



# FĀṬEMA I. IN HISTORY AND SHI'ITE HAGIOGRAPHY

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## i. IN HISTORY AND SHI'ITE HAGIOGRAPHY

The diametrically opposed views of Henri Lammens, who made the first attempt at a biography of Fāṭema, providing a pale, even negative picture, and Louis Massignon (continued by Henry Corbin, q.v.), who conceived an ideally mystical figure, reflect to some extent the information provided in the sources, particularly the earlier sources, characterized as they are by lacunae, uncertainties, and contradictions. Laura Veccia Vaglieri demonstrated that historical reality lay somewhere between the two pictures; her long and often dense article remains the best synthetic study of Fāṭema, and it will be summarized and to some degree supplemented here.

*History.* In contrast to the rich hagiographic material on Fāṭema (see below), purely historical information, reported particularly in Sunni sources, is rare and usually involves only insignificant episodes. Fāṭema was probably the youngest daughter of Moḥammad and his first wife, Ḳadija, the only daughter to live long enough to bear numerous offspring. Her date of birth is variously given as between five years before and two years after the beginning of the Prophet's mission (Lammens, pp. 8-14). She was particularly close to her father and is said to have followed him to Medina shortly after his emigration (*hejra*). Although there is disagreement over details, she became the wife of the Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb (q.v.) while still an adolescent, probably in 2/623-24.



Moḥammad arranged this marriage in obedience to divine will, having already rejected requests for her hand by Abū Bakr, ‘Omar, and probably the very wealthy ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf (Ebn Sa’d, pp. 11-20; Ebn Rostam, p. 12). Before the occupation of the prosperous oasis of Kaybar ‘Alī and Fāṭema were poor, and her life does not always appear to have been happy. On a few occasions, most probably owing to ‘Alī’s attempts to take other wives, the Prophet had to intervene to reconcile the couple (Ebn Ḥanbal, p. 326; Bokārī, II, pp. 440 ff.; Termedī, pp. 319-21). At any rate, as long as she lived Fāṭema was ‘Alī’s only wife and bore him five children: Ḥasan, Ḥosayn, Moḥassen (or Moḥsen, dead at very young age), Omm Kolṭūm, and Zaynab. She was apparently much affected by her father’s death and died of illness in Medina a few months later, in 11/633. Reports on her death, her burial, and the exact place of her grave are contradictory (Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rīk* II, pp. 128-30; Ṭabarī, III, pp. 2436 ff.; Mas‘ūdī, *Morūj* VI, p. 165). Today three sites in Medina are visited as her burial place. She seems to have performed only three acts of political significance, each recorded in almost all sources, both Sunni and Shi‘ite, though in different versions. First, after the conquest of Mecca she refused her protection to Abū Sofyān; second, after the death of the Prophet she courageously defended ‘Alī’s cause, fiercely opposed the election of Abū Bakr, and had violent disputes with him and particularly with ‘Omar; third, she laid claim to the property rights of her father and challenged Abū Bakr’s categorical refusal to cede them, particularly Fadak and a share in the produce of Kaybar.

*Hagiography.* Hagiographical material on Fāṭema is much more ample. Whereas Sunni authors emphasized her perfectly “orthodox” virtues, in particular her rank as the daughter of the Prophet, her ascetic life, and her exemplary piety (Abu’l-Naṣr, pp. 72 ff.), Twelver Shi‘ite hagiographers depicted her as a figure of cosmic significance, though early reports, as well as traditions attributed to her, are much scantier than those related to the other thirteen immaculate ones (*ma’ṣūm*; see COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY v). Fāṭema was counted among the Prophet’s house (*ahl al-bayt*; AHL-E BAYT), the five people of the mantle (*ahl al-kesā*; see AHL-E ‘ABĀ), and the people of the ordeal (*mobāhala*) and thus occupies a central place in the pleroma of the immaculate ones, enjoying ontological, initiatory, and eschatological privileges of the same order as those attributed to the Prophet and the imams. Her luminous pre-existential entity, issuing from the divine light thousands of years before the creation of the world, devoted itself to the praise of God while circumambulating the divine throne (Ebn Bābūya, 1385/1966 pp. 135 ff.;



Ḳazzāz, pp. 110-11, 169-70). Her name, like those of all the people of the mantle, was derived from a divine name (al-Fāṭer “the Creator”; Ebn Bābūya, 1405/1985, p. 252; No‘mānī, p. 137; Ebn ‘Ayyāš, p. 23). She was present in the light of the fourteen impeccable ones when it was placed in Adam’s loins (*ṣolb*). It was because of this light that angels were ordered to prostrate themselves before him (Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, pp. 219 ff.; Ebn Bābūya, 1385/1966, pp. 6, 209; idem, 1405/1985, p. 255). Among the names God taught to Adam (Qur’ān 2:31-33) were those of the people of the mantle, including that of Fāṭema (Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, p. 217; Forāt, p. 56).

Her conception and birth were miraculous. Her origin was in a fruit from paradise, often identified as an apple or a date, that Moḥammad had eaten during one of his ascensions and that had become “the water of his loins” (Forāt, pp. 75-76; Ebn Bābūya, 1385/1966, pp. 183-84). According to one tradition, this fruit had previously been touched by the sweat and a plume from the wing of the angel Gabriel (Forāt, pp. 321-22). It was for this reason that the Prophet always said that Fāṭema was a celestial being in human form (*ḥūrā’ ensīya*), that she emitted the perfume of paradise, and that she had a name in heaven (usually Manṣūra). Fāṭema spoke with her mother while still in the womb. All the most pious women recognized from pre-Islamic religions were present at her birth, namely, Sarah (Sārā), Āsīa, Sephora (Ṣafūrā’), and especially Mary the mother of Jesus (Ebn Rostam, p. 9; Ḥosayn, pp. 48 ff.). These names are often linked with that of Fāṭema, and parallels with Mary are particularly frequent, parallels emphasized by Massignon in all his works on Fāṭema (cf. Ayoub, 1976, pp. 165 ff.; idem, 1978, s.v.; McAuliffe, 1981). Yet Fāṭema’s superiority to other women is always underscored. She is given the epithet “the Great Lady/the Best of Free Women” (*sayyadat/ḳīārat al-nesā’/al-ḥarā’er*; cf. the epithet of the mother of the *qā’em* “the Great Lady/the Best of Slave Women [*al-emā*]; No‘mānī, pp. 331 ff.; Ebn Qūlūya, pp. 54, 78, 123-24). At her birth Fāṭema pronounced sacred formulas and announced future events; the world was bathed in light (Ebn Šahrāšūb, pp. 119 ff.).

In fact, light and Fāṭema are always linked: at the anthropogenic stage already mentioned, in Shi’ite commentaries on the Light verse, and at her birth and later in her life, especially when she prayed and meditated. She is said to have been “the source of the light on the horizon,” and it is for that reason that she is called “the Confluence of the Two Lights” (*majma’ al-nūrayn*, i.e., those of exoteric prophecy and of the esoteric imamate; Marandī, pp. 4-19), and that her most famous epithet was al-Zahrā’ (Resplendent; Ḥosayn, pp. 46 ff.; Ebn



Šahrāšūb, pp. 106 ff.). Ebn Šahrāšūb (pp. 133 ff.) listed more than seventy honorary names for Fāṭema, among which the most common are Maryam Kobrā (the supreme Mary), Batūl (lit., “Virgin,” defined by the Prophet as “she who never menstruates”; Ebn Bābūya, 1385/1966, p. 181), and the mysterious Omm Abīhā (Mother of her father), which has been variously interpreted.

In addition to light, the life of Fāṭema was characterized by piety; sadness over the destinies of her relatives and children; courage; obedience to God, her father, and her husband; and initiatory knowledge (*‘ilm*; for this translation, see Amir-Moezzi, pp. 174-99; on Fāṭema’s knowledge, cf. Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, pp. 221-22; Ebn Bābūya, 1404/1984, p. 596; Ebn Šahrāšūb, pp. 102-4). She is the guardian of two of the secret and sacred books of the immaculate ones, *Ketāb Fāṭema* and *Moṣḥaf Fāṭema*, which may in fact be only a single book, and two secret tablets, of white pearl and emerald respectively (Amir-Moezzi, pp. 188-89; Kohlberg, pp. 302-05). Miracles resulting from her superior nature, piety, and esoteric knowledge are frequently attributed to her (Ebn Šahrāšūb, pp. 16 ff.; Borsī, pp. 85-86; Majlesī, pp. 19-81).

Other salient points in the hagiography of Fāṭema have been brought together by Veccia Vaglieri: her betrothal and marriage to ‘Alī, raised to the level of cosmic events; her glorious resurrection on the Day of Judgment; her complaint to God about the injustices wreaked by the community on her kinsmen and followers; her intervention in favor of the Shi‘ites; and her hagiography as it developed in other branches of Shi‘ism, specifically the Bāṭeniya (q.v.).

Finally, according to early Imami writings, the name Fāṭema is explicitly mentioned in the “integral” Qur’ān (in 20:115; see Kolaynī, p. 283; on the “integral” Qur’ān, see Amir-Moezzi, pp. 200-27), and early Imami exegetes, finding allusions to Fāṭema in a number of suras, sometimes resorted to rather daring interpretations, for example, identification of the “night of the decree” (*laylat al-qadr*) or the “holy spirit” (*al-rūḥ al-qods*) with the daughter of the Prophet (Forāt, pp. 581-82). These interpretations differ little in nature from those of “extremist” Shi‘ites (see ĠOLĀT), some of whom identify her with the cavern of the Seven Sleepers or with the rock of Moses from which water gushes forth (characterized by Veccia Vaglieri, p. 849, as “deviant”). The distinction between early esoteric Imamism and the Shi‘ism considered “extremist” must be made with great care (Amir-Moezzi, pp. 313-16).



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