

## Fāṭima Bt. Muḥammad

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**Fāṭima**, daughter of the prophet Muḥammad and his first wife Khadīja, is venerated throughout the Islamic world. She married her father's cousin 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and gave birth to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the only male descendants of the Prophet. Historical sources on her life are scarce and often shaped by religio-political tendencies. Fāṭima is the numinous female figure of Islam, adored in religious traditions and cosmogonic myths of the Shī'a. As the favourite daughter of the Prophet and bearer of his *baraka*, she is also honoured in Sunnī Islam and popular belief.

### 1. Scholarship

Decades after its publication, Laura Veccia Vaglieri's article in *EI2* still provides useful information on Fāṭima in history and legend. In light of more recent research, it has become apparent that her image of the historical Fāṭima frequently incorporated projections of later Muslim authors. Veccia Vaglieri explicitly distances her study from Henri Lammens' *Fatima et les filles de Mahomet* (1912), which underlay his article in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1927). Contrary to the negative portrait that Lammens drew of the Prophet's daughter, Louis Massignon portrayed Fāṭima exclusively as a mystically elevated figure (Massignon, *Der gnostische Kult*, and *Mubāhala*). In this work, he built his position mostly on

notions of minority Shī'ī groups, as well as rituals and celebrations that are linked to Fāṭima. More recently, Muhammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Jean Calmard published a valuable article providing new material regarding Fāṭima's role in Shī'ī spirituality, popular devotion, and folklore. Amir-Moezzi often touches upon Fāṭima's position in cosmogony and spirituality in his works on the early esoteric doctrines of Imāmī Shī'ism (*Divine guide; Spirituality*; cf. Ayoub).

Since the 1990s, early Islamic traditions have been increasingly examined from a literary point of view and with regard to the discourses that shaped them (e.g., Donner; Günther). Denise Spellberg has shown, in her study of 'Ā'isha bt. Abī Bakr (1994), that images of the women close to the Prophet were constructed in the light of intra-Islamic discourses and struggles for political legitimacy. Bärbel Beinbauer-Köhler has published a groundbreaking, comprehensive study (2002) that analyses particularly the genesis of Sunnī and Shī'ī images of the Prophet's daughter in light of religious-political differentiation, and also in mysticism, magic, and popular devotion. Verena Klemm's articles (*Erzählung; Image formation*) delineate literary processes of emerging Sunnī and Shī'ī notions of Fāṭima. Todd Lawson studies the reincarnation (or "return") of Fāṭima—in a woman known as Ṭāhira (Qurrat al-'Ayn), who was seen by many Bābīs as the reincarnation of Fatima—and her role during the rise of the Bābī movement in nineteenth-century Iran. Beinbauer-Köhler and Klemm (*Fāṭima is Fāṭima*) also present modern receptions of Fāṭima, in which she functions as a role model for socially and politically conscious and committed contemporary women.

## 2. Fāṭima in historiographical sources

(For this section, see Beinhauer-Köhler, 39–56, Klemm, Image formation, 184–90.) References to Fāṭima's existence are rarely found in the historiographical and biographical works of the second/eighth to the fourth/tenth centuries. These references tend to be fragmentary and incidental, either marginalising or venerating the historical figure, and they are frequently coloured by the religious-political position of their authors and produce contradictory images of Fāṭima. We can thus gather only a few undisputed historical data:

Fāṭima was probably the youngest of the eight children born to Khadija bt. Khuwaylid and the Prophet (Ibn Hishām, 1:190; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/4:1767). The year of her birth is not known. In the year 1 or 2/622–24, she married 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (Ibn Sa'd, 8:22; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/3:1273, 1367); she gave birth to al-Ḥasan in the year 3/625. She is said to have conceived al-Ḥusayn fifty nights after al-Ḥasan's birth (al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/3:1431; al-Balādhurī, 1:404). She also bore two daughters, Umm Kulthūm and Zaynab. Another son, Muḥassin, who was either stillborn or died in infancy, is rarely mentioned outside of Shī'ī tradition (al-Balādhurī, 1:402; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/6:1623). Fāṭima survived her siblings and died shortly after her father; the exact date is disputed (al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/4:1825; Ibn Sa'd, 8:24). She was probably about thirty years old at the time of her death and was buried at al-Baqī', in Medina, the famous cemetery of the Companions. Early on, the precise location of her grave was uncertain (Ibn Sa'd 8:25; Ende, 184–6).

Records in which Fāṭima is portrayed as passive or even negate her existence contrast with traditions that are apparently influenced by Shī'ī notions and ascribe to

Fāṭima an active role and considerable significance. Only a few episodes are transmitted. They exist in multiple variants, such as the incident in which Fāṭima refuses to ask the Prophet to grant protection to Abū Sufyān following the conquest of Mecca (al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/3:1623f.). In another episode, associated with the battle of Uḥud (3/625), she is said to have cleansed either her father's wounds (al-Balādhurī, 1:324) or his bloody sword (Ibn Hishām, 2:100; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/3:1426). Another incident that is variously depicted in the traditions is Abū Bakr's refusal to hand over Fāṭima's inheritance from her father, the oasis of Fadak. According to some accounts Fāṭima punishes him with silence until her own death (al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/4:1825), while others report that she was opposed to this refusal (Ibn Sa'd, 8:23; al-Ya'qūbī, 2:141f.) and to selecting Abū Bakr as her father's successor, supporting her husband 'Alī instead (al-Ya'qūbī, 2:141; cf. Madelung, *Social legislation*; Madelung, *Introduction*).

Very different from Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833), for example, al-Wāqidī (d. 207/822) depicts Fāṭima positively, as taking an active role in the political events of her time. She not only cleanses her father's wounds but also leads other women who care for wounded men on the battlefield (al-Wāqidī, 1:249f.) and mourns the fallen warriors (al-Wāqidī, 2:313, 766). According to al-Wāqidī, she refuses, in an encounter with Umm Hānī, to take in former enemies (al-Wāqidī, 2:830). The Shī'ī historiographer al-Ya'qūbī (d. c. 284/897–8) portrays her as an active and vocal person. Moreover, in an embellished scene, she is spiritualised and consoled by Gabriel following her mother's death (al-Ya'qūbī, 2:34f.; cf. Klemm, Fāṭima, 52–5).

Her close relationship with her father was disputed equally early (see below, *Fāṭima in Sunnī ḥadīth*). One of the earliest known historiographical works, the *Kitāb al-maghāzī* by Mūsā b. 'Uqba (d. 141/758–9), records a *ḥadīth* according to which the Prophet treated Fāṭima no differently from her siblings (Sachau, 467). The original *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767–8) includes a tradition with a Shī'ī *isnād* (chain of authority), which refers to Fāṭima as “mistress of the women” (*sayyidat al-nisā'*) (Ibn Ishāq, 250). She is classed with honourable women, such as Maryam, Khadīja, and Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh (Ibn Ishāq, 244; cf. below *Fāṭima in Sunnī ḥadīth*). Ibn Hishām, on the other hand, omits these praises from his edition of the *Sīra* (Beinhauer-Köhler, 52f.).

The figure of Fāṭima is shaped by Ibn Sa'd's *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, which dedicates an entire volume to Muslim women and includes an entry on Fāṭima. Traditions portray her consistently according to her family connections and role: in seeking a spouse, for instance, Muḥammad rejects Abū Bakr's and 'Umar's courtships and gives his daughter's hand to 'Alī, to which she reacts in silence. According to some traditions, 'Alī could offer only a small dowry, such as a tanned ram skin, an old cloak, or a coat of mail (Ibn Sa'd, 8:17–9). Other events recorded by Ibn Sa'd include her wedding with 'Alī and the humble banquet, to which various Companions contribute food items (Ibn Sa'd, 8:17); Muḥammad's wish for Fāṭima and 'Alī to live near by (Ibn Sa'd, 8:18f); the wedding night, during which the couple is blessed by the Prophet (Ibn Sa'd, 8:20f.); conflicts during their marriage, in which the Prophet has to mediate between the spouses, such as 'Alī's intention to take a second wife (Ibn Sa'd, 8:21); the

household's poverty, which requires Fāṭima to work the flour mill (Ibn Sa'd, 8:21); and her death shortly after that of her father, when Abū Bakr refuses to hand over her inheritance. She forgives Abū Bakr (Ibn Sa'd, 8:22). Before her passing, she washes and dresses herself and demands a closed bier (Ibn Sa'd, 8:22f.). Contrary to the Shī'ī tradition described below, Ibn Sa'd puts little emphasis on her role as a mother but portrays her position as somewhere between compliance and religiously motivated volition. Numerous traditions infer a mysterious empathy between father and daughter, such as the *ḥadīth* of Fāṭima's weeping and laughter, in which the Prophet whispers into her ear that he will die soon, only to reveal to her that she is the mistress of the women of the Muslim community and of the worlds (Ibn Sa'd, 8:22).

### 3. Fāṭima in Sunnī ḥadīth

As Fāṭima lived near her father, many of the reports recorded by Ibn Sa'd are found also in *ḥadīth* compilations. Like the historiographical literature, *ḥadīth* literature mentions her mostly incidentally. Those *ḥadīth* describing the close relation between the Prophet and his daughter are found in especially abundant variants, such as the *ḥadīth* of Fāṭima's weeping and laughter (al-Bukhārī, *K. Bad' al-khalq, bāb 'Alāmāt al-nubuwwa fī l-Islām*) and a tradition in which the Prophet states that “Fāṭima is a part of me” (*Fāṭima baḍ' a minnī*), adding that, “Whoever offends her offends me” (al-Bukhārī, *K. Faḍā'il aṣṣḥāb al-nabī, bāb Manāqib Fāṭima*); cf. al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan, K. al-manāqib, bāb faḍl Fāṭima*; Muslim, *K. Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥāba, bāb Fāṭima bint al-nabī*, Beinhauer-Köhler, 57–73).

Fāṭima is linked to the Qur'ānic figure of Maryam through a scripturalist connection

(Stowasser, 60). As the daughter of ‘Imrān and the mother of Jesus, Maryam was venerated by the Prophet and is the only woman in the Qur’ān with an entire *sūra* named for her. Q 3:42 mentions that God “made her pure” and that she was “preferred” by God “above (all) the women of the worlds.” In Q 66:11f. Maryam and Asiya (Pharaoh’s wife) are made examples for the believers (Stowasser, 59f.). As “mistress of the women of the worlds” (al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb Faḍā’il aṣḥāb al-nabī, bāb Manāqib Fāṭima*), Fāṭima is compared with Maryam (Q 3:42) and even surpasses her as “mistress of the women of Paradise” (al-Tirmidhī, *Kitāb al-manāqib, bāb Faḍl Fāṭima*). Together with Maryam, Asiya, and Khadīja, Fāṭima is ranked among the “best women of the world” and becomes an exemplary woman of Islam’s sacred history and a female archetype of righteousness and obedience to God (Stowasser, 60). As such, she is found in the *tafsīr* tradition (al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 6:393–401; McAuliffe, 20–6). Fāṭima stands in implicit rivalry with ‘Ā’isha, particularly with regard to their excellence and proximity to the Prophet. The overarching sectarian debate on legitimacy and authority thus influences the portrayal of both women in *ḥadīth*. (For this entire paragraph, see Spellberg, 151–90.)

#### 4. Fāṭima in Imāmī Shī‘ī tradition

Already in the fourth/tenth century, the first known religious texts of the Twelver Shī‘a create a vivid and multilayered image of Fāṭima. Imāmī scholars in Iraq and Iran, supported by the Būyids (r. 320–454/932–1062), made extensive compilations of religious traditions, particularly concerning members of the Prophet’s family and the Imāms descending from Fāṭima and ‘Alī. The qualifications, virtues, and miracles of the Imāms are featured in thematic *ḥadīth*

compilations discussing lives, miracles (*ma‘ājiz, ‘ajā’ib*), passions (*maqātil*), and proofs (*dalā’il*) (Halm, *Shiism*, 47–62; Amir-Moezzi *Spirituality*, 195–9). There are also works dedicated to the virtues (*manāqib*) and merits (*faḍā’il*) of Fāṭima. This material was incorporated into extensive compilations, such as the *Kāfī fī ‘ilm al-dīn* by the earliest Shī‘ī compiler al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940–1). The theologian and compiler Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 381/991) played a crucial role in shaping the legend of Fāṭima through numerous *ḥadīth* included in more than a dozen of his books, which were in, in turn, incorporated into the vast compilation of al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699) (Klemm, *Image formation*, 197–204).

“Twelver Hadith is infused with the miraculous and the marvelous” (Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality*, 193). Biographical traditions of Fāṭima, similar to the ones found in Ibn Sa‘d, constitute the raw material of a legendary narrative including elements from folk fairy tales and miracle narratives, or topoi of the lives of saints. These elements embellish Fāṭima’s entire life cycle, starting from her conception and proceeding to her birth, marriage, pregnancy, delivery, motherhood, and death. Her conception is said to have occurred after the Prophet ate a fruit from Paradise. Similarly, Fāṭima herself is surrounded by angels or women of Paradise in crucial moments of her life, which elevates her entire existence into the realm of Muslim cosmology and salvation history (Beinhauer-Köhler, 94–136, Klemm, *Image formation*, 197–204).

Based on her presence at the incident of the Mubāhala—the ordeal Muḥammad called for in his dispute with a Christian delegation from Najrān about the divinity of Jesus, during which he sheltered his

daughter Fāṭima, his son-in-law ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and his grandsons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn under his cloak—Fāṭima belongs to both the people of the cloak (*ahl al-kisā’*) and the Prophet’s family (*ahl al-bayt*). With the Prophet and the twelve Imāms, she is considered one of the fourteen Immaculate Ones (hence her name Fāṭima al-Ma‘šūma; Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality*, 273f.). Fāṭima is the Keeper of the Sacred Book (Muṣḥaf Fāṭima, or Kitāb Fāṭima), which was given to her by Gabriel after the Prophet’s death and which contains hidden knowledge of the future (Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide*, 74). Furthermore, it is said that the Prophet bestowed upon her a tablet (*lawḥ*) that anticipates the official sequence of Twelver Shī‘ī Imāms (Beinhauer-Köhler, 121–4). In cosmogonic myths, Fāṭima manifests herself as a celestial being transcending the realms of time and space. For instance, various creation accounts that were recorded already by al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), depict her as part of the divine pentad (Khamsa), consisting of the Prophet, ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, and herself. All five were created, before the act of creation, as spiritual and immaterial beings of light (al-Kulaynī, 1:440; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide*, 30; cf. Amir-Moezzi and Calmard, 401b). Fāṭima, as a being of light, is further manifested in her sobriquet al-Zahrā’ (the shining one). She is the confluence of two lights (*majma‘ al-nūrayn*) between the esoteric (*bāṭin*) and exoteric (*ẓāhir*) aspects of divine truth or between the light of prophecy and the light of the imāmate (Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide*, 29f.). She is frequently associated with celestial bodies and is said to illuminate like the rising sun in the morning, the gleaming moon before sunset, and the twinkling star at night (Ibn Shahrāshūb, 3:378). Fāṭima is also considered the Queen of Heaven and the

Mistress of the Day of Resurrection, on which she will wear a luminous crown and lead the pious women under a dome of light into Paradise. She avenges her sons and other Shī‘ī martyrs in a gruesome scenario of the end of times and is the mediator for Shī‘īs on the Day of Judgement (al-Majlisī, 43:219–27; Ayoub, 212–6). The cosmogonic motifs originate in extreme Shī‘ī movement (*ghulāt*), which, in turn, incorporated various gnostic systems. Fāṭima parallels great goddesses of the ancient Near East and late antiquity, such as Ishtar-Astarte, who is a manifestation of the Venus star, and Isis, the universal mother and queen of heaven (cf. Beinhauer-Köhler, 339f.). There are also parallels between Fāṭima and the ancient Iranian goddess Anāhitā (the immaculate one), who is considered the mistress of water and associated with the planet Venus (Eilers, 105–8).

Shī‘ī traditions frequently compare Fāṭima and Maryam in terms of motherhood and chastity. One of Fāṭima’s eighty-nine sobriquets listed by Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192) is Greatest Mary (Maryam al-Kubrā). Like the Qur’ānic Maryam, whose body was chaste (cf. Q 66:12), Fāṭima is referred to as the Pure (al-Ṭāhira) and the Virgin (al-Batūl) (Ibn Shahrāshūb, 406). The mysterious sobriquet Umm Abīhā perhaps reflects the Christian understanding of Mary as the Mother of God (Veccia Vaglieri, 847b).

Fāṭima’s complex literary persona is at once maternal and virtuous, and disputatious and quarrelsome. The Shī‘ī tradition relates that she fiercely opposes Abū Bakr and does not shy away from the confrontation with him. An assault by supporters of Abū Bakr leads to Fāṭima miscarrying her son Muḥassin (al-Majlisī, 197–200). Yet, despite Fāṭima’s rage and

resistance, she is overwhelmed by evil, which is evidenced by her weeping. This gives rise to the Shī'ī notion of her being the Mistress of the House of Sorrows (*bayt al-aḥzān*), always mourning her family's destiny until she is herself martyred (Ayoub, 24f., 48–52, 144f).

### 5. Images of Fāṭima among the Ismā'īliyya and the *ghulāt*

Textual sources about Fāṭima's representation in the Ismā'īliyya and the extreme Shī'ī movement (*ghulāt*) have been comprehensively examined only in Beinhauer-Köhler's study (pp. 136–75, 176–205). She has shown that Fāṭima is not ascribed much significance in the early Ismā'īliyya, but only in the Fāṭimid Ismā'īliyya. Here, she performs the official function of legitimising the rule of the Imām-caliphs. Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's (d. 363/974) book *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, the foundational legal work for the Fāṭimid state system, used the notion of the Khamsa as a means of legitimisation by portraying Fāṭimid rule as the continuation of the five. Fāṭima played no significant role in the abstract, neo-Platonically inspired cosmogonic notions of the Ismā'īliyya as they are found in works like the *Rāḥat al-'aql* of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020). She reappeared in the concepts and cosmic analogies of the Yemeni Musta'li-Ṭayyibī tradition. The *dā'ī muṭlaq* (absolute missionary) Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn (d. 872/1467–8), in particular, relied on Imāmī Shī'ī material of the Prophetic family, the Mubāhala and the Khamsa, accompanied by an extensive imagery of light (Beinhauer-Köhler, 166f.). Based on the historical sources, there is no evidence that the Nizārī branch of the Ismā'īliyya expanded their veneration of Fāṭima

beyond her role as the female ancestor of all Imāms.

The greatest transfiguration occurs among the so-called extremist Shī'īs (*ghulāt*), who were influenced by notions of gnosis from late antiquity and absorbed ancient Iranian dualistic concepts. The earliest extant source relating their intricate dogmas and myths is the second/eighth-century *Umm al-kitāb*, which contains the notion of a deity manifesting itself in the Khamsa, which turns Fāṭima into a luminous goddess, stating, “There is no god but me being God (*lā ilāha illā anā llāh*)...who is Fāṭima the creator (Fāṭima al-Fāṭir) and creator of Spirits of the faithful” (Ivanow, *Umm 'l-kitāb*, 99, fol. 40; cf. Halm, *Gnosis*, 133). There is also an eighth/fourteenth-century poem from the later Nuṣayrī tradition that depicts Fāṭima as the Great Goddess (Massignon, *Der gnostische Kult*), although Nuṣayrī mythology usually considers 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as God and revealer of the Qur'ān. The Prophet's daughter is equally present as an abstract historical and transcendent being who is neutral in gender and elevated above all terrestrial women (Strothmann, 39; Beinhauer-Köhler, 198–201).

### 6. Cult and veneration

(For this entire paragraph, see Beinhauer-Köhler, 265–94.) Early reports of Fāṭima's grave in Baqī' were contradictory (see above, *Historiography*). From the fifth/eleventh century onwards, travel accounts relate practices of visitation (*ziyāra*, Ayyoub 180–5) of the grave of Fāṭima in the Prophet's mosque (Masjid al-Nabī). Her burial place was assumed to be close to her father's grave and was referred to as Bayt Fāṭima, as her house had been situated there. Women, in particular, and Shī'īs, are said to have gathered at Fāṭima's

grave, to mourn and lament her. Graves in the Baqī' cemetery have been demolished repeatedly by Wahhabīs, most recently in 1926 (Ende, 189-91), and renovations of the Prophet's mosque in 1930 and 1950 eliminated the garden in which Fāṭima was said to have planted palm trees and which was still seen by travellers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Also named as places of veneration for Fāṭima are a "house of grief" (*bayt al-ḥuzn*) in Baqī', in which Fāṭima is said to have mourned her father; a mosque in the village of Qubā', where the Prophet entered Medina; and the house in which Fāṭima was born. The latter was still extant in the nineteenth century before it, too, was demolished. The religious policies of the Āl Sa'ūd curbed significantly the vivid practices around graves and commemorative spaces of early Islamic history, including those important in the veneration of Fāṭima.

There is no evidence of *mawlid* celebrations (cult of commemoration at the birthday of a saint, which takes place at his grave or in mosques) in Medina, but festivities for the Mawlid Fāṭima al-Zahrā' were reported in Fāṭimid Cairo (al-Maqrīzī, 1/2:384). In Shī'ī areas, public and private festivities are celebrated in Fāṭima's honour (Amir-Moezzi and Calmard 403f.; Beinhauer-Köhler, 295–313). In Qom, a Mawlid Fāṭima, frequented mostly by women, is dedicated to both her and Fāṭima al-Ma'sūma, the sister of the eighth Imām, 'Alī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818) (Sadeghi, 139f.). Massignon was the first to mention a festival dedicated to the commemoration of the ordeal (*mubāhala*) (Massignon, *Mubāhala*, 19), which gives legitimacy not only to the Prophet's daughter but to the entire Khamsa (cf. Beinhauer-Köhler, 311). As Mistress of the House of Sorrows and of the Day of Judgement and in numerous

other roles, Fāṭima is an integral part of the Muḥarram rituals. In Iran and Iraq, her birthday is celebrated by women and children, and, in Iran, a female recitator (*rawza-kh'āna*) relates the legend of Fāṭima's attendance at a Quraysh wedding during the feast of 'Arūsī-yi Quraysh (Beinhauer Köhler, 306).

Fāṭima plays an important role also in popular beliefs, bearing the Prophet's *baraka*, and her name is invoked or worn on amulets (Kriss and Kriss-Heinrich, 1:5; 2:63, 93). She is also considered a mediator and aid in delivery. The "hand of Fāṭima" (in some regions "Fāṭima's eye") is an amulet popular throughout North Africa and the Middle East and is said to repel the evil eye. In Iran, various magical rituals and healing procedures are also connected with her (Massé).

[Verena Klemm](#)

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