

of the material is discernible in a range of sources (chronographies, prosopographies, and biographies) authored by a diverse array of scholars. This chapter demonstrates the fundamental similarity in approach between non-Twelve (i.e. primarily Sunnī) and Twelver historians. The latter are often referenced in modern studies, but typically in a dismissive manner that marginalizes their utility. Zaydī historical works, by contrast, are rarely cited by contemporary scholars at all.<sup>201</sup> The final case study (Chapter 4) addresses this lacuna by focusing mainly on Zaydī works to examine a period in the life of a particularly important Zaydī Imām. In the process, it further showcases the broad applicability of the model at the heart of this study.

<sup>201</sup> The one possible exception is al-Iṣbahānī's *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*.

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## 4 | The Last Years of Yahyā b. 'Abd Allāh (d. 187/803)

In Chapters 2 and 3, the application of a rhetoricized model of historical writing generated useful correctives to ingrained assumptions about Islamic historiography. These case studies revealed the similarity in historical approach across genres and the fallacy of dismissing or marginalizing historical works on the basis of the partisan loyalties of their writers. This chapter applies the proposed model to the case of Yahyā b. 'Abd Allāh, a prominent Zaydī Imām who appears in a wide range of historical sources. The analysis reinforces many of the conclusions of the previous chapters while extending the material scope of this study to the largely underutilized historiographical corpus of the Zaydī Shī'a.

The chapter focuses on the last eleven years of Yahyā's life as presented in twelve Muslim historical works composed between the third/ninth and ninth/fifteenth centuries (see Table 4.1). The first section identifies the core structure common to most depictions of this period of Yahyā's life. The second section discusses the Sunnī sources, in which Yahyā is deployed as a secondary character in a larger 'Abbāsīd narrative. The third section turns to the Zaydī sources, which affirm Yahyā's place as a legitimate Zaydī Imām despite his apparent complicity with 'Abbāsīd power. They also utilize Yahyā to elaborate their doctrine of the Imāmate. A final (and very brief) section examines a single Twelver Shī'ī source that seems to bridge the gap between the Sunnī and Zaydī accounts.

In comparison with the revolt of Mukhtār (Chapter 2) or the life of al-Kāzīm (Chapter 3), the core structure for Yahyā's last years is quite sparse. This results from the fact that non-Zaydī sources primarily employ an interpretive framework that minimizes Yahyā's importance. Despite this scarcity, a clear core structure is still readily apparent across historiographical traditions. As in the other case studies, the nature of the source material dictates the application of the model and the consequent structure of the analysis. The discussion of the Sunnī