the civil war stage of Mu`awiya’s life, he was still governor and would not become caliph until the post-civil war period – leaving room for an entirely separate analysis. On the other hand, Marwan II had already been proclaimed caliph by the civil war stage of his life. There is no need, then, for al-Tabari to focus on some parallel depiction of Marwan II as an ineloquent/insubordinate governor as he did with Mu`awiya’s inability or ineloquence, or his overtly insubordinate attitude. Second, Marwan II dies by the end of the civil war stage of his life. Therefore, following al-Tabari’s account of Marwan II’s death in 750 CE, his character becomes very incidental and appears only rarely by flash-back reference. This contrasts with Keshk’s analysis of al-Tabari’s “post-civil war Mu`awiya” whose presence in two incidents that loom large in the narratives of early Muslim historians becomes very anecdotal. Al-Tabari, and a number of early historians, place Mu`awiya within anecdotal spheres of Islamic narratives. According to Keshk, the words used by the characters in these anecdotal incidents are attempts at clarifying different political positions on a particular subject. In al-Tabari’s portrayal of Mu`awiya, there were both negative and positive characterizations during this same parallel period. In Marwan II’s case, however, the end of the civil war meant the downfall of the dynasty.

273 Al-Tabari, The `Abbasid Revolution, 175.
274 Ibid., 175.
275 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiya, 8-9.
Conclusion

This thesis has been inspired by Keshk’s source critical approach to the analysis of early Muslim sources. Whereas Keshk considered a range of written sources and their depictions of Mu‘awiya, my effort has been to focus solely on al-Tabari. I have done this by examining an early and deeply significant period of Islamic history on both religious and political grounds. Doing so has allowed me to critically examine how one particular ‘Abbasid era historian viewed the Islamic Empire under the rule of the three Umayyad civil war caliphs. By applying Keshk’s approach to al-Tabari’s account of these three civil war periods, we see how an examination of one particular early Muslim historian’s choices in content, structure, and approach can provide modern scholars with a critical lens into the past with which to better understand and interpret early Muslim historiography.

The Umayyad Dynasty was the first of its kind to emerge in the Middle East following the conquest of the region by the Arabs and the accounts of its rule are often complex and confusing.276 This thesis argues that the significance of Umayyad rule to modern historians stems in large part from how the dynasty has traditionally been regarded by early Muslim historians in relation to their own aims and goals in generating a historical origin story of the Islamic Empire in which they lived and worked. It has, therefore, been the purpose of the present study to remove al-Tabari’s work from its present location under the critical lens of the modern historian looking to rate a historical source’s ability to provide historical facts about “what really happened.”277 Instead, the focus has been on al-Tabari as an early Muslim historian, and how his representations of the first, second, and third Islamic civil war caliphs fit within the context of his religio-political vision. I have argued, in line with Keshk’s work on Mu‘awiya, that al-Tabari’s treatment of the three Umayyad civil war caliphs varies significantly. Chapters One and Chapter Two demonstrate how al-Tabari’s representation of Mu‘awiya is dissimilar in the narrative timeframe of three distinct periods of his life (pre-civil war, civil war, and post-civil war), which makes sense, given Keshk’s conclusion that these dissimilarities are a natural outcome of the historical reality of the civil war and all the controversies of that period.278 “Pre-civil war Mu‘awiya’s” appearance in al-Tabari’s narrative was neither a purposeful insertion (or

276 G.R. Hawting, The First Dynasty, 1.
277 With time, this approach could potentially remove other Muslim historians’ work from under the same critical lens.
278 Keshk, Depictions of Mu‘awiya, 183.
removal) nor was it an attempt to associate him with an objectionable act. Rather, the depiction of “pre-civil war Mu`awiya” is merely a result of al-Tabari’s editorial choices of isnad-narrators, which he sees fit to include. According to Keshk, al-Tabari used, for the most part, Iraqi sources even though he would have had recourse to Syrian transmitters. This is most likely due to the fact that he resided most career within Baghdad. Al-Tabari’s motivation to associate the caliph with objectionable acts changes during the narrative sequence dealing with the civil war and post-civil war periods of Mu`awiya’s life. Here, al-Tabari’s representation of the caliph drastically takes on a very negative tone. His choice of transmitters, at this point, was perhaps more strategic by selecting those that would assist him in weaving for his reader the sad saga of the civil war and post-civil periods – the periods which demonstrate lack of stability within the Islamic Empire.

Keshk has argued that al-Tabari demonstrates pro-Alid tendencies. He did this by shaping the complicated issues of the civil war into a struggle between good (`Ali) and evil (Mu`awiya). The result is a depiction of Mu`awiya’s character as an evil, anti-Islamic usurper unworthy of the caliphate. 279 “Post-civil war Mu`awiya” is a result of our early historians’ (al-Tabari included) attempts at satisfying their regional and political interests by attempting to legitimize, or de-legitimize Mu`awiya’s policies and appointments – in this case, the execution of a rebel leader Hujr b. `Adi, and the appointment of his son as heir apparent. 280 The analysis of “post-civil war Mu`awiya” discussed in Chapter Two has illustrated that al-Tabari was unenthusiastic about Mu`awiya’s decision to appoint Yazid as heir apparent due to his choices in content and structure of this episode.

I argue that al-Tabari strays significantly from the narrative trends noticed by Keshk when discussing the first Islamic civil war caliph Mu`awiya b. Abi Sufyan in comparison to the second Islamic civil war caliph `Abd al-Malik b. Marwan. When discussing the narrative timeframe of `Abd al-Malik’s pre-civil war, civil war, and post-civil war life, al-Tabari does not conform to any distinct or intentional approach. In fact, many times, the early Muslim historian refrains from discussing the caliph at all. This should have come as a surprise to the modern reader particularly because it was `Abd al-Malik’s caliphate that has become characterized, both by contemporary and modern scholars alike, as a prosperous and innovative period in Islamic

279 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiya, 184.
280 Ibid., 185-186.
history. I have concluded that this is most likely due to the fact that al-Tabari was less concerned with generating a general history of `Abd al-Malik’s reign as he was with pointing out the lack of stability within the Islamic Empire and associating that instability with the reigning caliph of the time. Because `Abd al-Malik’s caliphate lacks any significant instability, there was little need to portray him in any other fashion.

The present study has illustrated that al-Tabari returns to a familiar narrative approach in his commentary on the third Islamic civil war caliph Marwan II. The early author’s representation of Marwan II, in many ways, mirrors that of his account of Mu’awiya’s reign, and I have concluded that this is most likely due to al-Tabari’s motivations and intentions in writing the history of the caliphate. In Chapter Three and Chapter Four, again, I argue that al-Tabari was unconcerned with generating a general history of the Islamic Empire as he was in highlighting lack of stability within the empire. This is precisely why his commentary on `Abd al-Malik is sparse in comparison to that of the other two civil war caliphs. Mu’awiya’s reign, according to al-Tabari’s account, came to represent anti-Islamic values and conflict, and while his rule marks the beginning of a controversial dynastic rule, Marwan II’s reign marks its end. In my view, both caliphates were stricken with great internal and external civil conflict and it comes as no surprise that al-Tabari’s narrative approach when discussing the two men is much the same.

This thesis has demonstrated how early Muslim sources can provide the modern historian with critical insights into the past, but only once inconsistencies and discrepancies are put under the microscope. Should this project expand in the future with extended lines of inquiry or research, I would plan to investigate the three caliphates in a broader range of sources that are contemporary with al-Tabari. As Keshk states, “The student of Islamic history cannot avoid becoming aware of ‘streams’ of redactional activity in the Islamic narratives.” Therefore, taking the project a step further and examining a number of sources’ depictions of Mu’awiya, `Abd al-Malik, and Marwan II in the parallel timeframes of pre-civil war, civil war, and post-civil war will allow me a wider perspective on how early Muslim historians of the `Abbasid era viewed this turbulent and controversial period in Islamic history.

The analysis of this thesis has demonstrated the multitude of controversies surrounding al-Tabari’s work. It is my view that the modern historian of early Islam ought to first and foremost understand the social and political motivations behind early Muslim historians’ works,

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281 Keshk, Depictions of Mu`awiya, 186.
before working on the questions of “what really happened.” This holds especially true for the modern historian looking to reconstruct the history of the Umayyad Dynasty. Such a controversial political entity, which has been represented by our sources in a number of ways, presents the modern historian with a unique set of obstacles with respect to attaining any sense of “truth.” But in an intellectual world that has found itself at odds, it remains questionable as to if we can ever really know how to properly use such valuable material, and if we can ever really come to some sense of “historical truth” in using it. Our complex source-texts for early Islam present numerous difficulties of contextualization and interpretation. Despite these difficulties, as of now we have no other choice than to incorporate them in some way or another into our examination of early Islamic history. Perhaps one day, whether in this generation or the next, the modern scholars’ tiring yet rewarding task of interpreting the tradition on particular points of history and doctrine will assist us in coming one step closer to knowing the past “as it really happened.” It has been the goal of this thesis to use al-Tabari and his accounts of the three Umayyad civil war caliphs to contribute to these modern conversations in source criticism. Modern historians should not approach early Muslim sources as evidence of how history “actually” happened but rather as critical, social, and intellectual lenses not of the past, per se, but rather of how we make and remake the past based on present concerns.
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