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The Emergence of the Proto-Sunnī Elite

BY

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To My Parents

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PREFACE

I have been assisted in the writing of this book by the help and encouragement of several people. Professor Donald P. Little has provided wide ranging guidance on all matters academic, and it is his continuing support that has made this work possible. Dr. Patricia Crone and Professor Wael B. Hallaq were kind enough to read, with their customary thoroughness, what now seem to me antediluvian versions of some of the chapters. I am grateful to them for much help, and hope in particular that my disagreements in this book with some of Dr. Crone's work will not obscure the debt that I owe to her writings. Others who have commented on various aspects of this work and helped improve it in sundry ways include Professors Charles J. Adams, Arthur F. Buehler, R. Stephen Humphreys, Abdulaziz Sachedina, and, in particular, the anonymous reader for E.J. Brill. But if even their advice did not always save me from errors of judgement or infelicities of style, the responsibility must evidently be mine alone. I wish also to thank Professors Adams and Sajida S. Alvi for much encouragement.

Several fellowships from McGill University, Montreal, between 1990 and 1994 made it possible for me to work on this book. The libraries where the research for it was carried out include those of the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, the British Library and the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Duke University, Durham. I am grateful to all these institutions for their assistance.

Without the encouragement and support of my mother, and of Rabia, Fakiha and Hamid, I should not have been able to begin, much less to complete this book. To my late father, Professor Waheed-uz-Zaman, I am grateful for a host of things, not the least of which is his contribution towards making me a historian. As for Shaista's companionship, which I have been privileged to enjoy from the very inception of this work (as well as much help with preparing my manuscript for the publishers), I wish only to say that I cannot think of this book without thinking of her.

Some of the conventions employed in this book may, finally, be noted. Most of the Arabic words which occur in the following pages are transliterated and italicized. Those not italicized are certain terms of very frequent occurrence, such as 'ulamā' and imām. Place names, such as Baghdad, Kufa, Basra, are not transliterated, and where Anglicized forms are common (for example, Damascus, Mecca, Medina), these have been adopted. The system of transliteration used here conforms to that of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition (Leiden, 1960–); *jīm* is transliterated as j rather than dj, however, and *qāf* as q rather than ḳ.

ABBREVIATIONS

BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London, 1917–.
CHIr	*Cambridge History of Iran*, III(2), ed. E. Yarshater, Cambridge, 1983.
EI(2)	*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, Leiden, 1960–.
EIr	*Encyclopaedia Iranica*, London, 1982–.
GAS	Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, I, Leiden, 1967.
IJMES	*International Journal of Middle East Studies*, New York, 1970–.
IOS	*Israel Oriental Studies*, Tel Aviv, 1971–.
JAL	*Journal of Arabic Literature*, Leiden, 1970–.
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*, New Haven, 1842–.
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Leiden, 1957.
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Chicago, 1942–.
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, London, 1834–.
JSAI	*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, Jerusalem, 1979–.
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*, Oxford, 1956–.
MW	*Muslim World*, Hartford, 1911–.
REI	*Revue des études islamiques*, Paris, 1927–.
RSO	*Rivista degli studi orientali*, Rome, 1907–.
SI	*Studia Islamica*, Paris, 1953–.
TB	al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, Cairo, 1931.
Th&G	Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denken im frühen Islam*, Berlin and New York, 1991–.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

I.1

This book studies the religious policies of the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs in relation to proto-Sunnī religious trends and the emergence of a religious elite associated with those trends. "Early ʿAbbāsid" is understood here as the period from the inception of ʿAbbāsid rule in 132/749 to approximately the death of al-Maʾmūn in 218/833, though certain developments during the reigns of his three immediate successors will also be noted. That such actions and initiatives of the caliphs as had some bearing on religious trends have been broadly characterized here as "religious policies" is not to suggest that caliphal initiatives were necessarily well-conceived or systematically executed. Nor does the reference to "religious policies" cover the entire spectrum of religious life in relation to the early ʿAbbāsids; it is essentially limited to those trends, and the people associated with them, which I have characterized in this study as "proto-Sunnī".

"Proto-Sunnī" designates those groups of the late 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries which defined their identity in terms of what they saw as their adherence to the Prophet's *sunna*. The rhetoric of such adherence consisted not only in their increasingly unrelenting advocacy of the authority of *ḥadīth*, but also in a firm (but evolving and therefore not always consistent) commitment to the righteousness of the early Muslim community and the rectitude of the Prophet's first successors. One of the most characteristic of their attitudes was reverence for the memory of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, the first two successors of the Prophet Muḥammad. The status of ʿUthmān and ʿAlī as righteous caliphs after ʿUmar continued to be much debated in the second and early third centuries of Islam; many of those designated here as proto-Sunnīs counted Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān as legitimate caliphs, whereas many others included ʿAlī as one of them. There also were questions and many disagreements about the order, in terms of religious merit, in which these caliphs ought to be properly ranked. Gradually, it came to be recognized that all four of the Prophet's

immediate successors were legitimate and rightly guided, and that the historical sequence of their succession was also the order of their religious merit. This latter development was slow to crystallize. Towards the end of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's (d. 241/855) life, this doctrine seems to have become firmly established though it was still not universally accepted.[1]

That the evolving doctrine of the righteousness of the first caliphs will be a major point of reference for this study means that despite the many differences (not to mention the hostility) between those who defined themselves as the "*ahl al-sunna*" and the "others", the contribution of many groups among the latter—for example the Murji'a and even the Mu'tazila—to this evolution can also be treated as part of the history of early Sunnism. The differences between the Murji'a and the *ahl al-sunna* were not necessarily, or in all cases, greater than those within the *ahl al-sunna*, nor was the contribution many a scholar of Murji'ī persuasions made to the evolution of early Sunnism any less significant than, say, that of the early specialists of *ḥadīth*. In recognition of this fact, perhaps, many of the Murji'a eventually came to be rehabilitated by Sunnī consensus. This consensus never worked to the benefit of the Mu'tazila, though certain Mu'tazilī viewpoints had also contributed to the development of what were to be recognized as distinctively Sunnī doctrines.[2]

Proto-Sunnī trends and scholars will not, however, be studied in this book with reference only to their attitudes towards the past—the first generations and early caliphs of Islam. The attitudes of these scholars towards the society and polity in which they lived (and their attitudes towards other groups competing for influence in that society) are equally important for any understanding of their developing world view. As this study will show, the early 'Abbāsid state was not merely a part of the milieu in which proto-Sunnī trends evolved, the caliphs and their religious policies were also participants in that evolution. The articulation of the proto-Sunnī attitudes towards the state, evolving patterns of the scholars' relations with the caliphs, and the definition of the caliphs' role in religious life, are all part of the history of nascent Sunnism and of its distinctive outlook. It is with some aspects of the emergence of this outlook—as regards the past as well as the present—and with those associated with it, that we shall be concerned in this book.

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[1] See II.3, especially II.3.1 and II.3.2, below.
[2] See II.3.3, below.

Two caveats about the people who will be described in the following pages seem to be in order here. First, as used in this study, the term "'ulamā'" (singular: *'ālim*) refers primarily to experts of *ḥadīth* and of *fiqh*. The former are usually designated in the sources as *ahl/aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* or *muḥaddithūn*, the latter as *fuqahā'*. The term "'ulamā'" can be used to refer to them both, though it is not necessarily limited to the *muḥaddithūn* and *fuqahā'*; it may (though for our purposes only occasionally will) also include historians, grammarians, littérateurs and so forth within its range of signification. Any reference to the "'ulamā'" during the period under study here, the second and early third centuries of Islam, posits the claim—not equally acceptable to all students of early Islam[3]—that there already existed individuals who are recognizable as such. This study would, I hope, not only justify this claim, but also, in examining the attitudes and activities of many of those individuals, throw some light on the evolving definition of their communal and religious identities in the early 'Abbāsid period. To be able to speak of particular individuals as 'ulamā' is not to assert, however, that there was a distinct "class" such individuals comprised or that the pursuit and transmission of learning was necessarily their only vocation.

Second, 'Abbāsid patronage of the proto-Sunnīs will be studied here at length, but such a focus should not be taken to mean that those recognizable as proto-Sunnī scholars were the only ones to exercise some influence over the caliphs or to be the beneficiaries of royal patronage. The caliphs' companions, the *ṣaḥāba*[4] and others, were not necessarily scholars, much less proto-Sunnī scholars. Poets were always prominent in the royal entourage,[5] the secretaries (*kuttāb*) are likely to have exercised considerable influence over the caliphs,[6] and non-Muslims too often enjoyed caliphal patronage.[7] A history of the

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[3] See, for instance, Norman Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1993), who places "the emergence of a literate elite laying claim to special rights of guarding, interpreting, and producing legal texts" towards the end of the third/ninth century. (Ibid., pp. 181ff. and passim; the quotation is from pp. 184f.) For a review of some aspects of Calder's work, see III.3.3, below.

[4] On the *ṣaḥāba*, see chapter III n. 47, below.

[5] See, for instance, S.P. Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the 'Abbāsid Age* (Leiden, 1991).

[6] On the *kuttāb*, see *EI(2)* (Leiden, 1960–), s.v. "Kātib" (R. Sellheim and D. Sourdel et al.); D. Sourdel, *Le vizirat 'Abbāside de 749 à 936 (132 à 324 de l'hégire)* (Damascus, 1959–60), passim.

[7] Cf. J.M. Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les abbasides surtout à Bagdad (749–1258)* (Louvain, 1980), passim.

ʿAbbāsid relationship with the proto-Sunnīs, even if all facets of that relationship were explored (which is not the case in this study), would still be only a *part* of the religious, intellectual and social history of early ʿAbbāsid times and of the caliphs position in it. Even as only a part of a bigger and more complex picture, however, ʿAbbāsid relations with and patronage of proto-Sunnī scholars constitute dominant themes of ʿAbbāsid religious policies in general and, for that reason, are crucial for any understanding of the early ʿAbbāsid period as a whole.

I.2. *The State of the Field*

Religious trends in early ʿAbbāsid society have been little studied with reference to the initiatives or policies of the caliphs, or indeed, in any sort of social or political context. Madelung's *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*[8] does make some effort to contextualize the trends studied there; but quite apart from the limited scope of that effort, the studies comprising this work do not focus on caliphal policies any more than they do on the early ʿAbbāsid period. In his *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, a magisterial synthesis of a lifelong work, van Ess is far more successful in relating intellectual to social and political history.[9] Though fundamental to any future study of Islamic thought in the first centuries, and relevant in sundry ways to the early ʿAbbāsid period, van Ess' work is concerned with tracing the history of theological development in Islam, and shows a rather limited interest in, for instance, the nature and expressions of ʿAbbāsid involvement with the proto-Sunnīs.

Conversely, studies devoted to the early ʿAbbāsids, which are not many,[10] have not been much interested in religious policies and related questions either. Fārūq ʿUmar has contributed several brief studies on matters bearing on ʿAbbāsid religious policies;[11] Lassner and Sharon

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[8] W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, 1988).

[9] J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denken im frühen Islam* [hereafter *Th&G*] (Berlin and New York, 1991–).

[10] F. Omar (= Fārūq ʿUmar), *The Abbasid Caliphate, 132/750–170/786* (Baghdad, 1969); E.L. Daniel, *The Political and Social History of Khurasan under Abbasid Rule, 747–820* (Minneapolis and Chicago, 1979); J. Lassner, *The Shaping of Abbasid Rule* (Princeton, 1980); H. Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate: A political history* (London, 1981).

[11] Fārūq ʿUmar, *al-ʿAbbāsiyyūn al-awāʾil* (Beirut, 1970–73); idem, "Some Aspects of

have studied questions of ʿAbbāsid legitimism and propaganda,[12] and several scholars have briefly examined ʿAlid revolts in the early ʿAbbāsid period.[13] Some work has also been done on problems pertaining to individual caliphs, among whom al-Maʾmūn and the *Miḥna* have received the most attention. Any effort to place the early ʿAbbāsids in the religious life of the times has continued to be a desideratum, however. Nor has the caliphate as a religious and political institution received much attention since Emile Tyan's monumental and still standard work on the character, functions and religious significance of the caliphal office.[14]

Ḥadīth and historiography are among areas of intellectual history fundamental to any understanding of the early ʿAbbāsid period. More than a century ago, Ignaz Goldziher drew attention to the use of *ḥadīth* as a vehicle for the expression of theological and political conflicts in the first two centuries of Islam.[15] Sketching the dissemination and dialogue of various conflicting viewpoints through *ḥadīth* his studies also provided insight into some of the ways the partisans of the Umayyads and the ʿAbbāsids tried to build a pious image for their patrons. Fundamental contributions have been made to the study of *ḥadīth* and early Muslim jurisprudence since Goldziher's day; but the interest has essentially remained focused on materials of a juristic content. In the study of *ḥadīth* for political and ideological motifs, Goldziher's legacy is yet to be claimed.[16] A recent development of great promise is, however, the attention which has been given by Wilferd Madelung, Suliman Bashear, Michael Cook and other scholars to messianic and apocalyptic *ḥadīth* materials, which throw much light on religious trends, and not just those involving messianic

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the ʿAbbāsid-Ḥusaynid Relations during the early ʿAbbāsid Period, 132–193/750–809", *Arabica*, XXII (1975), pp. 170–79; idem, *Buḥūth fi'l-ta'rikh al-ʿAbbāsī* (Beirut, 1977).

[12] Lassner, *Shaping of Abbasid Rule*; idem, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory* (New Haven, 1986). M. Sharon's *Black Banners from the East* (Leiden, 1983) and *Revolt: the social and military aspects of the ʿAbbāsid revolution* (Jerusalem, 1990), though both concerned with the ʿAbbāsid revolution, do sometimes digress to remark on aspects of the post-revolution legitimist propaganda.

[13] See, for example, Kennedy, *Early Abbasid Caliphate*, especially pp. 198–213; Lassner, *Shaping of Abbasid Rule*, pp. 69–87; Omar, *ʿAbbāsid Caliphate*, ch. 4.

[14] *Institutions du droit public musulman*, I: *Le califat* (Paris, 1954).

[15] I. Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle, 1889–90), tr. C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern (London, 1967–71), vol. II.

[16] One rather modest yet noteworthy exception is the critical edition, translation, and study of al-Suyūṭī's collection of pro-ʿAbbāsid *ḥadīth*: A. Arazi and A. Elad, "al-Ināfa fī rutbat al-xilāfa de Ğalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī", *IOS*, VIII (1978), pp. 230–65.

expectancy, in early Islam and, specifically for our purposes, in ʿAbbāsid society.[17]

Among studies of ʿAbbāsid historiography, several studies are notable. R. Sellheim's analysis of the *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq suggests the existence of a layer of pro-ʿAbbāsid propaganda in that work.[18] In analyzing the historiography of the ʿAlī-Muʿāwiya conflict, E.L. Petersen illustrates the creation or manipulation of *akhbār* on that conflict to express pro-ʿAbbāsid viewpoints. These *akhbār*, Petersen suggests, may not be worth much on that conflict itself but they do tell us something about shifts in ʿAbbāsid ideological positions.[19] T. Nagel has done important work in explicating facets of ʿAbbāsid ideological legitimation, and has tried, beside much else, to retrieve some of the contents of al-Haytham b. ʿAdī's (d. 206/821) lost *Kitāb al-dawla*, a work serving the cause of such legitimation in the early ʿAbbāsid period.[20] J. Lassner's *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory* is not only concerned with pro-ʿAbbāsid tradition but also seeks to explicate the mechanisms and processes through which ʿAbbāsid propaganda passed into ʿAbbāsid historiography. All of these studies, and others, reveal the ideological and political concerns of the early ʿAbbāsids, and are thus relevant to some of the issues addressed in this book. They also show that considerable intellectual resources were available to the ruling dynasty for the promotion of its interests, however they were defined at any given time.[21] The latter is part of the complex problem of state patronage whose styles and

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[17] W. Madelung, "The Sufyānī between Tradition and History", *SI*, LXIII (1986), pp. 5–48; idem, "Apocalyptic Prophecies in Ḥimṣ", *JSS*, XXXI (1986), pp. 141–85; S. Bashear, "Apocalyptic and other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A review of Arabic sources", *JRAS*, third ser., I (1991), pp. 173–208; M. Cook, "Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions", *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies*, I (1992), pp. 23–47.

[18] R. Sellheim, "Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte. Die Muḥammed Biographie des Ibn Isḥāq", *Oriens*, XVIII–XIX (1967), pp. 33–91.

[19] E.L. Petersen, *ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya in early Arabic Tradition* (Copenhagen, 1964), pp. 67–187 passim.

[20] T. Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des abbasiden Kalifates* (Bonn, 1972). Nagel's impression that al-Haytham's *Kitāb al-dawla* is the first work of its kind is incorrect, however. As van Ess has pointed out, following Ibn al-Nadīm, Abū Hurayra al-Rāwandī seems already to have had a massive *Kitāb akhbār al-dawla* before al-Haytham compiled his (van Ess, *Th&G*, III, pp. 18f.; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud, 3rd edn. (Beirut, 1988), p. 120). Ibn al-Nadīm says that al-Rāwandī's work comprised "about two thousand leaves" ("*naḥw alfay waraqa*"—not *one* thousand, as van Ess says: *Th&G*, III, p. 18). On al-Haytham, see F. Sezgin, *GAS*, I (Leiden, 1967), p. 272; S. Leder, *Das Korpus al-Haiṭam ibn ʿAdī* (Frankfurt, 1991), especially pp. 304ff.

[21] Cf. Petersen, *ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya*, esp. p. 184.

significance we shall examine later in this study as aspects of the intricate and evolving relationship of religion and politics under the early ʿAbbāsids.

This relationship has been much debated by scholars concerned with the study of early Islam, and considering that the early ʿAbbāsid period saw formative developments in religious thought as well as initiatives towards defining and regulating the relations between the caliphs and the ʿulamāʾ, it is not surprising that much of the debate on questions of religious authority has tended to be focused on this period. It is striking, however, that despite varied approaches to these questions, and to early ʿAbbāsid history in general, there is remarkable agreement among modern scholars on the "classical model" of religion and politics in Islam, a model which postulates a sharp conflict between the caliphs and the ʿulamāʾ and the eventual separation of religion and politics. A quick survey of the principal contributions to this subject should illustrate some of the formulations of what ultimately is a fairly broad based consensus.

In an important analysis of the "political collapse of Islam", Hamilton Gibb argues that though the ʿAbbāsids began with some important initiatives towards building religious, bureaucratic and military institutions, they were unable to live up to or to sustain the "myth" of the caliphate. "[T]he Caliphate . . . was gradually emptied of its 'real' content by the expansion and growing independence of the very institutions that the ʿAbbāsids had set up for its support." The reason why this happened was the caliphs' failure to integrate the institutions in question into some kind of an overall Islamic framework, which would also give credence and credibility to the myth of the theocratic state. These institutions therefore developed independently of the state: the religious institution severed itself from the caliphate, the military and the bureaucracy eventually took over the state, the caliph withdrew into an impotent privacy, and society was completely alienated from the caliphate.[22]

The separation of the religious establishment, so to speak, from the state in early Islam is also the subject of an influential article by Ira Lapidus which he published in 1975.[23] Focusing on events in Baghdad

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[22] H.A.R. Gibb, "Government and Islam under the Early ʿAbbāsids: The political collapse of Islam" in *L'Élaboration de l'Islam* (Paris, 1961), pp. 115–27.

[23] I.M. Lapidus, "The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of early Islamic Society", *IJMES*, VI (1975), pp. 363–85. Also see idem, "The Evolution of Muslim

following the civil war between al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn, Lapidus argues that the function of *al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf* was effectively taken over from the caliph by religious leaders and vigilante groups, which in turn signifies the end of the caliph's role in the religious sphere of the community's life. The failure of the *Miḥna* only confirmed this separation between religion and state, a separation which also entailed one between society and state.

Tilman Nagel's monumental and erudite *Rechtleitung und Kalifat* was published about the same time as Lapidus' article.[24] Nagel's study, which encompasses the first three centuries of Islam, views the caliphate in relation to the major religio-political parties. As regards the 'Abbāsids, the ideological initiatives and religious politics of the early caliphs are seen as efforts to build their authority on the idea (or institution) of the *sunna* or the *imāma* (or both). Neither idea served the 'Abbāsids well; the *ahl al-sunna* developed in opposition to the 'Abbāsids, while al-Ma'mūn's effort to be recognized as the *imām al-hudā*, or to impose his vision of religious politics, failed, ensuring that Sunnī Islam developed on its own terms rather than on those the caliph, in conjunction with the Mu'tazila, may have wished to lay down for it. The Sunnīs did eventually become supportive of the caliphate, but only *after* the 'Abbāsids had surrendered to their world-view in the aftermath of the *Miḥna*'s failure.

While Nagel suggested that devotion to the *sunna* and the idea of the *imāma* etc. were "*Ersatzinstitutionen*" intended to substitute for the Prophet's inimitable authority, P. Crone and M. Hinds have argued that religious authority did not die with the Prophet but rather continued in the person of "God's caliph".[25] The Umayyad caliphs enjoyed religious authority, it is argued, as also did the early 'Abbāsids. However, by the time the 'Abbāsids came to power, the 'ulamā', armed with the concept of an immutable *sunna* of the Prophet, of which they alone claimed to be the interpreters, were already well-advanced on the way to terminating the caliph's religious authority. The showdown did come with al-Ma'mūn, but "the fact that the 'ulamā' had managed

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Urban Society", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XV (1973), pp. 21–50, especially pp. 28ff.; idem, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 120ff.

[24] T. Nagel, *Rechtleitung und Kalifat: Versuch über eine Grundfrage der islamischen Geschichte* (Bonn, 1975). Cf. the reviews of G.R. Hawting in *BSOAS*, XXXIX (1976), pp. 660f., and G.H.A. Juynboll in *JSS*, XXII (1977), pp. 123–26.

[25] P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious authority in the first centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, 1986).

to produce even al-Shāfiʿī before the collision came evidently meant that al-Maʾmūn's chances of winning were slim";[26] "under the leadership of Ibn Ḥanbal . . . ["the vulgar masses"] rejected caliphal guidance in religious matters once and for all."[27]

In an earlier work Crone had come to a similar conclusion regarding the separation of religion and the state, but as part of a more ambitious and more radical argument.[28] The tribal basis of the state having finally been laid to rest with the ʿAbbāsid revolution, there was, it is argued, nothing on which to build the legitimacy of the ʿAbbāsid state. Muslims lacked any traditions of statehood; the *sharīʿa*'s vision of politics was tribal; and the ʿulamāʾ, who constructed that vision, would have nothing to do with, nor even accept the legitimacy of, the state. Early ʿAbbāsid efforts to create a legitimating ideology thus proved abortive as also did efforts to create supporting institutions. Within a hundred years the state had been taken over by slave soldiers, and the divorce of religion and polity, society and state, was finalized. However, it is pointed out, "for all its agony the divorce was also a source of great relief to the Sunnī world. The state had ceased to lay claim to religious authority, so that for the *ʿulamāʾ* it was no longer a competitor, and its very presence soon became sporadic."[29]

Besides the broad-based interpretive studies reviewed above, important work has been done on various aspects of ʿAbbāsid culture and society, and on certain religious and political trends of the early ʿAbbāsid period. Though many lacunae continue to persist in the study of this crucial period of Islamic history and thought, the work of Cahen, Watt, Sharon, Halm, van Ess, Modarressi, and Amir-Moezzi on various aspects of Shīʿism,[30] on the *zanādiqa* by Melhem Chokr

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[26] Ibid., p. 93.

[27] Ibid., p. 96.

[28] P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The evolution of the medieval polity* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 61–91.

[29] Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, p. 85. Cf. ibid., p. 88: "Intellectually, it is the very totality of the disjunction between the exponents of state and religion that explains why the relationship between the two could come to be seen even by the medieval Muslims as a symbiosis: once the divorce was finalized, there was nothing to obstruct an improvement in the relationship between the divorcees."

[30] C. Cahen, "Points de vue sur la 'revolution 'abbaside'", *Revue Historique*, CCXXX (1963), pp. 295–338; W.M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973); van Ess, *Th&G*, I, pp. 233–403 and passim, II, pp. 423–29, 716–18 and passim, III, pp. 10–19, 28–30 and passim; H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis: Die extreme Schīʿa und die ʿAlawiten* (Zurich, 1982); idem, *Shīʿism* (Edinburgh, 1991); H. Modarressi, *Crisis*

and earlier scholars,[31] on Iranian "extremist" revolts of the early ʿAbbāsid period by Sadighi and Daniel,[32] and on ʿAbbāsid court ceremonial, regnal titles, and religious symbolism by Sourdel, Lewis, al-Dūrī, Lassner and others[33] is all fundamental to any understanding of religion and politics under the early ʿAbbāsids and in early Islam generally. Several studies of the 'ulamā' and their milieu have also been attempted since Patton's work on Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal a hundred years ago,[34] though in view both of the importance of the subject and the source materials which can be utilized for its study (see the following section), the progress in this area has been surprisingly slow.[35] The work done on the judges and the judiciary in the Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid periods is noteworthy, however, if still sparse. Emile Tyan's study of judicial administration remains the standard work, but more recently Raif Khoury, Gerhard Conrad and other scholars have also contributed significantly to the history of judicial practice and schools of law in the first centuries of Islam.[36]

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and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shiʿite Islam (Princeton, 1993); M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: The sources of esotericism in Islam* (Albany, 1994).

[31] M. Chokr, *Zandaqa et zindīqs en Islam au second siècle de l'hégire* (Damascus, 1993). Also see van Ess, *Th&G*, I, pp. 416–56, II, pp. 4–41. For other references, see II.4, below.

[32] G.H. Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens au II^e^ et au III^e^ siècles de l'hégire* (Paris, 1938); Daniel, Khurasan.

[33] D. Sourdel, "Questions de ceremonial 'abbaside", *REI*, XXVIII (1960), pp. 121–48; B. Lewis, "The Regnal Titles of the First Abbasid Caliphs" in *Dr. Zakir Husain Presentation Volume* (New Delhi, 1968), pp. 13–22; ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī, "al-Fikra al-mahdiyya bayna'l-daʿwa al-ʿAbbāsiyya waʾl-ʿaṣr al-ʿAbbāsī al-awwal", in W. al-Qāḍī, ed., *Studia Arabica et Islamica: Festschrift for Iḥsān ʿAbbās* (Beirut, 1981), pp. 21–32; Lassner, *Shaping of ʿAbbasid Rule*. Also see P. Sanders, *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany, 1994).

[34] W.M. Patton, *Aḥmed ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna* (Leiden, 1897).

[35] Some of these source materials have been examined by M.D. Aḥmad, *Muslim Education and the Scholars' Social Status up to the 5th century Muslim era in the light of Taʾrikh Baghdād* (Zurich, 1968), and M. Abiad, *Culture et education Arabo-Islamiques au Šām pendant les trois premiers siècles de l'Islam, d'après Taʾrīḫ Madīnat Dimašq d'Ibn ʿAsākir (499/1105–571/1176)* (Damascus, 1981). For another perspective on the 'ulamā', see H.J. Cohen, "The Economic Background and the Secular Occupations of Muslim Jurisprudents and Traditionists in the Classical Period of Islam (until the middle of the eleventh century)", *JESHO*, XIII (1970), pp. 16–61.

[36] E. Tyan, *Histoire de l'organisation judiciare en pays d'Islam* (Paris, 1938–43, repr. 1960); R.G. Khoury, *ʿAbdallāh ibn Lahīʿa* (Wiesbaden, 1986); G. Conrad, *Die Qudāt Dimašq und der Maḍhab al-Auzāʿī: Materialen zur syrischen Rechtsgeschichte* (Beirut, 1994). Also see H.F.S. Kasassebeh, "The Office of Qāḍī in the Early ʿAbbāsid Caliphate (132–247/750–861)", Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1990; N. Tsafrir, "The Spread of the Ḥanafī School in the Western Regions of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate up to the End of the Third Century A.H.", Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1993.

The findings of this study will frequently be seen to be at variance with some of those towards which many earlier works have pointed: that the early 'Abbāsid caliphs (except al-Ma'mūn) enjoyed or claimed any religious authority over and above the 'ulamā' is not as evident to this writer as it seems to be to the authors of *God's Caliph*; that the caliph's participation in religious matters was effectively terminated with the failure of the *Miḥna*, as is argued, *inter alia*, by Lapidus, is a view which seems to require considerable revision; so does Nagel's view that the proto-Sunnī 'ulamā' were irrevocably hostile to the 'Abbāsids until the failure of the *Miḥna*. These and other disagreements, major as well as minor, will shape our arguments here, but so also will the effort to build on and supplement the many insights that the work of these scholars provide into the history of early Islam.

This study demonstrates the deep involvement of the early 'Abbāsids in the religious life of the times. It explores various hitherto much neglected or misunderstood facets of the caliphs' religious policies in relation to the emergence of the proto-Sunnī religious elite, and suggests how the 'Abbāsids were part of the processes which went into the making of early Sunnism. Some of the other, more specific arguments of this book are worth outlining here. I shall argue that the caliphs gradually came to align themselves with the proto-Sunnī trends and that this development seems to have crystallized in the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (chapter II). A rudimentary pattern of state-'ulamā' relations begins to emerge by that time. One of the most striking things about this relationship is that the caliph's own view of his position and function had much in common with what contemporary religious scholars were also prescribing for him. al-Ma'mūn diverged from this pattern with his claims to religious authority over and above the 'ulamā', claims which are scarcely attested for his predecessors. The significance of the latter point is that al-Ma'mūn's *Miḥna* ought to be seen not as the culmination of a struggle over religious authority between the caliphs and the 'ulamā', but only as an interregnum which disturbed but did not destroy, and in its failure only reaffirmed, the earlier pattern of state-'ulamā' relations. Nor should the *Miḥna* be seen as bringing an end to the caliphs' involvement in religious life and as finally marking the separation of religion and politics in Islam. Rather, the caliphs not only continued to be actively involved in matters of law and religious life, that was also precisely what many a religious scholar expected them to do. In chapter III, I hope to suggest, in short, that there is much in our view of the *Miḥna*, of the caliphs' involvement

in religious life, and of religion and politics under the early ʿAbbāsids, which needs to be seriously reconsidered.

The picture which emerges from this study of religion and politics reveals a pattern of collaboration between the caliphs and the ʿulamāʾ, not a separation or divorce between them. Elaborate, multi-faceted channels of patronage characterized and defined the relations of the caliphs with the scholars. Religious patronage is a little studied problem in the history of early Islam in general, and it is therefore worth studying in its own right. But, for our purposes, the significance of this patronage lies primarily in the identity of those who benefitted from it: as chapter IV will show at some length, these were scholars associated with the articulation of proto-Sunnī trends. This patronage demonstrates how ʿAbbāsid support for these scholars was expressed, and what this support may have meant to them. But there were many other expressions of the caliphs' support for proto-Sunnī scholars and their viewpoints as well, and some of these will be discussed in chapter V. The major concern of that chapter is to show two other things, however: first, that while several scholars might have wished to have nothing to do with the ruling elite, and some probably remained very cynical about the caliphs' religious rhetoric, the proto-Sunnī sentiment was in general favourable towards the ʿAbbāsids; second, that there was a significant concordance in the interests of the caliphs and the emergent proto-Sunnī elite. This convergence helps explain not only why the latter came to be supportive of the regime but also, I would argue, why it was the proto-Sunnīs with whom the early ʿAbbāsids came to identify in the first place.

I.3. *The Sources: A Survey*

The classical and medieval Islamic sources are rich in materials pertaining to religious and intellectual life in the early ʿAbbāsid period. The religious concerns and policies of the caliphs, their relationship with and patronage of the ʿulamāʾ, and the latter's attitudes towards the caliphs are among problems which, however, are nowhere systematically addressed in them. Yet the materials which comprise these sources not only raise many significant questions which invite systematic reflection, they also contain numerous indications which point towards at least tentative answers. Such indications are scattered over a vast corpus of literature, and in principle, at least, *all* classical and

medieval Islamic texts with any bearing on the early ʿAbbāsid period are part of this corpus. Yet even as the nature of the subject to which this book is devoted requires that a wide range of sources be used, it also dictates that works of a certain genre, in particular the medieval biographical dictionaries, be used more extensively than certain other kinds of sources. In what follows, I describe the principal sources on which this study is based, as well as some of their noteworthy features. The conventional classification of these sources into different categories (which I follow here) is not arbitrary and has some analytical usefulness, but it should be noted that not only their contents but also some of their concerns can often overlap. Conversely, differences of form can also give a different context, nuance, or meaning to similar materials. The primary focus of this book is not historiographical, but it is only at one's own peril that one can ignore the literary strategies through which the materials comprised in our sources were preserved, transmitted, and sometimes transformed.

Chronicles and annals comprise one broad category of major importance. The texts which belong in this category range from "universal" histories (such as the *Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk* of al-Ṭabarī [d. 310/923])[37] to local histories focussing on particular cities (such as ʿUmar b. Shabba's (d. 264/877) *Taʾrīkh al-Madīna*,[38] Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's [d. 280/893] *Kitāb Baghdād*[39] and al-Azdī's [d. 334/946] *Taʾrīkh Mawṣil*),[40] or those organized around families of notables (the most important examples being al-Balādhurī's [d. 279/892] monumental *Ansāb al-ashrāf*[41] and the anonymous *Akhbār al-dawla*

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[37] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk*, ed. M.J. De Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879–1901). On al-Ṭabarī see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 322ff. (and ibid., pp. 303–38 for a general survey of "Welt- und Reichgeschichte"); F. Rosenthal, "General Introduction" to *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. I (Albany, 1989); C. Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue et théologie en Islam: l'exégèse coranique de Ṭabarī (m. 311/923)* (Paris, 1990); A.I. Tayob, "Islamic Historiography: al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk on the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad*", Ph.D. diss. Temple University, 1988. On the sources of his *Taʾrīkh* see Jawād ʿAlī's useful but incomplete "Mawārid taʾrīkh al-Ṭabarī", *Majallat al-majmaʿ al-ʿilmī al-ʿIrāqī*, I (1950), pp. 143–231, II (1951), pp. 135–90, III (1954), pp. 16–56, VIII (1961), pp. 425–36.

[38] ʿUmar b. Shabba, *Kitāb taʾrīkh al-Madīna al-munawwara*, ed. Fahīm Muhammad Shaltūt (Qumm, 1410 A.H.); Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 345f.

[39] Ibn Abi Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, *Kitāb Baghdād*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Cairo, 1949); Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 348f.

[40] Ed. ʿAlī Ḥabība (Cairo, 1967). Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 350, and ibid., pp. 339ff. on "Lokal- und Stadtgeschichte" in general.

[41] *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, III, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī (Wiesbaden, 1978), is devoted to "al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib wa waladuhu". Balādhurī does not go much beyond the time of Manṣūr, however; for the rather perfunctory reports which relate to, or include reference

al-ʿAbbāsiyya,[42] and perhaps also Iṣfahānī's [d. 356/967] *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*).[43] Such chronicles usually are composite works, which is to say that they are the work of compilers who in various ways drew on sources which themselves were often compilations of still earlier materials.

This character of the chronicles, and indeed of all classical compilations, suggests several things. One of the most significant of these is that a chronicle preserves materials which can be much earlier than the time to which the final compilation itself dates.[44] Even late compilations, be they chronicles or biographical dictionaries, frequently contain and may sometimes be the only source for early but lost materials. But if the *akhbār*, viz. the historical reports, traditions and anecdotes which comprise any given compilation, come from earlier sources, they are also subject to adaptation and reformulation at the hands of their successive transmitters, redactors, or final compilers.[45] This means that the attribution of a particular statement or the genuineness of an account cannot be accepted simply because a biographical dictionary or chronicle attributes it to a particular early figure or because it purports to come from a relatively early but no longer extant source.

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to the immediate successors of Manṣūr, see index, under the names of the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs. For a discussion of some of al-Balādhurī's sources (though with reference to an earlier volume concerned with the Umayyads), see K. Athamina, "The Sources of al-Balādhurī", *JSAI*, V (1984), pp. 237–32. On Balādhurī see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 320f.; *EI(2)*, s.v. (C.H. Becker and F. Rosenthal).

[42] On this work see E.L. Daniel, "The Anonymous 'History of the 'Abbāsid Family' and its Place in Islamic Historiography", *IJMES*, XIV (1982), pp. 419–34.

[43] Ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1949). On Iṣfahānī, see *EI(2)*, s.v. "Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī" (M. Nallino); *EIr*, s.v. (K. Abu Deeb); Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 378–82. On the sources of the *Maqātil* see S. Gunther, *Quellenuntersuchungen zu den Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn des Abu'l-Faraǧ Iṣfahānī (gest. 356/967)* (Zurich, 1991).

[44] Cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 323ff. (on al-Ṭabarī).

[45] On *akhbār*, their nature, function and transmission see S. Leder, "Authorship and Transmission in Unauthored Literature: The *akhbār* attributed to al-Haytham ibn 'Adī", *Oriens*, XXXI (1988), pp. 67–81; idem, "Features of the Novel in early Historiography: The downfall of Xālid al-Qasrī", *Oriens*, XXXII (1990), pp. 72–96; idem, "The Literary Use of Khabar", in A. Cameron and L.I. Conrad, *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, I: *Problems in the literary source material* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 277–315; and idem, *Das Korpus*. Leder argues that *akhbār* were "made up according to the author's imagination" and were subject to continuous reshaping by those who handled these materials: "Features of the Novel", passim; the quotation is from pp. 93f. For a similar argument about the reshaping of material, see Conrad, "Conquest of Arwād", passim, especially pp. 391ff. Much further work needs to be done, however, before this judgement can be said to characterize the Arabic historical tradition as a whole. On *akhbār*, see also T. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 42f., 61, 75ff. and passim.

Conversely, that a particular account has come to be preserved in a given source after having been transmitted through several channels, or that it has become embedded in a larger narrative does not in itself necessitate that it be viewed (unless that can be demonstrated) as fashioned by the whims of its transmitters or redactors. Insofar as such reshaping does occur, however, it is not only a function of the styles and vicissitudes of transmission but also of the very character of a historical text as a narrative.[46]

For as literary theorists like Hayden White and others have argued, *all* narrative is a "literary artifact" in that it imposes a structure, coherence, and meaning on events which "they do not possess as a mere sequence".[47] It is thus possible to fashion several competing narratives on the basis of the same set or sequence of events, and indeed a chronicle such as al-Ṭabarī's, but also collections of *ḥadīth* and other compilations from medieval Islam, often preserve multiple accounts of the same episode, with little or no effort to privilege one over the other. Consequently, it is not just the transmission of materials over a long period of time, or their inclusion in a variety of possible literary contexts, but also the very form of the narrative which gives them a meaning and coherence they would otherwise lack. In the latter respect, an account which has been transmitted through several channels is not materially different from one which comes directly from the "author", nor indeed are medieval constructions of empirical "reality" very different in that respect from more recent ones: all share the attribute and consequences of a narrative construction, and exhibit the variety of ways in which narrative allows the "facts" of a given episode to be ordered.[48] Yet the narrative form does not necessarily divest given materials of their historicity, it only alerts us that the materials in question could have been presented differently, with a

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[46] On the narrative structures of medieval Islamic historiography, a problem still little studied, see Albrecht Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A source-critical study*, tr. M. Bonner (Princeton, 1994), esp. pp. 173–218; R.S. Humphreys, "Qur'anic Myth and Narrative Structure in early Islamic Historiography", in F.M. Clover and R.S. Humphreys, eds., *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity* (Madison, 1989), p. 272, and generally pp. 271–90; B. Radtke, "Towards a Typology of Abbasid Universal Chronicles", *Occasional Papers of the School of ʿAbbāsid Studies*, III (1990), pp. 1–18.

[47] H. White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", in idem, *The Content of the Form: Narrative discourse and historical representation* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 1–27; the quotation is from p. 5; idem, "The Historical Text as a Literary Artifact" in White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in cultural criticism* (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 81–100.

[48] Cf. White, *Content of the Form*, pp. 1–57 and passim; idem, *Tropics of Discourse*, pp. 81–134.

different emphasis and with some other moral. The fact that multiple narratives of the same episode do frequently find their way even into the same chronicle suggests, moreover, that early materials did not have to be reshaped out of existence as the pre-condition of their survival in later works; the multiplicity of narratives may have provided for their survival—and in at least some cases, their survival *intact* from early to relatively late sources.[49]

The existence of multiple narratives, of variant traditions suggests, finally, that though a certain "consensus" may have been reached among particular groups of scholars about what was worth remembering, and how,[50] it did not result in the elimination of variants. Classical works of history enshrine *ikhtilāf* no less than do works of law. Again, competing versions may not lead us to the discovery of what "really" happened, but they do provide an intimate guide of how the past was perceived, imagined, and represented. In the emergence of Sunnism, at least, the imagination and representation of the past was no less, if not more, important than was the "reality" of that past itself. This point deserves a brief illustration.

The *Ta'rīkh al-Madīna* by 'Umar b. Shabba (d. 264/877) is an important history of the "city of the Prophet". The wealth of materials it contains are in general poorly organized, and the book seems to be incomplete in its extant form. But one thing stands out in particular: this work is not a mere compendium of information on early Islamic Medina but a contribution to the controversies surrounding the early history of Islam in the first centuries. The structure of the work is itself suggestive. *Akhbār* on various aspects of the career of the Prophet are followed by a detailed treatment of the caliphate of 'Umar and 'Uthmān. The role of Abū Bakr in this material is not very much more than to mark the transition from the Prophet

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[49] Leder, *Das Korpus*, makes a strong case for the continuous shaping of historical materials attributed to al-Haytham b. 'Adī in the course of their transmission. For a more optimistic view of the value of later compilations in retrieving early materials, see R.G. Khoury, "L'importance de l'*Iṣāba* d'Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī pour l'étude de la littérature arabe des premiers siècles islamiques, vue à travers l'exemple des ouvres d''Abdallāh ibn al-Mubārak (118/736–181/797)", *SI*, XLII (1975), pp. 115–6; idem, "Importance et authenticité des textes de *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'* d'Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī", *SI*, XLVI (1977), pp. 73–113. Also see Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, pp. 134–60.

[50] On this notion of historiographical consensus (whose importance should not however be exaggerated), see the observations of Conrad, "The Conquest of Arwād", p. 392; C. Cahen, "History and Historians", in M.J.L. Young et al., eds., *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Religion, learning, and science in the 'Abbāsid period* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 196ff.; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, pp. 10f.

to 'Umar,[51] while nearly half of the entire work (two out of four volumes) is devoted to 'Uthmān and controversies arising from his murder. 'Alī is not discussed here as caliph, but the question of his culpability in 'Uthmān's murder is given extensive attention, and though there is a large sampling of traditions both favourable and hostile to him, the former seem to outweigh the latter.[52]

This book would not qualify as a statement of the developed proto-Sunnī world view, say, of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's later years: it gives rather too little attention to Abū Bakr and seems to end with 'Uthmān without treating of 'Alī as his legitimate successor. Not everyone even among the proto-Sunnīs subscribed, of course, to Ibn Ḥanbal's formulation on the rectitude of all four of the first caliphs; even after his time, some took only the first three to have been legitimate.[53] But we must also consider that the materials gathered by Ibn Shabba go back to earlier generations than his, and we do not know when in his life the work under consideration was composed: that is, this work reflects a stage, or one strand, in the evolving proto-Sunnī view, but may not be indicative of even Ibn Shabba's final position on the matter. Even so, many of the ingredients of the proto-Sunnī world view are here, the most important of which are the effort to exonerate 'Alī as well as other Companions of the Prophet from responsibility for the first *fitna*, a firm advocacy of the legitimacy and rectitude of 'Uthmān, and of the continuing righteousness of the community.[54] Nor, finally, are the materials gathered in this work devoid of traditions favourable to the ruling house. Among the many appearances al-'Abbās—the uncle of the Prophet and founder of the 'Abbāsid family—makes in Ibn Shabba's *Ta'rīkh*, some depict him, for instance, as mediating in an early dispute between 'Uthmān and 'Alī;[55] and

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[51] Cf. Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rīkh*, II, pp. 665–73.

[52] For some examples of reports hostile to 'Alī, see ibid., IV, pp. 1154f., 1166ff., 1197f., etc; for reports favourable to him, see for instance ibid., IV, pp. 1219ff., 1228ff., 1258–69, and passim.

[53] See chapter II, below.

[54] Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh*, IV, passim. Retrospective discussions of the legal implications of this (or any other) *fitna*, and of the necessity for the community to continue its ritual observances, are strikingly illustrated by 'Uthmān's insistence that congregational prayers be performed even if the imām (that is, himself) was besieged and even if it was a matter of praying with the rebels. Ibid., IV, pp. 1215–17. Note that one of the those who figures in the *isnād*s of the latter traditions is the noted Syrian jurist al-Awzā'ī (d. 157/774). On him and his *madhhab*, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 516f.; G. Conrad, *Die Quḍāt Dimašq.*

[55] Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh*, III, pp. 1045ff. It is not without interest to note that one of those through whom this material is transmitted is Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798), the chief *qāḍī* of the caliph Hārn al-Rashīd. On him, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 419–21; also see III.3.3, below.

later, ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās is seen warning ʿAlī against the consequences of becoming embroiled in the *fitna*.[56]

Ibn Shabba's *Taʾrīkh* tells us little about the Medina of ʿUthmān's day; but it sheds much light on the evolution of proto-Sunnī attitudes, and on how the early history of Islam was viewed.[57] Significantly, despite Ibn Shabba's apparent effort to favour a particular vision of early Islam (and not every chronicler privileged one account over another, as noted earlier), traditions which contradict that vision (for example, by presenting ʿAlī in less than favourable light) continue to subsist together with those which serve to promote the compiler's agenda. This work is thus not just a guide to an evolving position, but also to many of those which dissented from it.

There are no firm boundaries between *akhbār* and *ḥadīth*. Ibn Shabba's *Taʾrīkh* comprises both, as indeed do many other chronicles. In al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-ashrāf* or al-Fasawī's (d. 277/890) *Kitāb al-maʿrifa waʾl-taʾrīkh*—an important early work which combines features of a chronicle with those of a biographical dictionary—the sections which are devoted to al-ʿAbbās and to his son ʿAbdallāh contain a cascade of *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* which emphasize their kinship with the Prophet, extol their piety and sagacity, and, not least, prognosticate the political fortunes of their descendants.[58] Again, such traditions tell us little about al-ʿAbbās or his son, but much about the legitimist concerns of the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs. On the other hand, early collections of *ḥadīth* are of crucial importance not only for the evolution of proto-Sunnī attitudes, but also for many remnants of pro-ʿAbbāsid and many other ideological concerns and controversies. As Goldziher showed, *ḥadīth* was a major instrument of propagating or refuting a viewpoint, and it is scarcely surprising that such efforts have left numerous traces.

In general, early collections of *ḥadīth* illuminate much about the complex evolution of attitudes towards the more remote, but also more contested, past of Islam's first generations. But inasmuch as at least some of the *muḥaddithūn* wrote "from the centre of the action",[59]

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[56] Ibn Shabba, *Taʾrīkh*, IV, pp. 1127f.; also cf. ibid., IV, pp. 1255f.

[57] For other examples of controversies over the events and personalities of early Islam, see Petersen, *ʿAlī and Muʿāwiyah*; D.A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The legacy of ʿA'isha bint Abi Bakr* (New York, 1994).

[58] al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, III, pp. 1–22 (al-ʿAbbās), 27–55 (Ibn ʿAbbās); al-Fasawī, *Kitāb al-maʿrifa waʾl-taʾrīkh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿUmarī (Medina, 1410 A.H.), I, pp. 493–542.

[59] I am indebted for this phrase to Nancy F. Partner, "Historicity in an Age of Reality-

so to speak, they may also be taken as contributing to that evolution. The section devoted to the *maghāzī*, or the career and campaigns of the Prophet, in Ibn Abī Shayba's (d. 235/849) *Muṣannaf*, for instance, also contains traditions on the successors of the Prophet. It is significant that besides the Prophet he limits himself to only the first four caliphs after him and orders his materials in accordance with the sequence of their succession which to many proto-Sunnīs defined as well the hierarchy of their religious merit. A certain concordance between the content of this material and the sequential form in which it is presented here is striking, and given Ibn Abī Shayba's proto-Sunnī affiliations, it is scarcely fortuitous. Ibn Abī Shayba's materials on the *maghāzī* also contain traditions favourable to al-ʿAbbās, which may indicate something not only about the political affiliations of this traditionist but perhaps also suggest, more generally (as do similar examples noted earlier), that the shaping of al-ʿAbbās' image in a certain fashion was part of the way in which the image of early Islam as a whole was shaped.[60]

In addition to chronicles and early collections of *ḥadīth*, works of a juristic or doctrinal interest are also of direct relevance to the subject of this book. The *Kitāb al-kharāj* of the Ḥanafī chief *qāḍī* Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798), for instance, is concerned not only with matters of fiscal and other departments of administration, but also, as I will show later in this study, with questions of the caliph's function and role, and not least, with ʿAbbāsid legitimism.[61] Early juristic works dealing with problems pertaining to holy war and military administration on the frontier, of which Abū Isḥāq al-Fazārī's (d. 186/802) *Kitāb al-siyar* is one example, offer valuable testimony to an intimate interaction between scholars and caliphal officials.[62] The numerous occasions when the scholars' opinion is cited on how the "imām" (probably signifying governor/military commander in this context)[63] ought to handle the

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Fictions", in F. Ankersmit and H. Kellner, *A New Philosophy of History* (Chicago, 1995), p. 29, where it refers to the classical historians of Greece and Rome.

[60] On Ibn Abī Shayba, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 108f.; M.Q. Zaman, "*Maghāzī* and the *Muḥaddithūn*: Reconsidering the treatment of 'historical' materials in early collections of Ḥadith", *IJMES*, XXVIII (1996), pp. 1–18, esp. p. 11 (on the proto-Sunnī concerns of his *maghāzī*) and pp. 7f. (on his pro-ʿAbbās traditions).

[61] See III.3.3, below.

[62] Abū Isḥāq al-Fazārī, *Kitāb al-siyar*, ed. Fārūq Ḥammāda (Beirut, 1987).

[63] Cf. N. Calder, "The Significance of the Term *Imām* in Early Islamic Jurisprudence", *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften*, ed. F. Sezgin, I (Frankfurt, 1984), pp. 263f.

various situations arising on the frontier are suggestive of the growing authority of legal specialists. The action of the "imam" is being constantly evaluated here, or, conversely, answers are provided to queries many of which probably came from military commanders themselves. Some of these questions and answers are no doubt hypothetical, but all of them can scarcely be regarded as such. These instances recall caliphal directives to their governors to follow the advice of religious scholars.[64] A vibrant sense of the jurists' concern to regulate the affairs of the state according to the religious law, even as that law is itself in the process of articulation, clearly comes across in al-Fazārī's *Siyar*, as indeed it does in Abū Yūsuf's *Kharāj*. This concern is anything but evocative of a situation in which the religious scholars were supposedly busy separating religion from the state, divorcing themselves from politics and the political elite.

Yet another category of sources comprises *firaq* or "heresiographical" literature. The relentless proliferation of sects depicted in works of this genre is too schematized (often transparently so) to be very trustworthy, though that is not to say that religious groups did not exhibit chronic fissiparous tendencies. Nor does the *firaq* literature give a very clear sense of how religio-political doctrines and groups really *developed in history*, as opposed to simply emerging full-blown on the historical scene where they are then shown to subsist thereafter.[65] It has also been argued that "several different polemical strategies [are at work] within any standard *firaq* tradition, and within any one text participating in it."[66] This judgement can, of course, be extended to many a chronicle and to works of other genres; like accounts comprised in them, those of the *firaq* works are also quite often suspect. Even so, individual reports cannot be deemed fictitious simply because they are preserved in a schematic framework or are presented alongside other traditions which are demonstrably tendentious. Many of the *firaq* works are especially valuable because they often preserve earlier sources which are otherwise lost. The *Kitāb firaq al-Shī'a* of al-Nawbakhtī (d. ca. 300/912)[67] and the *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa'l-firaq*

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[64] See III.3.4, below.

[65] Cf. W.M. Watt, *Formative Period*, p. 3, and generally pp. 1ff. for some of the assumptions which inform *firaq* works.

[66] K. Lewinstein, "The Azāriqa in Islamic Heresiography", *BSOAS*, LIV (1991), p. 268. Also see idem, "Making and Unmaking a Sect: the heresiographers and the Ṣufriyya", *SI*, LXXXVI (1992), pp. 75–96.

[67] Ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931); Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 539f.; *EI(2)*, s.v. (J.L. Kraemer).

of Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh al-Qummī (d. 301/914)[68] are partly based, for instance, on a heresiographical work which may have been composed towards the end of the second century and probably during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd.[69]

Islamic heresiography also exemplifies that "most archaic and pervasive of genres", the list,[70] in terms of which sects and sub-sects are ranged, systematized, compared, and by an almost compulsive logic, even brought into being.[71] As Steven Wasserstrom has argued, heresiographical lists are an exercise not so much in comparative religion as in self-definition, in defining "us" against "them".[72] If the materials in some of the *firaq* works go back to the early 'Abbāsid period, as suggested by Madelung, then we should have at least some materials which are not far removed in time from religious trends and attitudes which, however schematically, they purport to describe. But what is no less important, we may also have an illustration here of how religious identities were imagined, forged and stabilized through the form of the list—in which many of the *firaq* materials were preserved—as no doubt through other techniques.

The making or strengthening of religious identities (among other things) through the literary medium of the list—a medium which lent itself extremely well to defining, classifying, variously characterizing and comparing the "other", and in doing so, defining oneself and the "true" doctrines one stood for—was, of course, not peculiar to works of *firaq*. Literary anthologies, themselves a sophisticated medium of "construct[ing] a tradition", as Thomas Wilson has shown in his study of Confucian anthologies, also made much creative use of the list form.[73] For instance, in his *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*—a wide-ranging anthology of knowledge he considered to be essential for cultural refinement—Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) has organized most of his materials in the form of elaborate lists: of Prophets prior to Muḥammad, of

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[68] Ed. Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr (Tehran, 1963); Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 538.

[69] See W. Madelung, "Bermerkungen zur imamitischen Firaq-Literatur", *Der Islam*, XLIII (1967), pp. 37–52.

[70] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Sacred Persistence: Toward a redescription of canon", in idem, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago, 1982), p. 44.

[71] On the list as a literary form in early Islamic historiography, see Noth, *Arabic Historical Tradition*, pp. 96–104.

[72] Cf. S. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The problem of symbiosis under early Islam* (Princeton, 1995), pp. 96ff.

[73] T.A. Wilson, *Genealogy of the Way: The construction and uses of the Confucian tradition in late imperial China* (Stanford, 1995), p. 6.

prominent Companions of the Prophet and their descendants—a list which begins with his four immediate successors who are described here in sequence,—of caliphs from Muʿāwiya (r. 41/661–60/680) to al-Muʿtamid (r. 256/870–279/892), notables and notable rebels, prominent members of the generation following the Companions (*tābiʿūn*), the *aṣḥāb al-raʾy*, the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, the Qurʾān-reciters, of sects and some of those who belonged to them, and so forth.[74] Ibn Qutayba's proclivities for the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* are manifest in his various writings, above all in the *Taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*.[75] In the *Kitāb al-maʿārif*, however, he does not expressly take a position in their favour. Yet the anthology and list-forms allow him to do more than blandly state his own preferences. In an age when there was no census, no public opinion polls, the rhetoric of comparative lists could be extremely potent. To take only one example, Ibn Qutayba's resolution of the rivalry between the early jurists, the *aṣḥāb al-raʾy* whom the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* accused of relying excessively on their reason, and the latter, is simple and forceful: his list of the *aṣḥāb al-raʾy* has only nine entries; that of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* ninety-eight. The lists here are as effective a means as one might imagine of showing which of the two sides had the most scholars and hence mattered most in the community. Implicitly, the lists lay claim to a certain consensus in favour of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* and, by the same token, *against* the other group.[76]

The lists in Ibn Qutayba's anthology have the form and features of many an early biographical dictionary. On the other hand, many works of the latter genre came to have the properties of an anthology—for example, a sampling of anecdotes concerning the subject of

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[74] Ibn Qutayba, *al-Maʿārif*, ed. Tharwat ʿUkāsha (Cairo, 1960). On this anthologist and littérateur, see *EI(2)*, s.v. "Ibn Ḳutayba" (G. Lecomte), where he is considered to be "an eminent representative, if not the exclusive spokesman, of the *ahl al-sunna waʾl-djamāʿa*".

[75] Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth* (Cairo, 1326 A.H.).

[76] Ibn Qutayba, *al-Maʿārif*, pp. 494–500 (*aṣḥāb al-raʾy*), 501–27 (*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*). Compare Calder, *Studies*, p. 187: "Expressly articulated in the *Mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*, the distaste [for *fiqh*] is also evident in the organization of biographical material in the *Maʿārif*. There, the three sequent sections on Successors (*tābiʿūn*), jurists (*ahl al-raʾy*), and transmitters (*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*) are so organized as to mark the deviation of the jurists from the tradition. Transmission was from the Successors to the transmitters; the jurists, dominated by *raʾy*, failed to take up and pass on the cultural baton." But Calder exaggerates. It is noteworthy that Ibn Qutayba lists Sufyān al-Thawrī and Mālik b. Anas, both highly respected among scholars of *ḥadīth*, as jurists rather than "transmitters" (as Calder calls them). That Ibn Qutayba meant to emphasize the importance of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* does not therefore mean that he was uniformly dismissive of those he took to be jurists.

a biographical notice, his teachers and students, the traditions transmitted by him. Formal distinctions or similarities between anthology and biographical dictionary need not detain us here, but as the classic form of *Listenwissenschaft* in Islam, the genre of the biographical dictionary merits a brief discussion.[77] The purpose here is not to examine the origins and history of this genre, but only to consider some of those features which make it the most important source for any study of the emergence, attitudes and activities of the religious scholars in early Islam or, for that matter—depending on the scope and concerns of a biographical dictionary—for any other period of Islamic history.

Given that "[a]lmost any category, however exotic or limited, could generate at least the beginnings of a list",[78] biographical dictionaries could be organized according to various criteria. The most important category of persons with which these works dealt was neither exotic nor limited, however, but represented rather a major concern during the first centuries of Islam and later: the need to know about those who narrated traditions from or about the Prophet, his Companions, and their successors. One of the earliest extant biographical dictionaries, the *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* of Muḥammad b. Sa'd (d. 230/845), is ordered on the principle of *al-sābiqiyya li'l-Islām*: it begins with the Prophet Muḥammad, then describes the leading figures of the first generations of Islam in terms of their proximity or distance from the time of the Prophet and of the different regions of the empire where they settled, and comes down to the time of the scholars contemporary with the compiler of this information.[79] As Michael Cooperson has observed, there is a certain concordance between the content of this and many other biographical dictionaries and their

[77] For the term *Listenwissenschaft*, see Smith, *Imagining Religion*, pp. 47f. (following Albrect Alt, "Die Weisheit Salamos", *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, LXXVI [1951], pp. 139–44); Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, pp. 98f. On biographical dictionaries see H.A.R. Gibb, "Islamic Biographical Literature", in B. Lewis and P.M. Holt, eds., *Historians of the Middle East* (London, 1962), pp. 54–58; R.W. Bulliet, "A Quantitative Approach to Medieval Muslim Biographical Dictionaries", *JESHO*, XIII (1970), pp. 95–111; M.J.L. Young, "Arabic Biographical Writing" in *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Religion, learning and science in the 'Abbāsid period*, pp. 168–87; Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, pp. 204–10; Michael Cooperson, "The Heirs of the Prophets in Classical Arabic Biography", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1994. For a survey of the ways biographical literature has been used by modem scholars, see Humphreys, *Islamic History*, pp. 188ff.

[78] Noth, *Arabic Historical Tradition*, p. 97.

[79] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (Beirut, 1985); Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 300f.; I. Hafsi, "Recherches sur le genre *Ṭabaqāt*", *Arabica*, XXIII (1976), pp. 242ff.; on *ṭabaqāt* in general, see ibid., pp. 227–65, XXIV (1977), pp. 1–41, 150–86.

form or structure: a scholar's status is defined by where his name is computed in the *ṭabaqāt* quite as much as by a description (where one is given) of his personal credentials as a transmitter or scholar.[80] His credentials, in turn, are determined in such works by reference to those he met and narrated *ḥadīth* from, the scholars he associated with among his contemporaries, and how he compares to them or what they thought of him. Not only is a community of scholars thereby defined and ranked, a particular view of early Islamic history—with the Prophet and his Companions at the apex of the structure of religious authority yet connected to subsequent generations through a variety of channels—is also reinforced through this genre. The list is only one among several different literary forms and techniques biographical dictionaries employ, but as the foregoing suggests it is basic not only to the structure of these works but also to many of their purposes.

There are many indications that scholars of the early ʿAbbāsid period were already engaged in making lists of their fellow scholars and predecessors, preserving what they took to be important details of their scholarly career, and recording what some scholars said about others. Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt* are, of course, one among several early testimonies to this effort. Many other proto-Sunnī scholars who will appear frequently in the following pages—Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776), Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn (d. 233/847), Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), for instance—are known also for being much concerned with examining the credentials of other scholars, and the extant works of Ibn Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn abundantly testify to this activity.[81] Such works are not only repositories of the attitudes and opinions of the scholars active in the early ʿAbbāsid society. As lists of those who are reliable or authoritative and those who are not, they, as well as materials in even later biographical dictionaries (themselves drawn from earlier writings), are also an intimate guide to the complex processes involved in the definition of group identities and the construction of religious boundaries in the early ʿAbbāsid period.[82]

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[80] Cooperson, "Heirs of the Prophets", pp. 56ff. On the notion of the "resemblance of form and content in the historical text", see F.R. Ankersmit, "Statements, Texts and Pictures", in Ankersmit and Kellner, *A New Philosophy of History*, pp. 233ff.

[81] Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn, *al-Taʾrīkh*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Nūr Sayf, *Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn wa kitābuhu al-taʾrīkh* (Mecca, 1979); Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-ʿilal wa maʿrifat al-rijāl*, ed. Waṣī Allāh b. Muḥammad ʿAbbās (Beirut, 1988). For his part, Shuʿba is said to have been "the first to investigate the affairs of the traditionist (*amr al-muḥaddithīn*) in Iraq". Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-thiqāt* (Haydarabad, 1973–82), VI, p. 446.

[82] Juynboll has drawn attention to the tendency of many a biographical notice to contain

I.4. *The Sources: Constraints and Possibilities*

The richness and variety of the materials which have been shown in the foregoing to have some bearing on the subject of this book—the emergence of the proto-Sunnī religious elite in the early ʿAbbāsid period—does not obscure the many problems these materials raise. I have already mentioned some of these: uncertainties about whether or how early texts may have been transformed in the course of their transmission through various channels, and even in being supposedly preserved in later compilations, the fact that several competing narratives often purport to describe the same sequence of events, and so forth. But it has also been observed that the latter is a problem with which *all* historical understanding must grapple for it is not peculiar to early Islam or the medieval chronicles but is implicit in the very nature of the historical text as narrative. Nor is this a problem which necessarily inhibits historical understanding. We may not be able to discover the indubitable historical "fact" or demonstrate the "truth" of a narrative, but our materials do provide ample evidence of how particular events and attitudes were represented and remembered. This is obviously not as good as having access to the "fact" itself, but we can at least ask what interests were served in representing the past in one way rather than another or in the effort by some to reconcile different representations. Close attention to the

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contradictory evaluations of the same scholar, especially when he is compared to other scholars. Thus, "transmitter A, compared with B in A's *tarjama*, is awarded the first prize, while B is preferred to A in B's *tarjama*." (Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, p. 163 n. 4; idem, "On the Origins of Arabic Prose: reflections on authenticity", in G.H.A. Juynboll, ed., *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* [Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1982], p. 172.) Juynboll concludes therefore that "even the experts did not know" (ibid., p. 172.), which in some cases at least must have been the case. But note that the sort of contradictory evaluations he cites are especially characteristic of a work like Ibn Ḥajar's *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* which (like those of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Ibn ʿAsākir and many others: see the bibliography) is a monumental feat of synthesis, but not, by its very nature and scope, of great coherence or consistency. The countless earlier writings of the genre on which it draws should not be supposed to be necessarily quite as contradictory in evaluating the credentials of fellow scholars as Ibn Ḥajar's work seems to be. The *Taʾrīkh* of Yahyā b. Maʿīn is, for instance, far less "complete" in its evaluations than Ibn Ḥajar's *Tahdhīb*, but it is also much less contradictory. Ibn Maʿīn's *Taʾrīkh* records *his* view on the reliability or unreliability of particular scholars or their standing relative to each other, Ibn Ḥajar records the views of a host of experts of whom Ibn Maʿīn is only one, which means that despite his efforts at synthesis glaring inconsistencies remain. What these indicate is not so much that "even the experts did not know" as that the experts differed in their evaluations and that later works of synthesis deemed such evaluations, as well as the differences in them, sufficiently important to preserve them.

rhetoric of representation is especially apposite when it involves some aspect of the controversies surrounding early Islam, for as the following chapter will show more fully, such controversies were central to the development of proto-Sunnī trends. The engagement of early ʿAbbāsid scholars with these controversies, in *ḥadīth*, historiography, juristic literature, or in whatever is otherwise reported of their opinions, obviously tells us little about early Islam itself, but much about these scholars and their emerging world view.

This world view concerned not only the past, however, but also the present, not just the status of the early figures of Islamic history but also the authority of later religious scholars. The latter problem also raises questions of representation which merit some consideration here.

It is reported that when Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn died in Medina in the days of the Ḥajj (233/847), the Prophet's bedstead (*sarīr*) was brought out for his body to be carried on it.[83] There is no compelling reason to doubt that this incident did take place: it may have been a way in which the local community, and possibly the local officials, wanted to show their respect to a distinguished scholar; Medina was, after all, the self-conscious home of *sunna*, and it would be an apt finale to this scholar's lifetime of devotion to *ḥadīth* to have him carried on the Prophet's *sarīr*. Nor, of course, should the significance of religious relics be underestimated.[84] Yet, for all this, it is possible to be sceptical about this report: it may represent no more than an effort to enhance Ibn Maʿīn's image by showing how well regarded he was at the time of his death. But even if this report is fictitious, which it need not be, it still shows how the scholar's image was constructed, and that probably not long after his death (the source of this report is Abu'l-Faḍl al-ʿAbbās b. Muḥammad b. Ḥātim al-Dūrī, who transmitted from Ibn Maʿīn the materials which comprise his *Taʾrīkh*).[85]

This image of their scholars' authority and influence was crucial to the proto-Sunnīs, as we have observed earlier with reference to Ibn

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[83] Ibn Maʿīn, *Taʾrīkh*, III, p. 68.

[84] Cf. P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 78, 88ff.

[85] Cf. too the representation of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's image and of the authority of religious scholars in two works apparently written not long after the *Miḥna* by men close to him: Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 265/878), *Sīrat al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Fu'ād ʿAbd al-Munʿim Aḥmad (Alexandria, 1981); Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq b. Ḥanbal (d. 273/1886), *Dhikr miḥnat al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Muḥammad Naghash (Cairo, 1977). The former was Ibn Ḥanbal's son, the latter his nephew. For a brief discussion of these works, see III.4.1, below.

Qutayba's anthology. In a society where different groups were competing for influence, it was necessary to demonstrate that influence in sundry ways. Even if the foregoing report tells us nothing else, then, it illustrates, at the very least, a way in which the scholar's authority was represented, even constructed. Biographical dictionaries abound in such images of religious authority, and though the historicity of each report must be examined separately, they would not cease to be important as *images*, created not just to convey a certain world view but perhaps also to help construct it.

These images, and much other information and commentary on individuals and events, often take the form of anecdotes. I do not propose to analyze the literary significance or structure of the anecdote here, nor of the *khabar* of which it is a sub-genre; but given that anecdotes are ubiquitous in biographical dictionaries, chronicles and other sources, they cannot be excluded from any discussion of methodological problems pertaining to the medieval Arabic sources.

Anecdotes are not necessarily fictitious. Many people would certainly have been tempted to invent a story about a caliph, or better still, about one's own encounter with him or with another prominent scholar. Yet the fact that scholars were a part of the caliph's entourage and could act as his advisers and confidants does suggest that what transpired between a scholar and a caliph might be preserved and passed on in a more or less faithful form. The same might be said, and with probably greater confidence, regarding what one scholar claimed to remember of his teachers and peers. It was said of a scholar that "he was one of those who had exhausted (*afna*) their lives in the attendance of (*bi-mujālasa*) Ibn ʿUyayna, and that he was the most learned of his age in [Ibn ʿUyayna's] *ḥadīth*."[86] But a scholar did not have to spend an entire lifetime in the company of another to be able to report much from or about him, and not just in the matter of *ḥadīth*. As indicated earlier, much attention was often paid to what one prominent scholar said about others, whom he shunned or praised, what he said in support or condemnation of others. Neither such praise and blame, nor memories of such evaluations on the part of different witnesses, were necessarily consistent, which is at least partly why assessments of a scholar's credentials often tend to be contradictory. Yet the assiduous preservation of "the circumstances of the scholars"

[86] Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt*, VIII, 218. The scholar in question was Ḥāmid b. Yaḥyā al-Balkhī (d. 242/856). On Sufyān b. ʿUyayna (d. 196/811), see IV.3, below.

was no less important than was the knowledge of the materials they had transmitted: the latter depended, after all, on the credibility of the former.[87] With their training in writing (or memorizing) the vast materials that their teachers and peers dictated or read to them,[88] many appear to have recorded not just the materials of hadith, but also comments and recollections about "the circumstances of [other] scholars" and, in general, what one expert said about others.[89]

In principle, then, we may legitimately suppose that anecdotes enshrine much genuine information in them. Yet, in practice, it is usually very difficult to be certain that an anecdote accurately conveys an actual historical event, or to distinguish a "true" from a "fictitious" anecdote. But as with larger narratives (which themselves are composed of anecdotes and other *akhbār*), the question to ask here is not (or not only) whether an anecdote or story is "factual" or "fictitious", true or false, but what image of the past it seeks to create, whose interests it serves and how, and how it compares with other accounts.[90] Fictional accounts may be no less illustrative in this regard than any other.

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[87] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād* [hereafter *TB*] (Cairo, 1931), X, p. 240 (nr. 5366), *ad* ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Mahdi (d. 198/813): "... he was among the masters of knowledge and one of those [who were] praised for [their] memory excelling in knowledge of *athar*, the paths of transmission and the circumstances of the scholars." Also cf. Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt*, VIII, p. 381, s.v. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ibrāhīm al-Dimashqī (d. 245), *qāḍī* of Ṭabariyya, about whom it is reported that "he was among those who remember the 'ulamā' of their region, together with [the names of] their teachers and their genealogies." As for the Damascene Abū Mushir ʿAbd al-Aʿlā b. Mushir al-Ghassānī (d. 218/833), "he was the imām of the Syrians in his memory and mastery of the genealogies of the people of his region (*balad*) and of the reports concerning them. It is to him that the Syrians turned in matters concerning the credentials of their teachers": ibid., VIII, p. 408.

[88] Cf. N. Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, II: *Qur'ānic commentary and tradition* (Chicago, 1967), pp. 33–72.

[89] See, for instance, the *Ta'rīkh* of Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn, which comprises his opinions and response on other scholars of *ḥadīth*, as recorded by Abu'l-Faḍl al-ʿAbbās b. Muḥammad al-Dūrī. (An overwhelming number of these materials are prefaced with the formula: *samiʿtu Yaḥyā*; but many other also begin with formulae such as: *qāla Yaḥyā*, or *sa'altu Yaḥyā*, or *qultu li-Yaḥyā*, and so forth.) Such opinions were evidently meant to be recorded. Also see *Su'ālāt Ibn al-Junayd li-Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn*, ed. Abu'l-Maʿāṭī al-Nūrī and Maḥmūd Muḥammad Khalīl (Beirut, 1990). As the title indicates, (most of) the materials comprised here are Ibn Maʿīn's comments on other traditionists in response to the questions of Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī b. al-Junayd al-Khuttalī (d. ca. 260/874), or of others which were recorded by the latter.

[90] See F.R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A semantic analysis of the historian's language* (The Hague, 1983), on "statements [through which] ... an 'image' or 'picture' of the past ... is constructed." These statements he characterizes as "narrative substance". Ibid., p. 204 and ch. 5, passim.

Writing about-early Greek historiography, Nancy Partner observes that "fiction was the expressive instrument of interpretation, supra-local significance, psychological analysis, large-scale pattern; all the passages from raw event to intelligible additions to permanent knowledge, from the jumble of actuality to truth, were negotiated via fiction."[91] Something similar can be said of the work of classical Muslim historians and compilers of biographical dictionaries too. The *form* in which a "historical" anecdote, or any narrative, describes a situation is contrived, as already noted; and in at least some cases, some or all of the content may also be imaginary. Yet, even as fiction, an anecdote might still provide valuable comments on the significance of a particular historical situation, and some insight into how it was remembered and represented; it may even provide what in essentials is a more or less accurate account of that situation. (Precisely because we often have multiple accounts of an episode, we can, at least in some cases, observe and contrast different interpretations which might be at issue in them, different representations of the same past. For as F.R. Ankersmit says, the "narrative scope of a historical narrative . . . only comes into being when one compares narrative interpretations with rival interpretations. If we have only *one* narrative interpretation of some historical topic, we have *no* interpretation.")[92] A complex historical development often becomes a discrete and dramatic event in an anecdote, long-term trends or evolving processes might be "telescoped" into a single defining moment, and what the anecdote describes as a precise "event" may never have happened, at least not quite the way it is said to have taken place.[93] Yet that description can still throw much light on certain developments characteristic of the period in which the anecdote is set.

Consider the following anecdote which purports to describe a conversation between the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd and one of his confidants on the proper attitude to be adopted towards the Rāshidūn caliphs. The historical context in which this anecdote is to be seen, as well as the anecdote itself, will be analyzed in the next chapter.

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[91] Partner, "Historicity in an Age of Reality-Fictions", pp. 27f. "Fiction" for Partner denotes two quite distinct things: "(1) the creation of form in language; and (2) the invention or imaginary description of events and persons." (Ibid., p. 33). Her primary concern in this essay is to bring out the significance of the latter in historical narratives.

[92] F.R. Ankersmit, *History and Tropology: The rise and fall of metaphor* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 41. Ankersmit's emphasis.

[93] Cf. J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, 1985), esp. pp. 130ff.

I quote it here only to illustrate some methodological considerations, not to elucidate the implications of its content:

> Abū Muʿāwiya [Muḥammad b. Khāzim] said: I entered into the presence of Hārūn, the Commander of the Faithful, and he said to me, "O Abū Muʿāwiya, I intend to severely punish [lit.: to do such and such to] whosoever affirms the caliphate of ʿAlī [i.e. holds him to have been a legitimate caliph]." [On hearing this,] I remained silent. He said, "Speak, speak".... I said, "O Commander of the Faithful, the Taym say, 'There has been a caliph (*khalīfa*, lit.: "successor") of the Prophet of God from amongst us'; and the ʿAdī say, 'There has been a successor (*khalīfa*) of the caliph of the Prophet of God from amongst us"; and the Banū Umayya say, 'There has been a successor of the caliphs (*khalīfat al-khulafāʾ*) from amongst us.'[94] So where is your share of the *khilāfa*, O Banū Hāshim? By God, it is none but ʿAlī who has placed you in it [sc. the *khilāfa*]." So he [sc. Hārūn] said, "By God, O Abū Muʿāwiya, if I [now] hear about anyone not affirming [the legitimacy of] ʿAlī's caliphate, I would punish him severely!"[95]

It would be hard not to suppose that one of the purposes of this anecdote is to illustrate Abu Muʿāwiya's influence on the caliph, doubtless a matter of prestige for him and his kin: it was he, rather than someone else, who was responsible for a major change in the caliph's attitude on something which, as would be seen in the following chapter, was a matter of grave significance in the early ʿAbbāsid period. But this anecdote can also be read as suggesting that at some point the early ʿAbbāsids saw it in their interest to affirm the legitimacy of ʿAlī's caliphate, that they had not always seen their interest that way, and that at least some of the historical traditions remembered this development, however shematically they preserved its memory, as having taken place during the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd. As we shall see later, several other indications also suggest a similar dating for this development. Consequently, though this anecdote may be fictitious in content, it may yet (for all the implausibility of its drama) describe an actual historical situation of considerable significance. An anecdote such as this may in fact have been the means of making a complex development intelligible.

This anecdote may conceivably have had still other uses too: the

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[94] The claims refer to Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān, who were from the Taym, ʿAdī, and Umayya clans of the Quraysh respectively.

[95] *TB*, V, p. 244.

story could serve (for a broader audience) to show where caliphal sympathies lay. In a milieu where several doctrinal viewpoints, many different formulations of legitimacy and variant lists of who exactly had been a legitimate caliph, were competing for attention and acceptance, it would surely have mattered to know, or at least to claim, which side, what version, the caliphs were backing. Questions of audience and/or readership have been little studied in relation to early Islamic history;[96] but whatever the audience, the *rhetoric* of political, and social, influence, of espousing a doctrine which is supported not only by large numbers but also by the political authorities, could scarcely have eluded the scholars and writers of the early Abbasid age. Even as "fiction", if indeed they are such (and it would be perilous to pass one sweeping verdict, negative or positive, on all such materials) anecdotes can reveal a great deal about the milieu they speak of, all the more so should it be possible to ascertain approximately when they may have originated. In this study, I shall use them for the purpose they serve best, a purpose many of them seem in fact to have been intended for in the first place: as illustrations of complex historical processes and as comments on them by people who, as evidenced in at least some cases by their engagement with the events described, were not far removed in time from them.

For all their richness and diversity, anecdotes—or for that matter anything else our sources preserve—are not the kind of materials on the basis of which one might hope to write, say, biographies of scholars or of ʿAbbāsid caliphs and other notables. These materials are simply too problematic for any such exercise.[97] But while I do not wish to belittle the problems involved in writing any history of early Islam, our sources at least on some of the major religious trends of the early

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[96] An important recent exploration of these questions with reference to the early Christian period is H.Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A history of early Christian texts* (New Haven, 1995).

[97] Cf. Humphreys, *Islamic History*, pp. 191ff. For an example of the problems encountered in the biographical tradition see Wadād al-Qāḍī, "Riḥlat al-Shāfiʿī ilaʾl-Yaman baynaʾl-usṭūra waʾl-wāqiʿ", in M.M. Ibrāhīm, ed., *Arabian Studies in Honour of Maḥmūd Ghūl* (Wiesbaden, 1989), pp. 127–41; for a later period, see D.P. Little, "Did Ibn Taymiyya have a screw loose?", *SI*, XLI (1975), pp. 93–111. On the embellishment and reshaping of the scholars' *tarjama*s in biographical dictionaries see, for instance, F. Malti-Douglas, "Controversy and its Effects in the Biographical Tradition of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī", *SI*, XLVI (1977), pp. 11–31; Cooperson, "Heirs of the Prophets". For a comparative perspective, cf. W.S. Green. "What's in a Name?—The problematic of Rabbinic 'biography'", in idem, ed., *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and practice* (Missoula, 1978), pp. 77–96.

ʿAbbāsid times and especially on the emergence of those designated here as proto-Sunnī scholars—the subject of this book—are, I think, sufficiently rich and wideranging to permit meaningful enquiry into them. As a whole, from the materials at our disposal, it is possible not just to get certain glimpses of early ʿAbbāsid society and its religious trends, but also to view at least some aspects of the *evolution* of these trends. One does not have to pretend that these sources can, in any meaningful sense, ever approach a "complete" view of that society, or that their testimony is either clear or necessarily consistent, in order to see that what they do or can tell us about the past, about religious trends and caliphal policies, is important and worth exploring.

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGIOUS TRENDS IN EARLY ʿABBĀSID SOCIETY

II.1

The complexity of religious trends in early ʿAbbāsid society and the unevenness in what we know about them defies their systematic description. Fortunately for our purposes, a selective account of the trends which had an immediate bearing on the emergence of what I have called proto-Sunnism and the policies of the early ʿAbbāsids in that regard can suffice. This chapter seeks to trace certain developments in the gradual evolution of proto-Sunnī trends as well as of the broader religious milieu in which that evolution took shape. Wherever possible, I shall try to relate these trends to the caliphs' concerns and policies which evolved at the same time and in tandem with these religious trends.

II.2 *Shiʿism and the ʿAbbāsids*

II.2.1

It was a Shīʿite movement,[1] calling for the rights of "the family of the Prophet" (*ahl al-bayt*) which brought the ʿAbbāsids to power in 132/749. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that in the period following their elevation to the political headship of Islam, the ʿAbbāsids took great pains to emphasize their position as the kin of the Prophet

[1] Unless defined or qualified otherwise, the terms "Shīʿism", "Shīʿa", "Shīʿite", etc. will be used in this study to designate those tendencies and groups which, in some form, recognized that ʿAlī and his descendants were the best/only ones entitled to succeed the Prophet, and/or claimed their own political rights through ʿAlī. In speaking of "Shīʿism" in such terms, one is concerned with certain ill-defined but recognizable tendencies, not with a determinate sect or a developed religious system. Such tendencies, which already existed in the 2nd/8th century and earlier, do not therefore have to be qualified with the prefix "proto-", though in speaking of the early foundations of a sectarian community within an overall Shīʿite context, one must use that prefix—hence "Shīʿite" but "proto-Imāmiyya".

and members of his household.[2] Whether they were generally regarded as belonging to the *ahl al-bayt* in the pre-revolution period is rather less certain; it is probable that they were, for all that those who claimed direct descent from ʿAlī enjoyed better standing as the *ahl al-bayt*, owing to a closer kinship with the Prophet.[3] The many uncertainties about the ʿAbbāsid position in the Prophet's household do not, however, bring in question the Shīʿite character of the movement which brought them to power. This Shīʿite orientation is indicated not only by the call to restore the political rights of the Prophet's family and to seek vengeance for the perceived wrongs done to members of this family; it is also expressed in the special position accorded to the person of ʿAlī as the sole legitimate successor of the Prophet. In building the ideological bases of their legitimacy, the ʿAbbāsids eventually tried to bypass ʿAlī completely, but that clearly is a development which began to take shape only some time after the establishment of the dynasty in power.

Our sources, in particular the *Akhbār al-dawla al-ʿAbbāsiyya*, speak of a "testament" from Abū Hāshim (a son of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya, and a grandson of ʿAlī) to Muḥammad b. ʿAlī (the grandson of the Prophet's uncle al-ʿAbbās, and the father of the first two ʿAbbāsid caliphs) whereby he transferred the imamate and the leadership of his Shīʿa to Muḥammad b. ʿAlī.[4] The question of the historicity of this testament has been much discussed by scholars, and arguments for and against it have been proposed; the problem remains unsettled, though the arguments *against* such a transfer having actually taken place seem rather stronger.[5] In any case, what is *not* in dispute is that the story of the testament of Abū Hāshim was used

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[2] Cf. M. Sharon, *Black Banners from the East: the establishment of the ʿAbbāsid state—incubation of a revolt* (Jerusalem, 1983), ch. 4.

[3] Sharon's position that there "is no doubt that around the year A.H. 100 the term (*ahl al-bayt*) was already used to refer exclusively to the house of ʿAlī" (*Banners*, p. 79), is perhaps too dogmatic. For a critique and some evidence that the Banū ʿAbbās and the Banū Muṭṭalib were, together with the household of ʿAli, also regarded as part of the *ahl al-bayt*, see W. Madelung, "The Hāshimiyyāt of al-Kumayt and Hāshimī Shīʿism", *SI*, LXX (1989), pp. 5–26.

[4] *Akhbār al-dawla al-ʿAbbāsiyya* (hereafter *Akhbār*), ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī and Abd al-Jabbār al-Muṭṭalibī (Beirut, 1971), pp. 184ff. The most detailed study so far of "the testament of Abū Hāshim" is Sharon, *Banners*, pp. 121–140. Sharon's is a vigorous plea for the authenticity of the essentials of this tradition, his position being that a "tradition such as this could never have been created had not the problem of the transference of an ʿAlid *imāmah* to the ʿAbbāsids arisen." (Ibid., p. 127.)

[5] For a case *against* the historicity of the "testament", see T. Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung der abbasidischen Kalifates* (Bonn, 1972); P. Crone, "The Meaning of the

for sometime in the early years of the 'Abbāsid caliphate as the basis on which the new dynasty's claim to legitimacy was staked.[6] For our purposes here, the fact that the 'Abbāsids are known to have used this story for legitimist propaganda once is of interest for two reasons. First, it suggests that the 'Abbāsids may initially have claimed for themselves the position and prerogatives of a Shī'ite imām[7]—claims which they came to abandon not long after their rise to power. Second, the story of the testament of Abū Hāshim reminds us—as does much else in Shī'ite trends pertaining to the period ca. 132/750 A.D.—that in speaking of Shī'ism at this time, we are still only speaking of certain broadly recognizable tendencies, often in mutual conflict, with much fluidity about them. There were competing claims to the imamate, and no one individual from "the family of the Prophet" was regarded as the imām by all those who belonged to the Shī'ite milieu.[8] In claiming to be Shī'ite imāms, the 'Abbāsids could scarcely have been ignorant of the appeal which the 'Alid household and its prominent members—some of whom seem to have been regarded as imāms at this time—could exercise over the 'Abbāsid supporters themselves. It was with good reason then that after the revolution, if not already before it,[9] the 'Abbāsids seem to have been suspicious of the 'Alids.

One of the most prominent 'Alids living under the first 'Abbāsids was Ja'far b. Muḥammad "al-Ṣādiq" (d. 148/765), whom the Imāmi Shī'ites of a later date reckoned as the sixth of their twelve imāms. It is likely that Ja'far was recognized as an imām already in his lifetime; he also seems to have made significant contributions towards defining the doctrinal bases of the community which looked to him as the imām.[10]

'Abbāsid Call to al-Riḍā", in C.E. Bosworth et al., eds., *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times* (B. Lewis Festschrift) (Princeton, 1989), pp. 95–111, especially p. 102.

[6] Cf. Sharon, *Banners*, pp. 138ff.; Crone, "'Abbāsid Call", pp. 104, 110f. n. 50.

[7] There was, however, no single view on the position and function of a Shī'ite imām: the followers of the various Shī'ite leaders could have differing conceptions no less than the adherents of the same imām might. In broad terms, ideas regarding the imām's position could range from regarding him as the most learned member of the community, endowed with a knowledge uniquely his own, to deifying him or believing that simply to know the imām was to be exonerated from all further religious obligation. Cf. H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 3–51.

[8] Cf. Fārūq 'Umar, *al-'Abbāsiyyūn al-awā'il* (Beirut, 1970), I, p. 169.

[9] Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. M.J. De Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879–1901), II, p. 1501; *Akhbār*, p. 204; also cf. Sharon, *Banners*, p. 148.

[10] On Ja'far, see al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār ma'rifat al-rijāl, al-ma'rūf bi-rijāl al-Kashshi* (hereafter *Rijāl al-Kashshī*), ed. Ḥasan al-Muṣṭafawī (Mashhad 1348 H.sh.), index, s.v.; *EI(2)*,

What political implications a prominent ʿAlid's being regarded as the "imām" entailed in the early ʿAbbāsid period is uncertain. While Jaʿfar, for one, comes across in our sources as maintaining a quietist political stance, it is noteworthy that such a stance was unacceptable even to many of his own followers.[11] In contrast to Jaʿfar, Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh "al-Nafs al-Zakiyya", another prominent ʿAlid of the time, did not subscribe to a quietist view as demonstrated by an abortive revolt he led early in the reign of al-Manṣūr.[12]

That political activism or quietism had not yet come to be associated with particular Shīʿite groups, as Tilman Nagel has argued,[13] is another indication that Shīʿism was still an ill-defined phenomenon. The fluidity characterizing Shīʿite trends of the period is further illustrated, in rather stark terms, by what the heresiographical and other sources usually characterize as *ghulū*, that is, "exaggerated" or "extremist" religious beliefs. As Wadād al-Qāḍī has argued, *ghulū* meant

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s.v. (M. Hodgson); H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis: Die extreme Schia und die ʿAlawiten* (Zurich, 1982), index, s.v.; idem, *Shīʿism* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 29f.; Modaressi, *Crisis*, pp. 4–13, 28–31, 53–59. In the extraordinarily rich store of traditions concerning him, Jaʿfar is particularly associated with efforts towards defining the position of the imām, maintaining and justifying a quietist political stance, and seeking to exercise some measure of discipline over his "extremist" followers. Such a role is undoubtedly exaggerated in the Shīʿite tradition. (Attributing sudden and dramatic change to "culture heroes", and suggestions of a complete break with the past at their hands, are familiar motifs in the lore of early or oral cultures, as J. Vansina has argued: *Oral Tradition and History* [Madison, 1985], pp. 130ff.) Yet Jaʿfar's prominence in the Shīʿi tradition does suggest that he had a following over which he hoped to exercise his influence and that this following recognized him as the imām. The serious disputes over the succession to Jaʿfar further point to the strong likelihood that he was already regarded as an imām.

The beginnings of an "Imāmī" community may consequently be traced to the time of Jaʿfar (cf. Halm, *Shīʿism*, p. 29). The term "Imāmiyya" is later, however, and may only have come into general use towards the end of the 3rd/9th century (cf. W.M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973), pp. 274f.). Those who regarded Jaʿfar and his successors in linear descent as the imāms, and generally maintained a quietist political stance (and were eventually claimed for the Ithnā ʿashariyya) will be characterized here as the proto-Imāmiyya. The term "al-Rāfiḍa", used by opponents of the Shīʿa from the 2nd/8th century, is to be understood as referring primarily, but not exclusively, to the proto-Imāmiyya. On this term, see below.

[11] For instance, Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb, once a close associate and confidant of Jaʿfar, led a revolt in Kufa during the reign of the caliph Manṣūr, to be repudiated by Jaʿfar presumably before the event itself. On Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb, see *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, pp. 290–308, and index, s.v.; al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Kitāb firaq al-shīʿa*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931), pp. 38–40, 58–60; Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa'l-firaq*, ed. Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr (Tehran, 1963), pp. 81–83; Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 199ff.

[12] On this revolt, see al-Ṭabarī, III, 189–265; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1949), pp. 260–99.

[13] T. Nagel, "Ein früher Bericht über den Aufstand des Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh im Jahre 145 h", *Der Islam* (1970), pp. 227–62.

(or was thought to consist in) different things at different times in the evolution of Shī'ite trends,[14] though it is noteworthy that certain individuals could be characterized as "extremists" (*ghulāt*)[15] even at a time when an "orthodox" stance itself was still in the process of articulation.[16] Conversely, it was precisely in conscious contrast or opposition to some typically "extremist" notions—such as the deification of the imām(s), metempsychosis, and antinomianism[17]—that the proto-Imāmiyya, for instance, defined their own "moderation".

Imāmī sources recognize that the followers of the imāms included many "extremists".[18] These sources give the impression that the imāms in question frequently "dissociated" from such "extremist" followers, and cautioned others to be wary of them. As regards an imām such as Ja'far b. Muḥammad, or his successors, who lived at a time when the foundations of the Imāmī community were being laid, this impression needs to be taken seriously. Yet all those whose beliefs approximated to some form of "extremism" were not *ipso facto* repudiated. That there was considerable fluidity of religious belief, and a variety of attitudes on any given matter, is acknowledged by Imāmī sources themselves.[19] To seriously discipline suspect followers could scarcely be possible at a time when the imām's authority was itself uncertain, and when even some of those leading Shī'a whom

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[14] W. al-Qāḍī, "The Development of the Term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature", *Akten des VII Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft* (Göttingen, 1976), pp. 295–319.

[15] Studies on the Ghulāt include: M.G.S. Hodgson, "How did the Early Shī'a become Sectarian", *JAOS*, LXXV (1955), pp. 1–13; idem, *EI(2)*, s.v. "Ghulāt"; W.F. Tucker, "Bayān b. Sam'ān and the Bayāniyya: Shī'ite extremism of Umayyad Iraq", *MW*, LXV (1975), pp. 241–53; idem, "Rebels and Gnostics: Mughīra b. Sa'īd and the Mughīriyya", *Arabica*, XXII (1975), pp. 33–47; idem, "Abū Manṣūr al-'Ijlī and the Manṣūriyya: A study in medieval terrorism", *Der Islam*, LIV (1977), pp. 66–76; idem, 'Abdallāh b. Mu'āwiya and the Janāḥiyya: Rebels and ideologues of the late Umayyad period", *SI*, LI (1980), pp. 39–57; W. al-Qāḍī, *al-Kaysāniyya fi'l-ta'rīkh wa'l-adab* (Beirut, 1974), passim; E. Kohlberg, "Barā'a in Shī'ī Doctrine, *JSAI*, VII (1986), pp. 163ff.; Halm, *Gnosis*; idem, *Shī'ism*, ch. 3; Modarressi, *Crisis*, pp. 19–59; S.M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The problem of smybiosis under early Islam* (Princeton, 1995), pp. 64ff., 82ff., 117ff., 136ff. and passim.

[16] For instance, in the *Risāla fi'l-ṣaḥāba* of Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 142/759) (ed. and tr. C. Pellat, *Ibn al-Muqaffa': "conseilleur" du calife* [Paris, 1976], pp. 23, 25, para 10) the term "*ghālin*" occurs, in a sense which seems to approximate to heresiographical usage.

[17] Halm, *Shi'ism*, p. 156.

[18] Cf., for example, *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, passim, and index, s.v. "*ghulāt*".

[19] Cf. the following remark which Imāmī tradition attributes to the fifth imām, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, as addressed to his Shī'a: "What business do you have dissociating from one another? You behave like the Khārijīs who have defined their doctrine so narrowly that they dissociate from one another. We allow a range of beliefs that is as wide as the distance between heaven and earth . . ." Quoted in Kohlberg, "Barā'a", pp. 167f.

later tradition recognized as architects of Imāmī theology and jurisprudence were themselves frequently in conflict with their imāms.[20] In general, however, the evolution of Imāmī Shīʿism meant an increasing marginalization for the "extremists", even as the latter themselves gradually separated to constitute, as Heinz Halm puts it, an independent religion.[21] On the other hand, not only did extremist ideas contribute to Shīʿite thought in the formative period—both positively[22] and by evoking the "moderate" reaction—the (selective) *repudiation* of extremism also helped define the imām's position and his image.

II.2.2

Historical tradition depicts the ʿAbbāsids too as having to face, both before and after the revolution, the problem of "extremism" among their followers. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, for whom Abū Hāshim allegedly made his testament, is said to have dissociated, in 118/736, from a man named Khidāsh, who apparently was in charge of the *daʿwa* organization in Khurasan.[23] The episode of this disavowal is unusually obscure, and what our sources have to say about Khidāsh is often tendentious. My concern here is not with "what really happened", however, but only with some of the ways in which this episode is represented in later heresiography. Khidāsh is said to have betrayed the guidelines set for him by the imām, not only preaching "Khurramī" ideas[24] to those over whom he had been deputed but also ascribing these ideas to the imām himself. When the latter became aware of Khidāsh's heresy, he repudiated him. According to the account preserved by pseudo- al-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar, the Khurāsānī Shīʿite leaders, when they realized their error in having followed Khidāsh, requested the ʿAbbāsid patriarch "to write for them a document (*kitāb*) containing the ordinances (*sharāʾiʿ*) and the prescripts (*aḥkām*) which God sent with

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[20] Cf. Kohlberg, "Barāʾa", pp. 158ff.; A.A. Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shiʿite Islam* (New York, 1988), pp. 42ff.

[21] Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 25f.

[22] Cf. Hodgson, "The Early Shīʿa", passim.

[23] On Khidāsh, and for references to him in the sources, see Sharon, *Black Banners*, pp. 165–86; *EI(2)*, s.v. (M. Sharon).

[24] For the period under consideration, the name "Khurramiyya" is to be understood as referring to the Mazdakites, as well as to those groups which combined Mazdakite with extremist Shīʿite and Gnostic ideas in various proportions. In the early ʿAbbāsid period, such groups were frequently in arms against the state. See *EI(2)*, s.v. "Khurramiyya" (W. Madelung); E. Yarshater, "Mazdakism" in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, III(2), ed. E. Yarshater (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 1001ff.

Muḥammad. So he [sc. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī] wrote a document (*kitāb*) for them, explaining in it the ordinances (*sharāʾiʿ*) of Islam, and its statutes (*ḥudūd*) and prescripts (*aḥkām*); he [also] expressed in it his condemnation and repudiation of Khidāsh."[25]

The foregoing tradition presupposes, of course, that the ʿAbbāsid patriarch, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, was already directing the Shīʿite movement in Khurasan, a movement whose leadership he had inherited from Abū Hashim. That Muḥammad b. ʿAlī was recognized as an "imām" by the Khurasānī Shīʿa is problematic and uncertain, but it is significant that the historical and heresiographical tradition presents him as such, all complete with his "Shīʿa". Also noteworthy here is his image as one dissociating from his extremist and wayward followers. This image of the "orthodox imām" probably tells us more about the early ʿAbbāsid times than it does about the time it purports to describe.

Whatever the reality of Khidāsh's extremism may have been, the story had an important message to convey in the early ʿAbbāsid period, a message well-conveyed by pseudo- al-Nāshi's account. It is noteworthy that the tradition here is concerned not so much with Khidāsh's heresy itself as with the ʿAbbāsid patriarch's defence of an "orthodoxy" in opposing it. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī had "laid down the rules of religion for him (*rasama lahu rusūm min al-dīn*), but he [sc. Khidāsh] altered those rules and exceeded [the bounds of] his *madhhab* . . ."[26] That Khidāsh *deviated* from the "imām's" position (= *al-dīn*) suggests that the latter was already sufficiently well-defined for such a deviation to have been recognizable; more importantly, the ʿAbbāsid patriarch comes across not merely as warding off challenges to right belief or stamping out any deviation from it, but also as articulating the very content of such right belief. In short, the foregoing tradition makes a rather strong case for the doctrinal rectitude of the first ʿAbbāsids and seems therefore to be a product of the time when the early caliphs were striving hard to claim a timeless "orthodox" image for themselves.[27]

That the name of Khidāsh should have lent itself, in the early ʿAbbāsid period, to use in the processes of ʿAbbāsid ideological adjust-

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[25] J. van Ess, *Frühe muʿtazilitische Häresiographie: Zwei Werke des Nāšiʾ al-Akbar (gest. 293 H.)* (Beirut, 1971; hereafter, van Ess, *Häresiographie*), p. 34, para 50 (all references are to the Arabic text published by van Ess).

[26] Van Ess, *Häresiographie*, p. 34, para 50.

[27] See V.2.1.c, below.

ments and legitimation certainly does not mean that the Khidāsh-affair is merely a convenient historical fiction. Nor does it mean that Khidāsh was necessarily innocent of the kind of beliefs which the ʿAbbāsid tradition attributed to him.[28] The problem rather is that we are unsure in what relationship, if any, the ʿAbbāsid Muḥammad b. ʿAlī stood vis-à-vis the Khidāsh affair (and of why, and when, the repudiation of Khidāsh may have occurred). The case of Khidāsh does nevertheless seem to have important affinities with those individuals among the proto-Imāmiyya who were on occasion repudiated by the ʿAlid imām for their "extremism", such extremism being perceived as a political no less (if not more) than a religious threat.

The Khurāsānī Shīʿa evidently retained some of their extremist beliefs even after the date when the repudiation of Khidāsh and fresh directives from Muḥammad b. ʿAlī might have been expected to chasten them. Thus, a few years after the ʿAbbāsid revolution, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ could still use the metaphor of a man riding a lion—"who terrifies everyone who sees him, but who is himself the most terrified of all"—to characterize the caliph's relationship with his Khurāsānī troops which, he noted, included many "extremists" (*mufriṭin ghālin*).[29] Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's point evidently was that extremism could have politically destabilizing implications. He spelled out none of those implications, though he did describe the devotion of these Khurāsānī troops to the caliph's person:

> Many of the *mutakallimūn* among the Commander of the faithful's [army-] commanders . . . [hold] that were he to order the mountains to move they would, and if he ordered that in prayer back[s] be turned towards the *qibla*, that would be done.[30]

Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's testimony should suffice at least to suggest that the first ʿAbbāsids were regarded, by some of their followers, as "imāms" in the Shīʿī sense of the term. How else would they be regarded by

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[28] *Pace* Sharon, "Khidāsh" in *EI(2)*, there seems no compelling reason why he could not have professed—even preached—ideas of a "Khurramī", or Mazdakite, nature and provenance, which our traditional sources invariably accuse him of. Mazdakite trends did, of course, persist well into the ʿAbbāsid period, and there evidently was mutual exchange and influence between them on the one hand and the so-called extremist forms of Shīʿism on the other. The movement through which the ʿAbbāsids came to power is also known to have drawn some support from Mazdakite groups: cf. E.L. Daniel, *Khurasan under ʿAbbāsid Rule* (Chicago, 1979), ch. 4.

[29] Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *Risāla*, p. 25, para 10.

[30] Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *Risāla*, p. 25, para 12.

the Rāwandiyya, an extremist group among their followers?[31] But the Rāwandiyya, who presumably held the views the foregoing passage reports, were not the only Shīʿites among the supporters of the ʿAbbāsids; and the characterization as "Shīʿa" may have meant more in the early days of the dynasty's rule than simply the "supporters" of the ruling house. The story of Abū Hāshim's testament too, whenever it may have originated, was replete with Shīʿite motifs of *ʿilm, imāma*, and, of course, *waṣiyya*; nor was the "lexique technique" of the extremists among ʿAbbāsid supporters distinguishable from that of the supporters of any other Shīʿī imāms. Such extremists—the Rāwandiyya in case of the ʿAbbāsids—were as much of a nuisance to the latter as other extremists would have been to a proto-Imāmī imām. No less significantly perhaps—and provided we accept the testimony of the heresiographers—the succession disputes which plagued the early ʿAbbāsids were couched in terms very similar to those in proto-Imāmī circles. Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh al-Qummī's report on a schism which occurred among ʿAbbāsid supporters when Manṣūr decided to give precedence in the matter of succession to his son al-Mahdī over his nephew ʿĪsā b. Mūsā is very instructive in this regard and deserves to be quoted in full:

> At that moment his Shīʿa were divided and became turbulent. They [1] disapproved of what [Manṣūr] proposed and refused to give allegiance (*bayʿa*) to al-Mahdī and [to recognize] his precedence over ʿĪsā b. Mūsā. To those they [1] were arguing with (*aṣḥābihim*) they [1] said: "How could you pledge loyalty to al-Mahdī and give him precedence over ʿĪsā b. Mūsā . . . [when the latter] was nominated by Abu'l-ʿAbbās . . . as the successor of Manṣūr?" They [2] replied: "[We have done so] by virtue of . . . al-Manṣūr's command to that effect, for he is the imām obedience to whom God has prescribed upon us (*al-imām alladhī iftaraḍa Allāh ʿalaynā ṭāʿatahu*)." They [1] said: "[But] Abu'l-ʿAbbās had been the *muftaraḍ al-ṭāʿa* from God before . . . [Manṣūr became such]. It was he who had commanded that allegiance be given to Abū Jaʿfar, and to ʿĪsā b. Mūsā after him. The *imāma* of Abū Jaʿfar is itself established only through the command of Abu'l-ʿAbbās. . . . So how do you justify deferring someone he gave precedence to, and giving precedence

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[31] On the Rāwandiyya, see al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 129ff., 418f.; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, pp. 29f., 41f., 46f.; al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, pp. 39f., 64f., 69f.; *EI(2)*, s.v. "Kaysāniyya" (W. Madelung); ʿUmar, *al-ʿAbbāsiyyūn*, II, pp. 85ff.; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* [hereafter *Th&G*] (Berlin and New York, 1991–), III, pp. 10–17.

> to al-Mahdī over him?" They [2] replied: "Obedience is due to the imām only so long as he lives; when [the imām] dies, the command (*amr*) is his who succeeds him (*al-qā'im*), [and only] for so long as he lives." They [1] said: "If Manṣūr died . . . and people were to reject . . . [his] command [regarding succession], just as you have rejected that of Abu'l-'Abbās, would that be justified?" They [2] replied: "No . . . for an oath has [now] been pledged to . . . [al-Mahdī]." They [1] said: "But how could you justify deferring 'Īsā and giving precedence to someone you [previously] had not [even] given allegiance to?" They [2] replied: "'Īsā has willingly sold . . . [his own rights]; we have accepted for him what he has agreed to for himself." On this a group separated from them [2].[32]

The problems faced by the early 'Abbāsids in disciplining their followers had certain affinities, then, with those of the 'Alids whom their followers considered to be imāms. The paths of the 'Alids and the 'Abbāsids began to diverge, however, after the latter came to power. For while the years following the 'Abbāsid revolution saw efforts by the imām Ja'far b. Muḥammad to consolidate the position of his Shī'a as a distinct community, the 'Abbāsids had to make themselves acceptable to, rather than distinct from, the Muslim community at large, or at least to a substantial part of it. That required the effort to distance themselves from their "extremist" followers, but also to repudiate or modify much else in ideas they had hitherto shared with other Shī'ī groups. Especially conspicuous and problematic among such ideas were Shī'ī views of the early Muslim community and its history.

II.2.3

It was apparently some time in the 2nd/8th century that the term "al-Rāfiḍa" (lit. "the deserters") came to be used for the proto-Imāmi Shī'a.[33] For all the uncertainty about it, the term was evidently one

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[32] al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 68 (the numbers—[1], [2]—are intended to distinguish the statements of the contending parties).

[33] For Sunnī traditions on the Rāfiḍa, see al-Lālakā'ī, *Sharḥ uṣūl i'tiqād ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā'a*, ed. Aḥmad al-Ghāmidī (Riyaḍ, 1994), VIII, pp. 1540–52. Studies of the Rāfiḍa, and of this term, include: I. Friedlaender, "The Heterodoxies of Shī'ites in the Presentation of Ibn Ḥazm", *JAOS*, XXIX (1908), pp. 137–59; W.M. Watt, "The Rāfiḍites: A preliminary study", *Oriens*, XVI (1963), pp. 110–21; E. Kohlberg, "The Term Rāfiḍa in Imāmī Shī'ī Usage", *JAOS*, XCIX (1979), pp. 1–9; Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, pp. 100ff.

of abuse, and it is often explained as referring to the Shīʿite repudiation of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, the first two successors of the Prophet and two of his most revered Companions in Sunnī estimation. With the exception of the Zaydīs, the Shīʿites generally regarded the caliphates of Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān as based on a usurpation of the right of ʿAlī to succeed the Prophet, and condemned the vast majority of the Prophet's Companions for their complicity in this usurpation.[34] This Shīʿite attitude towards the Companions has, historically, been a cause of much friction and ill-will between them and the non-Shīʿites; and there is little doubt that it already was such during the period under study here. Many among the Zaydī Shīʿa, for their part, are reported to have recognized the caliphates of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar as legitimate, though they believed that ʿAlī was all along superior to them.

Where did the ʿAbbāsids stand as regards this issue at the time of their coming to power?

The duʿāt of the movement in Khurasan summoned their audience not just to the "Book of God and the *sunna* of His Prophet", but, apparently, also to the *sunna* of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.[35] Naṣr b. Sayyār, the last Umayyad governor of Khurasan, is, for his part, reported to have sought the favour of the religious circles there by promising to follow, besides the Book of God and the *sunna* of His Prophet, "the *sunna* of the two ʿUmars" (the two ʿUmars presumably being ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al ʿAzīz).[36] The Shīʿite revolutionaries' attitude towards ʿUmar I may have been as hostile as towards the Umayyad ʿUmar. Naṣr could conceivably have hoped to attract the non-Shīʿite piety-minded by undertaking to follow the example of the two widely revered ʿUmars; there may also have been a silent reminder in such a promise that if anyone *could* revive the *sunna* of the two ʿUmars, it was the existing government, and *not* its Shīʿite opponents.

On the occasion of the first ʿAbbāsid caliph's inauguration, Dāʾūd b. ʿAlī, an uncle of Abuʾl-ʿAbbās, asserted in his speech that the latter was the only caliph apart from ʿAlī to legimately occupy the caliphal

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[34] See van Ess, *Th&G*, I, pp. 308ff.

[35] Cf. *Akhbār*, p. 284, where an erstwhile supporter of the *daʿwa* chides the revolutionary leaders with having done things not justified by the Book of God and the *sunna* of the Prophet or that of ʿAlī. The presumption, therefore, is that the *duʿāt* called to, and claimed to follow, all three.

[36] Note, however, that "al-ʿUmarayn" could also signify Abū Bakr and ʿUmar I, as in al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 759f.

position. While such a statement amounts to charging all other caliphs with usurpatory rule—a charge which clearly expresses the Shī'ite view on the matter—it is noteworthy that in his own brief speech earlier, Abu'l-'Abbās not merely spared the Companions but praised them, reserving his ire only for the Umayyads:

> When God took . . . [Muḥammad] to Himself, his Companions took on this authority after him, and their affair was by mutual counsel. They took possession of the inheritance of the nations and distributed it justly, put it in its proper place, gave it to those entitled to it, and left with their own bellies empty. Then up reared the Banū Ḥarb and the Banū Marwān . . .[37]

Dā'ūd b. 'Alī's implicit condemnation of the predecessors of 'Alī in the caliphal office is in rather marked contrast to Abu'l-'Abbās' praise for the Companions of the Prophet. But then members of the 'Abbāsid family need not have had an identical position on the matter.[38] On the basis of the foregoing statement at least, one may assume that the first 'Abbāsid caliph already wished to take a view of the Muslim past which would help cultivate the favour of non-Shī'ite Muslims. It may be observed, however, that the Companions are praised only in very general terms, possibly to avoid antagonizing the Shī'ites; less than a decade earlier, Zayd b. 'Alī had, after all, been deserted by some of his followers when he had refused to denounce Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Dā'ūd b. 'Alī's remarks about the exclusive legitimacy of 'Alī may have been intended to further reassure the Shī'a about 'Abbāsid commitment to their world view. But any such commitment was to prove short-lived.

A very different attitude towards 'Alī finds expression in a letter which al-Manṣūr is reported to have written to the Ḥasanid rebel, Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya. That 'Alī had any precedence over other leading Companions of the Prophet—an essential basis of the legitimist claims of 'Alī's descendants—is denied in this letter.[39] It is suggested that if 'Alī was bypassed on three different occasions, it was only because he was not considered by the early community

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[37] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 30; translation as in J.A. Williams, tr., *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXVII (Albany, 1985), pp. 153f.

[38] It is interesting, though, that in another *khuṭba*, which Dā'ūd b. 'Alī is said to have delivered in the *ḥaram* of Mecca, it was the "*dhimma* of God, his Prophet, and of *al-'Abbās*" that he promised the people. 'Alī was not mentioned at all. See Ibn 'Adī, *al-Kāmil fī ḍu'afā' al-rijāl*, 3rd edn. (Beirut, 1988), III, p. 89.

[39] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 213f.

to be best suited for the caliphate (the unstated implication being that it was ʿAlī's own deficiencies rather than the electors' usurpation of his rights which are to blame). Further, not only was it with difficulty that ʿAlī finally managed to become caliph, he was—in the process—implicated in the murder of his predecessor ʿUthmān, and later lost what legitimacy he had by being deposed in the arbitration between him and Muʿāwiya.[40]

There is some doubt about the authenticity of some of the contents of al-Manṣūr's letter to Muḥammad.[41] Given, however, that the letter purports to belong to a historical moment when the caliph was engaged in a bitter struggle with the ʿAlids, his attack on ʿAlī as a way of attacking the legitimist pretensions of his opponents makes good sense and should be counted among the letter's authentic parts.[42] al-Manṣūr's attack on ʿAlī also leads to the assertion, in the same letter, that the ʿAbbāsids derive their political rights from al-ʿAbbās—the uncle of the Prophet—to whose descendants (sc. the ʿAbbāsids), rather than ʿAlī's, the inheritance of the Prophet (including the caliphate) rightfully belongs.

This assertion marks a new departure in ʿAbbāsid legitimism, in seeking to bypass ʿAlī completely as a source of legitimacy for themselves. In al-Manṣūr's letter, however, this assertion about inheriting from Muḥammad through al-ʿAbbās is still rather undeveloped. It is with his successor al-Mahdī that a more formal articulation of this assertion is associated.

The caliph Mahdī seems to have made a succession of responses to certain religio-political trends of the time. Early in his reign, a letter written in the caliph's name reminded a Khārijite rebel—ʿAbd al Salām al-Yashkurī—that in slandering ʿAlī he was guilty of disobedience to God and His Prophet, for the Prophet had clearly stated: "He whose *mawlā* I am, ʿAlī is his *mawlā*."[43] The position this letter attributes to al-Mahdī conforms to his generally lenient policy towards the ʿAlids;

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[40] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 213ff.

[41] Nagel, "Früher Bericht", pp. 252ff. Nagel's tentative suggestion is that the correspondence between al-Manṣūr and Muḥammad was given the shape it is now preserved in only towards the end of the 2nd century A.H. (ibid., pp. 255f.)

[42] Nagel (cf. ibid., p. 254) does not seem to dispute the authenticity of this component of the letter.

[43] al-Azdī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mawṣil*, ed. ʿAlī Ḥabība (Cairo, 1967), p. 238. Accepting such a tradition does not necessarily make one some kind of a "Shīʿī" however. The same *ḥadīth* was to enter Sunnī compilations, where it naturally did not have the same meaning as it did for the Shīʿa. See, for example, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Cairo, 1313 A.H.), I,

it also conforms to the Shīʿite milieu to which the ʿAbbāsids themselves had belonged. But it contrasts rather sharply with the attack on ʿAlī's special merit which is attributed to al-Manṣūr. While there is no particular reason to doubt al-Mahdī's seriousness in coming to the defence of ʿAlī, his espousal—if it may be called such—of ʿAlī's cause did not remain a continuing concern; for it is this same caliph who is credited in our sources with the attempt to place ʿAbbāsid legitimism on a new footing.

al-Manṣūr had gone only so far as to argue that al-ʿAbbās was the true inheritor of the Prophet, and that his claim to be such was superior to that of Fāṭima—Muḥammad's daughter and the wife of ʿAlī—since the latter was a woman, while for purposes of inheritance the uncle was like the father: the descendants of al-ʿAbbās were thus the true successors/inheritors of the Prophet. al-Mahdī, for his part, put forth the claim that al-ʿAbbās had been the Prophet's successor in more than the formal or legal sense: al-ʿAbbās, in fact, was the imām—the legatee of the Prophet and his successor as the community's guide.[44] With such a position, the Shīʿite world view—stressing ideas of *waṣiyya* and *imāma*—was not immediately renounced, only the ʿAlid *dramatis personae* were replaced by ʿAbbāsid ones: the imamate no longer had to be derived from ʿAlī through Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya and Abū Hashim, but could directly be traced back to al-ʿAbbās himself. The question once again arises: if al-ʿAbbās and his successors were the imāms all along, would not the "rightly-guided" caliphs who actually succeeded Muḥammad have been illegitimate? A group of the ʿAbbāsid Shīʿa of al-Mahdī's time are in fact reported to have regarded the patriarchal caliphs as usurpers, though they apparently found it politic to keep this opinion of theirs secret.[45]

The ideological shift sponsored by al-Mahdī is interpretable as an effort to challenge the legitimist claims of the ʿAlids, and to define the position of the ʿAbbāsid Shīʿa as completely distinct from other Shīʿite groups. But the ʿAbbāsids wanted more than to be sure of their followers' devotion; they needed also to cultivate an "orthodox" image

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pp. 84, 118, 119, 152, 330; IV, 281, 368, 370, 372; V, 347, 350, 350, 361, 366, 370, 419; also cf. al-Lālakāʾī, *Sharḥ*, VIII, pp. 1542f.

[44] See al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, p. 65: al-Mahdī "affirmed that after the [death of the] Prophet of God, al-ʿAbbās was the imām. He [sc. al-Mahdī] summoned them [sc. the supporters of the ʿAbbāsids] to that [doctrine], received the oath of their allegiance on that basis, and said: 'al-ʿAbbās was the uncle [of the Prophet], his heir, and the [person] most entitled to succeed him.'" Also see *Akhbār*, p. 165.

[45] al-Qummī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 65f.; cf. al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, pp. 42f.

for themselves in the Muslim community at large. Replacing ʿAlī with al-ʿAbbās as the first legitimate imām might be an argument against the ʿAlids; but it was scarcely interpretable as a step towards proto-Sunnism. Since the ʿAbbāsids did aim at a moderate, broadly acceptable position, it appears that they never explicitly drew the implications of al-ʿAbbās' having been the imām—or if they did, they never acknowledged this, as al-Qummī's report suggests. The claim about al-ʿAbbās having inherited from the Prophet as his sole surviving uncle soon came to be an expression probably of no more than the ʿAbbāsid claim to close kinship with the Prophet. In other words, the idea that al-ʿAbbās was the imām after the Prophet—with all that this implied—may have been toyed with only briefly, to be abandoned already during al-Mahdī's caliphate. The notion that the ʿAbbāsids had *inherited* their rule by virtue of al-ʿAbbās' close kinship with the Prophet continued, however, to be put to propagandistic use.[46]

The ʿAbbāsid Shīʿa of al-Mahdī's time may well have thought of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar as usurpers; but as an anecdote recorded in al-Ṭabarī suggests, by the end of his reign the caliph Mahdī had, for his part, distanced himself completely from any criticism of the Prophet's first successors.[47] As is characteristic of such anecdotes, the following account provides no insight into the *process* through which the caliph came to extricate himself from the Shīʿite milieu to which the ʿAbbāsids had belonged until then; but it does depict the outcome of that process, in the form of a conversation between al-Mahdī and the veteran ʿAbbāsid general Abū ʿAwn (the latter shown here as being on his death-bed):

> al-Mahdī said (to Abū ʿAwn): "Request from me what you need . . . and I will provide for you in life and death. . . ." Abu ʿAwn thanked him and . . . said, "O Commander of the Faithful, my request is that you show favour to ʿAbdallāh b. Abī ʿAwn and summon him, for your anger against him has lasted a long time." Al-Mahdī replied, "O Abū ʿAwn, he is on the wrong road and is against our belief and your belief. He defames the two *shaykh*s, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, and uses evil language about them." Abū ʿAwn said, "He is, by God, O Commander of the

[46] This motif occurs frequently in ʿAbbāsid poetry: cf., for instance, al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 742f.

[47] In polemicizing against ʿAlid legitimism in his second letter to Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, al-Manṣūr had already noted that "the people [of Islam's earliest generations?] denied recognition to anyone but the *shaykhayn* and [asserted] their precedence [over all the rest]." al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 213.

> Faithful, of the belief for which we rebelled and that we summoned people to (*'ala'l-amr alladhī kharajnā 'alayhi wa da'awnā ilayhi*). If you have engendered any change (*fa-in kāna qad badā lakum*),[48] order us to do what you wish, so that we can obey you."[49]

Though the dialogue which this anecdote purports to record does not inspire much confidence, the likelihood that it correctly depicts al-Mahdī's position towards the end of his reign remains strong.[50] This is not an account hostile to the ruling house; from the Sunnī perspective, the caliph is after all backing the right position. Yet what it says about the views espoused earlier by the 'Abbāsids would have been extremely embarrassing to their supporters at a time when the caliphs had identified themselves with nascent Sunnism. Consequently, the very recognition here that the ideology of the 'Abbāsid revolutionaries had once contained those reprehensible views may be taken to mean that the basic contention of this anecdote—about the change in the 'Abbāsid position, and the suggestion about al-Mahdī's role in effecting that change—can be accepted.

That al-Mahdī should have, in a span of about ten years, probed a series of religio-political attitudes is striking but not implausible.[51] What these modifications in his perspective illustrate is, above all, that it was very gradually and with much uncertainty that the 'Abbāsids moved towards the proto-Sunnī position. That they had, in fact, moved in that direction became clearer during the reign of his successor, Hārūn al-Rashīd, as we shall see.

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[48] Abū 'Awn's use of the term "*badā*" may echo the doctrine that it is conceivable for God to *change* His will or decision in certain circumstances. This doctrine, which probably originated among the Kaysāniyya, was to have great importance for the proto-Imāmiyya in their formative period. Cf. *EIr*, s.v. "Badā'" (W. Madelung). If Abū 'Awn does indeed have the doctrine of *badā'* in mind here, he is to be understood as conceiving of the caliph as an instrument (*qua* imām) whereby a change *in God's will* is affected. A further implication is that it is not *the 'Abbāsids* who were previously in error; rather it is God's will which earlier was different than it now is, the 'Abbāsids being in both cases true to it.

[49] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 537; translation as in H. Kennedy, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXIX (Albany, 1990), pp. 256f. (with minor modifications).

[50] The precise date of Abū 'Awn's death is rather uncertain. R. Bulliet places al-Mahdī's visit to Abū 'Awn, as the latter lay dying, in 169/784, but gives no reference in support (cf. *EIr*, s.v. "Abū 'Awn"). H. Kennedy (tr., *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXIX, p. 48 note 121) dates his death in 168/784–85; he too does not indicate his source.

[51] M. Hinds, "The Early 'Abbāsid Caliphs and Sunna", unpublished paper presented at the colloquium on the study of *ḥadīth*, Oxford, 1982, pp. 6ff., offers important observations on the various ideological and political moves of al-Mahdī. He makes no effort, however, to see them in any sort of chronological or developmental sequence. (I am grateful to Dr. P. Crone for making Dr. Hinds' paper available to me.)

II.3 *Towards Proto-Sunnism*

In gradually distancing themselves from the Shīʿite circles in which the ʿAbbāsid revolution had originated, the early ʿAbbāsids moved in the direction of the proto-Sunnīs. Some aspects of this move have been briefly noted in the previous section; a more detailed treatment of the caliphs' relations with the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ, and ʿAbbāsid patronage of the latter, is the subject of subsequent chapters. The purpose here is to delineate briefly some of the trends which contributed to the making of proto-Sunnism, and to situate them wherever possible vis-à-vis the early ʿAbbāsids.

II.3.1

The term "*ahl al-sunna*" seems to have made one of its earliest appearances in a statement by Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (d. 110/729), who is reported to have remarked: "They (sc. the traditionists) were not used to inquiring after the *isnād*, but when the *fitna* occurred, they said: Name us your informants. Thus, if these were *ahl al-sunna*, their traditions were accepted, but if they were *ahl al-bidaʿ*, their traditions were not accepted."[52]

The "*fitna*" mentioned in this statement refers, according to Juynboll, to what is often characterized as the Second Civil War (63/683–73/693), which witnessed, among others things, ʿAbdallāh b. Zubayr's contest with the Umayyads for the caliphate. The "*ahl al-sunna*" are apparently those who saw themselves as standing aloof from such individuals or groups whom they considered as holding "innovative" doctrines—the *ahl al-bidaʿ*. The latter characterization was employed by the *ahl al-sunna*, according to Juynboll, to refer to adherents of the doctrine of free-will (the Qadariyya), as well as to the Khārijīs, the Rāfiḍa, and the Murjiʾa.[53] All these, and others the "*ahl al-sunna*" disagreed with, were seen too as *ahl al-ahwāʾ*—people who follow their "whims" rather than authoritative doctrines—whereas the *ahl al-sunna* were those who represented and held on to the "original" practice of the primeval Muslim community. That these individuals

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[52] Quoted in G.H. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 17f., from Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī (Cairo, 1955–56), I, p. 15. On Ibn Sīrīn, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 633f.; Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, pp. 52ff., and index, s.v.

[53] G.H.A. Juynboll, "Muslim's Introduction to his *Ṣaḥīḥ*: translated and annotated with an excursus on the chronology of *fitna* and *bidʿa*", *JSAI*, V (1984), pp. 310f.

saw themselves as distinct from the aforementioned groups—all of which represented a political, no less than religious, viewpoint—suggests too that the *ahl al-sunna* had their own political proclivities, though we are badly informed about them. Many (though by no means all) of them were known, for instance, for a favourable stance towards the Umayyad regime and for political quietism. They retained both of these positions into ʿAbbāsid times.[54]

A favourable attitude towards the Umayyads—which, some time in the early ʿAbbāsid period, came to be typically expressed in the form of veneration for Muʿāwiya—did not, however, amount to denying the legitimacy of ʿAbbāsid rule.[55] Rather, it is to be seen as an assertion that, contrary to early ʿAbbāsid propaganda, the Umayyads had not been illegitimate rulers, that Islam had not fallen into abeyance during that period, and that the historical continuity and rectitude of the Muslim community had therefore not been compromised by the Umayyads. As I shall argue more fully later in this study, this same logic which assured a favourable view of the Umayyads also vouched for the legitimacy of the ʿAbbāsids in the world view of the proto-Sunnīs. As regards the political quietism which many among the *ahl al-sunna* professed, it should be understood as signifying their unwillingness to revolt against constituted authority but should not be construed to mean that they did not wish to play an active role in society in articulating and defending their doctrines. Nor was quietism the only position on the matter among the *ahl al-sunna*, or in circles supportive of them: some of those who belonged to, or were later claimed for, the *ahl al-sunna* could support an activist political alternative in the early ʿAbbāsid period.[56]

Among the evolving doctrines of the *ahl al-sunna*, probably the most distinctive (and often the most prone to be defended with highly charged emotions) was their attitude towards some of the most prominent of the Prophet's Companions. Any criticism of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar was, for the *ahl al-sunna*, tantamount to heresy,[57] which is

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[54] Cf. W. Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 223ff.

[55] For a specimen of pro-Muʿāwiya traditions, see al-Lālakāʾī, *Sharḥ*, VIII, pp. 1524–39; on the veneration for Muʿāwiya in ʿAbbāsid society see C. Pellat, "Le culte de Muʿāwiya au IIIe siècle de l'hégire", *SI*, VI (1956), pp. 53–66.

[56] See III.2.1, III.2.2, below.

[57] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, III, p. 307 (nr. 571).

hardly surprising if it was part of the *sunna* to love the *shaykhayn* and to recognize their virtue.[58] Indeed, the sheer possibility that anyone among the Prophet's Companions could have been superior to Abū Bakr and ʿUmar was not to be countenanced.[59] The attitude of the *ahl al-sunna* and the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* towards ʿUthmān was also generally favourable. But ʿAlī was a more controversial figure, and in the early ʿAbbāsid period, there continued to be much debate on how his status was to be defined. The Kufan traditionists not only revered his memory, but ranked him as superior to ʿUthmān.[60] On the other hand, many prominent *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* of early ʿAbbāsid Baghdad were not prepared to accept that ʿAlī had been a legitimate caliph at all.[61] Among those to whom this view is attributed, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn (d. 233/847) and Abū Khaythama (d. 234/848) are some of the most prominent traditionists.[62] Yet, to Ibn Ḥanbal is also attributed the view that all four of the Prophet's first successors were righteous caliphs, and he appears in numerous accounts vehemently supporting a *ḥadīth* according to which "the caliphate" is to last for only thirty years after the Prophet's death. The significance of this *ḥadīth*, which makes the six years of ʿAlī's reign part of the short-lived era of the Rāshidūn, and Ibn Ḥanbal's support for it, will be discussed later in this study.[63] But it should be stressed here that we need not try to resolve the contradiction between the two positions attributed to Ibn Ḥanbal by choosing one as having been "really" his. It seems much more likely that his position (and that of many others among his contemporaries) evolved over time, and that towards the end of his life he had come to view ʿAlī as having been one of the Rāshidūn caliphs.[64] A similar view is attested for Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn:

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[58] al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa wa'l-ta'rīkh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyā' al-ʿUmarī (Medina, 1410 A.H.), II, p. 813.

[59] Cf. *TB*, XIV, p. 376.

[60] Van Ess, *Häresiographie*, pp. 65f., paras 110f.

[61] Ibid., p. 66, para 113.

[62] Ibid., p. 66, para 113.

[63] See V.2.1.a, below.

[64] Cf. al-Lālakā'ī, *Sharḥ*, VIII, p. 1475 (nr. 2670), where one Wazīrah b. Muḥammad recalls going to Ibn Ḥanbal "after he had made known/introduced [the doctrine] that ʿAlī was the fourth" of the legitimate caliphs (*ḥīna aẓhara al-tarbīʿ bi-ʿAlī*). This manner of putting it, as well as the exchange which follows, suggests that Ibn Ḥanbal had previously been known to have a different position on the matter. Also cf. *EI(2)*, s.v. "Imāmah" (W. Madelung).

> [Abū'l-Faḍl al-'Abbās b. Muḥammad b. Hātim al-Dūrī, the transmitter of Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn's *Ta'rīkh*, said:] I said to Yaḥyā: What about one who says: Abū Bakr and 'Umar and 'Uthmān [were legitimate caliphs]? [Yaḥyā] said: He is correct (*muṣīb*); and one who says Abū Bakr and 'Umar and 'Uthmān and 'Alī is [also] correct. He who says Abū Bakr and 'Umar and 'Alī and 'Uthmān is a Shī'ī, but one who says Abū Bakr and 'Umar and Uthmān, and stops at that, is correct. Yaḥyā said: I say, Abū Bakr and 'Umar and 'Uthmān and 'Alī. This is our doctrine (*madhhab*) and our position (*qawlunā*).[65]

In spite of much hesitation and disagreement among the *ahl al-sunna* as well as the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, to which Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn's statement bears testimony, it was in terms of the rectitude and righteousness of *all four* of the immediate successors of the Prophet that the Sunnī world view eventually came to be defined.[66] Though Ibn Ḥanbal, like Ibn Ma'īn, seems to have been willing to countenance some disagreement on this issue (not recognizing 'Alī at all was acceptable, but preferring him to 'Uthmān, or any doubts about Abū Bakr and 'Umar was not), a strong current of support for the doctrine of the four righteous caliphs existed by his time,[67] and it is not unreasonable to suppose that he played some role in strengthening it.[68]

Besides references to the *ahl al-sunna* as a group, numerous individuals of the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries are characterized in biographical dictionaries as "*ṣāḥib sunna*". Much work remains to be done on the meaning of this designation, and we have yet to determine whether it means the same thing for each individual characterized as such; but it seems reasonable to suppose at least that these individuals adhered to the doctrines of the *ahl al-sunna*.[69] Also worth mentioning here are certain reports of the *awā'il* genre which speak of a certain scholar as having been the "first" to introduce (*aẓhara*) the *sunna* in a given region.[70] Though such reports should

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[65] Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn, *al-Ta'rīkh*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Nūr Sayf, *Yaḥyā ibn Ma'īn wa kitābuhu al-ta'rīkh* (Mecca, 1979), III, p. 465 (nr. 2285). Cf. al-Lālakā'ī, *Sharḥ*, VIII, p. 1476 (nr. 2672).

[66] Cf. al-Khallāl, *al-Musnad min masā'il Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, British Library MS. Or. 2675, fols. 66b–67b; also Madelung, *Der Imām*, pp. 225ff.

[67] Cf. van Ess, *Häresiographie*, p. 66, para 113.

[68] See V.2.1.a, below.

[69] For some instances of those characterized as *ṣāḥib sunna*, see Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-thiqāt* (Haydarabad, 1973–82), VIII, pp. 155, 254, 272, 317, 321, 341, 465, 467, 521. Also see G.H.A. Juynboll, "Some New Ideas on the Development of *Sunna* as a Technical Term in Early Islam", *JSAI*, X (1987), pp. 112ff.

[70] Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt*, VIII, p. 197 (Ḥumayd b. Zanjawayh [d. 247/861]: "he was

be viewed with great caution, it is tempting to suppose that the person so characterized may have been involved not only in propagating the "*sunna*", and perhaps advocating the authority of *ḥadīth*, but also in striving to bring his local community round to particular *proto-Sunnī* conceptions and doctrines. Such *awāʾil* traditions, which exist in many different forms, also recall (though they are independent of) reports about how particular proto-Sunnī viewpoints came to be introduced in various regions, and by whom:

> ... the people of Egypt used to disparage ʿUthmān, until al-Layth [b. Saʿd (d. 175/791)] arose amongst them and narrated to them the merits of ʿUthmān so that they stopped [disparaging him]; and the people of Ḥimṣ used to disparage ʿAlī, until Ismāʿīl b. ʿAyyāsh [d. 182/798] arose among them and narrated to them the merits of ʿAlī so that they stopped doing that.[71]

Traditions of this sort probably ascribe too much to the impact of individual scholars and concede too little to what must have been a relatively protracted historical development.[72] Yet they are illustrative of how the (later) Sunnī tradition itself viewed the dissemination of its characteristic doctrines. Nor is the contention of such reports about the role particular individuals may have played in spreading these doctrines necessarily implausible. al-Layth b. Saʿd, for instance, does come across in several accounts as upholding similar viewpoints,[73] and given that he was one of the most influential scholars of his age

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the one who introduced the *sunna* in Nasā"); p. 406 (ʿUbayd Allāh b. Saʿīd b. Yaḥyā [d. 241/855–6]: "he was the one who introduced the *sunna* in Sarakhs and called people to it"); p. 444 (ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-Ghaffār al-Ṣanʿānī: "he was one of those who introduced the *sunna* in his land and called people to it").

[71] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, VIII, pp. 463f. (nr. 832). On al-Layth, see ibid., pp. 459–65 (nr. 832); al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* [hereafter *TB*] (Cairo, 1931), XIII, pp. 3–14; Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 520; R.G. Khoury, "al-Layth ibn Saʿd (94/713–175/791), grand maître et mécène de l'Egypte, vu à travers quelques documents islamiques anciens", *JNES*, XL (1981), pp. 189–202. On Ismāʿīl b. ʿAyyāsh see *TB*, VI, pp. 221–28 (nr. 3276); Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, I, pp. 321–26 (nr. 584). I have not, however, encountered characterizations of either of these individuals as *ṣāḥib sunna*.

[72] Cf. Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, pp. 130ff.

[73] In a famous letter to Mālik b. Anas, al-Layth speaks of the religious guidance of "Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿUthmān, whom Muslims had chosen for themselves." Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn, *al-Taʾrīkh*, IV, p. 489; later in the same letter, al-Layth refes to "*al-khulafāʾ al-mahdiyyūn al-rāshidūn Abū Bakr wa ʿUmar wa ʿUthmān*" (ibid., p. 491). Also cf. al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-wulāt wa kitāb al-quḍāt*, ed. R. Guest (Leiden, 1912), p. 372, where al-Layth invokes, in support of *aḥbās*, the uninterrupted practice of "the Prophet of God, Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, ʿAlī, Ṭalḥa, al-Zubayr, and those who survived them".

in Egypt, it is not unlikely that he contributed to their development and dissemination.

Heresiographical sources and biographical dictionaries frequently mention certain group-names which seem to bear a close relationship—if some of them are not actually identical—with those characterizing themselves as the "*ahl al-sunna*". The "*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*", already mentioned in the foregoing, are one such group. The *ahl al-sunna* counted the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* among their ranks, but the two terms may not have been identical.[74] The latter were so called because they insisted on, and concerned themselves with, the transmission of concrete traditions (sing.: *ḥadīth*) from the Prophet himself, rather than being content—as were the early schools of law—to follow the (often anonymously handed down) *sunna* of the first generations of Islam. The *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* were thus not only adherents of the *ahl al-sunna*'s doctrinal viewpoints; in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, they seem also, if not primarily, to have defined their identity in terms of their espousal of the authority of *ḥadīth*. They saw it as their vocation to gather and sift the growing materials attributed to the Prophet, to identify the reliable and the unreliable among them and among the tradents of those materials. In doing so, they not only made the methods of studying *ḥadīth* and its *rijāl* progressively more sophisticated, they also articulated their own group identity, and of the proto-Sunnīs in general, in increasingly precise terms.[75]

While "*ahl al-sunna*" and "*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*" are, of course, self-designations, the opponents of the people denoted by these terms understandably took a less complimentary view. One common term which was used by them was "*al-Ḥashwiyya*" (lit.: "the stuffers").[76] This characterization reflected the accusation that the *ahl al-sunna* and *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* gave credence to—"stuffed" their beliefs with!—all kinds of crude notions and fabricated traditions, ascribing these

[74] This is not to say that the terms *ahl al-sunna* and *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* could not be used for the same people. Cf. Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb ta'wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth* (Cairo, 1326 A.H.), p. 98: "... if someone ... asks to be shown *ahl al-sunna*, he would be shown the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* ..."

[75] For references to the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* as a determinate group (from which particular individuals were sometimes excluded by name—indicating increasingly rigid group-identities), see Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 18 (nr. 76), 359 (nr. 1742); IV, pp. 8, 46, 48.

[76] On this term and those it designated, see van Ess, *Häresiographie*, pp. 65–67, paras 110–114; A.S. Halkin, "The Ḥashwiyya", *JAOS*, LIV (1934), pp. 1–28.

to the Prophet. Popularly, the term *al-Ḥashwiyya* connoted "the rabble", whose credulity, especially when it came to religious matters, was scorned. Equating the *Ḥashwiyya* (= *ahl al-sunna*?) with the rabble, i.e. the masses, is significant too in suggesting that in this—the early ʿAbbāsid—period, the *ahl al-sunna* had come (or were beginning) to be seen as having a popular base. That this popular "movement" was a rather new phenomenon may be inferred from, and the suggestion probably was intended in, another pejorative appellation, "al-Nābita", which, to al-Jāḥiẓ and to several writers after him, apparently denoted the same people.[77] The irony intended by characterizing as al-Nābita people who prided themselves on the claim to represent, follow, and thus being part of the *original* practice of the community could scarcely have been fortuitous.[78]

The *ahl al-sunna/al-Ḥashwiyya/al-Nābita* seem to be closely related to another group called the "ʿUthmāniyya". The ʿUthmāniyya

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[77] On the Nābita, see al-Jāḥiẓ, "Risāla fi'l-nābita" in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiz*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo, 1964–65), II, pp. 7–23; *EI(2)*, s.v. (C. Pellat); I. Alon, "Fārābī's Funny Flora: al-Nawābit as 'opposition'", *Arabica*, XXXVII (1990), pp. 56–90; W. al-Qāḍī, "The Earliest 'Nābita' and the Paradigmatic 'Nawābit'", *SI*, LXXVIII (1993), pp. 27–61. According to al-Qāḍī, "The 'Nawābit', any 'Nawābit', 'Nābitiyya,' or 'Nābita' are not supposed to be, in essence, the 'names' of particular groups. They are common, generic nouns which mean 'contemptible, suddenly powerful, irritating sprouters on the scene'; at the most, they are nicknames. And it is only when an author chooses to designate by them a specific group which, in his opinion, is made up of 'contemptible, suddenly powerful, irritating sprouters on the scene,' that they become, or seem to become, proper nouns." (Ibid., pp. 58f.). As al-Qāḍī shows, the term "Nābita" had already been applied by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Yaḥyā, the secretary of the last Umayyad caliph, to those associated with the clandestine ʿAbbāsid movement in Khurāsān (Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyā al-kātib wa mā tabaqqā min rasā'ilihi wa rasā'il Sālim Abi'l-ʿAlā'* [Amman, 1988], letter nr. 8, pp. 198–201; al-Qāḍī, "Earliest 'Nābita'", pp. 29ff. and passim.); it was used, a century later, by al-Jāḥiẓ for the opponents of the Muʿtazila (al-Qāḍī, "Earliest 'Nābita'", pp. 41ff.). Other applications of the term are also attested (ibid., pp. 30, 37ff., and passim). That the term "Nābita" had precise pejorative connotations but was actually applied to quite different groups of people is clear from the evidence al-Qāḍī adduces. As al-Jāḥiẓ uses the term, however, it refers unambiguously to the traditionalist opponents of the Muʿtazila and the rabble following them. Several writers who came after al-Jāḥiẓ show a similar understanding (possibly under his influence), as al-Qāḍī concedes (ibid., pp. 28f., 59). In the present context, the Nābita are to be understood essentially as those characterized as such by al-Jāḥiẓ.

[78] In defending the *aṣḥāb al ḥadith*, Ibn Qutayba may be seen as trying to turn such criticism on its head: he argues that while the Prophet denounced, explicitly and by name, such groups as the Qadariyya, the Rāfiḍa, the Murjiʾa, and the Khawārij, he is not known to have said anything at all about the Ḥashwiyya or the Nābita, which means that the latter terms have only been coined by opponents of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* and have no validity. (*Mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*, pp. 96f.) At the same time, however, Ibn Qutayba—like many a scholar among the *aṣḥab al-ḥadīth*—seeks to distinguish the latter from the credulous "*ḥashw*" of which, it is pointed out, no group or movement can claim to be free. (Ibid., pp. 93, 96, and generally 88ff.).

represented the cause of ʿUthmān against attacks from the partisans of ʿAlī; in doing so, the former also affirmed the legitimacy and the merit of ʿUthmān's two predecessors, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. Their critical attitude towards ʿAlī was gradually toned down—by the time of al-Jāḥiẓ at any rate, who wrote a *Kitāb al-ʿUthmāniyya*[79] though he himself was a Muʿtazilite—to a denial of the Rāfiḍite position that ʿAlī alone, to the exclusion of his three predecessors, was deserving of the caliphate, or that he was gifted with such extra-ordinary qualities as none but he possessed.[80] The ʿUthmāniyya, therefore, had virtually the same attitudes, and may often have been the same people, as the *ahl al-sunna*. It should be noted, however, that the former were often critical of the Umayyads, differing in this respect from the *ahl al-sunna* etc., many among whom were well-disposed towards the fallen dynasty.[81]

II.3.2

It was argued in the previous section that towards the end of al-Mahdī's caliphate, the ʿAbbāsids had distanced themselves from the Shīʿite milieu in which their movement had originated, and moved towards the proto-Sunnī position—the position, that is, which the *ahl al-sunna* represented. Hārūn al-Rashīd's reign witnessed an endorsement of that position.

An anecdote which purports to describe a conversation between Hārūn and a Murji'ite scholar named Abū Muʿāwiya Muḥammad b. Khāzim (d. 194/810), has already been discussed in the previous chapter.[82] Briefly, that anecdote depicts the caliph as initially being hostile to the notion that ʿAlī had been a legitimate caliph, but as eventually coming round to a recognition of his legitimacy. At least two things in the alleged conversation are worth noting here. The attitude which is attributed to Hārūn at the beginning of the anecdote corresponds to the critical attitude which the *ahl al-sunna* and the ʿUthmāniyya initially had regarding ʿAlī. On the other hand, Hārūn's

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[79] Ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo, 1955).

[80] The polemical assertion of al-Jāḥiẓ that "there is no Uthmānī on earth whom you do not know as rejecting [ʿAlī's] having been an imām" (*al-ʿUthmāniyya*, p. 176) can be understood in one of two possible ways: as representing the original ʿUthmāni position that ʿAlī was not a legitimate caliph at all; or the later, more moderate (and proto-Sunnī), position that ʿAlī (although a caliph) was *not* an "imām" in the Shīʿite sense of that word.

[81] Cf. *EI(2)*, s.v. "al-Nābita"; also cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, VII, pp. 126f. (nr. 269).

[82] *TB*, V, p. 244. On Abū Muʿāwiya, see van Ess, *Th&G*, I, pp. 216–18.

changed attitude towards ʿAlī, following Abū Muʿāwiya's observations ("The Taym say, 'There has been a caliph [*khalīfa*] of the Prophet of God from amongst us'; and the ʿAdī say, 'There has been a successor [*khalīfa*] of the caliph of the Prophet of God from amongst us'; and the Banū Umayya say, 'There has been a successor of the caliphs [*khalīfat al-khulafāʾ*] from amongst us.' So where is your share of the *khilāfa*, O Banū Hāshim? By God, it is none but ʿAlī who has placed you in it [sc. the *khilāfa*]"), may be read as a prefiguration of later proto-Sunnī views so far as the question of ʿAlī's legitimacy is concerned. But it may perhaps also be interpreted as an echo of the *earlier* ʿAbbāsid legitimist position, which was based on the claim of having inherited the imamate ultimately from ʿAlī. That such an echo is discernible here certainly does not mean that Hārūn reverted to that earlier position. What the anecdote shows rather is that by the time of Hārūn, the ʿAbbāsids had moved markedly away from their initial Shīʿite basis of legitimation, and, more importantly, that when they came back to ʿAlī, so to speak, it was in a different frame of reference. ʿAlī was now seen as *one* of the four caliphs who had rightfully succeeded the Prophet: he was neither the only legitimate caliph between the time of the Prophet and that of the ʿAbbāsids (as Dāʾūd b. ʿAlī had alleged at the inauguration of their rule) nor, on the other extreme which Hārūn is said to have initially favoured, was he devoid of legitimate status as caliph. In terms of kinship, the ʿAbbāsids were in fact closer to him than to any other of the first caliphs.

The following account is also illustrative of the lines along which Hārūn was thinking. It reports a conversation between him and ʿAbdallāh b. Muṣʿab al-Zubayrī (d. 184/800), a Medinese notable who was one of the *ṣaḥāba* of al-Mahdī and later served as the governor of Medina and of Yemen.[83] The anecdote has Hārūn once ask this confidant of his:

> "What's your view about those who have impugned ʿUthmān?" I [sc. ʿAbdallāh b. Muṣʿab] replied, "O Commander of the Faithful, one group of people have impugned him, whilst another group have defended him. Now as for those who have impugned him and who then have diverged from him, they comprise various sects of the Shīʿa (*anwāʿ al-shīʿa*),

[83] On ʿAbdallāh b. Muṣʿab, see al-Zubayr b. Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab Quraysh wa akhbārihā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo, 1381 A.H.), I, 124–49; *TB*, X, pp. 173–76 (nr. 5313).

> heretical innovators (*ahl al-bidaʿ*), and various sects of the Khārijites (*anwāʿ al-khawārij*); whereas in regard to those who have defended him, these are the . . . *ahl al-jamāʿa* up to this present day." Al-Rashīd told me, "I shan't need ever to ask about this again after today." . . . He [sc. al-Rashīd] further asked me about the status (*manzila*) which Abū Bakr and ʿUmar enjoyed in regard to the Messenger of God. I told him, "Their status in regard to him during his life was exactly the same as at the time of his death." Al-Rashīd replied, "You have provided me with a completely satisfactory answer for what I wanted to know."[84]

Anecdotes such as these may also be compared with certain traditions, in the *Akhbār al-dawla al-ʿAbbāsiyya*, which depict ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās—an ancestor of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs particularly revered for his religious knowledge—lavishly praising, one after another, each of the four immediate successors of the Prophet.[85] Such unqualified praise is to be contrasted with the sharp criticism which, according to some other traditions in the *Akhbār* itself, Ibn ʿAbbās directed against all caliphs other than ʿAlī, asserting that the legitimist claims of the *ahl al-bayt*—and of ʿAlī in as much as he was one of those—alone had any validity.[86] The presence of traditions with such drastically opposed tendencies means of course that the *Akhbār* is a composite work, without a coherent vision in certain crucial matters. More significantly for our purposes, the *Akhbār* also seems to reflect, if in patently tendentious terms, some of those religious trends—*in early ʿAbbāsid society*—with which we have been dealing here. In the disparate traditions about the attitudes of Ibn ʿAbbās regarding the first successors of the Prophet may, for instance, be seen precisely that ideological transition which the early ʿAbbasid period actually witnessed: a transition, that is, from ʿAlid legitimism—the basis of the

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[84] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 749; trans. as in C.E. Bosworth, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXX (Albany, 1989), p. 315 (with minor modifications).

[85] *Akhbār*, pp. 70–72.

[86] Cf. *Akhbār*, p. 33, especially ll. 12f.: ʿUmar, among others, is implicitly attacked for having usurped the *ahl al-bayt*'s rights (observe that here, and often elsewhere, Ibn ʿAbbās acts as the representative and spokesman of the *ahl al-bayt*). Ibid., pp. 128f.: in a conversation with ʿUmar, Ibn ʿAbbās asserts the superior rights of ʿAlī and insinuates that these rights have been usurped; note that ʿUmar here comes across as mildly admitting ʿAlī's superiority, but tries to justify the latter's not having succeeded the Prophet with arguments which in turn are effectively demolished by Ibn ʿAbbās. Ibid., p. 94: in an altercation with ʿAbdallāh b. Zubayr, Ibn ʿAbbās does acknowledge the merits of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, but only rather grudgingly. Ibid., pp. 125ff.: Ibn ʿAbbās subjects ʿĀʾisha, the favourite wife of the Prophet and a highly regarded figure in Sunnī tradition, to a blistering attack.

first ʿAbbāsid claims to legitimacy—to an endorsement of the proto-Sunni position by the time of Hārūn. The traditions extolling the Rāshidūn caliphs in succession may of course be later than the time of Hārūn, but clearly they are not likely to be much *earlier* than that; conversely, those critical of the first three successors of the Prophet are not likely to be *later* than this same time. Such dating is admittedly very speculative. What seems more certain in any case is the endorsement of the proto-Sunnī position by Hārūn al-Rashīd's time. The historical formation of the proto-Sunnī camp and some of its distinctive viewpoints may now be given some further consideration.

For all their perceptions of themselves as upholding the practice of the forbears, and of representing the community—hence their standard designation eventually as *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamāʿa*—the *ahl al-sunna* were only one among several religio-political groups in late Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid society. Among the groups to which they are known to have been very hostile were the Murji'a and the Muʿtazila. Yet, both of these also played some part in the shaping of proto-Sunnism.

II.3.3

The Murji'a stood for a deferring of judgement to God on the alleged sinfulness of certain Companions of the Prophet in the first *Fitna* of Islam—the events leading to the murder of ʿUthmān and culminating in the assassination of ʿAlī. This *Fitna* had divided Muslims deeply in their attitudes to those involved in it. The Murji'a refused to take the side of either ʿUthmān or ʿAlī, and sought on this basis a broad reconciliation of mutually antagonistic groups.[87]

The Murji'ite stance on the events of the first *Fitna* had similarities with that of the *ahl al-sunna*; the latter too were much concerned to avoid thinking in terms of the Companions' culpability, though not to the extent of suspending judgement on ʿUthmān. In theology, the Murji'ite plea not to exclude the grave sinner from the community

[87] Modern studies on the Murji'a include: A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed* (Cambridge, 1932); W.M. Watt, *Formative Period*, index, s.v.; M. Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma* (Cambridge, 1981); W. Madelung, "The Early Murji'a in Khurāsān and Transoxania and the Spread of Ḥanafism", *Der Islam*, LIX (1982), pp. 32–39; idem, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, 1988), ch. 2; K. ʿAthamina, "The Early Murji'a: some notes", *JSS*, XXXV (1990), pp. 109–30; van Ess, *Th&G*, I, pp. 152–233, II, pp. 164–86, 493–544, 659–63, etc; *EI(2)*, s.v. (W. Madelung).

of believers and the effort to arrive at the minimum definition of a Muslim are views which seem to have influenced the stance that Sunnism itself later adopted on these matters—once, that is, it had emerged out of the many controversies which marked its evolution during the first centuries of Islam.

During the period under study here, Murji'ism continued, however, to be severely opposed by many among the *ahl al-sunna*.[88] Abū Ḥanīfa, the eponym of the Ḥanafī *madhhab* had himself espoused Murji'ite doctrines, and his school was long under attack for the suspicion of being tainted with Murji'ism.[89] Yet individual Murji'ites were often highly regarded by many of the *ahl al-sunna* (and even as *ahl al-sunna*), and several others were firmly, if perhaps retrospectively, rehabilitated by an informal consensus on the part of *rijāl* critics.[90] Scholars with Murji'ite leanings, or suspect for a Murji'ite "past", themselves worked hard for a broader acceptance. Abū Ḥanīfa had already disowned the appellation "Murji'ite"; and Abū Yūsuf—to many a *ṣāḥib sunna*[91]—energetically strove to improve the image of his *madhhab*, trying to distance it from the stigma of Murji'ism[92] even as he brought it into increasing conformity with the traditionists' position on the authority of Prophetic ḥadīth.

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[88] See, for instance, Lālakā'ī, *Sharḥ*, V, pp. 1058–78; al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fols. 94a–112b.

[89] Thus, the criticism of some leading scholars on Abū Yūsuf—a leading pupil of Abū Ḥanīfa, the architect of the Ḥanafī school of law, and the chief *qāḍī* of Hārūn—seems to have been at least partly motivated by the suspicion (or justified by the charge) of Murji'ism: cf. Wakī', *Akhbār al-quḍāt* ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz Muṣṭafa al-Marāghī (Cairo, 1947–50), III, p. 261; *TB*, XIV, pp. 256, 257, 260 (nr. 7558).

[90] Cf. *TB*, VI, p. 109.

[91] Cf. *TB*, XIV, p. 253 (nr. 7558); also see Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn, *Ta'rīkh*, IV, p. 474: "... Abū Yūsuf was favourably disposed towards (*yamīl ilā*) the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* ..."

[92] Abū Yūsuf supposedly went so far in redeeming his own reputation, and that of his *madhhab*, as to distinguish between his master's theological and juridical views and to make the point that Abū Ḥanīfa's "Jahmite" views did not taint his *fiqh*, which is all that Abū Yūsuf took from him: Wakī', *Akhbār*, III, p. 258. The tendencies of the foregoing report may be contrasted with those of other reports according to which Abū Yūsuf tries to make the *madhhab* respectable not by disclaiming Abū Hanīfa's theology but by bringing the master himself into the "orthodox" fold. Abū Yūsuf is said to have asserted, for instance, that Abū Hanīfa was the *first* to maintain that the Qur'ān was the "uncreated" word of God: Ibid., p. 258. Abū Ḥanīfa's critics took a very different view of his position on the question: cf. Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Majrūḥīn* (Aleppo edn.), III, p. 65, where Abū Ḥanīfa is alleged—on Abū Yūsuf's authority!—to have been the first in Kufa to assert the createdness of the Qur'ān. Cf., too, the anecdote about Abū Yūsuf's strong condemnation of the Murji'ite-Ḥanafite Bishr al-Marīsī for the latter's belief in the createdness of the Qur'ān: Wakī', *Akhbār*, III, p. 257.

A concern to mediate between the several religio-political groupings into which the community was divided by, and since, the first *Fitna* was shared by the early Mu'tazila as well.[93] Against the Rāfiḍa, most of the Mu'tazila affirmed the legitimacy of the caliphates of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān, and not just that of 'Alī, although many of the Mu'tazila of Baghdad regarded 'Alī to have been all along the "*afḍal*".[94] On the other hand, the Mu'tazilite attitude towards 'Alī was usually much more favourable than what the early *ahl al-sunna* allowed. The Mu'tazila may consequently be regarded, as Tilman Nagel has argued, as preparing the ground for the characteristic Sunni doctrine that all four of the first successors of the Prophet were "rightly-guided".[95]

Yet, it was not the Mu'tazila but the *ahl al-sunna* and the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* who emerged as the popularly acknowledged "orthodoxy" of Islam. It was ironic that the Mu'tazila, who had been active in combatting the Manichaean and other perceived challenges to Islam,[96] were themselves denounced, by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and others among the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, as "Magians" and "*zanādiqa*"! The justification for such a denunciation was theological: Mu'tazilite affirmation of *qadar* (free will, which was construed by the opponents of the doctrine as compromising the omnipotence of God), and the doctrine of

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[93] For a description, and defence, of the conciliatory views of various early Mu'tazilite thinkers on the people involved in the first *Fitna*, see al-Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb al-intiṣār*, ed. H.S. Nyberg (Cairo, 1925), pp. 60ff., 97f., etc. Also cf. ibid., p. 169, where the author concedes, in effect, that the Mu'tazilite way of looking at Islam's early history is tendentious, and no less so than that of the Rāfiḍa. But, he asks, which course is preferable: "to elucidate the acts of the Companions of the Messenger of God in the most favourable manner [possible], so that [those acts] come across as unobjectionable; or [conversely], to elucidate them, even [for the time] when [the Companions] were in a state of togetherness and congeniality, in the worst possible manner, as the Rāfiḍa do. In doing so, the Rāfiḍa dissociate from them [sc. the Companions] and denounce them as infidels. Thus [the Companions] escape from the Rāfiḍa neither when they agree among themselves nor when they disagree." On the Mu'tazila, see Madelung, *Der Imām*, passim; W.M. Watt, *Formative Period*, ch. 8, and index, s.v.; van Ess, "Une lecture à rebours de l'histoire du mu'tazilisme", *REI*, XLVI (1978), pp. 163–240, XLVII (1979), pp. 19–69; idem, "L'autorité de la tradition prophetique dans la theologie Mu'tazilite", in G. Makdisi et al., eds., *La notion d'autorité au moyen âge: Islam, Byzance, Occident* (Paris, 1982), pp. 211–26; idem, "Mu'tazila" in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* (New York, 1987), X, pp. 220–29; idem, *Th&G*, II, pp. 233–342, 382–423, etc.; *EI(2)*, s.v. (D. Gimaret).

[94] Watt, *Formative Period*, pp. 224ff.

[95] T. Nagel, "Das Probleme der Orthodoxie im frühen Islam" in *Studien zum Minderheitenproblem im Islam*, I (Bonn, 1973), pp. 7–44, passim.

[96] Cf. S. Stroumsa and G.G. Stroumsa, "Aspects of anti-Manichaean Polemics in Late Antiquity and under Early Islam", *Harvard Theological Review*, LXXXI (1988), pp. 37–58.

the "created" Qur'ān, which followed from the Mu'tazilite denial of the divine attributes.[97] The *ahl al-sunna*'s hostility was aggravated, of course, by the Mu'tazila's association with al-Ma'mūn's *Miḥna*, which seems to have hurt their standing in society even as it ultimately enhanced the image and the identity of the persecuted.

The *ahl al-sunna*'s antagonism needs also to be seen at another, probably a more fundamental level, however. Like the Christian bishops' apprehensions of public disputation in Late Antiquity, the *ahl al-sunna*'s was a deep-rooted suspicion of the very style and methods—and the social implications—of argument, of disputation, characteristic of the Mu'tazila and the *mutakallimūn* in general.[98] It would be misleading to attribute this suspicion simply to a pious distaste for "rationalist" styles of discourse, or the use of "reason" in matters of religion. *Jadal, kalām*, or—in the more common derogatory characterization of the proto-Sunnīs—*khuṣūmāt*, were not only alternate ways of reaching the truth (unacceptable alternatives, that is, to the binding authority of *ḥadīth*); they were also suspect, it seems, as potential means of questioning and undermining the authority of the 'ulamā', even of defeating them in argument and humiliating them.[99] A scholar could respond, of course, that he knew nothing of *kalām*—as Ibn Ḥanbal is supposed to have done in the course of his Inqui-

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[97] For such denunciations, cf. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Radd 'ala'l-zanādiqa wa'l-Jahmiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Fihr Shaqfa (Hama, n.d.), where the "Jahmite" doctrine of the Qur'ān's createdness is attacked. Though Jahm b. Ṣafwān was a predestinationist, whereas the Mu'tazila espoused the doctrine of free-will, the Mu'tazila were often characterized as "Jahmiyya" for their view on the Qur'ān. Cf. ibid., pp. 31f. where the "*aṣḥāb Abī Ḥanīfa wa aṣḥāb 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd*" are said to have followed Jahm in his "*dīn al-Jahmiyya*"; on the latter, see *EI(2)*, s.v. "Djahmiyya" (W.M. Watt). In turn the "Jahmiyya" (and thus, by extension, the Mu'tazila) were frequently denounced as "*zanādiqa*": cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Radd 'ala'l-zanādiqa*; al-Dārimī, *al-Radd 'ala'l-Jahmiyya*, ed. G. Vitestam (Leiden, 1960), especially pp. 100, 103, etc. A more common term of abuse for the Mu'tazila, however, was "Magians" (*majūs*), in accordance with a famous tradition attributed to the Prophet: cf. Lālakā'ī, *Sharḥ*, IV, pp. 707–12. The equation of heretical "insiders" (that is, people who characterized themselves as Muslims) with particular non-Muslim groups, a familiar technique in medieval Islamic polemics, was as much an exercize in self-definition as in the damnation of the other: on such "equation lists" (e.g., "Shī'is are the Jews of our community"), see Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 96ff.

[98] R. Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 149–81. My discussion of the adverse effects of disputation on religious authority draws heavily on Lim's work.

[99] Cf. al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fols. 149b–150b; ibid., fols. 176b–178b (Ibn Ḥanbal's letter to al-Mutawakkil). For a wide ranging selection of Sunnī views and traditions condemning disputation with the heretics, or with anyone else for that matter, see al-Lālakā'ī, *Sharḥ*, I, pp. 128–69. For the condemnation of *qadar* and *kalām*, and of those engaging in it, see ibid., III, pp. 421–634, IV, pp. 637–827, passim.

sition—implying not his own ignorance but the lack of any religious sanction for *kalām* itself.[100] Even so, the challenge to their authority—as guardians of religious truth, as scholars of all that was worth knowing—that was implicit in *kalām* could not have been lost on the traditionists, and it is not unlikely that many of them saw the *Miḥna* simply as the objectification of that challenge.[101] Finally, as Richard Lim has shown so clearly in his study of public disputation in Late Antiquity, doctrinal debates were seen not just to undermine religious beliefs, but also to threaten the social order;[102] and even Muʿtazilīs like al-Jāḥiz agreed that the common people (*ʿāmma*) took an inordinate and dangerous interest in such disputes.[103] To the proto-Sunnīs, such *khuṣūmāt* were not just a *fitna* for *din*, they could easily become one for society as well.[104] It is unlikely that the ʿAbbāsid caliphs would have disagreed with this assessment.

The religious trends we have so far been concerned with contributed, in varying measure, to the evolution of proto-Sunnism in early ʿAbbāsid society. Also worth considering, finally, is the relevance of a category of people, characterized in our sources as the "*zanādiqa*" (singular: *zindīq*), to this evolution. This was an extremely diffuse category, yet, as I would argue, one of crucial importance in shaping—and, for the historian, illustrating—some of the processes which went into the definition of religious identities in the period with which this book is concerned. The case of the *zanādiqa* also illuminates certain aspects of ʿAbbāsid religious policies and forms part of the context in which the image of the caliphs as patrons of the proto-Sunnī "orthodoxy" developed, together with that "orthodoxy" itself.

II.4 Zandaqa *and the* Zanādiqa

Like many other much used terms, "*zandaqa*" was a highly charged but ill-defined term in the early ʿAbbāsid society. It could denote

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[100] Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Sīrat al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. F. ʿAbd al-Munʿim Aḥmad (Alexandria, 1981), pp. 60f.; Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq, *Dhikr miḥnat al-imām Aḥmad ibn Hanbal*, ed. M. Naghash (Cairo, 1977), pp. 49, 51, 56f.

[101] Cf. al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fols. 149b–152b, for reports denouncing Bishr al-Marīsī, a major influence on al-Maʾmūn and the prosecution of the *Miḥna*.

[102] Lim, *Public Disputation*, pp. 149–81, and passim.

[103] al-Jāḥiz, *al-ʿUthmāniyya*, pp. 254f.; compare Lim, *Public Disputation*, p. 149.

[104] al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 177a.

many different things, though it seems primarily (or, at least, initially) to have signified an adherence to Manichaeism, a "heresy" which had survived into ʿAbbāsid times.[105] Many of those who were charged with and persecuted for *zandaqa* claimed to be Muslims, however, which is what made this term dangerously ill-defined. In case of such Muslims, the accusation which was brought up was that they secretly harboured Manichaean beliefs. The proof for such an accusation was typically sought, if at all, either in any indication that the accused believed in some kind of "dualism", or in that he (or she) openly flouted Islamic beliefs and practices, or in both. Certain Muslim poets of the early ʿAbbāsid times with a "libertine" way of life could therefore be accused of *zandaqa* as much as an actual Manichaean might.[106]

The charge of *zandaqa* was not an idle one; it could cost the accused his life. The persecution of the *zanādiqa* began on an organized and extensive scale only in the caliphate of al-Mahdi, and was vigorously continued by his successor al-Hādī. Hārūn, who succeeded al-Hādī, seems to have continued this policy, though clearly without the vigour which had characterized it earlier. The policy may have survived even afterwards, though those who could serve as the conspicuous objects of such persecution may not have. In any case, al-Maʾmūn's priorities were rather different; and it was a different kind of persecution that he launched with the *Miḥna* towards the close of his reign.

Why the *zanādiqa* were persecuted under the early ʿAbbāsids is not easy to determine, though some possibilities are worth considering. First, *zandaqa* was viewed as a threat to Islam, to Muslim society and

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[105] For the primary texts relating to *zandaqa* and the *zanādiqa* in medieval Islamic sources, see Aḥmad Afshār Shīrāzī, *Mūtūn ʿArabī va Fārsī dar bāra-i Mānī va Mānaviyyat*, published together with Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzādeh's *Mānī va dīn-i ū* (Tehran, 1335 H.sh.). Studies include: G. Vajda, "Les *zindiq*s en pays d'Islam", *RSO*, XVII (1938), pp. 173–229; F. Gabrieli, "La 'zandaqa' au 1er siècle abbaside" in *L'Élaboration de l'Islam* (Paris, 1961), pp. 23–38; G. Monnot, *Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes: ʿAbd al-Jabbār et ses devanciers* (Paris, 1974), pp. 88ff. and passim; van Ess, *Th&G*, I, pp. 416–56; II, pp. 4–41; M. Chokr, *Zandaqa et zindīqs en Islam au second siècle de l'hégire* (Damascus, 1993).

Bibliography on Manichaeism is extensive. See, most recently, S.N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A historical survey* (Manchester, 1985). Also idem, "Some Themes in Later Roman anti-Manichaean Polemics", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, LXVIII (1986), pp. 434–72, LXIX (1986), pp. 235–75. On Manichaeism in the lands of the caliphate, see Lieu, *Manichaeism*, pp. 78–85, especially pp. 82ff.; M. Morony, *Iraq after Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 404ff., and 637f.; van Ess, *Th&G*, I, pp. 418ff.

[106] On such poets suspected of *zandaqa*, though only in rare cases actually persecuted for it, see Chokr, *Zandaqa et zindiqs*, pp. 235–308, passim; van Ess, *Th&G*, I, pp. 443ff., II, pp. 4ff.; Y. Khulayf, *Ḥayāt al-shiʿr fi'l-Kūfa ilā nihāyat al-qarn al-thānī li'l-hijra* (Cairo, 1968), pp. 224ff., 607–642 passim, especially pp. 618ff.

the state. In the second/eighth century, Islamic beliefs and practices, social norms and religious identities were still very much in the process of articulation. Muslims were still a rather small minority in the territories ruled by the caliphate, and even those who had converted were, to many observers, often "imperfectly" Islamized;[107] many of these converts had a Manichaean past, and Manichaeism—"the missionary religion par excellence" in Late Antiquity[108]—had witnessed something of a resurgence in the early phases of Muslim rule. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that the Manichaeans should have been perceived as a threat by the ʿAbbāsid state and many among the Muslim religious elite. As also with many a *mutakallim*, the threat was particularly to be seen in the "knockabout rationalism"[109] and quasi-scientific manner in which the Manichaeans posed unsettling, challenging questions to their opponents, attacked their beliefs, and defended their own intricate and attractive world view.[110] Well-versed in the art of disputation, it was not unknown for them in Late Antiquity to try to create a favourable impression on the people through public disputations with Christian bishops, and to challenge with these skills the doctrines and, concomitantly, the social and religious authority, of the bishops.[111] The *zanādiqa* of early ʿAbbāsid times may have challenged Islamic beliefs and the authority of the religious specialists in a similar manner. The Manichaean intellectual challenge evoked a far-reaching response from Muslim, as it once had from Christian, theologians.[112] There is no doubt, however, that for many in early ʿAbbāsid society who were disaffected with the visions of Islam or ideologies of the state being then articulated, Manichaean ideas did exercise considerable fascination. At a time when religious boundaries

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[107] Conversion and Islamization remain difficult areas of inquiry, and not just for the first centuries of Islam. For a discussion of some of the issues involved, see Madelung, *Religious Trends*, pp. 15f., 31; G.R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam* (London, 1986), pp. 1–9 and passim; R.W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An essay in quantitative analysis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979).

[108] Lim, *Public Disputation*, p. 29.

[109] This characterization of their method is by W.H.C. Frend, "The Gnostic-Manichaean Tradition in Roman North Africa", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, IV (1953), p. 21; cited in Lim, *Public Disputation*, p. 89.

[110] On the Manichaean rationalistic and quasi-scientific appeal, see also van Ess, *Th&G*, I, pp. 424f.

[111] Lim, *Public Disputation*, pp. 70–108.

[112] Cf. S. Stroumsa and G.G. Stroumsa, "Anti-Manichaean Polemics"; Lieu, "Later Roman anti-Manichaean Polemics", passim; Chokr, *Zandaqa*, pp. 93–186 and passim. Chokr argues (ibid., p. 25) that the defeat of *zandaqa* in ʿAbbāsid society was brought about not so much by official persecution as by the response of the Muslim theologians.

were being drawn and Muslim identity (or identities) being defined in ever more precise terms, Manichean rationalism, and its well-known strategy of obscuring boundaries to win converts,[113] may have been especially attractive to many a non-conformist. That would be one way of protesting against the social and religious order then being devised, if nothing else.[114]

The persecution of the *zanādiqa* must be seen, however, not only with reference to the challenges or threats they were perceived to pose to Muslim society and state, but also in terms of what the early ʿAbbāsid state and its religious elite stood to gain from this challenge and their response to it. The persecution of "heresy" can be a crucial means of gaining, consolidating, and legitimating political power and social influence, as R.I. Moore has shown with reference to medieval Western Europe.[115] In order to serve the ends it is intended for, such persecution requires that its object—the *zanādiqa*, in this case—be invested with all those images of the vile, scheming, and dangerous "other" which inspires hatred and fear, and seems to justify, even necessitate persecution.[116] The *zanādiqa* may have asked unsettling questions, challenged authority, undermined boundaries, led an openly dissolute life. But as all studies of their attitudes and activities concur, they never comprised a cohesive, well-defined community whose *raison d'être* was to undermine Islam or the Muslim community.[117] Yet there were obvious advantages in giving the *zanādiqa* a shared identity, a cohesiveness that they almost certainly lacked, for nothing short of the image of a well-defined "other" would suffice in affirming the caliph's commitment to Islam.[118]

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[113] On this strategy, see R. Lim, "Unity and Diversity among Western Manichaeans: A reconsideration of Mani's *sancta ecclesia*", *Revue des études Augustiniennes*, XXXV (1989), p. 244.

[114] Cf. Lim, *Public Disputation*, pp. 88ff. on the attractions of dialectic, a skill in which the Manichaeans excelled, "to those who possessed talent and ambition but lacked institutional authority." (The quotation is from p. 90.)

[115] R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: power and deviance in Western Europe 950–1250* (Oxford, 1987). As will readily be apparent, I am much indebted in what follows to Moore's brilliant study.

[116] Cf. the carefully constructed and enduringly powerful image of heresy as contagion in medieval Europe: R.I. Moore, "Heresy as Disease" in *The Concept of Heresy in the Middle Ages (11th–13th C.)*, ed. W. Lourdaux and D. Verhelst (Louvain, 1976), pp. 1–11.

[117] This is a conclusion which emerges clearly from the work of Chokr, *Zandaqa*, though he is hardly unique in this respect. Also see Lim, "Unity and Diversity", pp. 231–50, which offers an important corrective to the tendency of viewing the Manichaeans as a uniform and cohesive community.

[118] Cf. Moore, *Formation*, pp. 71f., 98f., 152, and passim.

A new administrative office, that of the *Ṣāḥib al-zanādiqa*, was created by al-Mahdī and charged exclusively with the function of pursuing and persecuting them.[119] The state felt called upon to combat the *zanādiqa* even as it constituted the accused into a distinct social entity informed by a determinate ideology. With the *zanādiqa* being represented as the gravest of threats to all that Islam stood for, their persecution could not have failed to assist the ʿAbbāsid state in establishing its own credentials as the defender of Islam. That this persecution was launched during the reign of a caliph who is also known to have sponsored the formal dissociation from the extremist Shīʿite milieu in which the ʿAbbāsid revolution had originated is also significant. Extremist Shīʿism was not *zandaqa*, but, on occasion, the two could overlap or might be perceived to do so.[120] Some of those accused of *zandaqa* did have Shīʿite inclinations;[121] and there also are indications that al-Mahdī's inquisition was viewed with apprehension in certain Shīʿite circles.[122] To add a more speculative note here: it may have been during this same period, which witnessed the ʿAbbāsids distancing themselves from the Shīʿa and persecuting the *zanādiqa*, that the story about Muḥammad b. ʿAlī articulating an "orthodoxy" for the benefit of his Shīʿa in the wake of the Khidāsh affair may have been popularized: for the moral of the story evidently was that the ʿAbbāsids were committed to "orthodox" Islam, and—what is no less important—that there was nothing new about this commitment on their part.[123]

If the state could validate its Islamic credentials through the persecution of *zandaqa*, the religious scholars could likewise define some of their own positions in opposition to those putatively held by the *zanādiqa*.[124] The engagement of early Muslim theologians, in particular

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[119] On this office, see al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 499, 519, 522; Chokr, *Zandaqa*, pp. 22–23.

[120] Cf. al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 41, ll. 6f., where the "Zindīqiyya" are alleged to be one of the sources from which the "*ahl al-ghulū*" draw inspiration; also see al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, p. 64, para 127. More generally, see Chokr, *Zandaqa*, pp. 143–51.

[121] Cf. Vajda, "Les *zindīq*s", p. 221, and passim; van Ess, *Th&G*, I, p. 439.

[122] Cf. *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, pp. 265f. (nr. 476), 269f. (nr. 485).

[123] Ironically, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī and his followers could once be disparaged, by a *mawlā* of the Umayyads, as "*zanādiqa*"!—thus, according to a thoroughly pro-ʿAbbāsid source: *Akhbār*, p. 163.

[124] As Richard Lim has observed, though the authority of Christian bishops in Late Antiquity might be challenged in disputations with Manichaeans, the former sometimes also sought such confrontations in order to impress their authority over their audiences; disputations in writing, or written but often contrived accounts of actual verbal contests, served similar purposes. See *Public Disputation*, pp. 70–108.

the Mu'tazila, with the Manichaeans seems to have played a considerable role in the development of *kalām*. But the combat against the *zanādiqa*, or perhaps only the memory of it, also contributed to the intellectual arsenal of people other than the *mutakallimūn*. The Manichaeans and their sympathizers may have challenged the religious boundaries and identities being defined by the Muslim religious elite in the second/eighth century. By the same token, however, the perception of such a challenge, or the conviction that they were faced with one, may have assisted the scholars precisely in articulating the identity of the group they represented.

Given, moreover, that a "*zindīq*" could stand for many things, and there was little need to specify exactly what was meant, this epithet could effectively be hurled at a variety of opponents. From the perspective of the proto-Sunnīs, not only a secret Manichaean but also a poet or littérateur who openly flouted their norms of belief and behaviour, an "extremist" Shī'ī, an especially notorious forger of *ḥadīth*, a *qadarī*, one who professed the doctrine of the Qur'ān's createdness, or anyone interested in *kalām* might all be counted among the *zanādiqa*. The latter were the "other" in opposition to which one's own community was defined. More often than not, perhaps, the vices of the "other" could alone suffice for the definition of the self. The noted proto-Sunnī *rijāl*-critic and scholar of *ḥadīth* Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn was asked about one Ibn Manādhir, and replied: "I know him. He was a poet (*ṣāḥib shi'r*), and was not one of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*. He used to release scorpions in the Masjid al-Ḥarām so as to have them bite the people; and he would pour ink in the place where ablutions were performed so that the faces of people doing ablutions would turn black. No one who has any good in him narrates [*ḥadīth*] from him." As if any doubt was left about the character of this person, the report which follows this statement quotes Ibn Ḥanbal as saying that "Ibn Manādhir was a *zindīq*".[125] Whether Ibn Manādhir was a secret Manichaean or only someone who hated the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, his characterization as a *zindīq* makes him part of a larger group to which a variety of abominations could indifferently be attached and in opposition to which the proto-Sunnīs (or some other group), not to mention the 'Abbāsids themselves, might define themselves.

The Manichaeans of early 'Abbāsid times may once have been seen by many as some sort of a threat to Islam and the Muslims, though

[125] Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn, *al-Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 77 (nrs. 309–10).

in all probability it is not the gravity of the threat but the advantages of viewing and responding to it as such which explains the persecution launched under al-Mahdī.[126] By the time of Ibn Ḥanbal, however, *zandaqa* had essentially become a metaphor for all that the proto-Sunnīs wanted to define themselves against. Ibn Ḥanbal's *al-Radd ala'l-zanādiqa wa'l-Jahmiyya*, for instance, is largely concerned with refuting the doctrine of the Qur'ān's createdness, and with refuting too the interpretations of the Qur'ān—attributed to Jahm b. Ṣafwān—that Ibn Ḥanbal and the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* found unacceptable. The actual Manichaeans could not have been more conspicuous by their absence here. But that was immaterial. What mattered was the category of otherness,[127] and by Ibn Ḥanbal's later years, and to him and his colleagues at least, it was not so much the Manichaeans as the *mutakallimūn* who best fitted that category.[128]

[126] See Moore, *Formation*, pp. 1ff., 66f.

[127] I have borrowed this useful expression from M. Rubin's review of Moore, *Formation of a Persecuting Society*, in *Speculum*, LXV (1990), pp. 1025–27.

[128] Cf. al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fols. 175a–175b on the characterization, by certain prominent proto-Sunnī scholars, of those affirming the createdness of the Qur'ān as *zanādiqa*.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CALIPHS AND THE 'ULAMĀ': DEFINING A RELATIONSHIP

III.1

The early 'Abbāsid period is usually thought of as a time when a definitive and enduring separation between religion and politics took place.[1] On this view, the failure of the *Miḥna* instituted by al-Ma'mūn was the critical moment which finally stripped the caliphs of their religious authority and marked the end of their involvement in matters of religion and the law. This chapter argues against positing any such separation and questions the conception of the caliph's religious authority on which this view is predicated. It shows rather that the caliph continued to be recognized, after the *Miḥna* as well as prior to it, as an active participant in religious life, which, among other things, included the function of commenting on or resolving obscure matters of a legal import.

That the case for a separation between religion and politics rests on very slender bases, as will be argued here, is not to deny, however, that many religious scholars were opposed to the 'Abbāsids and some were also persecuted by them. Any account of the relations between the caliphs and the scholars must take into consideration the conflicting strands which went into the evolution of this relationship. This chapter will therefore describe not only the various efforts to define the terms of this relationship but also some of the strains and ambiguities which were a part of its evolution. The outcome of this evolution was not, however, to marginalize the 'Abbāsids, so far as the religious life of the community was concerned, but rather to affirm their position and role in it, together with that of the religious scholars.

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[1] See the studies by Gibb, Lapidus, Nagel and Crone and Hinds reviewed in ch. I, above.

III.2 *Caliphs and 'Ulamā': "The Heat of the Sword"*

III.2.1

The caliphs' concern to seek the support of members of the religious circles goes back to the milieu of the 'Abbāsid revolution. There is some evidence to suggest that the 'Abbāsid revolutionary propagandists, the *du'āt*, actively sought to cultivate the favour of the religious circles; their purpose apparently was not only to enhance their support-base but also to bolster the "Islamic" credentials of their movement in the face of serious contrary accusations.[2] The *du'āt* appear to have been successful with some from among the religious circles,[3] though the efforts of the Umayyad governor of Khurasān, Naṣr b. Sayyār, to win or keep many of them on his side also appear to have been fairly effective.[4] In any case, if any prominent men of religion were actively supporting the 'Abbāsid movement, we know next to nothing about them. Conversely, we do know a little about some of those who are reported to have been opposed for some reason to the partisans of the 'Abbāsid movement and their ways.

Wilferd Madelung has drawn attention to some evidence on what he characterizes as Murji'ite opposition to Abū Muslim Khurāsānī during the militant phase of the 'Abbāsid *da'wa* in Ṭukharistan and Khurasan.[5] Certain individuals killed in Khurasan and elsewhere are indeed counted among the Murji'a.[6] But it seems unwarranted to posit any necessary correlation between Murji'ism and opposition to the 'Abbāsid revolutionaries, or to suppose that the Murji'a were acting in such instances as a group. Rather, it is more likely that many pious and locally influential individuals from a variety of backgrounds found

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[2] See *Akhbār al-dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dūrī and 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Muṭṭalibī [hereafter *Akhbār*] (Beirut, 1971), pp. 282, 290, 292, 313f., etc.

[3] *Akhbār*, pp. 285, 292f.; also cf. M. Sharon, Revolt: *The social and military aspects of the 'Abbāsid revolution* (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 59f.

[4] *Akhbār*, pp. 284, 290.

[5] W. Madelung, "The Early Murji'a in Khurasān and Transoxania and the Spread of Hanafism", *Der Islam*, LIX (1982), p. 35; idem, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, 1988), p. 20.

[6] These include: Ibrāhīm al-Ṣā'igh (Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-majrūḥīn*, ed. 'Azīz al-Qādirī [Haydarabad, 1970–77], 1, pp. 144f.; idem, *Kitāb al-thiqāt* [Haydarabad, 1973–82], VI, p. 19; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* [Haydarabad, 1325–27 A.H.], I, pp. 172f.) and Yazīd al-Naḥwī (Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, XI, p. 332), both of whom were killed on Abū Muslim's orders in Marw; Khālid b. Salama al-Makhzūmī (ibid., III, pp. 95f.), who was killed in Wasit; Sālim b. 'Ajlān al-Afṭas, killed in Syria (ibid., III, pp. 441f.).

themselves opposed, again for several possible reasons, to the revolutionary activity, or, conversely, that the ʿAbbāsids saw them as something of a threat. In an age when literacy and means of communication were severely restricted, local preachers, holy men, and all those who took it upon themselves to "command that which is proper" could be not only very effective but, to many, also very threatening. That many of the piety-minded who came into conflict with the revolutionary leadership were in fact active in *al-amr bi'l-maʿrūf* cannot have been fortuitous;[7] and one did not, of course, have to be a Murjiʿī in order to be scandalized by the revolutionaries' conduct. As al-ʿAṭāʾ b. ʿUtba of Ḥimṣ reportedly complained to a fellow scholar, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalḥa, in the wake of ʿAbbāsid massacres of their Umayyad rivals: ". . . we loved the family (*āl*) of Muḥammad only because of the love for him [sc. Muḥammad]; but if they oppose his *sīra* and act in contravention of his *sunna*, they are the most hateful of people to us."[8]

Others among the piety-minded were more politic (and, precisely for that reason, perhaps, are seldom mentioned in biographical dictionaries). The stance of one Husayn b. Wāqid (d. 157/774 or 159/776), who at one time served as the *qāḍī* of Marw, may have typified that of many others: "when the *fitna* of Abū Muslim occurred, he asked no one about it until it had ceased."[9] A more colourful story, which seems intended primarily to illustrate the religious authority of one Abū Ṭiba ʿĪsā b. Sulaymān (d. 153/770), a prominent ascetic and holy man of Jurjān, also deserves retelling here inasmuch as it tends towards a similarly quiescent yet hostile attitude towards the revolutionaries:

> ʿAbd al-Wāsiʿ [b. Saʿīd b. ʿAbd al-Wāsiʿ] said that al-Sabʿ (?) narrated to me: When the Musawwida arose in Khurasan, people were frightened.

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[7] This function is attested for both Yazīd al-Naḥwī and Ibrāhīm al-Ṣāigh. The latter is reported to have admonished Abū Muslim "for the shedding of blood and the unlawful appropriation of property"; and one scholar at least thought that it was a *ḥadīth* commending *al-amr bi'l-maʿrūf* which had led Ibrāhīm to sacrifice his life. Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Majrūḥin*, (Haydarabad edn.), I, pp. 144f. Sālim b. ʿAjlān, who was executed by the ʿAbbāsid governor of Syria, figures as the transmitter of a *ḥadīth* which vehemently urges the performance of this function, in terms of the threat of divine retribution were this function neglected: cf. Muḥammad b. Waḍḍāh al-Qurṭubī, *Kitāb al-bidaʿ*, ed. and tr. I. Fierro (Madrid, 1988), p. 230 (nr. xii:58). al-ʿAwwām b. Ḥawshab, who was initially refused amnesty when Wasit fell to the ʿAbbāsids though he was later pardoned, is also known as "*ṣāḥib amr bi'l-maʿrūf wa nahy ʿan al-munkar*": Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, VIII, pp. 163–65; cf. ibid., III, p. 96.

[8] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, VII, p. 341.

[9] Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt*, VI, p. 209.

> They kept to their houses in Jurjan, Abū Ṭiba being one of those who did so. [al-Sabʿ said:] In a dream, I saw the Prophet entering Jurjan from the direction of Istarabadh. I followed him . . . until he came to the door of Abū Ṭiba and knocked on it. [Abū Ṭiba] opened the door, [the Prophet] entered, and I entered behind him. I saw the Prophet in the centre of the portico (*ṣuffa*) with Abū Ṭība sitting in front of him. I knelt in front of the Prophet and said: "O Prophet of God, we have fallen into this *fitna*! What do you command us to do?" He pointed to Abū Ṭība and said: "Do as he does". [al-Sabʿ said:] I woke up [and went to Abū Ṭība]. . . . I narrated my dream to him, and asked: "What do you command me to do, for the Prophet of God has instructed me to follow you." He said: "Keep this dream a secret, and stay in your house." So I did that.[10]

This story nicely illustrates two issues which came to be at the heart of the proto-Sunnī world view: political quietism and religious authority. But as usual, historical reality was far messier than what was schematically remembered or imagined about it in a later chronicle or biographical dictionary. That a quietist stance was the best course to adopt was not yet, in the milieu and aftermath of the ʿAbbāsid revolution, a settled matter. This point is perhaps best illustrated with reference to the revolt of the ʿAlid Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh "al-Nafs al-Zakiyya" and his brother Ibrāhīm in 145/762, in Medina and Basra respectively, during the reign of al-Manṣūr.[11]

This revolt is unique in early ʿAbbāsid history for the large number of scholars who are said to have supported it.[12] The more prominent among those mentioned include: Mālik b. Anas and Abū Ḥanīfa, the eponyms of the Mālikī and Ḥanafī *madhhabs*,[13] Misʿar b. Kidām, a

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[10] al-Sahmī, *Taʾrīkh Jurjān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿīd Khān (Beirut, 1987), pp. 287f.

[11] Ibrāhīm's revolt in Basra, though politically more dangerous for the ʿAbbāsids than that of Muḥammad in Medina, was ideologically dependent upon, and a continuation of, the latter. The two episodes will therefore be treated here as a single revolt. On this revolt, see principally: al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk*, ed. M.J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879–1901), III, pp. 189–265 (Muḥammad's revolt), 282–318 (Ibrāhīm's revolt); Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1949), pp. 260–299 (Muḥammad's revolt), 315–86 (Ibrāhīm's revolt). Studies include: T. Nagel, "Ein früher Bericht über den Aufstand des Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh im Jahre 145 h", *Der Islam*, XLVI (1970), pp. 227–62; J. Lassner, *The Shaping of ʿAbbāsid Rule* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 69ff., 79ff.; H. Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate* (London, 1981), pp. 67ff., 200ff.; ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī, "al-Fikra al-mahdiyya . . .", in W. al-Qāḍī, ed., *Studia Arabica et Islamica* (Beirut, 1981), pp. 21–32; etc. For references to some other sources and studies on Muḥammad's revolt, see F.-C. Muth's translation of a portion of al-Ṭabarī's Taʾrīth, *Der Kalif al-Manṣūr im Anfang seines Kalifats (136/754 bis 145/762)* (Frankfurt, 1987), p. 377 n. 1564.

[12] Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 277ff., 354ff.

[13] Mālik is said to have given the ruling that the people were justified in contravening

Murji'ite like Abū Ḥanīfa,[14] well-known Medinese *qadarīs* like Muḥammad b. ʿAjlān and Ibn Abī Dhi'b,[15] a former *qāḍī* of Medina ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Muṭṭalib al-Makhzūmī,[16] *muḥaddithūn* like Abū Bakr b. Abī Sabra,[17] Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj, Hushaym b. Bashīr, ʿAbbād b. al-ʿAwwām, and Yazīd b. Hārūn,[18] some of the Muʿtazila of Basra,[19] and many others. It was even claimed that "none from amongst the *fuqahā'* stayed back" from Ibrāhīm's revolt,[20] and that ". . . the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* all rebelled together with him (sc. Ibrāhīm)".[21] The latter claims are extremely dubious, however: several scholars of Medina and Basra are, in fact, known to have abstained from backing the revolt, and even many ʿAlids opposed it.[22] It is also difficult to be

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their oath of fealty to the ʿAbbāsids because that oath had been exacted under duress. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 200; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 283. For Abū Ḥanīfa's support for the revolt of Ibrāhīm, see ibid., pp. 361, 364, 365, 378f.; C. van Arendonck, *Les débuts de l'imamat zaidite*, tr. J. Ryckmans (Leiden, 1960), p. 315. He is also said to have approved of the revolt of Zayd b. ʿAlī earlier: al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 146f.; van Arendonck, *L'imamat*, p. 307.

[14] Other Murj'ia are, however, said to have been critical of Abū Ḥanīfa and Misʿar for supporting Ibrāhīm's revolt. Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 361, 366.

[15] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 227, 251f., 259; Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 289. For a discussion of Ibn ʿAjlān along with the other Medinese Qadarīs, such as ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Jaʿfar b. ʿAbdallāh and Ibn Abi Dhi'b, who are known to have participated in al-Nafs al-Zakiyya's revolt, see J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* [hereafter *Th&G*] (Berlin and New York, 1991–), II, pp. 678ff.

[16] Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 282. His support for Muḥammad ended, however, before the revolt in Medina itself did. On him, also cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, VI, pp. 357f. (nr. 682). al-Makhzūmī had served as *qāḍī* of Medina for al-Manṣūr, prior to the revolt (cf. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyā' al-ʿUmarī [Najaf, 1967], pp. 465f.), and is also said to have been appointed, at one stage, as the governor of Medina by the same caliph (cf. al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 159).

[17] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 259; Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 285; Muḥammad b. Khalaf Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-quḍāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Muṣṭafa al-Marāghī (Cairo, 1947), I, p. 201.

[18] Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 377.

[19] See *Faḍl al-iʿtizāl*, ed. F. Sayyid (Tunis, 1974), p. 226: ". . . *hum wujūh al-muʿtazila* . . ." For Muʿtazilite participation in Ibrāhim's revolt, see van Ess, *Th&G*, II, pp. 327–335. Most Muʿtazila had previously tended to be, and were henceforward to remain, politically quiescent (Van Ess, "Une lecture à rebours de l'histoire du muʿtazilisme", *REI*, XLVII, [1979], pp. 65ff.) Many among the Muʿtazila continued, of course, to maintain their quietist commitment during Ibrāhīm's revolt as well (ibid., pp. 62ff.).

[20] Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 359.

[21] Ibid., p. 377. The "*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*" whom the *rāwī*, Isḥāq b. Shāhin—al-Iṣfahānī's source for this report—actually mentions are: Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj, Hushaym b. Bashīr, ʿAbbād b. al-ʿAwwām, and Yazīd b. Hārūn.

[22] Cf. the statement of the *rāwī* Ibn Shāhīn in Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 377: "Khālid b. ʿAbdallāh al-Wāsiṭī belonged to the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamāʿa*; people other than he revolted with Ibrāhīm, but he kept to his house [sc. abstained]" (on this Khālid, cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, III, pp. 100f. [nr. 187]). ʿUbaydallāh b. ʿUmar b. Ḥafṣ, one of the seven leading *faqīh*s of Medina, is also reported to have kept away from Muḥammad's revolt (Ibid.,

certain that all those who are said to have supported the revolt actually did so, or in what way. But to express these reservations is not to deny that the participation of the religious elite in this 'Alid revolt was, in general, most impressive and that scholars from a wide range of backgrounds lent their support to it. Indeed, on the showing of our sources, a more diverse group of scholars can hardly be imagined.[23]

Several possible reasons for the scholars' support of the revolt can be adduced. These would range from doubts about the legitimacy of 'Abbāsid rule and dissatisfaction with the conduct of the caliph or his governors[24] to a romantic sense that the pristine purity of early Islam might somehow be brought back[25] and, to some at any rate, the belief that al-Nafs al-Zakiyya was in fact the promised Mahdī.[26] These and other reasons for the scholars' support, or for the revolt itself, will not, however, be examined here. The fact that a considerable number of scholars did back the revolt must suffice for our purposes. Though it should not necessarily be supposed that they did so *qua* religious scholars (rather than simply as, say, disgruntled inhabitants of Medina or Basra), their participation does suggest that not only were they sufficiently disillusioned with the 'Abbāsids to

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VII, p. 40 [nr. 71]); so too did 'Abdallāh b. 'Awn b. Arṭabān, a prominent scholar of Basra (Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* [Beirut, 1985], VII, p. 264). On the 'Alids who were opposed to Muḥammad's revolt, see Kennedy, *Early 'Abbāsid Caliphate*, p. 202. In general, there is little doubt that opinion in religious circles, both in Medina and Basra, was no less divided than it would have been among people in general. Apart from other possible reasons—such as pro-'Abbāsid attitudes of some religious figures, or the fear of 'Abbāsid reprisals, etc.—quietist scruples probably led many to disapprove of the revolt.

[23] Note too that if some of the 'Alids did not support the revolt in Medina, certain Medinese families not otherwise known for their pro-'Alid sentiment did. Kennedy, *Early 'Abbāsid Caliphate*, pp. 202f.

[24] Cf. al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 197. A Mu'tazilī ascetic Bashīr al-Raḥḥāl, who supported Ibrāhīm's revolt in Basra, is reported to have said: "There is a burning in my heart which cannot be quelled, except by the coolness of justice or the heat of the sword." In rather more concrete terms, he is said to have complained about "the sanctity of things made inviolable by God having been violated, all kinds of disobedience to Him committed, property unjustly appropriated and improperly dispensed"—and all these transgressions by the rulers not having been resisted by the people. *Faḍl al-i'tizāl*, pp. 226f.

[25] Consider the following report about a Medinese *muḥaddith* 'Abdallāh b. Yazīd b. Hurmuz: Mālik b. Anas said: "I would go to see Ibn Hurmuz, and he would command his slave girl to bolt the door and to lower the curtain. Then he would reminisce about the early days of the *ummah* and weep until his beard was wet. When later he rebelled with Muḥammad, someone said to him, 'By God, there's no fight left in you!' 'I am aware of that,' he replied, 'yet some ignorant fellow may see me and follow my example.'" al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 252; translation as in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. XXVIII, tr. J.D. McAuliffe (Albany, 1995), pp. 216f.

[26] Cf. al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 291.

support a revolt against them, but also that they were sufficiently optimistic about the potential of the revolt to change things for the better. A militant stance against established authority could, in short, still be considered a valid option and could still be condoned.

III.2.2

Fortunately for the ʿAbbāsids, subsequent ʿAlid (or for that matter, any other) revolts did not usually attract the support or even sympathy of the ʿulamāʾ. Intimidation by the rulers, a time honoured device which was certainly not foreign to the ʿAbbāsids, must have played a part in the aftermath of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya's uprising: the punishments inflicted on several ʿulamāʾ included executions, mutilation, flogging, and imprisonment. But there was more to the ʿulamāʾ's subsequent quietism than the effects of intimidation. Given that this revolt had represented a massive threat to ʿAbbāsid legitimism, there seem to have been more concerted efforts in its wake to refurbish the latter; such efforts naturally involved cultivating better ties with the ʿulamāʾ, and there are indications that they were not without success.[27]

It is also clear that for all the respect that an ʿAlid notable might command in society, proto-Sunnī attitudes towards the Shīʿa were, even at the popular level, gradually becoming somewhat less favourable than they may have been earlier. The followers of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, who rebelled in Medina just a quarter of a century after al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, were already cursed by the Medinese for defiling their mosque;[28] and it there were any doubts about how the ʿAlids would behave, were they to come to power, the high-handedness of ʿAlid rebels who momentarily gained control in the Yemen and Mecca during the caliphate of al-Maʾmūn removed them.[29]

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[27] The patronage subsequently enjoyed by Mālik b. Anas provides one of the more prominent examples, as we shall see later, though his was not a unique case in this respect. For instance, the *muḥaddith* Ibn Abī Sabra later served as *qāḍī* in Baghdād (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrikh Baghdād* [hereafter *TB*] (Cairo, 1931), XIV, pp. 369, 371); Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj and Yazīd b. Hārūn distributed money on behalf of the caliph al-Mahdī and his son Manṣūr b. al-Mahdī, in Basra and Wāsit respectively (ibid., IX, p. 256; XIII, p. 82). It should not be difficult to add many other instances to these.

[28] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 556.

[29] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 987ff. The murderous activities of Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā—a son of Mūsā b. Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad, whom the later Ithnāʾ ʿashariyya recognized as their seventh imām—who rebelled in the Yemen, earned for him the nickname *al-jazzār*, "the butcher" (ibid., III, p. 988). His brother Zayd, who was with ʿAlid rebels in Basra, became notorious for having the partisans of the ʿAbbāsids (the "*Musawidda*") burnt alive, and the houses

As proto-Sunnī viewpoints gradually became better defined in the second and third centuries, and as *rijāl*-criticism became more stringent, scholars supporting those viewpoints also became less equivocal in their disapproval of the Shī'a. Prominent 'Alids usually continued to be regarded as trustworthy traditionists, but for many, their *ḥadīth* was acceptable only if transmitted through proto-Sunnī scholars. As Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) stated in his *tarjama* of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq: "[Only] those of his traditions which are not transmitted through his descendants (*awlādihi*) are authoritative (*yuḥtajja bi-riwāyatihi*), for in his descendants' *ḥadīth* there are many objectionable things (*manākīr*). . . . [But the traditions transmitted] from him by the trustworthy (*thiqāt*), such as Ibn Jurayj, al-Thawrī, Mālik, Shu'ba, Ibn 'Uyayna, Wahb b. Khālid and others are reliable."[30] This assessment comes from a fourth/tenth century source, but the attitude it expresses probably originated earlier. It is in any case striking that on this view what makes even a Shī'ī imām reliable is the fact that proto-Sunnī scholars have transmitted *ḥadīth* from him, and he is reliable only to the extent that they have done so. With such attitudes, it would have been difficult to support an 'Alid contender for the caliphate.

But there is also a more general point to be made about the lack of support by scholars for militant activism. As noted earlier, the 'Alid revolt of 145/762 was remarkable not only for the backing of many scholars, but also for the diversity of those scholars' backgrounds: jurists, *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, Murji'a, *qadarīs* and Mu'tazila, and scholars and holy people with no precise or determinable orientation could all come together to endorse the revolt in Medina and Basra. As boundaries between various religious orientations became firmer, it would have become progressively more difficult to join hands even against a common foe. Conversely, with its extensive patronage of scholars and its rhetoric of being the defenders of Islam and the Muslim community,[31] many would not have seen the 'Abbāsid state as a foe at all.

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belonging to the 'Abbāsid family burnt down: such reputation was reflected in his nickname, Zayd *al-nār*, Zayd "the fire" (ibid., p. 986). In Mecca, Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. Muḥammad—a son of the sixth imām in Ithnā' 'asharite reckoning—was set up as a caliph; he is said to have been widely respected, but his son, together with some of his followers, is reported to have caused much discontent there by his scandalous behaviour (ibid., pp. 989ff.).

[30] Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt*, VI, pp. 131f.

[31] On this role, see E. Tyan, *Institutions du droit public musulman*, I, Le califat (Paris, 1954), pp. 462ff.

If, then, the 'ulamā' are not usually seen as participating in any further uprising,[32] there is sufficient reason for that. A quietist political stance was very much in the air, though as the 'ulamā''s support for al-Nafs al-Zakiyya's revolt indicates it was not yet a matter of consensus among proto-Sunni (or for that matter, any other) religious scholars. But factors such as those noted above were at work in making it so. When Abū Yūsuf in his *Kitāb al-kharāj* expatiates on traditions affirming political quietism, he already gives the impression that this stance represents a matter of consensus, rather than one of *ikhtilāf*, among scholars. This impression is to be taken seriously even though Abū Yūsuf was scarcely a disinterested witness. A generation later, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal too was to endorse quietism, in more forceful terms and under more trying circumstances.[33]

III.2.3

Yet, if political quietism was becoming the measure of how a good Muslim ought to conduct himself, it could not have been self-evident to the early 'Abbāsid caliphs (or to anyone else) that a scholar or a holy man might not somehow threaten the stability of the regime, challenge the authority of the caliph, or at least condone such a challenge. The mere refusal of a scholar to associate himself with the

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[32] If certain reports about al-Shāfi'ī's politically activist involvements are credible, he should probably be regarded as something of an exception. Some Zaydī sources claim that he supported Yaḥyā' b. 'Abdallāh b. al-Ḥasan, a half-brother of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, who rebelled in Daylam in 176/792–93. Cf. the section of the *Kitāb al-maṣābiḥ*, by Abu'l-'Abbās al-Ḥasanī (fl. mid-4th/10th century), published in W. Madelung's *Arabic Texts concerning the History of the Zaydī Imāms* (Beirut, 1987), p. 55; and the selection from *Kitāb al-ḥadā'iq al-wardiyya*, by Ḥumayd b. Aḥmad al-Muḥallī (d. 652/1254), in Madelung, *Arabic Texts*, p. 175. According to the latter source (*loc. cit.*), al-Shāfi'ī is also said to have been punished by the caliph Hārūn for his indiscretion. Also cf. van Arendonck, *L'imamat*, p. 318. For the revolt of Yaḥyā see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 612ff. al-Shāfi'ī is also said to have had some political involvements while in Yemen: see W. al-Qāḍī, "Riḥlat al-Shāfi'ī ila'l-Yaman bayna'l-usṭūra wa'l-wāqi'", in M. Ibrāhīm, ed., *Arabian Studies in Honour of Maḥmūd Ghūl* (Wiesbaden, 1989), pp. 127–41.

[33] See the unequivocally quietist credal statements of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal: Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, ed. M.H. al-Fīqī (Cairo, 1952), I, pp. 26f., quoted in Madelung, *Religious Trends*, p. 25; also cf. Z. Ahmad, "Some Aspects of the Political Theology of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal", *Islamic Studies*, XII (1973), p. 55. That Ibn Ḥanbal and his associates should have persevered in a quietist stance vis-à-vis the caliph—even though they regarded belief in the "created" Qur'ān upheld by al-Ma'mūn, al-Wāthiq, and al-Mu'taṣim as amounting to *kufr* and the one professing it as, in principle, worthy of being put to death (cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-sunna* [Mecca, 1349 A.H.], pp. 4, 7, 9ff., etc.; al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 185a)—shows how important quietism had become as a tenet of "orthodoxy".

government, by accepting a judicial position for instance, may have been seen, and perhaps often intended, as an affront to the much publicized religious commitments of the caliphs. It could equally have been perceived as an adverse comment on the legitimacy of the ruling establishment. The scholars' refusal to accept such positions is a familiar motif of biographical dictionaries;[34] but it is not a mere *topos* and, in many cases, it may express serious reservations about associating with a regime which was felt to fall short of, if not to violate, ideals that many scholars held dear to their hearts.

Such reservations come across quite strongly in the biographical notices of several scholars. One of the most famous and unrelenting of these was the Kufan *muḥaddith* Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), a scholar in whom medieval biographical dictionaries show considerable interest but who (in part at least for precisely that reason), remains an unusually enigmatic figure. A stringent refusal to serve in the judicial administration, and in fact to have anything at all to do with the caliphs—even to give them moral and religious advice—is widely attributed to him, and seems in general to be a credible representation of his attitude. He is quoted as advising a fellow-scholar: "Beware of the rulers (*al-umarā'*), of drawing close to and associating with them. Do not be deceived by being told that you can intercede for the wronged and avert [evil] from him or that you can drive inquity away. All this is the deceit of the devil, which the wicked *qurrā'* have taken as a ladder [to self-promotion]..."[35] Such scruples, coupled with Sufyān's criticism of the ruling authorities, and not least, his influence among fellow-scholars, could not have endeared him to the 'Abbāsids, and it is not surprising that he is said to have spent his last days in hiding.[36]

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[34] See A.J. Wensinck, "The Refused Dignity", in T.W. Arnold and R.A. Nicholson, eds., *A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented to Edward G. Browne* (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 491–99; S.D. Goitein, "Attitudes towards Government in Judaism and Islam" in idem, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 196–213; N.J. Coulson, "Doctrine and Practice in Islamic Law", *BSOAS*, XVIII (1956), pp. 211–26.

[35] Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* (Cairo, 1932–1938, reprinted Beirut, 1967), VI, p. 376. The term "*qurrā'*", which literally seems to mean "reciters of the Qur'ān", often occurs in the early sources to denote religious scholars generally.

[36] On Sufyān, see Ibn Sa'd, al-*Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (Beirut, 1985), VI, pp. 371–74; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-jarḥ wa'l-ta'dīl* (Beirut, 1952–53), I, pp. 55–126; *TB*, IX, pp. 151–74: Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilya*, VI, 356–93, VII, 3–144: al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 386f.; Sezgin, *GAS*, I (Leiden, 1967), pp. 518f.; H.-P. Raddatz, *Die Stellung und Bedeutung des Sufyān al-Ṯaurī* (Bonn, 1967); van Ess, *Th&G*, I, pp. 221–28. For some striking expressions of Sufyān's cynicism as regards the 'Abbāsids, see Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ*, I, pp. 106ff.;

A scholar's refusal to associate with the caliph was not a call to arms against the ruling house. But it was an affront nevertheless, and the more so in case of an influential scholar to whom many others would look up for guidance and advice (Sufyān, for instance, also acted as a *muftī*).[37] This refusal also expressed the scholar's determination to retain an independence and autonomy in society which he evidently saw as being compromised by associating with the ruling elite. For their part, it was precisely this jealously guarded autonomy in society which the rulers often viewed as potentially subversive.[38] For all the hagiographical colouring of materials on a scholar such as Sufyān al-Thawrī, it is hard to avoid the impression that they do echo the strains which marked caliphal relations with at least some of those who were recognized to be influential in early ʿAbbāsid society. Besides much else, they indicate perhaps just how fragile the ʿAbbāsids themselves conceived the bases of their legitimacy to be, and how much stock they laid by the ʿulamāʾ's ability to refurbish or undermine it.

Some of the points made above are nicely underscored by certain reports in al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh* which show Hārūn al-Rashīd worrying about the subversive potential of a holy man from the family of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. When some *agents provacateurs* are sent to him to unravel his actual intentions, the ascetic affirms a firmly quietist stance ("By God, I wouldn't like to meet God even with just a cupping-glass full of the blood of a man from the Muslims . . ."). Hārūn, however, is said to have remained sufficiently apprehensive of the ascetic not to allow him in Baghdad to preach there: "I could endure him in the Ḥijāz", the caliph is quoted as saying, "but he has now made his way to the seat of my power and is seeking to subvert my followers!").[39]

Abu Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya*, VI, pp. 376ff.; T. Nagel, *Rechtleitung und Kalifat* (Bonn, 1975), pp. 108, 273f.

[37] Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya*, VI, p. 357.

[38] For a broad-based, theoretical discussion on matters of related interest, see P. Crone, *Pre-Industrial Societies* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 55ff., 65f., 71f., 117ff., 131f., etc. Also cf. the anecdote, in pseudo-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-tāj*, tr. C. Pellat, *La livre de la couronne* (Paris, 1954), pp. 123–25, where a self-styled ascetic, in league with the monarch and acting on his instructions, criticizes the latter in his sermons in order to test the political loyalties of the audience. One of the points which this anecdote—set in the reign of the Sasanid king Khosrow Parvīz—makes is that the very act of openly dissociating from society and state helps create the ascetic's image as a potentially subversive agent and, indeed, as a focus of popular loyalty in rivalry to that demanded by the state. Cf., too, the remarks of S. Digby, "The Sufi *Shaykh* and the Sultan: A conflict of claims to authority in medieval India", *Iran*, XXVIII (1990), pp. 70 and 78, n. 10.

[39] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 750f., 755; translation as in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. XXX, tr. C.E. Bosworth (Albany, 1989), pp. 317, 323. This ascetic was ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbd al Azīz al-ʿUmarī (on him, see Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt*, VII, pp. 19f.; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*,

Though the early caliphs were keen to develop cordial relations with the 'ulamā', they were by no means prepared to allow the latter to become independent foci of popular allegiance in society. That an autonomously exercised influence should exist at all would be disquieting enough, the suspicion that such influence might be exercised against them was even more so.[40] If, moreover, a scholar also took the function of *al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf* seriously, as many did, suspicions about him could multiply: the caliph's humbly listening to and being moved by pious admonition was thought to enhance his image, but that activity was only welcome when undertaken in "predictable" and formulaic terms, so to speak, in the controlled atmosphere of the court or (as the anecdote about Hārūn and the holy man suggests) perhaps on the occasion of caliphal visits to the holy cities.[41] A holy man's haranguing the populace on what *he* thought was the "proper" thing to do, or what he saw as the regime's shortcomings, was a different matter altogether, and to the extent that they could help it, neither Abū Muslim, nor Hārūn al-Rashīd, nor al-Ma'mūn, or anyone else from among the ruling elite for that matter, would countenance it.[42]

III.3. *Defining the Caliph's Role and Function*

Instances of conflict between the piety-minded and the ruling elite, of their mutual suspicions and strained relations, with which we have so far been concerned, are an indisputable part of the evolution of

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V, pp. 302f. [nr. 515]). Compare the recurrent motif of the "holy man" fearlessly admonishing the ruler in hagiographies of Late Antique saints: P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of Holy Man in Late Antiquity", *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXI (1971), pp. 92f., 95f.; for Brown's subsequent rethinking of the institution of the holy man, see idem, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman world* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 57–78.

[40] A perception of threat from men of religion may have been a familiar motif of contemporary courtly literature. The *Ahd Ardashīr*—embodying Sasanid political wisdom and well-known in early 'Abbāsid society—expresses such perceptions explicitly. See *Ahd Ardashīr*, ed. I. 'Abbās (Beirut, 1967), pp. 53f., and cf. ibid., pp. 56f; for a brief study of the relevant passages, see F. Steppat, "From Ahd Ardashīr to al-Ma'mūn: A Persian element in the policy of the *Miḥna*", in *Studia Arabica et Islamica*, pp. 451–54.

[41] Also see Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilya*, VIII, pp. 105–07 (Hārūn and Fuḍayl b. 'Iyāḍ). al-Mahdī, for his part, had supposedly wanted Sufyān al-Thawrī to come to him at the time of the Ḥajj, "put his hand in mine, and command what is proper . . ." (variant: "we shall put our hands in his [Sufyān's] hands and go to the marketplace to command what is proper . . .") Ibn Abī Ḥatim, *al-Jarḥ*, I, pp. 107, 109, 110.

[42] On al-Ma'mūn's proscription of *al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf* after his return to Baghdad, see *TB*, VII, p. 331; ibid., XII, p. 350.

religious trends and caliphal policies in early ʿAbbāsid society. But their importance should not be exaggerated. So far as the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ are concerned, it was their *support*, not their opposition to the ʿAbbāsids, which was to become the most distinctive feature of their relationship with the caliphs. Such support could only have grown gradually, and there always were those who would have nothing to do with any pro-ʿAbbāsid sentiment. But, as will be argued in chapters IV and V of this study, there is considerable evidence to suggest that, in general, the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ came to be supportive of the ʿAbbāsids, and there are good reasons why this should have happened. In what follows, I shall review certain attempts in early ʿAbbāsid times towards defining the relations of the caliphs and the ʿulamāʾ. These attempts inevitably revolved around implicit and/or explicit reflections on the role and function of the caliph and the position and role of the ʿulamāʾ. We know about these attempts because of three extant texts of fundamental importance, all of which purport to have originated in the early ʿAbbāsid period.

One of the texts—also the earliest—which discusses the matter from the "secular" side, so to speak, is the *Risāla fi'l ṣaḥāba* by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. ca. 139/756), one of the best known of early ʿAbbāsid secretaries (*kuttāb*). The other two works come from the ʿulamāʾ. One of these, a detailed letter from a Basran *qāḍī*, ʿUbayd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan al-ʿAnbarī (d. 168/784–5), to the caliph al-Mahdī, is a document of quite considerable interest; the other is the treatise on taxation which the celebrated chief *qāḍi* Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798) is reported to have addressed to the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. The attribution of this treatise to Abū Yūsuf has recently been questioned by Norman Calder, though, as I shall try to suggest, Calder's reasoning is far from being conclusive or even convincing. The attribution of this work to Abū Yūsuf will, therefore, be accepted here, and the work will be analyzed as a product of, and as reflecting, the early ʿAbbāsid times. All three works may briefly be considered in turn, insofar as their contents are relevant to our concerns here.

III.3.1

Among the things Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ[43] suggests to the caliph is that the nascent ʿAbbāsid state should be based on a recognition of the caliph's

[43] On him, see *EI(2)*, s.v. "Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ" (F. Gabrieli); D. Sourdel, "La biographie d'Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ d'après les sources anciennes", *Arabica*, I (1954), pp. 307–23; J.D.

religious authority, and that the caliph should cultivate relations with and utilize the services of the religious scholars. The caliph's religious authority is to be expressed in his writing an "*amān*" containing principles which must be faithfully adhered to by the Khurāsānī army, and whereby their wayward religious beliefs are to be reformed.[44] It is also the caliph's sole prerogative to enact and promulgate legal decisions and doctrines in the form of a uniform, binding code; and he alone must define what normative *sunna* should mean or consist of at any given time.[45]

If Ibn al-Muqaffa''s advice tends rather blatantly in the direction of making the caliph the source of religious authority, what function or role does he envisage for the 'ulamā'? Insofar as his "*ahl al-fiqh wa'l-sunna wa'l-siyar wa'l-naṣīḥa*"[46] are to be taken as religious scholars (or at least as a people including religious scholars) Ibn al-Muqaffa' makes it quite clear that he conceives of their role essentially as functionaries of the caliph, co-opted into the state apparatus. Serving as the caliph's companions (*ṣaḥāba*) is one of the functions he has in mind for them.[47] More striking perhaps is his suggestion that they should act as moral administrators, so to speak, of the communities

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Latham, "Ibn al-Muqaffa' and early 'Abbāsid Prose", in J. Ashtiany et al., eds., *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: 'Abbāsid belle-lettres* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 48–77.

The text of the *Risāla fi'l-ṣaḥāba* used here is that published by C. Pellat, *Ibn al-Muqaffa': "conseilleur" du calife* (Paris, 1976). For an analysis of the contents of the *Risāla*, see, in particular, S.D. Goitein, "A Turning Point in the History of the Islamic State", in idem, *Studies*, pp. 149–67.

[44] *Risāla*, p. 25, para 11. Latham ("Ibn al-Muqaffa'", p. 67) translates *amān* as a "religious code". Goitein (*Studies*, p. 167) uses the term "catechism" for it, and Pellat (*Ibn al-Muqaffa'*, para 11, p. 24,) "règlement". On this term, also cf. S. Shaked, "From Iran to Islam: Notes on some themes in transmission", *JSAI*, V (1984), p. 34.

[45] *Risāla*, pp. 43, 45, para 26; and cf. generally pp. 41–45, paras 24–27.

[46] *Risāla*, pp. 61, 63, para 55.

[47] *Risāla*, p. 57, para 49. The institution of the *ṣaḥāba* seems, however, to have existed before Ibn al-Muqaffa' wrote on its importance. The first 'Abbāsid caliph, Abu'l-'Abbās al-Saffāḥ already had his *ṣaḥāba* (cf. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dūrī [Wiesbaden and Beirut, 1978], III, p. 160; Muṣ'ab b. 'Abdallāh al-Zubayrī, *Kitāb nasab Quraysh*, ed. E. Levi-Provencal [Cairo, 1953], p. 218; Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad al-'Ali, *Baghdād* [Baghdad, 1985], I, p. 53). That the "institution ... is attested only under Manṣūr and Mahdī" (P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses* [Cambridge, 1980], p. 67) is incorrect not only because the institution is attested for Abū'l-'Abbās but also because it is attested for the successors of al-Mahdī too: several individuals are mentioned in the sources as the *ṣaḥāba* of Hārūn al-Rashīd (al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, pp. 79, 242, 273; *TB*, X, p. 313 [nr. 5461], XII, p. 126 [nr. 6581]), of Muḥammad al-Amīn (*TB*, X, p. 313 [nr. 5461]), of al-Ma'mūn (al-Zubayrī, *Nasab*, p. 400; *TB*, XII, p. 126 [nr. 6581], 264 [nr. 6707]), and of al-Mu'taṣim (Wakī', *Akhbār*, I, p. 260). That after al-Mahdī, the term "*khāṣṣa*" replaced the term "*ṣaḥāba*" (al-'Alī, *Baghdād*, I, p. 57) does not evidently inspire much confidence either.

they live in, serving to discipline and reform the people, restrain them from innovations (*bidaʿ*) as well as civil strife (*fitan*), supervise their affairs, and report to higher authorities on matters they cannot themselves handle.[48]

Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's suggestions are of considerable interest for articulating the possibilities that may have existed, or been considered, at the outset of the ʿAbbāsid rule. That this advice comes from a Persian bureaucrat is not fortuitous, for it suggests the vision of a determinate religious establishment working as part of the administrative bureaucracy, somewhat in the ancient Persian tradition. Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's advice can also be interpreted as a plea to the caliph to check the autonomy of the religious scholars and to make them dependent on himself. The suggestion concerning the caliph's enactment of legal doctrine says as much with reference to the need for uniformity of legal practice in the empire, and the advice to co-opt the ʿulamāʾ into the service of the state can also be construed to have similar implications.

If Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's suggestions ever reached al-Manṣūr, we know nothing about how the caliph reacted to them. There are some reports, however, according to which the caliph intended to promulgate the *Muwaṭṭāʾ* of the Medinese jurist Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) as the single and uniform basis of legal decisions in the empire, certain accounts even asserting that it was al-Manṣūr himself who commissioned the *Muwaṭṭāʾ*. Mālik, for his part, remained unimpressed with what the caliph intended, dissuading him by pointing out precisely what Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ had also noted, but to opposite effect.[49] While Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ had called for the caliph's promulgating a code because legal diversity was too inconvenient, Mālik reportedly argued that such regional diversity in legal matters was too developed to be harmonized or regulated.[50]

It is impossible to be certain about the authenticity of the aforementioned reports concerning Mālik. There is the possibility that they may have come about as an effort to extol Mālik by suggesting, for

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[48] *Risāla*, pp. 61, 63, paras 55f.; cf. p. 57, para 49.

[49] Probably the earliest available source on al-Manṣūr's asking Mālik to compile the Muwaṭṭāʾ is ʿAbd al Malik b. Ḥabīb (d. 238/852), *Kitāb al-taʾrikh*, ed. J. Aguadé (Madrid, 1991), p. 160 (nr. 489); also see Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Jarḥ*, p. 29. Both sources are cited in P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 86f.

[50] Later, al-Shāfiʿī was to expend much effort in his *Risāla* justifying such diversity, in the form of *ikhtilāf*, among the scholars. See Norman Calder, "Ikhtilāf and Ijmāʿ in Shāfiʿī's *Risāla*", *SI*, LVIII (1983), pp. 55–81. (I owe this reference to Prof. W.B. Hallaq.)

example, that he was considered the most authoritative of the *fuqahā'* by the caliph; or that as a paragon of the (later) Sunnī orthodox spirit, he respected and was prepared to work with the fact that there existed a diversity of approaches to matters of law. Whatever their provenance, however, these reports reveal a quite different understanding of the caliph's function than what Ibn al-Muqaffa' prescribes, and they may even be thought of as a comment on ideas such as Ibn al-Muqaffa''s: it is an *'ālim* the caliph invites to draw up a legal code, proposing to make it the law of the land; the *'ālim* refuses to oblige, and the caliph apparently leaves it at that. The moral of the story, if indeed it is no more than a story, is that *no one*, not even a prominent *'ālim*, has the authority to draw up a code which might be given the sanction of the law. The story is not about the separation of religion and politics, as one might be tempted to suppose, but only about the way legal understanding (*fiqh*) properly evolves in an Islamic society.

III.3.2

Like Ibn al-Muqaffa''s *Risāla*, the letter of the Basran *qāḍī* 'Ubayd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan al-'Anbarī is primarily a treatise on administration.[51] Its basic concern is to draw the attention of the caliph, al-Mahdī, to four administrative matters which, according to the author, require the caliph's especial concern. These include: (1) the frontiers of the state (*thughūr*) whose defences have to be constantly guarded; (2) attention to the laws which are in force and to the affairs of those who administer them; (3) the collection of *fay'*, the administration of the lands and the people liable for its payment, and the proper distribution of the proceeds of *fay'* among those entitled to it; and, finally, (4) the levy and administration of the *ṣadaqāt* taxes.

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[51] On al-'Anbarī, see Waki', *Akhbār*, II, pp. 88–123; Khalifa b. Khayyāṭ, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyā' al-'Umarī (Najaf, 1967), pp. 457, 462, 470, 472, 473; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, VII, pp. 7f. For further references to the sources on him, cf. the editor's footnote in al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 1987–), X, p. 344, n. 1. For a brief but illuminating study of al-'Anbarī, see J. van Ess, "La liberté du juge dans le milieu basrien du VII[e] siècle (II[e] siècle de l'hègire)", in G. Makdisi et al., eds., *La notion de liberté au moyen âge: Islam, Byzance, Occident* (Paris, 1985), pp. 25–35; further elaborated in idem, *Th&G*, II, pp. 155–64.

Wakī', *Akhbār*, II, pp. 97–107, is apparently the only available source for al-'Anbarī's letter. For brief references to this letter, cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph* pp. 93, 98, 103; I. Bligh-Abramski, "The Judiciary (*Qāḍīs*) as a Governmental-Administrative Tool in Early Islam", *JESHO*, XXXV (1992), pp. 51, 66f., 70; van Ess, "La liberté", p. 28; idem, *Th&G*, II, p. 167.

There is, however, more to this short treatise than advice on administrative matters (which need not detain us here) and the use of religious formulae to buttress it. A notable feature of this work is the author's consistent reference to the practice of the pious. The identity of these pious men is not quite clear. One passage suggests that they include prophets (*anbiyā'*, *rusul*), rightly-guided caliphs (*al-khulafā' al-rāshidīn*), and leading scholars (*al-a'imma al-fuqahā' al-ṣiddīqīn*).[52] Further on in the same passage, a more picturesque characterization is offered:

> They are rightly-guided guides (*al-hudāt al-muhtadūn*) and compassionate imāms (*al-a'imma al-ʿā'idūn*), . . .[53] men of knowledge (*ʿulamā'*) [and?] deputies [of God?] (*al-khulafā'*),[54] in whom refuge is sought and who are unblemished (*al-muʿtaṣam bihim wa'l-maʿṣūmūn*). They [include] the prophets, the veracious ones (*al-ṣiddīqūn*), the martyrs (*al-shuhadā'*), and the upright people (*al-ṣāliḥūn*). . . .[55] Through them did God strengthen this religion . . . chart its path and establish His ordinances among the people: thereby the [share of the] weak was taken [back for them] from the strong, that of the wronged from the oppressor . . . and that of the pious from the vile; [through them] were the ways of the people straightened . . . the land became peaceful and the people upright.[56]

For all its rhetorical effect, al-ʿAnbarī's text is vague on who exactly comprises this body of the elect. There is little doubt, however, that it is not only the prophets and not only the religious scholars who do so, though both are very prominent. Some of the caliphs are certainly there, though they are left anonymous.[57] The elect need not all belong

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[52] Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, II, p. 97.

[53] The signification of the term *al-a'imma* is uncertain here. It could refer to caliphs or scholars or to both. Note, however, that on several occasions al-ʿAnbarī uses the term "*imām*" to refer unequivocally to the caliph: Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, II, pp. 99 (line 18), 100 (l. 15), 101 (l. 18), 103 (l. 14), 104 (l. 14), 105 (l. 5).

The sense of "*al-ʿā'idūn*" too is rather uncertain. According to the *Lisān al-ʿArab*, someone characterized as "*dhū ṣafḥ wa ʿā'ida*" is one who is "kind and compassionate" ("*dhū ʿafw wa taʿaṭṭuf*"). Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Beirut, 1955–56), III, p. 316. Note too that a "*muʿīd min al-rijāl*" is one "who knows things, one who is not inexperienced" ("*al-ʿālim bi'l-umūr alladhī laysa bi-ghumr*"). Ibid., p. 315.

[54] The term "*khulafā'*" as used here need not exclusively refer to caliphs, though it is very likely that they are among those the author has in mind.

[55] Cf. Qur'ān, IV, 69.

[56] Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, II, p. 98.

[57] al-ʿAnbarī also refers to *al-khulafā' al-rāshidūn*, though there is nothing to indicate that he has the Rāshidūn caliphs of classical Sunnism in mind, or all four of them, or only them. Note that the only caliphs who are actually named in this group of the elect are ʿUmar I, and ʿUmar II. See Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, II, p. 103. al-Manṣūr is also mentioned

to a bygone age, though the sense is that most do. In any case, a sketch of the piety and practice of the elect forms the context in which the caliph al-Mahdī is called upon to follow them in their rectitude. One of the points the author wishes rather obliquely to bring home is that in the case of the rulers among these pious forbears, piety also entailed worldly success;[58] further, that the ruler's obedience to God's commands increased the subjects' obedience to the ruler as well.[59]

Perhaps the most interesting, if somewhat problematic feature of the letter attributed to al-ʿAnbarī is the delineation, in one of its passages, of the bases of authority to which administrative and legal decisions (*al-aḥkām*) should conform. First of all comes the Qurʾān; then it is the *sunna* of the Prophet which has to be consulted for such *aḥkām*; and in case the *sunna* too has nothing to offer on the matter at hand, the decision is to be made in accordance with what the leading scholars have agreed upon (*mā ajmaʿa ʿalayhi al-aʾimma al-fuqahāʾ*).[60] If none of these three sources of authority give any guidance, however, the governor (*al-ḥākim*) is to have recourse to his *ijtihād*, in consultation with the scholars (*ahl al-ʿilm*), provided the caliph (*al-imām*) has permitted him this function (sc. *ijtihād*).[61] Elsewhere in the letter, the author briefly returns to the same question, but with a rather different emphasis:

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in the letter in a certain context (ibid., p. 102), but apparently not as a member of the elite group in question.

[58] Ibid., p. 98.

[59] Ibid., p. 98; also cf. ibid., p. 100, where the same point is made with specific reference to the caliph al-Mahdī himself.

[60] For the use of this, and similar, expressions, which were used before the technical term "*ijmāʿ*"(= consensus) came into vogue, see Z.I. Ansari, "Islamic Juristic Terminology before al-Šāfiʿī: A semantic analysis with special reference to Kufa", *Arabica*, (1972), pp. 282ff.

[61] Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, II, p. 101. Cf. Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, *Kitāb al-amwāl*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī (Cairo, 1353 A.H.), pp. 171–71 (paras 467–74), where an ʿAbbāsid governor of Hārūn's time, ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ṣāliḥ, is reported to have written to prominent *fuqahāʾ* on how he should respond to an act of aggression/treaty violation (*ḥadath*) by the Cypriots. "The *fuqahāʾ* at that time were numerous", Abū ʿUbayd notes (p. 171), and reproduces (from the governor's *dīwān*, as he tells us) the response of the following eight: al-Layth b. Saʿd, Mālik b. Anas, Sufyān b. ʿUyayna, Mūsā b. Aʿyan, Ismāʿīl b. ʿAyyāsh, Yaḥyā b. Ḥamza, Abū Isḥāq al-Fazārī and Makhlad b. Ḥusayn. Abū ʿUbayd informs us that these *fuqahāʾ* differed in their opinions and advice, but that those who counselled leniency outnumbered those who stood for severe retribution (ibid., p. 171). In making up his mind on what advice to follow, the governor would probably have exercised his own *ijtihād*. It is quite remarkable that the whole episode, as reported here, does not appear to have involved the caliph at all. But then this governor was known for his independent ways, and was subsequently to fall a victim to the caliph's suspicions.

> In such matters confronting the people about which the *a'imma* are perturbed, and which are not regulated by the Qur'ān or the *sunna* of the Prophet, no one is to have precedence over the *walī amr al-muslimīn* and the *imām jamā'atihim*. Such matters are not to be decided without him; rather it is incumbent on those who are subordinate to him to refer these matters to him and to accept his ruling on them.[62]

The second passage quoted here seems to refer to a concrete historical situation, as does much else in the treatise. It is apparently directed against the tendency of provincial governors themselves to take the initiative in deciding the matters at hand without deferring them to the caliph.[63] Instances of such initiative being taken by provincial governors are well-attested for our period.[64] Taking both the passages noted above together, the author's point clearly is that if any initiative belongs to the caliph's subordinate officials, it is only in so far as the caliph has specifically delegated it to them. For it is ultimately the *caliph's* prerogative to decide matters on which other sources of law are silent. Even as he calls for the conformity of administrative practice with what the sources of religious authority prescribe, al-'Anbarī makes the caliph himself an auxiliary of that chain of authority. The caliph too has a say in resolving legal problems which confront the people. His is a residual authority, which comes into play when all the other sources of religious authority are silent (and "the scholars are perturbed"), but it is no less real for being such.

Though the two passages discussed above seem, in several of their implications, to conform to the conditions of the period, they also raise some suspicion regarding authenticity. The reference to a hierarchy of the bases or sources of religious authority, to which the

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On 'Abd al-Malik b. Ṣāliḥ see *EI(2)*, s.v. (K.V. Zettersteen); H. Kennedy, *Early Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 74f. and index s.v.

[62] Wakī', *Akhbār*, II, p. 105. The letter's original text reads, in part: "... *fa-inna walī amr al-muslimīn wa imām jamā'atihim lā yuqaddam fīhā bayna yadayhi, wa lā yuqḍā dūnahu bal 'alā' man dūnahu raf'u dhālik ilayhi wa'l taslīm li-mā qaḍā.*" The "*walī amr al-muslimīn*" and "*imām jamā'atihim*" here is to be understood as a reference to the caliph and not to the provincial governor. Also cf. Abū Yūsuf's "*wulāt al-amr*", whom Allāh has made "*khulafā' fī arḍihi*": *Kharāj*, p. 71. The reference here is evidently to the caliphs; but compare ibid., p. 262, l. 7, and p. 266, l. 4, where 'Umar I is quoted as referring to his governors as "*wulāt bi'l-ḥaqq*" and "*a'immat al-hudā*".

[63] Compare al-Fazārī, *Kitāb al-siyar*, ed. Fārūq Ḥammāda (Beirut, 1987), pp. 108 (nr. 18), 111 (nr. 25).

[64] On the relations between the centre and the provinces, and the limits of central control, see Lassner, *Shaping of 'Abbāsid Rule*, pp. 3–90 passim; Kennedy, *Early Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 176–97.

ruler's *aḥkām* should conform, may seem to presume too developed a juristic theory for a *qāḍī* to espouse a generation before al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820).[65] But al-Shāfiʿī did not invent the four-fold schema comprising the Qurʾān, *sunna*, consensus and *raʾy*. A somewhat similar schema (with the absence of consensus, however) occurs in the longer of the two versions of a letter the caliph ʿUmar I is supposed to have written to Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī. Serjeant has argued that this version of the letter in fact originated in the early second century A.H., which means that we must also "date [the] existence of the theory on Qurʾān—*sunna*—*qiyās*—*raʾy* to early in the second century A.H."[66] To Wāṣil b. ʿAṭāʾ, the "founder" of the Muʿtazila, is also attributed a four-fold schema of "*kitāb nāṭiq wa khabar mujtamaʿ ʿalayh wa ḥujjat ʿaql wa ijmāʿ*"; these, to him, were the criteria for the discernment of the truth (*al-ḥaqq*), and he is said to have originated it.[67] al-ʿAnbarī's plea for conformity of the ruler's decisions to the Qurʾān, the Prophet's *sunna*, and the scholars' agreed opinion is thus hardly exceptional, for it had already surfaced in the thinking of the scholars of the age and milieu to which he belonged. On the other hand, al-ʿAnbarī's point about the caliph's *ijtihād* can also be related to some contemporary concerns of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs (vis-à-vis their governors, for instance, in which case it would have been in line with the centralizing tendencies of the early ʿAbbāsid period).

To al-ʿAnbarī is also attributed the view that "every *mujtahid* is correct [in his judgment]" ("*kull mujtahid muṣīb*"), and that the Qurʾān, and *sunna*, allow the validity of opinions which may be mutually contradictory.[68] If this view is indeed al-ʿAnbarī's, we might ask what

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[65] On al-Shāfiʿī's hierarchy of the sources of law, cf. J. Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1950), pp. 134ff.; N. Calder, "Ikhtilāf and Ijmāʿ", pp. 77f. That it was al-Shāfiʿī who shaped once and for all the future course of Islamic jurisprudence, as Schacht for instance would have it, has been questioned, however: see W.B. Hallaq, "Was al-Shafiʿi the Master Architect of Islamic Jurisprudence?", *IJMES*, XXV (1993), pp. 587–605.

[66] R.B. Serjeant, "The Caliph ʿUmar's Letters to Abū Mūsa al-Ashʿarī and Muʿāwiya", *JSS*, XXIX (1984), pp. 65–79; the quotation is from p. 78.

[67] Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *al-Awāʾil*, ed. Muḥammad al-Miṣrī and Walīd al-Qaṣṣāb (Damascus, 1975), II, p. 135, cited in J. van Ess, "L'autorité de la tradition prophetique dans la theologie muʿtazilite", in G. Makdisi et al., eds., *La notion d'autorité au moyen âge: Islam, Byzance, Occident* (Paris, 1982), pp. 213f; and ibid.: "Le contexte ne laisse pas douter que Wāṣil pense au *ḥadīth*. . . . L'enumeration correspond au scheme quadripartite des *uṣūl al-fiqh* classiques, la preuve rationelle tenant la place du futur *qiyās*."

[68] Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth* (Cairo, 1326 A.H.), pp. 55–57. Also cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, VII, p. 8. For a pioneering discussion of this dictum, see van Ess, "La liberté", pp. 25–35; idem, *Th&G*, II, pp. 155–64. al-Shāfiʿī's justification, in his *Risāla*,

implications it has for the bases of religious authority discussed in the aforementioned passages of his letter to the caliph. In asserting the rectitude of every *mujtahid*'s judgment, al-ʿAnbarī is not severing legal judgments from (a basis in) the traditional sources of religious authority but only pointing out that diversity in judgment is itself attested and thus accepted in these sources. Such a view strengthens the case for *ijtihād*, which is put forth in the letter with reference to the caliph and his governor. But, *pace* van Ess, the rectitude of every *mujtahid*'s judgment—leading to differences among scholars—does not contradict the authority of the scholars' agreement,[69] which al-ʿAnbarī's letter upholds. Not only has consensus always coexisted with the doctrine of the *mujtahid*'s rectitude,[70] al-Shāfiʿī's arguments, a generation after al-ʿAnbarī, for the admissibility of *ikhtilāf* may have been intended precisely to undergird the 'ulamā''s collective authority.[71] A recognition of their mutual differences was, for al-Shāfiʿī, the basis on which to bring them together; and, as for their mutual differences, they were the result of valid disagreement but not of error on any-one's part.[72]

If a ring of authenticity is to be heard in the overall tone and tenor of al-ʿAnbarī's letter—and in its echoing many of the concerns of the time to which it purports to belong[73]—then we must also ask what this scholar's vision amounts to in so far as the caliph's function and relationship with the 'ulamā' are concerned. al-ʿAnbarī posits conform-

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of the *ikhtilāf* of scholars and the latter's rectitude even as they disagree among themselves bears fundamental similarity to the position enshrined in this dictum, though he does not quote it. See Calder, "Ikhtilāf and Ijmāʾ", pp. 55–81, especially p. 67. Calder's certitude that this dictum "obviously had not emerged while Shāfiʿī was writing, but . . . clearly derives from his thinking" (ibid., p. 67) may, however, be a bit too dogmatic in both of its affirmations. Cf. van Ess, *Th&G*, II, p. 164, n. 93.

[69] Cf. van Ess, *Th&G*, II, p. 162.

[70] I owe this point to Prof. W.B. Hallaq.

[71] Calder, "Ikhtilāf and Ijmāʿ", pp. 55–81, especially 64ff., 71f.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Another feature of al-ʿAnbarī's letter is noteworthy in that regard. It contains seven traditions from the Prophet, none of them with an *isnād*; in view of the trend, characteristic of the age, towards increasing reliance on Prophetic dicta, the presence of *ḥadīth* is not surprising, and the lack of *isnād* may be taken to argue for the letter's early date. Five of the seven traditions quoted are eschatological, and are intended to exhort the caliph to hasten to the performing of good deeds before it is too late. It is tempting to speculate that the presence of such *ḥadīth* here may have something to do with al-Mahdī's image as a messianic figure (also cf. van Ess, *Th&G*, II, p. 157); or it may be a reflex of an expectation that the end of the world was near, a belief otherwise attested for this period (cf. W. Madelung, "New Documents concerning al-Maʾmūn, al-Faḍl b. Sahl and ʿAlī al-Riḍā", in *Studia Arabica et Islamica*, pp. 345f.).

ity with the tradition and practice of the elect as the essential basis of the caliph's conduct; and it is noteworthy that the 'ulamā' figure prominently in this body of the elect. He is to be seen here as taking a position drastically opposed to that of Ibn al-Muqaffa': it is not the caliph who can determine what the normative *sunna* is; rather, it is for the *sunna* of the pious forbears (as carried on by the 'ulamā') to define how the caliph is to conduct himself. Yet even as he derives his legitimacy from adherence to this normative tradition, the caliph, for al-'Anbarī, is also integral to its preservance and continued vigour.

Finally, as a *qāḍī* working in the 'Abbāsid administration, it is not surprising to see al-'Anbarī visualize the caliph and the scholars working in close association with each other. In concluding his letter, al-'Anbarī advises the caliph "to have with him a select group of people who are truthful, have knowledge of the *sunna*, and are men of worldly experience (*ḥunka*), intellect, and piety, to help him deal with and decide on such public matters as are brought to him. . . . For though God has bestowed on the Commander of the Faithful knowledge of His book and *sunna* (sc. God's *sunna*?) the affairs of the people of this *umma* keep pouring in[74] so that attending to some of them causes him to neglect others; . . . [having an advisory council] will, God willing, be a real help in these circumstances."[75]

Before returning to the question of the caliph's advisory council, let us first examine Abū Yūsuf's ideas on the caliph's function and relationship with the 'ulamā' and on the question of religious authority. These ideas are set out in his *Kitāb al-kharāj*.[76]

III.3.3

As already noted, the attribution to Abū Yūsuf of the *Kitāb al-kharāj* which conventionally bears his name has recently been questioned by Norman Calder. If Calder is right, there is not much point in studying this work in the context of early 'Abbāsid history. It becomes necessary, then, to begin by briefly reviewing some of Calder's arguments.

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[74] Reading *yaridu 'alayhi* instead of *radda 'alayhi*.

[75] Wakī', *Akhbār*, II, p. 107.

[76] On Abū Yūsuf, see: Wakī', *Akhbār*, III, pp. 254–64, and index, s.v.; *TB*, XIV, pp. 242–62; al-Dhahabī, *Manāqib al-imām Abī Ḥanīfa wa ṣāḥibayhi Abī Yūsuf wa Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī and Abu'l-Wafā al-Afghānī (Cairo, 1366 A.H.); idem, *Ta'rīkh Islām*, XII, pp. 496–503. For further references to the sources, see the editor's note in ibid., pp. 496f., n. 6; Sezgin, *GAS*, I (Leiden, 1967), pp. 419–21. For

Calder argues that the present text of the *Kitāb al-kharāj* is "the product of a single redactional effort" which must be dated to the middle of the third century A.H.[77] This view is part of a more elaborate argument which seeks to show, *inter alia*, that "[t]here are no secure examples of any works of Islamic *fiqh* redacted before the third or fourth decades of the third century."[78] While essentially an exercise in literary analysis, Calder's treatment of the *Kitāb al-kharāj* also offers a historical reconstruction of the circumstances in which the redaction of this work is likely to have occurred. He suggests that this treatise is to be identified with the *Kitāb al-kharāj* attributed to the Ḥanafī al-Khaṣṣāf (d. 261/874), which the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Muhtadī (r. 255/869–256/870) had commissioned him to write.[79] The conditions of al-Muhtadī's time, it is argued, are in accord with the concerns the *Kitāb al-kharāj* shows: al-Muhtadī was very pious and sought to reform everything from morals to finances; the caliphate faced acute political and economic crises; and there is "evidence of wholesale restructuring of the financial system".[80] The *Kitāb al-kharāj* seeks to affirm "absolute caliphal authority",[81] especially the caliph's "discretionary powers" in taxation. Nothing thus was better suited to the needs of those chaotic times.

The merits of Calder's literary analysis, or the validity of his conclusions on that basis, will not be examined here. It should be pointed out, however, that his hypothesis about the *historical* origins of the *Kitāb al-kharāj* is rather dubious—unless, of course, one is already convinced that the work in question *could not* have originated before the mid-third century. Calder is right in arguing that the treatise seeks to promote the caliph's administrative authority, but there is no reason why the historical Abū Yūsuf could not himself have been engaged in such an effort in favour of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. Whether or not the historical Abū Yūsuf could have had a similar

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a modern evaluation of Abū Yūsuf's contribution to Islamic law, see, in particular, Schacht, *Origins*, passim.; idem, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (London, 1964), index, s.v.

[77] N. Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 105–60, especially pp. 145ff.; the quotation is from p. 145. On this work, see John Burton, "Rewriting the Timetable of Early Islam", *JAOS*, CXV (1995), pp. 453–62. Burton says little, however, on Calder's treatment specifically of the *Kitāb al-kharāj*.

[78] Calder, *Studies*, p. 146.

[79] Ibid., p. 147. On al-Khaṣṣāf, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 436–38.

[80] Calder, *Studies*, pp. 147ff.; the quotation is from pp. 149f.

[81] Ibid., p. 160 and pp. 105–60, passim.

agenda is a question he does not raise: since, to him, this *Kitāb al-kharāj* could not have originated before the time to which he dates it, any effort to see how this treatise might fit the age of Hārūn al-Rashīd and Abū Yūsuf, rather than that of al-Muhtadī and al-Khaṣṣāf, would seem to be pointless. Calder correctly points out that a *Kitāb al-kharāj* is attributed to al-Khaṣṣāf; but he fails, oddly enough, to note that bio-bibliographical sources also attest to the production of earlier treatises on the same subject and often bearing the same title. "Now", Calder writes, "if Abū Yūsuf had produced prior to 182 the book that we now know as the *Kitāb al-kharāj* in the form we now have it and with the subtlety that we have recognized in it, there would have been little need for another call from the Caliph to a *faqīh* to produce another such work."[82]

The implications of the foregoing statement are worth spelling out here. If Abū Yūsuf's work were correctly attributed to him, then, by Calder's reasoning, *no* further works on *kharāj* ought to have been written; nor, by the same token, should any have been written *after* that of al-Khaṣṣāf if he is the author of what is usually attributed to Abū Yūsuf. This is clearly an extreme position. What about reports then that Abū Yūsuf's *Kitāb al-kharāj* was not the first work on the subject (any more than al-Khaṣṣāf's was the last)?[83] In fact, one of the three works on *kharāj* which are extant is attributed to Yaḥyā b. Ādam (d. 203/818), also a contemporary of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.[84] Calder would probably reply that the reports about earlier works of this genre are tendentious or their attributions inadmissible, again a rather high-handed way of dealing with the bio-bibliographical literature (though it must be conceded that Calder's position on this point is consistent with his over all thesis). There would still be no compelling, even plausible, reason to think, however, that al-Khaṣṣāf was the author of *this* particular, rather than just another, *Kitāb*

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[82] Ibid., p. 147. "On the other hand", Calder continues, "if the Caliph al-Muhtadī summoned al-Khaṣṣāf to produce such a work, then he might well have produced a work which called upon the authority of Abū Yūsuf. There was an obvious felicity in ascribing to him systematic opinions on taxation." Ibid., p. 147.

[83] Of the twenty-one works on *kharāj* that Ben Shemesh lists in a roughly chronological order, al-Khaṣṣāf's is the *seventh*. For this list, largely based on Ibn al-Nadīm's *Kitāb al-fihrist*, see A. Ben Shemesh, *Taxation in Islam*, I: *Yaḥyā b. Ādam's Kitāb al-Kharāj* (Leiden, 1958), pp. 3–6.

[84] On Yaḥyā b. Ādam see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 520; Ben Shemesh, *Taxation in Islam*, I. Yaḥyā is reported to have visited Hārūn al-Rashīd in Ḥīra (Ben Shemesh, *Taxation in Islam*, I, p. 1), though there is no indication that he wrote this treatise for the caliph.

al-kharāj. Qudāma b. Ja'far, for one, apparently quotes *both* Abū Yūsuf and al-Khaṣṣāf in his own *Kitāb al-kharāj*,[85] thus raising the distinct possibility that he may have had access to the work of both. If both works were indeed available to him, then we would have little reason to think that both Abū Yūsuf and al-Khaṣṣāf could not each have written on *kharāj*, or that the latter necessarily attributed his own work to the former.

That the pious al-Muhtadī, much concerned with efficient government, should have commissioned al-Khaṣṣāf to write a treatise on taxation certainly merits attention, for it tells us something about this caliph's concerns. The case of Abū Yūsuf's *Kitāb al-kharāj* shows that such works may not necessarily have been limited to administrative advice,[86] but might also help further the cause of caliphal authority and legitimacy, and perhaps also assist in creating a pious image for the caliph. It is easy to see then why al-Muhtadī should have found it useful to have such a work addressed to him. But, by the same token, it is not difficult to imagine that an earlier caliph—Hārūn al-Rashīd—would have liked a similar work produced for himself.[87] In the absence of conclusive evidence to the contrary, there-

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[85] The name al-Khaṣṣāf does not figure in Qudāma's *Kitāb al-kharāj*, but one "Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Shaybānī" does (once: 168). Ben Shemesh is probably right in emending the name to Aḥmad b. *'Umar* al-Shaybānī (A. Ben Shemesh, *Taxation in Islam*, II [Leiden, 1965], 8, 31), which is how al-Khaṣṣāf's name is recorded in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud, 3rd edn. (Beirut, 1988), 259. Abū Yūsuf, on the other hand, is quoted several times (see Qudāma b. Ja'far, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, Köprülü Library MS. 1076, published in facsimile by F. Sezgin [Frankfurt, 1986], index, s.v. Ya'qūb b. Ibrāhīm Abū Yūsuf).

[86] Note that the *Kitāb al-kharāj* of Qudāma b. Ja'far, the third of the three extant works in this genre, also contains a chapter which Rosenthal considers to have the elements of a Fürstenspiegel (F. Rosenthal, *History of Muslim Historiography* [Leiden, 1968], 117). S.A. Bonebakker, however, has expressed doubts whether this chapter was originally part of Qudāma's *Kitāb al-kharāj* (see *EI(2)*, s.v. "Ḳudāma b. Dja'far" (S.A. Bonebakker). Whether Qudāma, a *kātib*, was commissioned by anyone to write his *Kitāb al-kharāj* is not known, though it is reported that he showed it to 'Alī b. 'Īsa (d. 334/946), the 'Abbāsid wazīr (ibid.).

[87] Abū 'Ubayd Allāh Mu'āwiya b. 'Abdallāh is said already to have written for the caliph al-Mahdī what Qudāma b. Ja'far alternately characterizes as a "*risāla*" or "*kitāb*", and which he quotes from: see Qudāma b. Ja'far, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, pp. 178 and 200f. Very much later, the caliph al-Muttaqī (r. 330/940–333/943) had a wazīr, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Īsā, who too wrote an incomplete *Kitāb al-kharāj*, though it is not known whether the request for the work had come from the caliph. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 143. Many others to whom works of this genre are attributed were *kuttāb*, and thus in caliphal service; whether or not such works were commissioned by the caliphs or were written for them, they could hardly have failed to help promote the interests of the state, perhaps specifically those of the caliph too. (The afore-mentioned 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Īsā had himself been a *kātib*, as was Qudāma b. Ja'far; for other examples, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, pp. 145, 151.)

fore, the *Kitāb al-kharāj* of Abū Yūsuf must be treated as a work *by* Abū Yūsuf himself and written *for* Hārūn al-Rashīd, as the sources say; in what follows, it is analyzed accordingly.

As the title of his work suggests, Abū Yūsuf seeks to offer to the caliph advice on regulating the system of taxation in the 'Abbāsid state. The concern, however, is not just with a well-regulated system; it is also (and perhaps primarily) with bringing this system into conformity with the opinions and principles enunciated by religious authorities such as the Prophet, his Companions (above all, 'Umar I), the Successors, and leading jurists. These two concerns are complementary: it is assumed that to organize affairs according to the given opinions and principles is to ensure the justice and efficiency of the system.[88]

A salient characteristic of the work is Abū Yūsuf's exhortation to the caliph to conform to and revive the *sunna* of the *qawm al-ṣāliḥūn*.[89] Implicit throughout the treatise, this insistence comes across with particular clarity in the introduction. The *sunna* which the caliph is being referred to is apparently similar to, though far more concretely perceived and known than, what al-'Anbarī had in mind; for both, however, it is conformity to this *sunna* which ought to define the caliph's conduct and the character of his polity. Abū Yūsuf gives generous examples to illustrate where such normative traditions come from and what they consist in. Several of such traditions—for instance, in the form of statements ascribed to Abū Bakr, 'Umar I, 'Alī, etc. as regards the caliphal function—also serve to conjure up the image of a "golden age" in the past,[90] an image clearly intended to be emulated by rulers and administrators in the present, Inasmuch as the *sunna* that the caliph is called upon to revive and conform to is a precisely known entity, it is the 'ulamā' who are its living legatees.[91] Abū Yūsuf seems to visualize the latter not only as the bearers of the sacred tradition but, *ipso facto*, also as the locus of religious authority. Admittedly, the latter point is not explicitly stated; but the consideration that much of the book is concerned with what the *fuqahā'* think about various administrative and legal matters, and how *they* understand the bearing of the *sunna* of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*—of which,

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[88] For instance, *Kharāj*, p. 254 (sec. 201).

[89] *Kharāj*, 71; also cf. Abū Yūsuf's reference to those he calls "*al-wulāt al-mahdiyyūn*", though without further identification, ibid., 171 (sec. 76), 174 (sec. 86).

[90] Cf. *Kharāj*, pp. 84ff.

[91] Cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, pp. 88f., 91f.

again, it is the scholars who are the repositories—may legitimately be taken to argue for the scholars' religious authority.

While Abū Yūsuf seeks to affirm political quietism and ʿAbbāsid legitimism (as will presently be seen), as well as the caliph/imām's "discretionary powers" in matters of financial (and, we may take it, other spheres of) administration,[92] he does not forthrightly address the question of the caliph's authority in religious matters. Yet some of his statements do shed some light on his views in the latter regard. The caliphs are "deputies on [God's] earth", and they are endowed with a "light" whereby they clarify and resolve matters which are obscure to their subjects.[93] Being divinely endowed with the "light" does not, however, have any of those connotations which a similar endowment would manifestly have in case of a Shīʿite imām.[94] For Abū Yūsuf's caliphs, the "light" essentially signifies the duty to enforce law, safeguard the rights of people, revive the *sunna* of *al-qawm al-ṣāliḥūn*, promote justice and, of course, explain obscure matters.[95] These are the kinds of obligations which the caliph owes to the people and to God, and for which he is responsible to God. Neglect of such obligations, Abū Yūsuf emphatically warns the caliph, can lead not only to the ruin of the community but also to his own perdition.[96]

Abū Yūsuf's reference to the caliph's function of clarifying matters obscure to his subjects is of especial interest here. Such a function had already been noted by al-ʿAnbarī, if rather obliquely, and was expressed in explicit terms by the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd himself, as we shall see. A group of the "ʿAbbāsid Shīʿa", the Rizāmiyya, also affirmed a similar function for the caliph, for all that their view was expressed—as one might expect—in rather "extremist" terms.[97] The

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[92] Cf. Calder, *Studies*, pp. 134, 141, 145, 156f., 160. The phrase "discretionary powers" is Calder's.

[93] *Kharāj*, p. 71: "*inna'llāha . . . jaʿala wulāt al-amr khulafā' fī arḍihi wa jaʿala lahum nūran yuḍī'u li'l-raʿīya mā uẓlima ʿalayhim min al-umūr fīmā baynahum wa yubayyin mā ishtabaha min al-ḥuqūq ʿalayhim . . .*" The "*wulāt al-amr*" seems to refer here to caliphs, as frequently does the term "imām" in this treatise.

[94] On the notion of divine light in Imāmī Shīʿism, see U. Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors in early Shīʿa Tradition", *JSAI*, I (1979), pp. 41–65. Also see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). Early ʿAbbāsid poets, too, liked to use the imagery of light for the caliphs: see Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 82, n. 15.

[95] *Kharāj*, p. 71.

[96] Note Abū Yūsuf's invocation of certain eschatological verses of the Qurʾān and of some *ḥadīth* to state this point forcefully; and cf. Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, p. 253, n. 536.

[97] Pseudo- al-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar, *Masāʾil al-imāma*, in J. van Ess, *Frühe muʿtazilitische Häresiographie* (Beirut, 1971), p. 36.

appearance of this motif in Abū Yūsuf's *Kitāb al-kharāj* is noteworthy not only because it suggests the caliph's participation in the community's religious life, and in matters having a legal import, but also because this suggestion comes, in this instance, from one of the leading jurists of the time. Inasmuch as it occurs both in juristic treatises *and* in 'Abbāsid documents, there seems to have been a shared perception between the caliphs and many a scholar on this function; and since it occurs in 'Abbāsid documents from both before *and after* the *Miḥna* (see below), this motif may be taken to indicate a certain continuity in the caliph's religious functions, a continuity all too often obscured in thinking of the *Miḥna* as a watershed in 'Abbāsid, and Islamic, history.

A feature of the *Kitāb al-kharāj* which has hitherto escaped serious scholarly attention is its advocacy of the 'Abbāsid cause. Leaving aside the concern to enhance the caliph's "discretionary powers", which Calder has noticed in this treatise, I propose to draw attention to two other ways in which Abū Yūsuf may be said to have a pro-'Abbāsid agenda: through an unambiguous affirmation of political quietism and by suggestively embracing, and furthering, certain aspects of 'Abbāsid dynastic legitimism. Discussion of the former aspect occurs in the introduction, while various allusions to the latter are made in the main body of the *Kitāb al-kharāj*.

Quietism need not, of course, mean support for the regime, and could often signify only a pessimistic recognition that an alternative involving militant activism would cause more harm than good.[98] However, when advocated by the chief *qāḍī*, high in the caliph's favour, in a treatise which comes out strongly in support of the 'Abbāsid cause, quietism is hardly to be taken as signifying anything but a pro-'Abbāsid stance. Obedience to the caliph is equated with obedience to God, with reference to a famous *ḥadīth*, and much else is adduced to the same effect.[99] An unjust imām might be the worst of creatures in the sight of God,[100] but the imām's answerability is to God alone—not to the people. The political quietism being advocated here is not

[98] As the Murji'ite-Ḥanafite treatise *al-Fiqh al-absaṭ*, puts it: ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Cairo, 1368 A.H.), p. 44.

[99] *Kharāj*, p. 80 (tradition nr. 20: The Prophet said: "He who obeys me obeys God, and he who obeys the imām obeys me; he who disobeys me disobeys God, and he who disobeys the imām disobeys me"); and generally, pp. 79ff.

[100] Ibid., p. 78 (tradition nr. 15).

in itself very remarkable. Quietist trends seem all along to have existed, and were patronized by the rulers; some of the traditions recommending it apparently go back to the late Umayyad period. Nonetheless, the fact that Abū Yūsuf is able to muster so much of *ḥadīth* and *āthār* to present quietism virtually as a criterion of "orthodoxy" shows not just his own diligence, but also that the quietist view had by this time become, or was fast becoming, the standard one among proto-Sunnī religious scholars.[101]

Abū Yūsuf's advocacy of ʿAbbāsid legitimism is far less conspicuous than that of political quietism, and has therefore been commonly neglected. It is discreet and implied, rather than explicit, but is audible nevertheless. In one of the reports which Abū Yūsuf quotes on *khums*, for instance, Ibn ʿAbbās' answer to a query about who is entitled to the share of the *dhawu'l-qurbā* is unequivocal: "it belongs to us" (*wa huwa lanā*), he says.[102] Given that the early ʿAbbāsids were much concerned to emphasize their kinship with the Prophet and their position as members of his household—in the face of the apparently superior claims of the ʿAlids in this respect—the answer attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās seems intended to assert that the ʿAbbāsid household is clearly a component of the "*ahl al-bayt*" of the Prophet, if the ʿAbbāsids are not *the* household *par excellence*. Another report makes ʿAlī indirectly responsible for the *dhawu'l-qurbā*'s share having been permanently diverted to some state-expenditures;[103] yet another report has ʿAlī, after he became caliph, continue the practice of his predecessors in not assigning a share out of *khums* to the *dhawu'l-qurbā*.[104] These last two reports seem to betray a polemical concern: they are apparently a response to some Shīʿite claims about the injustice caused by the fact that the *dhawu'l-qurbā* were denied their shares by ʿUmar or ʿUthmān. What these reports suggest is therefore that ʿAlī concurred in the earlier caliphs' decisions on this matter, and that he may himself have been responsible for the discontinuation of the shares in question. The concern here is not only to clear the names of the first two caliphs of any blemish, but also to emphasize the *continuity* of tradition, respect for precedent, and, not least, ʿAlī's respect for and recognition of the authority of his predecessors. Such reports are not

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[101] M. Cook, "Activism and Quietism in Islam: the case of the early Murji'a", in A.S. Cudsi and A.E.H. Dessouki, eds., *Islam and Power* (London, 1981), p. 22.

[102] *Kharāj*, p. 104 (sec. 4, tradition nr. 9).

[103] *Kharāj*, pp. 103f. (sec. 4, tradition nr. 2).

[104] *Kharāj*, p. 102 (sec. 4, tradition nr. 2).

the figment of Abū Yūsuf's imagination; they are attested in other sources as well.[105] That they figure here, and elsewhere in proto-Sunnī sources, means however that 'Abbāsid legitimism and proto-Sunnī sentiment could converge.[106]

A somewhat more dramatic expression of 'Abbāsid legitimism occurs in the context of Abū Yūsuf's discussion of the *dīwān* instituted by 'Umar I.[107] The precedence of the 'Abbāsid over 'Alid claims to closer kinship with the Prophet, with all that this signifies, is implied here in terms of figures which show the striking disparity in the shares to which al-'Abbās and 'Alī were supposedly made entitled. The former is said to have received the highest share of 12,000, equivalent only to that of the Prophet's wives; 'Alī's share, on the other hand, was fixed at 5000, which was equivalent to that of the Companions fighting on Muḥammad's side at Badr—'Alī having been one of them—and to that of his two sons. In other words, no extraordinary merit is recognized for 'Alī, while that of al-'Abbās, the uncle of the Prophet, is clearly affirmed.[108]

It is not being suggested here that Abū Yūsuf had invented the traditions which portray al-'Abbās as being given the highest share. The contradictory ways in which traditions favourable to the ruling house sought to further its interest in the early 'Abbāsid period suggest that not only were many people simultaneously engaged in that exercise, but that there was no consensus on just how, at any given point in time, the cause of 'Abbāsid legitimism might be best served. That effort did not have to take the form of outright fabrication, for rich materials to choose from were doubtless always at hand. A comparison of Abū Yūsuf's traditions with those in some other works does, in any case, suggest that his version was neither the only nor even the most popular account on that subject. Ibn Sa'd and al-Balādhurī (whose account of 'Umar's *dīwān* is closely modelled on that of Ibn Sa'd) describe in some detail the shares allocated to different individuals and categories,[109] but they are ignorant of any report that the share of al-'Abbās may have been the highest. They note that the Prophet's wives (or most of them) were given the highest share—

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[105] Cf Ibn Sallām, *al-Amwāl*, pp. 332 (paras 847–49), 334f. (para 852).

[106] Some aspects of this convergence are analyzed in chapter V, below.

[107] On the *dīwān*, see *EI(2)*, s.v. (A.A. al-Duri, et al.).

[108] *Kharāj*, pp. 142ff.

[109] Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, III, pp. 294–304; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M.J. De Goeje (Leiden, 1866), pp. 448ff.

12,000—and that the share of al-ʿAbbās, ʿAlī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn was 5000 each, equal to the amount allotted to the *ahl Badr*. Another view, according to which the share of al-ʿAbbās was 7000, is noted, but it is immediately followed by the statement of historiographical "consensus" (*wa qāla sā'iruhum*) that "[ʿUmar] did not give preference to anyone over the people of Badr except for the wives of the Prophet, to whom he allocated 12,000 each".[110] The account of Ibn Saʿd and al-Balādhurī, in so far as it concerns al-ʿAbbās, is by all means favourable to him, for it makes clear that the latter received at least the equivalent of what was alloted to the *ahl Badr* (a share he did not deserve, for he had participated in the battle of Badr not on the side of the Muslims but on that of the polytheists) by virtue of his close kinship with the Prophet. Yet the tendency of these reports is far too mild in comparison with what Abū Yūsuf has to say.

A look at some other accounts is equally instructive. The Shīʿite al-Yaʿqūbī reports, unsurprisingly, that in instituting the *dīwān*, ʿUmar began by alloting a share to ʿAlī, though he does note the variant view that ʿUmar may have begun with al-ʿAbbās. In any case, according to al-Yaʿqūbī, while some of the Prophet's wives had a share amounting to 12,000 and ʿAlī's share (together with that of many others) was 5000, that of al-ʿAbbās was only 3000.[111] Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, a younger contemporary of Abū Yūsuf, did not, for his part, even mention al-ʿAbbās or his share while discussing ʿUmar's *dīwān*.[112] al-Ṭabarī, however, comes closest to the figures of Abū Yūsuf, if only to bypass them: according to his account, ʿUmar began with al-ʿAbbas and allotted him twenty-five thousand dirhams(!), or, according to another report, twelve thousand.[113] The confusion of these accounts does not obscure some of the tendencies at work in them, though this is not the occasion to examine them further. Suffice it to say that if, with the notable exception of al-Ṭabarī, Abū Yūsuf goes to such lengths in affirming the unrivalled status of al-ʿAbbās, then it would seem scarcely unwarranted to think of that effort as consciously expressing his legitimist agenda.

In concluding our discussion of the *Kitāb al-kharāj*, Abū Yūsuf's concern to provide for a close relationship of the ʿulamā' with the

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[110] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, III, p. 297; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, p. 451.
[111] al-Yaʿqūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. M.J. Houtsma (Leiden, 1883), II, p. 175.
[112] *al-Amwāl*, pp. 223–27 (paras 547–57).
[113] al-Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2412f.

state should finally be noted. His insistence that the administrative cadres be staffed by trusted, pious, and God-fearing men is interpretable as an advice to recruit more people from the religious circles.[114] The 'ulamā''s participation in the administration is, for Abū Yūsuf, the way to reform administrative abuses and a means too through which the "revival" of the *sunna* of old ought to be accomplished.[115] What seems equally important, though he does not say so, is that the involvement of the piety-minded would also give them a direct stake in the 'Abbāsid state, and that would not only help the 'Abbāsids with their religious prestige and legitimacy, but perhaps also moderate somewhat that autonomous position of the 'ulamā' in society about which the early 'Abbāsids had some misgivings.

III.3.4

So far as the caliphs prior to al-Ma'mūn are concerned, the lines along which al-'Anbarī and Abū Yūsuf were thinking seem to have suited their interests well. Caliphal religious policies generally tended towards courting the 'ulamā''s favour and playing up the caliph's role as defender of the interests of Islam and the Muslims; the advice of these authors affirms both concerns, not to mention the advocacy, by Abū Yūsuf particularly, of 'Abbāsid legitimism. Thus far, it is as if the caliph concerned is being addressed with an exhortation he would have liked, and expected, to hear—an exhortation to which the caliph's conspicuous submission would enhance his religious image. That both al-'Anbarī and Abū Yūsuf appear, despite their differences, to affirm the primacy of the 'ulamā''s religious authority may seem rather more problematic from the 'Abbāsid viewpoint. But this would seem problematic only if it is already taken for granted, as Crone and Hinds do, that the early 'Abbāsids laid claims to religious authority for themselves and were actively, if against increasing odds, competing with the scholars in that regard.[116] Before al-Ma'mūn took the

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[114] *Kharāj*, pp. 204 (sec. 129), 247 (sec. 188, 189), 252 (sec. 198), 253 (sec. 200), 288 (sec. 220), etc. Perhaps even more specifically, the advice could have referred to the Ḥanafīs. For it is scarcely unreasonable to suppose that Abū Yūsuf should have wanted to promote the influence of his own *madhhab*.

[115] Compare al-Fazārī, *Siyar*, passim, for a thoroughgoing concern to see the conduct of the holy war and matters of military administration on the frontiers evaluated, and regulated, by the opinions of the scholars. The opinions quoted in this case are primarily those of the Syrian jurist al-Awzā'ī (d. 157/774).

[116] Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, pp. 80–96.

initiative, the caliphs do not seem, however, to have challenged the 'ulamā''s authority. It is, after all, Mālik whom the caliph is supposed to have asked to codify law rather than taking the initiative himself; and Abū Yūsuf was, of course, a member of the official establishment, was writing under royal patronage, and was not likely to antagonize the caliph in either his affirmation of the scholars' authority or his delineation of the caliph's functions.

Far from being antagonized, in fact, the caliph subscribed to a view of his function that had a striking affinity to what Abū Yūsuf prescribed for him. The following passage from Hārūn al-Rashīd's letter to Harthama b. A'yan, appointed governor of Khurasan, offers an illustration:

> The caliph commands Harthamah to keep in mind the fear of God, to obey Him and to show concern for and watch over God's interests. He should make the Book of God a guiding example in all he undertakes and, accordingly, make licit what is legally allowable according to it and prohibit what is not allowable. When he is faced with anything doubtful and uncertain in it (*mutashābihihi*), he should pause and consult those with a systematic training and acquaintanceship with God's religion and those knowledgeable about the Book of God (*uli'l-fiqh fī dīn Allāh wa uli'l-'ilm bi-kitāb Allāh*), or alternatively, he should refer it to his Imām, so that God, may He be magnified and exalted, may make manifest to him His judgment in the matter and so that he may execute it according to his right guidance.[117]

At issue in this passage is not simply a matter of scriptural exegesis, but of determining how local problems are to be resolved in accordance with the Book of God. For inasmuch as the document is addressed to a governor, the context suggests that it is not just (or not primarily) the difficulties of understanding the *kitāb Allāh* itself, but the problems which might arise in its application—that is, legal problems—that require resolution. The caliph affirms the authority of the *kitāb Allāh*, but also his own authority to elucidate that which is doubtful in (or with reference to) it. Tellingly, however, his authority is described in conjunction (not in competition) with that of the local religious scholars. Abū Yūsuf could have had little to disagree with on the

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[117] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 717; translation as in *The History of al-Tabarī*, XXX, tr. Bosworth, p. 274 (with minor modification); also cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 89. Hārūn's conception of his function as caliph, as articulated in his letter to the provincial governors on the designation of his successors (al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 664f.) may also be compared with Abū Yūsuf's disquisition on the caliph's role (*Kharāj*, p. 71).

advice to consult such scholars; as noted, he was in fact much concerned to see a closer relationship between them and the 'Abbāsid administration. Hārūn's advice to Harthama about the option of referring the problems in question to the imām, i.e. to the caliph himself, likewise figures in Abū Yūsuf's advice to Hārūn. The recognition that the 'ulamā' and the caliph are *both* fit to rule on obscure matters (*mā uẓlima 'alayhim, mā ishtabaha*, in Abū Yūsuf's formulation)[118] is thus independently attested from both a scholar and a caliph.

The caliph's authority to clarify obscure matters is comparable with the authority of the 'ulamā' to do so, which suggests at once a recognition that the latter are the locus of religious authority *and* an effort to make the caliph a part of such authority. Nor is the recognition of the caliph's religious competence peculiar to Abū Yūsuf among the 'ulamā'. Mālik, for instance, recognised the caliph's *ijtihād*[119] as did Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal;[120] later al-Māwardī was to speak of "the knowledge that conduces to *ijtihād* in problems which occur (*nawāzil*) and in legal decisions (*aḥkām*)" as one of the seven preconditions for *imāma*.[121] That Harthama should have been advised to refer problematic issues to local scholars *or to the caliph* does not suggest two competing sources of authority. Not only might the caliph and the 'ulamā' try to resolve obscure matters together, as we shall see, but the caliph's ability to do so is based on the *same* sources—the Book of God, the *sunna* of the Prophet, and, of course, *ijtihād*—from which the 'ulamā' themselves draw their expertise and authority.

The following report, which relates to a Basran *qāḍī* of Hārūn, sheds further light on the caliph's aforementioned advice to his governor Harthama. A woman brought a case to the *qāḍī*, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Makhzūmī, but seems to have grown impatient with his slow handling of it.

> So [the *qāḍī*] said [to her]: "Your case is difficult; you will have to wait . . . if I am to understand it properly. But if you want me to refer the case to the *amīr*, who can gather the Basran *fuqahā'* for you, I will

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[118] *Kharāj*, p. 71.

[119] Schacht, *Origins*, p. 116.

[120] See the "Qiṭ'a min muqaddimat al-shaykh al-imām Abī Muḥammad b. Tamīm al-Ḥanbalī fī 'aqīdat al-imām al-mubajjal Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal . . .", appended to Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī (Cairo, 1952), II, p. 280.

[121] al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya*, ed. M. Enger (Bonn, 1853), 5. On al-Māwardī and the "classical" Sunnī view on the caliphs's position and functions, see A.K.S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam* (Oxford, 1981), especially chs. 5 and 6.

> do so; or if you wish I can write to the Commander of the Faithful so that he might ask the *fuqahā'* who are with him."[122]

That the caliph had *fuqahā'* with him is no surprise. Much more instructive is the information that the *qāḍī* could, and no doubt did, write for decision or advice on difficult matters to the caliph (or the governor). Letters of appointment to *qāḍīs* stipulated, in fact, that they write to *the caliph* when faced with difficult problems. A standard example of such a letter, preserved in Qudāma b. Ja'far's *Kitāb al-kharāj* reads, in part, as follows:

> [The commander of the Faithful] has ordered him [sc. the *qāḍī*] that if something is difficult to decide, he should resort to consultation and discussion with people of [sound] opinion and insight in judicial matters (*qaḍā'*) so that the matter can be resolved.[123] If [the matter at hand] remains obscure to the *qāḍī*, let him write to the Commander of the Faithful [and] explain the matter fully and truthfully . . . so that [the latter] can give an answer according to which . . . [the *qāḍī*] may [then] act.[124]

Resolving legal problems was thus not exclusively the 'ulamā''s business but was a calling that, at least in theory but possibly also in practice, involved the caliph too. Whether he himself decided, or participated in the *fuqahā'*'s deliberations, or had the latter alone give their verdict, or chose from their conflicting advice, the caliph was part of the process whereby such problems might be resolved and answered.[125] Why else should the governor and the *qāḍī* be instructed to have recourse to the caliph in difficult problems? Not that every

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[122] Wakī', *Akhbār*, II, p. 142. al-Makhzūmī is said to have been the first Ḥanafī to serve as *qāḍī* in Basra: ibid. p. 142.

[123] On the *qāḍī*'s "*consilium*", as Emile Tyan characterizes it, see Tyan, *Histoire de l'organisation judiciaire en pays d'Islam*, 2nd edn. (Leiden, 1960), 214ff. Tyan does not, however, discuss the *fuqahā'*'s assisting the caliph in his decisions.

[124] Qudāma b. Ja'far, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, p. 23.

[125] Cf. al-Kindī, *Quḍāt*, p. 413 (cited in Tyan, *L'Organisation judiciare*[1], I, p. 180), where it is the caliph al-Amīn who instructs his Egyptian *qāḍī* to annul a decision of the latter's predecessor. Also see al-Kindī, *Quḍāt*, pp. 474f. (cf. Tyan, *L'Organisation judiciare*[1], I, p. 180) for al Mutawakkil's bringing together Kufan *fuqahā'* to examine an Egyptian *qāḍī*'s decision. That decision was overturned and the *qāḍī*, who was *'alā madhhab al-Madaniyyīn*, resigned. Note that it is, appropriately enough, *the caliph* who then instructs the new *qāḍī* to annul the decision of his predecessor, for all that the caliph himself is explicitly stated to have been guided by the council of the *fuqahā'*. For an example of a caliph (al-Mu'tamid) choosing between the scholars' conflicting advice, see D. Sourdel, *Le vizirat abbaside de 749 à 936* (Damascus, 1959–60), I, pp. 342f.

caliph necessarily exercised this function; but given the ability and inclination to do so, he might; and it is not only documents from the 'Abbāsid chancery that say so, but also writings of *fuqahā'*, such as al-'Anbarī's and Abū Yūsuf's.

The caliph's participation in resolving legal questions gives him a religious authority akin to that of the scholars, not one over and above or against theirs; and it is in conjunction with the 'ulamā' that the caliph acts, even when he acts only as an *'ālim*. What emerges from a careful study of the pre-*Miḥna* 'Abbāsid period is not a struggle over religious authority, with the caliphs and the scholars as antagonists, but rather the effort, on the part of the 'Abbāsid caliphs, to lay claim to the sort of competence the 'ulamā' were known to possess. This effort was not meant as a challenge to the 'ulamā'. It signified rather a recognition of their religious authority and an expression of the caliphal intent to act as patrons of those scholars, even to act as scholars themselves. What is more, it signified the assertion of a public commitment to those fundamental sources of authority on which the 'ulamā''s expertise, and a slowly evolving Sunnism, were based. A forceful recognition of the 'ulamā''s authority, and consequently of the need to associate with them, finds another expression in an epistle which Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn, al-Ma'mūn's governor of Khurasan, is said to have addressed to his son. Written on the latter's appointment as the governor of Diyār Rabī'a ca. 206/821, the epistle suggests that ideas similar to Hārūn's had become influential within the ruling circles of the time.

> [Adhere firmly to] the practices (*sunan*) laid down by the Messenger of God; . . . persevere . . . in imitating his qualities and . . . the examples left by the Prophet's successors, the virtuous early generation of Muslims (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*). . . . Choose to be guided by the religious law (*fiqh*) and its practitioners, by religion and its exponents . . . and by the Book of God and those who act by it. . . . Spend a lot of time with the learned scholars . . .; seek their advice and frequent their company. Your desire should be that of following the established practices of the faith and of putting them into action . . .[126]

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[126] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 1046–61; translation as in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXXII, tr. C.E. Bosworth (Albany, 1987), pp. 110–28 (with minor modifications). For a brief introduction to this epistle, and a defence of its authenticity, see C.E. Bosworth, "An Early Islamic Mirror for Princes: Ṭāhir Dhu'l-Yamīnain's epistle to his son 'Abdallāh (206/821)", *JNES*, XXIX (1970), pp. 25ff. Also see W. al-Qāḍī, "An Early Fāṭimid Political Document", *SI*, XLVIII (1978), pp. 91ff.

Ṭāhir's views bear testimony to the recognition that the ruler's legitimacy and an "orthodox" image had both come to be seen as contingent on the patronage of the 'ulamā' and on conforming to (but also participating in) the religious tradition they represented. It is not without irony that Ṭāhir should emphatically have endorsed the scholars' importance for the ruler during the reign of a caliph who was to make the most massive effort in 'Abbāsid history to alter the terms on which the relationship of the 'ulamā' and the state had come to be based.[127]

III.4. *The Miḥna and its Aftermath*

III.4.1.

The *Miḥna* instituted by al-Ma'mūn in 218/833 to test the belief of *qāḍīs, fuqahā'* and *muḥaddithūn* on the "createdness" of the Qur'ān was the most dramatic form in which this caliph tried to challenge the authority of the 'ulamā', but it was not an isolated event.[128] It was preceded by other, implicit, challenges to the nascent Sunnī religious elite, such as the caliph's proclamations that the first Umayyad caliph, Mu'āwiya, was not to be favourably mentioned,[129] that 'Alī was to be ranked above all other Companions of the Prophet,[130] and, of course, that the Qur'ān was the "created" word of God.[131] It was this last mentioned doctrine that the caliph made, six years after he had first

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[127] That Ṭāhir was able to get away with his views may be because at the time when the epistle is said to have been written (206/821), al-Ma'mūn had not yet embarked on his confrontation with the 'ulamā'. For what it is worth, we even have a report about al-Ma'mūn's having greatly appreciated the epistle (Bosworth, "Mirror for Princes", pp. 29f.).

[128] Modern studies on the *Miḥna* include: W.M. Patton, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna* (Leiden, 1897); J. van Ess, "Ibn Kullāb et la *Miḥna*", *Arabica*, XXXVII (1990), pp. 173–233; idem, *Th&G*, III, pp. 446–80; J.A. Nawas, "A Reexamination of three current explanations for al-Ma'mūn's introduction of the *Miḥna*", *IJMES*, XXVI (1994), pp. 615–29; *EI(2)*, s.v. "Miḥna" (M. Hinds), and the sources cited there. Also see Michael Cooperson, "The Heirs of the Prophets in Classical Arabic Biography" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1994), pp. 329–506, for an analysis of the treatment of the *Miḥna* and of Ibn Ḥanbal's persona in the medieval biographical dictionaries.

[129] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 1098.

[130] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 1099. Many proto-Sunnī 'ulamā', for their part, were keen to stress that 'Alī had no special merit vis-à-vis the other companions of the Prophet: cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-sunna*, 187ff., 204f., where traditions making 'Alī himself affirm this viewpoint are quoted at length.

[131] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 1099.

proclaimed it in 212/827, the basis of the *Miḥna*. Rather than act in religious matters in conjunction with the proto-Sunnī 'ulamā', or conform to their view of what constituted "orthodox" conduct, al-Ma'mūn tried, through the *Miḥna*, to bring their own "orthodoxy" into question. The implication of imposing a criterion whereby to measure their "orthodoxy" not only was that the authority of the caliph to institute such a procedure was being asserted, but also that the caliph would come across as more "orthodox" than anyone else, and more worthy of being the guardian and defender of that "orthodoxy".[132] In his communications to the governor of Baghdad, the caliph made it plain that a refusal to accept the doctrine being officially sponsored would strip the 'ulamā' in question of recognition *as* 'ulamā' by the state[133]—the implication being that it was from the state that such a recognition was to be had.[134] Conversely, only those who subscribed to it could serve as *qāḍīs*, and they would also have to function as agents of the state in imposing and upholding this doctrine.[135] But the Inquisition was not confined only to *qāḍīs*. The probity (*'adāla*) of all those who failed to testify to the Qur'ān's createdness was to be nullified and their legal testimony (*shahāda*) invalidated, and they were to be disallowed from narrating *ḥadīth* or giving *fatwās*.[136]

In addition to demanding that the scholars conform to a criterion of right belief which *the caliph* had set for them, al-Ma'mūn also launched into savage, and highly personal attacks on the reputation of many of them.[137] In his long catalogue of invectives, the criticism which is perhaps most suggestive of the caliph's concerns seems to

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[132] In his communications to the governor of Baghdad, al-Ma'mūn presents himself as *upholding* an "orthodoxy" rather than *instituting* it. He implicitly claims, in fact, that the doctrine he is enforcing is *not* an innovation (cf., for instance, al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 1130)—which is what his critics said it was. Contrast Ibn Ḥanbal's refrain during his interrogation in al-Mu'taṣim's court: "Give me something from the Qur'ān or sunna of the Prophet [as proof of the Qur'ān's createdness]". See Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Sīrat al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Mun'im Aḥmad (Alexandria, 1981), pp. 56, 59, 63.

[133] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 1120.

[134] Ibid., III, p. 1116.

[135] Ibid., III, p. 1116.

[136] Ibid., III, pp. 1115, 1120; al-Kindī, *Quḍāt*, pp. 445–47.

[137] al-Ṭabarī, III, 1127ff.; also cf. Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, *Kitāb Baghdād*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Cairo, 1949), pp. 58f. Van Ess observes ("Ibn Kullāb", p. 179) that al-Ma'mūn seems to have kept himself very well-informed of the affairs of the 'ulamā'. That may be so, though it should be noted that charges of greed and of financial embezzlement, which the caliph liberally hurled at the scholars on this occasion, need not have been true in order to be effective. The charge of financial embezzlement is, moreover, a familiar topos in Islamic historiography.

be that the *fuqahā'* and traditionists being examined aspired, in deluding the ignorant populace with their erroneous beliefs, to positions of leadership in society.[138] This is an allegation which tells us something not only about the caliph's suspicions of the scholars, but also, perhaps, about the latter's growing social influence. Conversely, given the stigma which often attaches in the Islamic tradition to promoting oneself for positions of leadership, this charge indicts the scholars in insinuating that if they really were scholars they would not be seeking to promote their influence in society.

The *Miḥna* may be seen, in short, as a challenge calculated to undermine the authority as well as the social standing of the 'ulamā'. Whether al-Ma'mūn's conflict with the 'ulamā' was provoked by his assertion of religious authority, to which he saw them as a threat, or his claims to religious authority were themselves called forth by the need to make his challenge effective, need not be decided here. For either way, his claim to define right belief signified an attack on the authority and, in general, the position and influence, of the 'ulamā'.[139]

Who were the scholars at whom the *Miḥna* was directed? A number of *fuqahā'*, judges, and *muḥaddithūn*, both from Baghdad and the provinces, are mentioned in our sources. The latter include such prominent figures as Muḥammad b. Sa'd, Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn, Abū Khaythama Zuhayr b. Ḥarb, Aḥmad b. Ismā'īl al-Dawraqī, Abū Muslim the *mustamlī* of the Wāsiṭī traditionist Yazīd b. Hārūn,[140] 'Alī b. al-Ja'd al-Jawharī,[141] 'Alī b. 'Abdallāh b. Ja'far al-Madīnī,[142] Abū Mushir 'Abd al-A'lā b. Mushir al-Ghassānī,[143] Nu'aym b. Ḥam-

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[138] al-Ṭabarī, III, 1114. Later, al-Mu'taṣim too is reported to have accused Ibn Ḥanbal of "coveting leadership" (*qad balaghanī annaka tuḥibb al-riyāsa*): Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq, *Dhikr miḥnat al-imām Aḥmad ibn Hanbal*, ed. Muḥammad Naghash (Cairo, 1977), p. 56. al-Mu'taṣim then goes on to promise Ibn Ḥanbal not only freedom—should he give in—but also status and honour: "I will come to visit you with my entourage and clients . . . and I will extol your name . . ." (ibid., p. 56).

[139] Cf. Nawas, "Reexamination", 615–629.

[140] These five, as well as Ismā'īl b. Dāwūd and Ismā'īl b. Abī Mas'ūd are the seven scholars who were the first to be summoned to Raqqa for questioning by the caliph about *khalq al-Qur'ān*. All of them testified to the doctrine, both in Raqqa and later, publicly, in Baghdād. al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 1116f.; also cf. Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq, *Dhikr miḥna*, pp. 34–36. On Ibn Sa'd, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 300f.; on Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn, ibid., I, pp. 106f.; on Abū Khaythama, ibid., I, p. 107; on Aḥmad al-Dawraqī, ibid., I, p. 112.

[141] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 1121; on him, cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, p. 105.

[142] *TB*, XI, pp. 466f. (nr. 6349); on him, cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 108.

[143] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 1130; also see Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, *Kitāb Baghdād*, p. 150, where al-Ma'mūn ridicules Abū Mushir for a deficient knowledge of the Prophet's conduct. Note that the caliph here comes across as explicitly making the point that this scholar, owing

mād,[144] and, of course, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.[145] With some notable exceptions, of whom Ibn Ḥanbal is the most prominent, most scholars who were questioned in the course of the *Miḥna* assented to the official position, and not all seem to have done so under duress. Even Ibn Ḥanbal himself is alleged by some hostile reports to have given in,[146] though in view both of the subsequent favour he enjoyed with al-Mutawakkil and his harsh attitude towards those traditionists who had easily consented to al-Ma'mūn's doctrine, that seems rather unlikely.[147] But for our purposes at least, who consented and under what sort of pressures is less important than whose consent *mattered* to the ruling elite carrying on this persecution.

The lists of names our sources preserve—of which the foregoing is a small sample from among the *muḥaddithūn*—are untidy. Among them, there are prominent scholars and obscure ones, reliable (for Sunnī *rijāl*-critics at least) and unreliable ones. Those interrogated and persecuted also included many jurists,[148] which means that the Inquisition cannot be said to have been directed only against the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*. There were *fuqahā'* on the side of the persecuters too, and doubtless traditionists as well.[149] The identity of the schools of law

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to what al-Ma'mūn saw as his ignorance, was unfit to be regarded as a religious authority by the people. On this scholar's influence in his native Damascus, which is where this interview with the caliph is said to have taken place, see *TB*, XI, p. 72 (nr. 5750). On him, cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 100f.

[144] al-Kindī, *Quḍāt*, p. 447; *EI(2)*, s.v. "Nu'aym b. Ḥammād" (C. Pellat); Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 104f.

[145] Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 502–09.

[146] See *EI(2)*, s.v. "*Miḥna*"; Cooperson, "Heirs of the Prophets", pp. 340ff.

[147] The traditional view is that among the scholars who were interrogated by the governor of Baghdād, only two men, Ibn Ḥanbal and Muḥammad b. Nūḥ remained steadfast: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 1131. Many of those who assented to the official dogma could hardly have done so out of conviction, however, as the caliph himself was apparently aware (cf. ibid., p. 1132). For Ibn Ḥanbal's refusal to narrate *ḥadīth* from those *muḥaddithūn* who had given in to government pressures during the inquisition, see Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Sīra*, p. 80; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, I, pp. 273f. (nr. 511), XI, p. 287 (nr. 561).

[148] For general references to the "*fuqahā'*" interrogated during the *Miḥna*, see al-Kindī, *Quḍāt*, p. 447; al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 1121.

[149] Cf. Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq, *Dhikr miḥna*, p. 43, where Isḥāq b. Ḥanbal, Ibn Ḥanbal's uncle, is said to have asked the governor of Baghdad, Isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm, to "gather the *fuqahā'* and 'ulamā'" to engage in disputation with the imprisoned Ibn Ḥanbal, and to release the latter should he win the argument. "But I did not mention the *ahl al-ḥadīth wa'l-āthār* to him", Isḥaq b. Ḥanbal is said to have reminisced. The implication of the latter statement is not clear, though it can perhaps be taken to mean that Ibn Ḥanbal would not have wanted to debate with some of his erstwhile colleagues (the *muḥaddithūn*) who had been won over by the government. In any case, *fuqahā'* and judges are mentioned as attending the questioning of Ibn Ḥanbal in al-Mu'taṣim's court. Ibid., p. 49.

was still in the process of articulation at the time of the *Miḥna*,[150] but insofar as individual scholars are recognizable as Ḥanafīs, there were adherents of this school on both sides.[151] To a certain extent, then, the *Miḥna* can also be seen as a conflict *between* the scholars themselves.[152] Yet, the prominence of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* among those interrogated, the identification of the doctrine in question with the Mu'tazila, and the virtual absence of any prominent Shī'a in the ranks of those who were questioned[153] suggests that the Inquisition was directed not at scholars in general but against scholars associated with a certain trend. I do not wish to draw sharper lines than a messy body of evidence permits, but it does seem, at least from the names in the foregoing list, that the *Miḥna* is best characterized as an assault on the proto-Sunnī religious scholars. It was these scholars whose religious authority—most notably, perhaps, in the form of a growing specialization in *ḥadīth*, with all the prestige this vocation conferred—and influence among the people were disquieting to al-Ma'mūn, and it was they in particular he tried to rein in through the *Miḥna*. Yet the Inquisition had a bearing on the status not just of these, but of all scholars. If a major concern of this Inquisition was the assertion of the caliph's religious authority over the 'ulamā', as suggested in the foregoing, then this assertion, though directed primarily at those who seemed least prone to acknowledge it, no doubt prescribes the same position of subservience to the caliph's religious authority for *all* scholars.

The nature and implications of the religious authority that al-Ma'mūn appears to have claimed for himself merits a brief excursus here. It is tempting, but erroneous I think, to view this caliph as "assuming for himself the prerogatives of [the Shī'ī] imām, displaying the religious authority which he had won thereby in the institution of the *Miḥna*."[154]

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[150] As Tsafrir has argued: "Ḥanafī School", pp. 1ff. and passim; also cf. Michael Cook's review of van Ess, *Th&G*, II, in *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, LI (1994), col. 28.

[151] Tsafrir, "Ḥanafī School", pp. 107ff.; *EI(2)*, s.v. "al-Miḥna"; W.M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973), pp. 284f.

[152] H.F.I. Kasassebeh, "The Office of Qāḍī in the Early 'Abbāsid Caliphate, 132–247/750–861", unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1990, 131f.

[153] Note, however, that Ibn Ḥanbal is reported to have cited the Imāmī Shī'ī imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq as one of those who did not adhere to the doctrine of *khalq al-Qur'ān*: Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Sīra*, p. 91. To Ja'far is attributed the position that the Qur'ān is *laysa bi-khāliq wa lā makhlūq*: ibid.; also see W. Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy concerning the Creation of the Koran", in *Orientalia hispanica sive studia F.M. Pareja octogenario dicata*, ed. J.M. Barral, I (Leiden, 1974), p. 508.

[154] Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 94. Also cf. D. Sourdel, "La politique religieuse

The claims of the imām, at least as depicted in the early Imāmī Shī'ite tradition, are far more extensive than what al-Ma'mūn appears to have coveted for himself. This caliph saw it as his function

> to guide back to Him [*scil.* God] the one who has turned aside from Him . . .; trace out for . . . [his] subjects the way of salvation for them; draw their attention to the limits of their faith and the way to their heavenly success and protection from sin; and reveal to them those of their affairs which are hidden from them and those which are dubious and obscure by means of what will remove doubt from them and bring back illumination and clear knowledge to them all.[155]

The sort of knowledge al-Ma'mūn claims for himself here would enable him to guide his subjects to the right path and ultimately to salvation; such knowledge is evidently not given to his subjects, which is why they need someone like him. But this knowledge is quite different, it seems, from the esoteric knowledge of everything past, present and future, to which the Shī'ī imām lays claim, and which is among the fundamental bases of his claim to be the imām.[156] The notion of clarifying obscure matters for his subjects recalls statements by Abū Yūsuf and Hārūn al-Rashīd. As we have seen, al-Ma'mūn goes further and claims a religious authority which would not only be uniquely his, but which would also enable him to define the criteria of right belief rather than merely deciding and enforcing matters according to such criteria. Yet it does not follow that he thereby becomes, or seeks to become, a Shī'ī imām, say, in the tradition of the early Imāmiyya. The sort of knowledge al-Ma'mūn claims for himself is ultimately more akin to that of the emerging Sunnī 'ulamā''s than it is to the

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du calife 'abbaside al-Ma'mūn", *REI*, XXX (1962), pp. 27–48; A. Arazi and A. Elad, "L'épître à l'armée: al-Ma'mūn et la seconde da'wa", *SI*, LXVI (1987), pp. 44ff.

[155] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 1117.

[156] Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, pp. 69ff. Contrast Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 3–105 passim, for the view that the "moderate" or "mainstream" Imāmiyya of the second-third/eighth-ninth centuries considered the imām essentially as the most learned of scholars. Yet he recognizes that the imām's "knowledge was qualitatively different from that of other learned men for it was the knowledge of the House of the Prophet, which derived ultimately from the Prophet himself. It was, therefore, unquestionable truth and indisputable authority, representing in effect a part of the revelation that the Prophet had received from God." (Modarressi, ibid., p. 9). In general, Modarressi probably draws too sharp a line between his "moderates" and "extremists"; and though his work demonstrates the differences in early Shī'ī conceptions of the imām's authority, the "moderate" views need not have been quite so uniform as he suggests. Could one not believe in the imām's esoteric knowledge and yet distance oneself from other "extremist" positions?

Shīʿī imām's. True, the latter too is an *ʿālim*—indeed, the *ʿālim* par excellence—but, unlike al-Maʾmūn, the sort of *ʿilm* he claims is in large part, at least in the early stages of the development of Imāmī doctrine, supernatural and esoteric. The analogy of al-Maʾmūn's claims with those attributed to the Shīʿī imām is thus not just superficial but also misleading.

After the death of al-Maʾmūn (d. 218/833), the *Miḥna* continued in operation under his two immediate successors. Rather curiously, though, his claims to religious authority were neglected, and in this sense there already was a reversion to the pre-Maʾmūnid tradition. The *Miḥna* was now prosecuted more as a matter of commitment to the *sunna* of their predecessor, and, as our sources insist, due to the influence of Muʿtazilī scholars, of whom the chief *qāḍī* Ibn Abī Duʾād (d. 240/854) was the most influential, than for any apparent interest the caliphs may have had in asserting their own religious authority.[157] Or so it seems. It is important to bear in mind that most of our sources represent the viewpoint not of the prosecutors of the *Miḥna* but of the persecuted. Ibn Ḥanbal may have come out of the Inquisition as a hero, but the Sunnī sources also have a definite interest in representing him as such. By the same token, it is possible that presenting the caliphs Muʿtaṣim and Wāthiq as only half-heartedly continuing the policy of their predecessor may have been a way of demonstrating the moral bankruptcy of the whole affair and, perhaps also, of mitigating their culpability for it.[158] Yet, even as tendentious representation, early accounts of the *Miḥna* reveal much about the 'ulamā''s religious authority, especially in relation to the caliphs. I shall base some brief remarks in this regard on two of the earliest treatments of the *Miḥna*, one of which comes to us from Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, a son of Ibn Ḥanbal, and the other from his nephew, Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq.

That these sources purport to be almost contemporary with Ibn Ḥanbal does not, of course, vouch for their truth-claims, but it does mean that they can give us a fair idea of how the position of the

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[157] For a sympathetic biography of Ibn Abī Duʾād, a much maligned figure in Sunnī biographical dictionaries, see van Ess, *Th&G*, III, pp. 481–502.

[158] For the treatment of the *Miḥna* in biographical literature, see Cooperson, Heirs of the Prophets", pp. 340–400. My analysis, though indebted to Cooperson's, differs from his in being concerned not with how later biographers may have dealt with the uncomfortable suggestion (which Cooperson is inclined to accept) that Ibn Ḥanbal may have capitulated during the *Miḥna*, but rather with the representation of the 'ulamā''s authority in some of the earliest accounts of the Inquisition.

caliphs vis-à-vis the 'ulamā' was visualized in the milieu in which these texts originated. In this regard, it is striking that the influence which Ibn Abī Du'ād is shown to wield over the caliphs here makes the same general point as does al-Mu'taṣim's ironic admiration and solicitude for Ibn Ḥanbal: this caliph comes across as utterly convinced of the scholars' authority, and the only question is whose authority, among the scholars, he would defer to. It is the Mu'tazilī chief *qāḍī*, of course, who eventually has his way, but the celebrated flogging of Ibn Ḥanbal does not take place before the caliph has exhausted his patience and energy trying to persuade the latter to give in. The image of al-Mu'taṣim these sources conjure is that of a caliph who seeks collaboration, not confrontation, with the scholars: as this caliph is supposed to have said, Ibn Ḥanbal is the kind of scholar he would like by his side "to stave off the heretics (*ahl al-milal*) from me":[159] and he vows to break Ibn Ḥanbal's fetters with his own hands if only the latter should relent.[160]

If the purpose of the *Miḥna* was to curb the scholars' religious authority, then, on the above view at least, it had failed long before al-Mutawakkil officially terminated it. The accounts of Ibn Ḥanbal's son and nephew may represent al-Mutawakkil's ostentatious deference to the 'ulamā''s authority rather more than they do the attitudes of al-Mu'taṣim and al-Wāthiq. Yet they do indicate how the authority of scholars—even of vicious scholars—was seen by those who were intimate members of Ibn Ḥanbal's circle. In general, this view is in remarkable accord with the pattern we have observed as emerging in the caliph's relations with the 'ulamā' before the *Miḥna*: nowhere in these accounts of Ibn Ḥanbal's Inquisition is the propriety of the 'ulamā''s acting in concert with the caliphs questioned. What is deplorable here is only that the caliph was influenced by the wrong scholars,[161] not that scholars associated themselves with him; indeed, as noted, one is made to believe that al-Mu'taṣim already wanted to utilize the services of Ibn Ḥanbal, just as al-Mutawakkil tried to after the Inquisition. Nor, in these accounts, is there any hint that the caliph's participation in religious life ought to cease. If anything, these

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[159] Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Sīra*, p. 59; cf. Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq, *Dhikr miḥna*, p. 52.

[160] Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Sīra*, pp. 59, 60; Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq, *Dhikr miḥna*, p. 52.

[161] Or rather, by people who were not scholars at all. Ibn Ḥanbal is quoted as saying, for instance, that Ibn Abī Du'ād "was the most ignorant of people in *'ilm and kalām*. . . .; he had no knowledge of anything" (*mā kāna lahu ma'rifa bi-shay'*): Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq, *Dhikr miḥna*, p. 51.

accounts seem concerned to exonerate a caliph like al-Mu'taṣim for the role he almost inadvertently found himself playing;[162] but there is no denial that, under the right circumstances and for the right cause, the caliph's role is nothing but desirable.

III.4.2

Despite its significance as an unprecedented challenge to the authority and influence of the proto-Sunnī scholars, the *Miḥna* was hardly a watershed in the religious policies of the early 'Abbāsid caliphs. The failure of the Inquisition did not alter but only confirmed the trends and tendencies which were emerging before it was instituted. Contrary to what is sometimes suggested,[163] its failure did not result in a usurpation by the 'ulamā' of the caliph's role as the guardian of the community's religious life. The 'ulamā', of course, shared this function with the caliph, but they never denied it to him, nor do the caliphs ever seem to have relinquished it. We have noted, with Calder, al-Muhtadī's commitment to reform—not just of the finances but also of public morality. al-Mas'ūdī speaks explicitly of this caliph's "ordering the good and forbidding evil", and gives many examples of that activity on his part.[164] He wanted, as he is represented as saying to those who eventually murdered him, "to have [the people] follow the *sīra* of the Prophet, of his household, and of the *khulafā' al-rāshidūn*".[165] This did not appeal much to his detractors, and there is the suggestion that he may have carried his religious zeal to what many thought were inordinate lengths.[166] Yet the role of *al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf*, and the caliph's general guardianship of religious life, continued. Some further examples will be seen in the following chapter, but one telling instance of the caliph's engagement with religious

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[162] As Ibn Ḥanbal is quoted as saying, "there was none among the people [conducting his Inquisition] who was more merciful and compassionate than Abū Isḥāq [al-Mu'taṣim]". Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq, *Dhikr miḥna*, p. 51.

[163] For example, by Lapidus, "Separation of State and Religion"; cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 93–97. Crone and Hinds concede, however, that "the desanctification of the institution [of the caliphate] was never complete. . . . There is no point in Islamic history at which the caliphate can be said to have been entirely devoid of religious meaning." Ibid., 97. This "religious meaning" was, however, essentially symbolic, so that "the caliph had to satisfy himself with political power." Ibid., 97.

[164] al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. M. Muḥyi al-dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, 1958), IV, p. 183, and 183–94, passim.

[165] Ibid., IV, p. 186.

[166] Cf. ibid., IV, pp. 183, 186.

trends and attitudes in the (post-*Miḥna*) society over which he presided is worth considering here.

In 284/897, the caliph al-Mu'taḍid intended to have a document cursing Mu'āwiya, the first Umayyad caliph, read to the populace, but it is said that his advisers eventually dissuaded him from putting this intention into effect. al-Ma'mūn had had a similar intention, and al-Ṭābarī notes that the document al-Mu'taḍid wanted to have read out may, in fact, have been based on the one which had been prepared at al-Ma'mūn's behest.[167] The following passages are among some of its more remarkable:

> Praised be God Who made the Commander of the Faithful and his rightly guided and directed forbears the heirs of the Seal of the prophets and Lord of the messengers! He has put them in charge of the religion of Islam, charged them with setting straight God's believing servants, and entrusted them with the preservation of the pledges of wisdom and the heritage of prophethood. . . . The Commander of the Faithful has learned that a number of ordinary people have been beset by doubt (*shubha*) in their religious beliefs and have been affected by corruption in their faith. . . . [He] takes a very serious view [of this, and] . . . considers a failure to express his disapproval as harmful to himself regarding the religion of Islam, as detrimental to the Muslims whose affairs God has entrusted to him, and as a neglect of the duty imposed upon him by God to set straight opponents, inform the ignorant, establish proofs against doubters, and control the obstinate. . . . Good people! Get away from what makes God angry at you and turn to what makes Him pleased with you!. . . . Follow the straight path, the manifest road, and the people of the house of mercy, through whom God guided you in the beginning and saved you from injustice and hostility in the end. . . . O people! It is through us that God has guided you aright. We are the ones appointed to preserve God's concerns among you. We are the heirs of the Messenger of God (*warathat rasūl Allāh*) and the ones who are in charge of the religion of God. Thus stay where we put you, and execute what we command you to do! For as long as you obey the vicegerents of God and leaders toward right guidance (*a'immat al-hudā*) along the path of faith and the fear of God, you will be all right . . .[168]

Whether this document is in fact based on an earlier version ordered by al-Ma'mūn, and if so to what extent, it is impossible to say. There

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[167] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 2165f.

[168] For the full text of the document, see al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 2166–77; translation as in *The History of al-Ṭābarī*, vol. XXXVIII, tr. F. Rosenthal (Albany, 1985), pp. 48–63 (with some modifications).

is no characteristically "Maʾmūnid" assertion of religious authority here which would necessitate that it be placed in his time, and the documents that have come down to us from his reign, e.g. his letters on the createdness of the Qurʾān,[169] are markedly different: to take only the most striking example, they show none of the reliance on the authority of *ḥadīth* that al-Muʿtaḍid's document so amply exhibits.[170] Note should also be taken of the fact that al-Ṭābarī reproduces this document in his account of the reign of al-Muʿtaḍid, not of al-Maʾmūn. But even if it is granted that the document originated in al-Maʾmūn's reign, the fact that al-Muʿtaḍid could seriously think of having it proclaimed suggests that he subscribed not only to what is said in it about Muʿāwiya but also to what it asserts about the caliph's functions. But then, as I have argued, there is as little reason to suppose that after the *Miḥna* the caliphs came to lose their religious functions to the ʿulamāʾ as there is to view the caliphs and the ʿulamāʾ as engaged in a bitterly unrelenting struggle for religious authority before the *Miḥna*.[171] As for the *Miḥna* itself, it was precisely this role of being the defender of the faith that al-Mutawakkil was asserting in terminating it, and Ibn Ḥanbal is on record as having acknowledged it for the caliph.[172]

"According to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal," Lapidus writes, "it was the duty of the *ʿulamāʾ* to revive and preserve the law, and the duty of all Muslims to 'Command the good and forbid the evil', that is, to uphold the law, whether or not the Caliphate would properly do so. . . . The implication of Aḥmad's view is to circumscribe the authority of the Caliphs in religious matters and, though Aḥmad did not have a language to express it, to recognize a practical distinction between secular and religious authority."[173] Ibn Ḥanbal certainly did not have to be convinced of the ʿulamāʾ's religious authority, nor was he unique in that position. But an assertion of such authority does not necessarily signify that the caliph is being stripped of all religious functions, and that he is no longer relevant to the community's religious life. The following paraphrase of what purports to be Ibn Ḥanbal's views in this

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[169] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 1112ff., 1117ff., 1125ff., 1131f.

[170] This is not to say that al-Maʾmūn was not interested in *ḥadīth*. For some indications of such an interest, on his part as on that of other early ʿAbbāsid caliphs, see IV.2.i, below.

[171] For some other instances of the caliph's involvement in religious life in the aftermath of the *Miḥna* as well as before it, see IV.3, below.

[172] al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fols. 5a, 176b–179a; Ahmad, "Political Theology", p. 55.

[173] Lapidus, "Separation of State and Religion", p. 383.

regard comes from a later Ḥanbalī, Abū Muḥammad Rizq Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Tamīmī (d. 488/1095):

> [Ibn Ḥanbal] used to command that the true faith should be brought forth whenever corrupt doctrines made their appearance. The purpose, he said, is to establish the proofs of [the religion of] God; but doing so should not lead to hardship. . . . If it is possible to take [the matter] to the authorities (*al-sulṭān*), so that the latter can put an end to that [particular threat to the true faith], then one should not become involved with it [lit.: not stretch the hand towards it]. The authorities are better suited to dealing with it (*bihi awlā*). However, if one fears that the opportunity to act would be lost before the matter is brought to the authorities, then he must hasten [to act] provided that [in so acting] he does not endanger his life, or stir turmoil (*fitna*), or expose religion to disgrace and thereby weaken it. It is incumbent (*yajibu*) on all to assist the authorities when the latter seek assistance in putting an end to what is reprehensible. It is incumbent upon the 'ulamā' to contest whatever innovations (*bidaʿ*) and false beliefs arise, by establishing proofs which would eliminate doubts and end the darkness of error. On the Imām and his deputy [for their part], it is incumbent to enforce [what the 'ulamā' have established as proofs] and to oblige the deviant (*ahl al-zaygh*) to abandon their ways after the proofs have been made clear to them. If they refuse, the Imām, following the dictates of his *ijtihād*, should punish them to the extent he deems necessary to ensure their return [to right belief]. . . . Likewise, in case of rebels (*al-bughāt*), he should call upon them to return to the truth, should dispel their doubts, and [try to] bring them back [to the community's fold?] in the most lenient way possible. He should then deal with them according as his *ijtihād* guides him, resorting to force if he despairs of them, and if they refuse his call and war breaks out.[174]

The significance of the foregoing statement is two-fold. It recognizes, firstly, that the caliph has an essential role to play in religious life, and it is only when such role is lacking that others may step in and even then not unconditionally. Secondly, the statement emphasizes the functional interdependence and intimate collaboration of the caliphs

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[174] "Qiṭʿa min muqaddimat al-shaykh al-imām Abī Muḥammad b. Ṭamīm al-Ḥanbalī fi ʿaqīdat al-imām al-mubajjal Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal", in Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭābaqāt*, II, p. 280. On Abū Muḥammad, the source of this *ʿaqīda*, see Ibn Rajab al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-dhayl ʿalā ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, ed. H. Laoust and S. Dahan (Damascus, 1951), pp. 96–106. There is no compelling reason to suppose that the views attributed to Ibn Ḥanbal here were not espoused by him, but even if that turns out to be the case, they would still reflect the thinking of Ḥanbalī circles and be significant for that reason.

and the 'ulamā'. They do have different functions—which is what makes it a collaboration—but there is no sense here that caliphs are any less integral to the preservation of religious life, or any less involved in it, than are the 'ulamā'. Crone and Hinds have concluded their study of "religious authority in the first centuries of Islam" by arguing that *because* "all aspects of life are covered by a single sacred law . . . collaboration between [God's] rival representatives [*scil.* His caliphs and the 'ulamā'] was ruled out until one or the other side had won. . . . As it was the 'ulamā' won."[175] But except for the interregnum of the *Miḥna*, there is little to suggest that there was even a contest between the caliphs and the 'ulamā', much less that the failure of the Inquisition permanently altered either the character of caliphal authority or the caliph's relations with the 'ulamā'. A difference of function between the caliphs and the 'ulamā' in and by itself does not necessarily signify a *separation* of state and religion; nor even are the functions all too rigidly separated. The caliph too exercises his *ijtihād* after all, and with the 'ulamā' establishing the proofs of religion, as the foregoing statement has it, he too dispels the rebels' doubts to bring them back to the community's fold. Some of the other juristic texts we have analyzed earlier make clear that it is not only the "doubts" of the rebels but also legal and administrative matters obscure to his governor and *qāḍī* that are to be referred to him. The caliph does not define the law; but, even after the *Miḥna*, he remains part of the religious circles in which it is interpreted.

Another role which sheds further light on the caliph's participation in religious life is his patronage of the scholars. It is to the nature and significance of this role that we now turn.

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[175] *God's Caliph*, pp. 109–110. The statement is not without some ambivalence. Does it imply that *after* the 'ulamā' had "won", they began collaborating with the caliphs? If so, it is anything but clear on the authors' showing what they began collaborating on, or when, or how.

CHAPTER FOUR

EARLY ʿABBĀSID PATRONAGE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

IV.1

The patronage of religious scholars by the ruling elite is a much neglected subject in the social and religious history of early Islam. Modern scholars have sometimes remarked on the presence of one or another of the 'ulamā' in the entourage of a caliph or a vizier or on the significance of the fact that a certain work was allegedly written under a particular patron.[1] Yet the problem of patronage merits systematic investigation for what it can reveal about Muslim societies in general and about the social, cultural, and political context in which Muslim scholars lived and their intellectual activities were undertaken. What our medieval sources, in particular the biographical dictionaries, have to say on religious or cultural patronage is unsystematic, diffuse, and often tantalizingly elusive. Yet their evidence is by no means inconsequential. In what follows, I shall consider some of this evidence in relation to the patronage of religious life in the early ʿAbbāsid period. This is not, in any sense, a "comprehensive" account of religious patronage; it seeks only to illustrate certain aspects of this phenomenon and its importance for our period, and the purpose here is not to show merely that patronage existed—it would be surprising if that was not the case—but rather to see if any patterns emerge from the evidence on it.[2]

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[1] See, for instance, R. Sellheim, "Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte: Die Muhammed Biographie des Ibn Isḥāq", *Oriens*, XVIII–XIX (1967), pp. 33–91, which remains the fundamental study of Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīra*, written under the patronage of al-Manṣūr, and of its furtherance of the ʿAbbāsid cause. Also cf. idem, "Gelehrte und Gelehrsamkeit im Reiche der Chalifen", *Festschrift für Paul Kirn*, Berlin 1962, pp. 54–79.

[2] Cf. the remarks of Richard Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 3, on the "limited value" of simply looking for the mere existence of patronage, in his case in Rome under the Principate, for it "can be found in one form or another in most societies."

IV.2 *'Abbāsid Caliphs as 'Ulamā'*

IV.2.1

An anecdote in al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's *Ta'rīkh Baghdād* depicts a scholar named ʿUmar b. Ḥabīb al-ʿAdawī (d. 206/821) successfully interceding with al-Ma'mūn to save a man's life. The intercession took the form of a tradition from the Prophet, which called for compassion and which the scholar quoted to the caliph. The chain of transmission which he invoked for this tradition was none other than an ʿAbbāsid family *isnād*: Ibn ʿAbbās, who heard it from the Prophet himself, had reported it to his son ʿAlī, from whom it was successively transmitted through his direct descendants—Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr, al-Mahdī, and Hārūn. It was from Hārūn that the scholar had heard the tradition; and since Hārūn had also reported it to al-Ma'mūn, the latter could now publicly certify the veracity of the tradition, and of the chain of its transmission, as quoted by the scholar. The tradition, or rather its *isnād*, did what was expected of it and the man for whom the scholar was interceding was set free. al-Ma'mūn then asked the scholar: "Do you narrate traditions?" When answered in the negative, the caliph observed: "But you ought to. The only thing which my soul (*nafs*) has demanded of me without being able to obtain it is *ḥadīth*. I wish I were seated on a chair (*kursī*) and would be asked, 'Who transmitted [a particular *ḥadīth*] to you,' and reply, 'So and so did'." "Why don't you narrate traditions?" the scholar asked. The caliph replied: "Kingship and the caliphate do not go well with narrating *ḥadīth* to the people."[3]

This anecdote may be fictitious; yet the general point it makes about the caliph's interest in *ḥadīth* needs, as I hope to show in what follows, to be taken seriously.[4] If the story were, for the sake of

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[3] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādi, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād* [hereafter *TB*] (Cairo, 1931), XI, p. 199 (nr. 5903). ʿUmar b. Ḥabīb was a Ḥanafī who had been the first *qāḍī* of the Sharqiyya quarter of Baghdād; he also served as *qāḍī* of Baṣra from 173/789–181/797: Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-quḍāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Muṣṭafa al-Marāghī (Cairo, 1947–1950), II, pp. 142–47, III, p. 285. The name of ʿUmar b. Ḥabīb is also associated with an episode in which Hārūn al-Rashīd comes out convinced, thanks to this scholar, of the reliability of Abū Hurayra, a Companion of the Prophet: *TB*, XI, p. 197; for a discussion of this episode with reference to the evolution of the Sunnī doctrine of the collective *taʿdīl*, or reliability, of the Prophet's Companions, see G.H.A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 197f.

[4] Reports about the intercession of a prominent scholar or holy man on behalf of an individual or an entire community are not in themselves implausible, however, and neither

argument, to be taken at face-value, al-Ma'mūn would seem to exaggerate his desire to narrate *ḥadīth*. He may perhaps also have been exaggerating the incompatibility between being a caliph and a *muḥaddith*. The 'Abbāsid caliphs preceding him did, after all, dabble in *ḥadīth*, and he himself does not appear to have stayed aloof from it either.[5]

The early 'Abbāsid caliphs were much concerned to act as patrons of the 'ulamā' and often did so quite conspicuously. But in presenting themselves as transmitters and narrators of *ḥadīth* in their own right—a function which, more than any other, defined the *'ālim*'s vocation—the caliphs appear to have been seeking admission into the ranks of the 'ulamā' as well.

Typically the *ḥadīth* a caliph is said to have reported would have an 'Abbāsid family *isnād* of the type noted above. In some instances, the chain of transmission does not extend back to the Prophet but stops with Ibn 'Abbās.[6] In some rather infrequent cases, an 'Abbāsid caliph quotes or narrates a tradition with an *isnād* comprising well-known *ḥadīth* transmitters rather than members of the 'Abbāsid family.[7] There also are instances, of course, when no *isnād*s at all were used: two traditions from the Prophet were quoted in al-Mahdī's letter to his governor of Basra regarding the genealogy of Ziyād b. Abīhi (also known as Ziyād b. 'Ubayd and as Ziyād b. Abī Sufyān);[8] another

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is the possibility of his invoking *ḥadīth* or some other authority to make his point more effective. Some of the most striking instances of such intercession (*shafā'a*) are provided by the letters of the Syrian jurist al-Awzā'ī (d. 157/774) to the early 'Abbāsid vizier Abī 'Ubayd Allāh, to al-Mahdī himself, and to many others. See Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-jarḥ wa'l-ta'dīl* (Beirut, 1952–53), I, pp. 187–202. See ibid., p. 193, where, in a letter to al-Mahdī, al-Awzā'ī quotes a statement of 'Umar I as narrated to him by Dā'ūd b. 'Alī, an uncle of the first two 'Abbāsid caliphs.

[5] Many Umayyads, caliphs as well as other members of the clan, are also occasionally mentioned in our sources as narrators of *ḥadīth*. See N. Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, II: *Qur'ānic commentary and tradition* (Chicago, 1967), pp. 18–25.

[6] See, for example, *TB*, X, p. 48 (nr. 5178); ibid., XIII, p. 23 (nr. 6985).

[7] Ibid., X, pp. 237f. (nr. 5363): al-Mahdī—Shu'ba—'Alī b. Zayd—Abū Naḍra—Abū Sa'īd—the Prophet.

[8] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. M.J. De Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879–1901), III, p. 480. The letter was written in 159/775–6. (I leave aside here the question of the caliph's personal involvement in letters written in his name.) Ziyād, the celebrated governor of Iraq for Mu'āwiya I, was the son of Sumayya, a prostitute from the tribe of Thaqīf. Claiming Abū Sufyān's paternity for him, Mu'āwiya adopted Ziyād as his half brother in 44/664–5. In his letter of 159/775–6, al-Mahdī accused Mu'āwiya, as doubtless others had before him, of having contravened the express injunctions of the Prophet against such procedures. See U. Rubin, "'al-Walad li'l-firāsh': On the Islamic campaign against 'zinā'", *SI*, LXXVIII (1993), pp. 5–26, for a study of the two traditions in terms of which Mu'āwiya's adoption of Ziyād, and such procedures generally, were condemned (and both of which also figure in al-Mahdī's letter).

tradition was quoted in the same caliph's letter to ʿAbd al-Salām al-Yashkurī, a Khārijī rebel;[9] none of these traditions had any *isnāds*.

In their content the traditions supposedly narrated by the caliphs show a quite considerable diversity. Several of these relate to the ideological concerns of the early ʿAbbāsids, which is hardly surprising. From his ancestors al-Manṣūr reported a tradition, for instance, which has the Prophet say: "al-ʿAbbās is my legatee (*waṣī*) and my inheritor (*wārithī*)."[10] A tradition narrated by al-Mahdī, and going back to Ibn ʿAbbās, prophesied the advent of "al-Saffāḥ wa'l-Manṣūr wa'l-Mahdī".[11] In his afore-mentioned letter to the Khārijī rebel, al-Mahdī quoted the Prophet's statement, "He whose *mawlā* I am, ʿAlī is his *mawlā*", to rebuke the former for his hostility to ʿAlī.[12] al-Manṣūr is supposed to have already reported this tradition, though in another context and with a complete family *isnād*.[13] That al-Mahdī could still quote this tradition at the beginning of his rule probably means, as suggested earlier,[14] that the ʿAbbāsids had not yet entirely abandoned the effort to derive their legitimacy through ʿAlī. The legitimacy of the ʿAbbāsids was also based on kinship with the Prophet and, in broader terms, on membership of the tribe of the Quraysh. The Quraysh were not exactly admired by everyone; there is evidence, in fact, that some anti-Quraysh apocalyptic traditions were in circulation in the late Umayyad and the early ʿAbbāsid periods.[15] al-Hādī may have been reacting to such unfavourable sentiment—or simply asserting his role as guardian of the faith—when he had a man executed for allegedly abusing the Quraysh and the Prophet. On this occasion, he is reported to have reminded his audience of the *ḥadīth* that "he who despises (*ahāna*) the Quraysh is despised by God."[16]

This *ḥadīth* makes another interesting appearance, this time with reference to Sulaymān b. ʿAlī, the uncle of the first two ʿAbbāsid caliphs and governor of Basra in the caliphate of al-Manṣūr. No less

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[9] al-Azdī, *Taʾrīkh Mawṣil*, ed. ʿAlī Ḥabība (Cairo, 1967), p. 238. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Taʾrīkh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿUmarī (Najaf, 1967), II, p. 476. This letter was written in 160/776–7.

[10] *TB*, XIII, p. 137 (nr. 7122); cf. J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* [hereafter *Th&G*] (Berlin and New York, 1991–), III, p. 19.

[11] *TB*, X, p. 48 (nr. 5178).

[12] al-Azdī, *Mawṣil*, p. 238; Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Taʾrīkh*, II, p. 476.

[13] *TB*, XII, p. 344 (nr. 6785).

[14] See II.2.3, above.

[15] W. Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies in Ḥimṣ", *JSS*, XXXI (1986), pp. 148ff.

[16] *TB*, XIII, p. 23 (nr. 6985).

a source than the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal reports from one ʿUbayd Allāh b. ʿAmr (or ʿUmar) b. Mūsā:

> I was with Sulaymān b. ʿAlī, may God be pleased with him, when an elder of the Quraysh entered. Sulaymān said, "Treat this elder with respect and seat him where it befits [a man of his rank to sit], for the Quraysh have a right [to be so honoured]." I said, "O Amīr, may I relate to you a tradition which has reached me from the Prophet of God." "Indeed," he said. I said, 'It has reached me that the Prophet of God said: "He who despises the Quraysh is despised by God." He said, "God be praised! How wonderful is this [*ḥadīth*]! Who reported it to you?" I said, 'Rabīʿa b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān reported it to me from Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab from ʿAmr b. ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān [from his father ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, who heard it from the Prophet]. . . .[17]

The ʿAbbāsids may well have been introduced to this *ḥadīth* through the channel depicted above, before they appropriated the tradition to narrate it with their own family *isnād*. In the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal, or elsewhere in the collections of *ḥadīth*, this tradition does not occur with the ʿAbbāsid family *isnād*. But if it was actually narrated by al-Hādī *with* the family *isnād*, this would not be the only example of a tradition being so appropriated.[18]

Most of the traditions which the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs are said to have narrated do not appear, however, to reflect any particular ideological orientation or political interest.[19] That such is the case is not surprising. For the caliphs' involvement in the activity of reporting traditions appears to have been important in itself and not primarily because of the tendencies which the content of particular traditions might express.

If the anecdotes and *akhbār* which depict the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs as quoting or transmitting *ḥadīth* are to be taken seriously, and before their significance can be discussed, we must first assess the reliability

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[17] *Musnad al-imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal* (Cairo, 1313 A.H.), I, p. 64. For this tradition, or similar ones, but with different *isnād*s, see ibid., pp. 171, 176, 183.

[18] Cf. Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Kāmil fī ḍuʿafāʾ al-rijāl*, 3rd edn. (Beirut, 1988), III, p. 90, for a *ḥadīth* reported by Dāʾūd b. ʿAlī from his father—Ibn ʿAbbās—the Prophet; the same *ḥadīth* is also said to have been reported by al-Maʾmūn from his father—grandfather—ʿAbd al-Ṣamad b. ʿAlī—the latter's father—Ibn ʿAbbās—the Prophet (see *TB*, XII, p. 203 [nr. 6662]).

[19] For examples of such traditions, usually transmitted with ʿAbbāsid family *isnād*s, see *TB*, VII, p. 272 (nr. 3759); VIII, p. 162 (nr. 4267), p. 414 (nr. 4521); IX, p. 488 (nr. 5114); X, pp. 237f. (nr. 5363); XI, p. 37 (nr. 5713); XII, p. 203 (nr. 6662), p. 214 (nr. 6669), p. 343 (nr. 6785); XIV, p. 405 (nr. 7727). Also see al-Sahmī, *Taʾrīkh Jurjān*, ed. ʾAbd al-Muʿīd Khān (Beirut, 1987), p. 75.

of the fundamental contention such material makes—viz. that the early ʿAbbāsids frequently narrated traditions from the Prophet.

IV.2.2

The early ʿAbbāsid period was an age of frantic interest in *ḥadīth*, and the caliphs may not have wanted to lag far behind the *muḥaddithūn* and the *fuqahāʾ* in exhibiting that interest. The invocation of *ḥadīth* in at least two of al-Mahdī's official letters has already been noted. A letter from Hārūn to a Khārijī rebel also makes a fairly obvious allusion to a well-known *ḥadīth* without however quoting it expressly.[20] It was the same caliph who ruled that all official documents were to start with blessings on the Prophet.[21] Such evidence, pertaining to official documents, is to be distinguished from that of anecdotes which present the ʿAbbāsids as transmitters of *ḥadīth*: the former is an assertion of commitment, on the part of the ʿAbbāsid state, to the legacy of the Prophet; the latter, itself a statement of such commitment, is also an expression of the caliph's own piety, religious knowledge, and perhaps of succession to the Prophet. There obviously is an overlap here, and the distinction may only be formal and artificial. The point of making such a distinction is to remind ourselves that caliphal interest in *ḥadīth* had varied expressions: if *ḥadīth* could be quoted in official letters—which there is no reason to doubt—it is in no way strange that the caliphs should also have quoted or transmitted *ḥadīth* in other situations as well. Why they were interested in reporting traditions, especially with a standardized family *isnād*, will be discussed later. Suffice it to say here that reporting traditions—acting as veritable transmitters of *ḥadīth*—was, among other things, an expression of the caliphs' expertise in the religious sciences and of their much vaunted devotion to the Prophet.[22]

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[20] Cf. P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 90 n. 206.

[21] Cf. al-Ṣūlī, *Adab al-kuttāb*, ed. Muḥammad Bahjat al-Atharī (Cairo, 1922), p. 40. Hārūn apparently wanted the official documents to carry a more conspicuous statement of his devotion to the Prophet, and to have his letters introduced with statements such as: "from the servant (*ʿabd*) of God, Hārūn, the Imām, Commander of the Faithful, the servant (*ʿabd*) of Muḥammad, the Prophet of God", or "[from] Hārūn, the *mawlā* of Muḥammad". The Barmakid Yaḥyā b. Khālid is said to have dissuaded him from such purposes, however (Ibid., p. 40).

[22] It was not only the caliphs but other members of the ʿAbbāsid family as well who are known to have narrated traditions from the Prophet. These include: Dāʾūd b. ʿAlī (Ibn ʿAdī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ*, III, p. 90; al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa waʾl-taʾrīkh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿUmarī [Medina, 1410 A.H.], I, p. 541, II, 479, 700); Sulaymān b. ʿAlī (al-ʿUqaylī, *Kitāb al-ḍuʿafāʾ*,

If the purport of the stories which make the 'Abbāsids act as transmitters of *ḥadīth* is to be taken seriously, we must also ascertain the ways in which the caliphs could have acquired their modicum of religious knowledge. The standard family *isnād* of the traditions we are dealing with constitutes a claim to a knowledge which the caliphs inherited from their forefathers and ultimately from the Prophet. This implicit ideological claim can scarcely be regarded as an adequate explanation of how the caliphs—and members of the 'Abbāsid family in general—could demonstrate some acquaintance with *ḥadīth*; yet, it is significant precisely for being an ideological claim and for all that implies. In non-ideological terms, however, a likelier explanation for such religious knowledge as the caliphs tried to demonstrate would have to be in terms of the influence of the religious scholars—traditionists, jurists, theologians, grammarians—who visited, or stayed at, the caliphal court. Religious scholars were routinely made responsible for the education of the young princes;[23] it is hardly extravagant to assume that a caliph would be able to narrate some of the *ḥadīth* he had imbibed in his interaction with scholars. Religious scholars were, moreover, frequently summoned to the caliphal court to address morally edifying advice to the caliph, to assist him in various matters of a religious or administrative import, to satisfy his curiosity in religious matters, and of course to narrate *ḥadīth* to him. A Medinese scholar, Abū Ma'shar Najīḥ b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān (d. 170/786), was fetched to Baghdad and asked by al-Mahdī to "stay in our company so that those present here may become knowledgeable".[24] Such a statement insinuates that this caliph already was in possession of

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ed. 'Abd al-Mu'tī Qal'ajī [Beirut, 1984], IV, pp. 181f.); Muḥammad b. Sulaymān b. 'Alī (al-'Uqaylī, *al-Ḍu'afā'*, IV, p. 73); Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Samad b. 'Alī b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās (ibid., I, pp. 64f.); 'Īsā b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās al-Hāshimī (Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* [Haydarabad, 1325–27 A.H.], VIII, p. 221). Also see M. Abiad, *Culture et education arabo-islamiques au Šām pendant les trois premiers siècles de l'Islam* (Damascus, 1981), pp. 96ff.

[23] al-Ḥajjāj b. Arṭāt (d. 206/821–22), a Kufan *faqīh, muftī* and *muḥaddith* known for his haughty demeanour, was placed by al-Manṣūr in the entourage of his son al-Mahdī (*TB*, VIII, p. 230 [nr. 4341]). Muḥammad b. Muslim b. Abi'l-Waḍḍāḥ, a reliable traditionist, was tutor to Mūsā (al-Hādī) before the latter's accession (al-Fasawī, *al-Ma'rifa*, II, p. 454). al-Kisā'ī (d. 189/805), one of the most distinguished Qur'ān reciters of his day was tutor successively to Hārūn and al-Amīn (*TB*, XI, p. 403 [nr. 6290]). For an incomplete but suggestive list of scholars who taught the 'Abbāsid princes, see M.D. Ahmad, *Muslim Education and Scholars' Social Status* (Zurich, 1968), pp. 49–51; on the education of members of the 'Abbāsid family, see Abiad, *Culture et Education*, pp. 96ff.

[24] *TB*, XIII, p. 428 (nr. 7304): ". . . *takūn bi-ḥaḍratinā fa-tufaqqih man ḥawlanā*". Abū Ma'shar was a *mawlā'* of the Banū Hāshim, his *walā'* having been bought by Umm Mūsā, a daughter of the caliph al-Manṣūr: ibid., p. 431.

religious knowledge and only wanted others at his court to acquire some of it through the presence of a religious scholar there. There were occasions, however, when the caliph too, along with others, reportedly wrote down *ḥadīth* from a scholar narrating it. al-Manṣūr had "written *Ḥadīth* and acted as a transmitter in mosques" prior to the advent of the ʿAbbāsids,[25] and he "always remained well-known for seeking *ʿilm, fiqh*, and *athar*".[26] al-Maʾmūn too is reported to have attended lectures on *ḥadīth* and written down traditions;[27] on one occasion, he is said to have narrated more than forty traditions to Ismāʿīl b. Ṣubayḥ, who in turn faithfully reported these to Abū Bakr b. Ayyāsh (d. 193/809), a prominent Kufan scholar.[28]

Stories to this effect do not necessarily occur in contexts where the caliph himself is made out to be a transmitter of *ḥadīth* in his own right. Nor do anecdotes which depict the caliphs as reporting traditions necessarily belong only to biographical notices of these caliphs themselves; these anecdotes occur as often in the *tarjama*s of the individuals who claimed to have heard the caliph narrate a particular *ḥadīth*. In other words, they should not indiscriminately be dismissed as a *topos* featuring in biographical notices of the caliphs. Given the close association of the caliphs with religious scholars, and in view of an interest in *ḥadīth* evinced not just by the caliph but by members of his family as well, it is scarcely far-fetched to imagine that the caliphs would not only have heard, been instructed in, and written down traditions but also that they would have acted as narrators of *ḥadīth* in their own right.

Traditions heard from a scholar may simply have been appropriated by the caliph, and in the process endowed with an ʿAbbāsid *isnād*. On a visit to Mecca, al-Manṣūr inspected the *ḥadīth* collection of Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), praising everything in it except for the *isnād*, which he characterized as "*ḥashw*".[29] On another occasion apparently,

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[25] al-Maqdisī, *al-Badʾ waʾl-taʾrīkh*, ed. C. Huart (Paris 1899–1919), VI, p. 90, quoted from Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 84.

[26] al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī (Beirut, 1978), p. 183, quoted (with a slight modification) from Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 84. Also cf. al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān waʾl-tabyīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 3rd edn. (Cairo, 1968), III, p. 367: "*wa kānaʾl-Manṣūr muqaddaman fī ʿilm al-kalām wa mukthiran min kitāb al-āthār*".

[27] *TB*, IX, p. 33 (nr. 4622).

[28] See Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, I, p. 306 (nr. 561).

[29] *TB*, X, p. 404 (nr. 5573). Ibn Jurayj is said to have been the first among Meccan scholars to systematically organize *ḥadīth* materials: Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 91.

Ibn Jurayj—seeking monetary assistance from the caliph—brought him a special collection of traditions narrated exclusively on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, the caliph's ancestor.[30] Such traditions, and others, may have been transmitted further by the caliphs themselves; and in doing so they may well have endowed them with *isnād*s of their own. That *isnād*s were only *ḥashw*, as al-Manṣūr had said, seems to mean that they were accretions useless to the content of a tradition; but precisely because they were *ḥashw* could they not as well be used, and altered or moulded, the way one saw fit?

The general claim that the reports surveyed above make—that the early 'Abbāsid caliphs could and did narrate traditions from the Prophet—seems, then, to be much more real than the anecdotal forms in which it is embodied. Uncertainties no doubt persist. Biographical dictionaries concerned with evaluating the credentials of the *muḥaddithūn* normally do not mention the caliphs among those they discuss, which leads one to suspect that Sunnī *rijāl*-critics did not quite come round to regarding the caliphs as "accredited traditionists", so to speak.[31] Yet, as evidenced by numerous incidental indications scattered throughout many of the principal extant biographical dictionaries, they did recognize the caliphs' interest in *ḥadīth*.[32] As the case of al-Khaṭīb's *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*—our primary source for the materials surveyed above—illustrates, moreover, there are important exceptions even to the neglect caliphs suffer as traditionists in such works.

IV.2.3.a

No less important than the question of authenticity we have been dealing with is that of the caliphs' possible motives: why did they wish to narrate traditions at all, or to present themselves as doing so? A remark attributed to al-Manṣūr suggests an answer. He is believed to have said to the Medinese jurist Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796): "O Abū 'Abdallāh, the scholars (lit.: the people—*al-nās*) have all passed away; none remains except me and you!"[33] It is not ascertainable, of

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[30] *TB*, X, p. 400 (nr. 5573).

[31] Cf. al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rīkh al-Islam*, ed. Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 1987–), X, pp. 435f., where al-Mahdi's having narrated a tradition with the 'Abbāsid family *isnād* is dismissively noted: ". . . *hādhā isnād muttaṣil, lākin mā 'alimtu aḥadan iḥtajja bi'l-Mahdī wa lā bi-abīhi fi'l-aḥkām*".

[32] Cf. al-Fasawī, *al-Ma'rifa*, II, p. 684: ". . . *qāla Sufyān [b. 'Uyayna]: qāla lī Qays b. al-Rabī': ḥaddatha bi-hādha'l-ḥadīth al-Mahdī*."

[33] Abū Zur'a, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. Shukr Allāh al-Qūjānī (Damascus, 1980), II, pp. 438f.

course, if al-Manṣūr did actually share this observation with Mālik, or that, if he did, whether it was meant to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, it raises the possibility, which the caliphs' narrating *ḥadīth* also does, that they wished to have themselves regarded as *'ulamā'*.[34]

Apart from the various expressions of 'Abbāsid interest in *ḥadīth*, the evidence for the foregoing suggestion is admittedly not decisive. Some tantalizing indications do claim attention, however. For instance, the early 'Abbāsid caliphs were apparently fond of having themselves regarded as belonging to the *Medinese* tradition in *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. Thus, al-Saffāḥ instructed Ibn Abī Layla, his *qāḍī* of Kufa, to follow the Ḥijāzī tradition on a point of law.[35] A report intended to bolster al-Manṣūr's legitimist pretensions has this caliph once introduce himself as "*min ahl-al-Madīna*";[36] and many of those who served as *qāḍī*s in Baghdad were from Medina, especially before the rise of the Ḥanafīs to prominence.[37] A tendentious anecdote depicts Mālik trying to discredit Abū Yūsuf while insinuating that the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd—before whom both scholars were present—shared the Medinese world view and was therefore trustworthy, while Abū Yūsuf—*qua rajul Irāqī*—was not.[38] A rather different expression of the effort to create an *'ālim*-like image for the caliph is encountered in a *khabar* which has al-Mahdī deny that a particular practice was the *sunna*, and assert: "if it were the *sunna*, we would be more aware of it [than anybody else]". The caliph then proceeds to quote a tradition from Ibn 'Abbās with an 'Abbāsid family *isnād*.[39] In a letter attributed to al-Ma'mūn, a rather similar point is asserted: "The Commander of the faithful, by virtue of his position vis-à-vis the religion of God, the deputyship of the Prophet of God (*khilāfat rasūl Allāh*) and his kinship with him,

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[34] Cf. an early anecdote which has al-Manṣūr ask Mālik to compile the *Muwaṭṭā'* and advise him how to do so(!): "'O Abū 'Abdallāh, avoid the severities (*shadā'id*) of Ibn 'Umar, the concessions (*rukhaṣ*) of Ibn 'Abbās and the peculiarities (*shawādh*) of Ibn Mas'ūd; and concern yourself with that which has been agreed upon.' Mālik said: 'He thereby benefitted me in terms of both knowledge and insight (*fa-afādanī bi-qawlihi 'ilman wa 'aqlan*).'" 'Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-ta'rīkh*, ed. J. Aguadé (Madrid, 1991), p. 160 (nr. 489).

[35] Abū Yūsuf, *Ikhtilāf Abī Ḥanīfa wa Ibn Abī Layla*, ed. Abu'l-Wafā' al-Afghānī (Haydarabad, 1357 A.H.), pp. 37f.

[36] *TB*, X, p. 55 (nr. 5179).

[37] N. Tsafrir, "The Spread of the Ḥanafī School in the Western Regions of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate up to the End of the Third Century A.H.", Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1993, pp. 96f.

[38] Wakī', *Akhbār*, III, p. 260.

[39] Wakī', *Akhbār*, II, p. 130; cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 92.

is the foremost among those who follow his [sc. the Prophet's] *sunna* (*awlā man istanna bi-sunnatihi*).[40]

The statements quoted above underscore—as Crone and Hinds have observed—the special status which membership in the Prophet's household entails. The latter statement in particular makes other claims as well, though these may be ignored here. It is to be noted, however, that both statements also project something of an *'ālim*'s image for the caliph: the caliph is not only knowledgeable about the *sunna*, his own practice is also the embodiment of it. Both attributes are definitive of an *'ālim*'s vocation; so far as the caliph is concerned, he enjoys primacy in both of these respects. All this is, of course, the caliph's religious rhetoric, but it is no less significant for being such.

Why would the caliph want to present himself in the *'ālim*'s garb? The tremendous prestige which leading scholars enjoyed could scarcely have escaped the caliph's notice; nor would the latter have failed to observe that religious prestige carried considerable social influence with it too. About a Damascene scholar, Abū Mushir 'Abd al-A'lā b. Mushir al-Ghassānī (d. 218/833), it is reported that, when he went to the mosque, people used to line up to greet him and kiss his hands."[41] Wildly exaggerated figures are often quoted for the number of people attending a prominent scholar's *ḥadīth* sessions (*majlis*); while the figures themselves are almost surely not credible, the suggestion that such sessions attracted large numbers is very plausible.[42] al-Ma'mūn himself is said to have attended the *majlis* of a scholar named Sulaymān b. Ḥarb al-Baṣrī (d. 224/839), and written *ḥadīth* reported by him.[43] The wish attributed to this caliph to sit on a *kursī* to transmit *ḥadīth* may have expressed the desire not simply to act as an *'ālim* but, in doing so, also to enjoy some of the same religious prestige and influence in society which the leading 'ulamā' did.[44]

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[40] al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M.J. De Goeje (Leiden, 1866, rep. 1968), p. 32, cited in A.Z. Ṣafwat, *Jamharat rasā'il al-'arab* (Cairo, 1937), p. 509; also cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 92.

[41] *TB*, XI, p. 72 (nr. 5750). On Abū Mushir, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 100f.

[42] Cf. Ahmad, *Muslim Education*, pp. 56f.; Abbott, *Papyri*, II, pp. 48, 69; Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, p. 6. On popular interest in *ḥadīth* at a later period (Mamluk Cairo), see J. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A social history of Islamic education* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 210ff.

[43] *TB*, IX, p. 33 (nr. 4622); cf. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-jarḥ wa'l-ta'dīl* (Beirut, 1952–53), IV, 108.

[44] The *kursī* (hence *aṣḥāb al-karāsī*) could be evocative of the authority and prestige which one enjoyed in religious or political life: Abbott, *Papyri*, II, pp. 60f.

In acting as 'ulamā', the 'Abbāsid caliphs were probably also motivated by a concern to facilitate their dealings with the religious scholars. By presenting himself as one of them, the caliph could try to forge closer links with the 'ulamā', and patronize them from within their learned vocation—as a participant in it—rather than from outside. A rather different, but instructive, instance of this concern to appear as integral—rather than marginal—to the life of a particular group or community is evidenced by 'Abbāsid dealings with the 'Alids. Whatever the gravity of the threat perceived as coming from the latter, and however severe the reprisals against it, the early 'Abbāsids normally took care to emphasize that the feud was ultimately between members of the *same* family.[45] Such an insistence seems to have been necessary not only because the 'Abbāsids were very sensitive about being recognized as the *ahl al-bayt* together with the 'Alids, but also because the caliphs would not have wished to come across as dealing with, and frequently persecuting, the Prophet's household while themselves being external to it. An *'ālim*'s image for the caliph is, for its part, interpretable as a means (and form) of active participation in religious life, and on occasion of intervening in it. When the caliph played some role in matters of the law—as when al-Saffāḥ instructed his *qāḍī* to follow the Ḥijāzī practice on a certain legal matter, or al-Mahdī ordered his *qāḍī* to adhere to the practice of 'Umar I[46]—that role was not particularly different from the way a leading *'ālim* would have acted when advising the caliph himself. Conversely, this image is also interpretable as an effort to integrate the caliph himself, *qua 'ālim*, in the 'ulamā''s legitimating function vis-à-vis the political authority. The caliph's image as an *'ālim* was, in short, a crucial aspect of early 'Abbāsid religious rhetoric—a rhetoric to which the pursuit of religious prestige and political legitimacy were central.

IV.2.3.b

The caliphs' concern to appear as religious scholars in their own right must also be related to—and in part is to be explained in terms of—a continuing 'Abbāsid perception of an 'Alid challenge to their legitimacy. Knowledge, insight and expertise in matters of religion were among the several accomplishments which were habitually claimed by, or attributed to, prominent 'Alids of the time. Muḥammad al-Nafs

[45] Cf. al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 532; ibid., III, pp. 587f.
[46] Wakī', *Akhbār*, III, pp. 219f., 316.

al-Zakiyya, for instance, was not only the purest of the Quraysh in lineage (*ṣarīḥ Quraysh*),[47] but also very learned in religion. al-Manṣūr himself was rumoured to have recognized, before the 'Abbāsid rise to power, that there was "no one, in the family of the Prophet, more knowledgeable in the religion of God (*a'lam bi-dīn Allāh*) and more worthy of political headship than Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh."[48] The connection here between religious knowledge and worthiness for the caliphate is implicit but noteworthy.[49] al-Nafs al-Zakiyya himself was apparently aware of such a connection. Told that people had some doubts about his competence in *fiqh*, al-Nafs al-Zakiyya is said to have responded:

> It would not please me to have the community gather around myself . . . if I were incapable of giving satisfactory answers [even to such basic matters as those] pertaining to the lawful and the unlawful when asked about them. . . . Indeed, the most misguided of all people (*aḍall al-nās*), the most unjust (*aẓlam al-nās*) and the most disobedient [to God] (*akfar al-nās*) is the one who lays claim to [the political headship of] this *umma* but when asked about the lawful and the unlawful, has no answer.[50]

The imāms of the proto-Imāmiyya, in particular, come across in Imāmī literature as repositories of religious knowledge. This knowledge, it is true, is ultimately of divine provenance and is incomparably superior to what anyone else can claim.[51] The imām nevertheless appears as *the scholar par excellence*,[52] guiding his community as well as those among his followers who are scholars themselves (of a lesser order, naturally) and who therefore serve as deputies of the imām.[53]

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[47] al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1949), p. 233.

[48] Ibid., p. 253.

[49] Observe al-Iṣfahānī's characterization of the qualities on the basis of which Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya came to be regarded as the Mahdī: "*wa kāna min afḍal ahl baytihi wa akbar ahl zamānihi fī zamānihi fī 'ilmihi bi-Kitāb Allāh wa ḥifẓihi lahu wa fiqhihi fī'l-din, wa shajā'atihi wa jūdihi wa ba'sihi wa kull amr yajmal bi-mithlihi, ḥattā lam yashukk aḥad annahu al-Mahdī.*" *Maqātil*, p. 233.

[50] Ibid., p. 294.

[51] On the Imām's claims to knowledge, see van Ess, *Th&G*, I, pp. 278ff.; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism* (Albany, 1994).

[52] Van Ess, *Th&G*, I, p. 279; H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 8f.

[53] Cf. A.A. Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shī'ite Islam* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 29–57, on the early *fuqahā'* of the proto-Imāmiyya. On these associates of the Imāms, the Imāmī *rijāl*, see also L.N. Takim, "The Rijāl of the Shī'ī Imāms as depicted in Imāmī Biographical Literature", Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1990, esp. ch. 4 ("The Contribution of the Rijāl"), pp. 158–214; on their function as *muḥaddithūn*, see ibid., pp. 176–86.

The knowledge which the imāms of the proto-Imāmiyya claimed to possess was a principal basis of their position as imāms. Possession of such knowledge was a function of membership in the Prophet's household. It is not unlikely that the ʿAbbāsids, always insistent on asserting their own position as kin of the Prophet, would be concerned to compete with the ʿAlids in claims to the possession of knowledge as well. But as they disengaged themselves from Shīʿism, religious knowledge came to be the basis not of claims to a religious authority uniquely their own, but rather of cultivating relations with the ʿulamāʾ, of pretending ultimately to be one of them. In claiming the possession of religious knowledge, the caliphs may also have meant to suggest that, on this ground, their credentials were not inferior to those of the leading ʿAlids. The latter were not to be allowed to present themselves as any better qualified for the caliphate than the ʿAbbāsids were, on grounds either of being the repositories of *ʿilm* or of being the *ahl al-bayt*.

The imām was supposed to have inherited his knowledge from his ancestors. Typically an imām such as Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad would claim to have received a tradition from, or through, one or more of his direct ancestors, who were themselves coming to be recognized as imāms in the proto-Imāmī tradition of the late 2nd century. These traditions, reported by Jaʿfar or one of his successors as statements of earlier imāms—especially of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib—or of the Prophet himself, were adorned with *isnāds* featuring names of his ancestors, who were now being projected as imāms in the Imāmī circles.[54] The

[54] For examples of such *isnāds*, cf. al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār maʿrifat al-rijāl*, (hereafter *Rijāl al-Kashshī*), ed. Ḥasan Muṣṭafawī (Mashhad, 1348 H.s.), p. 166 (nr. 279): Muḥammad b. ʿAlī [al-Bāqir]—his father—his grandfather—the Prophet; ibid., p. 303 (nr. 546): Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad [al-Ṣādiq]—his father—his grandfather—the Prophet; ibid., pp. 396f. (nr. 741): Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad—his father—his grandfather—ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. For other specimens, cf. al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī, II (Tehran, 1382 A.H.), p. 80 (nr. 3): Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad directly from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib; ibid., pp. 92 (nr. 7) and 96 (nr. 1): same channel; ibid., p. 107 (nr. 5): Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad from his father; ibid., p. 108 (nr. 6): Muḥammad al-Bāqir from his father; ibid., pp. 116 (nr. 3), 117 (nr. 4), 124 (nr. 5), 126 (nr. 6): Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad directly from the Prophet; ibid., p. 153 (nr. 9): Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad—his father—his grandfather—the Prophet. Also cf. al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 450–52, where al-Manṣūr is represented as asking Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad to narrate to him a certain tradition "*alladhī ḥaddathtanī ʿan abīka ʿan ābāʾihi ʿan ʿAlī ʿan rasūl Allāh*"; Jaʿfar ends up narrating four traditions to the caliph with this *isnād*.

It seems unnecessary to add further examples to the list above. It may be observed that Imāmī *isnāds* show very considerable variety in their composition, which is only rarely the case with ʿAbbāsid *isnāds*. Given the Imāmī conception of the imām's knowledge and religious authority, it is also very common not to use any *isnāds* at all: a

chains of linear familial transmission in the ʿAlid household present a striking parallel to the ʿAbbāsid family *isnād*s, which accompanied the traditions putatively narrated by the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs.

This parallel is unlikely to have been coincidental; and if one of the two parties emulated the other in systematically using a standardized form of family *isnād*, it is the ʿAbbāsids who seem to have followed the ʿAlids and not the other way round. Some circumstantial evidence can be adduced for this suggestion. First, the number of ʿAlid traditions with a standard family chain of transmission clearly outweighs the ʿAbbāsid ones. Second, the early ʿAbbāsids were certainly more sensitive to an ideological threat from the ʿAlids than the other way, though the ʿAlids could scarcely have been oblivious to ʿAbbāsid propaganda against them. That it was the ʿAbbāsids who occasionally appropriated a useful, or threatening, idea from the ʿAlids is consequently rather more likely than the converse. With an ʿAbbāsid family *isnād*, the caliphs could present themselves as being in possession, like their ʿAlid rivals, of a continuously transmitted legacy of religious knowledge, of which the various traditions reported by them were individual instances.

It was precisely this assertion of a historical continuity that such a family *isnād* constituted, an assertion crucial to both the ʿAlids and the ʿAbbāsids. These *isnād*s represented an implicit effort to validate and stabilize the lines of succession which the ʿAlids and the ʿAbbāsids claimed for themselves. The individuals comprising these putative lines of succession were to be seen as having transmitted their authority no less neatly than they had transmitted particular traditions—and their knowledge as a whole—from one generation to the next.

The proto-Imāmī doctrine of the imāmate as transferred from one individual to another through the mechanism of *naṣṣ* may be expected to have led—from the mid-second century—to efforts towards defining a series of imāms through whom the imāmate would be deemed to have been handed down from one claimant to another. A family *isnād* would seem to be a perfect device for establishing just who such imāms were. For its part, the standard ʿAbbāsid *isnād*—comprising Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās, and sometimes ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib—may be seen as a claim that the ʿAbbāsids derived their authority and legitimacy from *this* series of individuals, the last

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statement or tradition would not necessarily be any less authoritative if it is recognized as originating in an Imām, say Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad, rather than going back to the Prophet.

two of whom were in intimate contact with the Prophet. This is the same line of transmission, of course, through which the ʿAbbāsids began to derive their rights to the caliphate in the time of al-Mahdī, if not already in that of al-Manṣūr.[55]

A rather tendentious tradition, said to have been narrated by the first ʿAbbāsid caliph Abu'l-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ, illustrates the point by virtue of its exceptional character. The tradition in question was supposedly heard by him from his brother, the "Imām" Ibrāhīm; Ibrāhīm had heard it from Abū Hāshim ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, the latter from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, and ʿAlī from the Prophet.[56] The *isnād* is probably fictitious, if only because Ibrāhīm was rather too young at the time of Abū Hāshim's death to be able to report from him.[57] That this *isnād* is fictitious does not really matter however, for the other, standard ʿAbbāsid family *isnād* is not very likely to be genuine either. The family *isnād*s are significant for the ideological claim they implicitly make, as already noted, and not for the possibility or otherwise of their genuineness. As for the peculiar *isnād* quoted above, it is important, and suggestive, precisely for its divergence from the standard form of an ʿAbbāsid chain of transmission. For it evokes the time when, in the days immediately following their advent, the ʿAbbāsids traced their title to the caliphate through an alleged transfer of the imāmate from Abū Hāshim ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī to Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās.[58] The latter,

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[55] Observe how the following anecdote—which may have come into circulation already in the time of al-Mahdī—bluntly promotes ʿAbbāsid legitimism as against the ʿAlids, and affirms, rather more implicitly, the claim that the ʿAbbāsid title to the caliphate originated with al-ʿAbbās himself. Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbdallāh b. Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib said: "I saw as a sleeper sees at the end of the reign of the Banū Umayyah, it was as if I had entered the Mosque of the Prophet of God and raised my head and looked at the mosaic that was in the mosque. It was written there, 'By the order of the Commander of the Faithful al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik.' There was a voice saying, 'Wipe out this writing and write in its place the name of a man from Banū Hāshim called Muḥammad.' I said, 'I am Muḥammad, and I am of the Banū Hāshim. Whose son is it?' and the voice replied, 'Son of 'Abd Allāh,' and I said, 'I am son of 'Abdallāh; son of whom?' and the voice said, 'Son of Muḥammad,' and I said, 'I am son of Muḥammad; son of whom?', and the voice said, 'Son of 'Alī,', and I said, 'I am son of 'Alī; son of whom?' and the voice said, 'Son of 'Abbās.' If I had not reached "'Abbās', I would have had no doubts that I was destined to become the ruler (*ṣāḥib al-amr*)." al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 534f., translation as in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXIX (Albany, 1990), pp. 254f. (with some modifications).

[56] *TB*, X, p. 51 (nr. 5178).

[57] He was only four years old at the time: cf. *Akhbār al-dawla al-ʿAbbāsiyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī and ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Muṭṭalibī (Beirut, 1971), p. 185.

[58] Cf. Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (Beirut, 1985), V, p. 328, where Abū Hāshim hands

oddly omitted from the *isnād*, was the father of Ibrāhīm. Given that such an *isnād* is unlikely to have served the purposes of the 'Abbāsids after they had started claiming their caliphate through al-'Abbās rather than 'Alī (thus circumventing any dependence on the alleged "testament" of Abū Hāshim), the *isnād*, for all its fictitious character, must have originated very early in the 'Abbāsid period. If so, it must have served the same purpose as the standard form of the 'Abbāsid family *isnād*, or, for that matter, the proto-Imāmī *isnād*: in each case, it asserts a caliph's or an imām's succession to a certain line of progenitors, whose putative authority in the past ratifies the authority and legitimacy of the aspirant to their succession in the present.

IV.2.4

The caliph's image as a religious scholar in his own right appears, then, partly to have been aimed at acquiring religious prestige and a greater leverage with the 'ulamā', and partly as a response to the Shī'ite imām's image of being endowed with a unique—inherited—knowledge and hence religious authority. Whatever the motives which informed it, however, such an image was primarily an expression of the caliphs' religious rhetoric. Caliphal rhetoric had other expressions too, some of which will be considered later. What significance should one attribute to this rhetoric, in so far as the caliphs' 'ulamā'-like image is concerned?

It is frequently noted by scholars that a wide gulf separated the expression of 'Abbāsid commitment to Islamic norms from their *Realpolitik* (not to mention their personal conduct), which not merely fell short of these norms but frequently violated them; and that, in any case, the caliphs failed, or never tried, to create the godly society to which they had appealed when struggling against the Umayyads.[59] These observations are, of course, perfectly valid. In the previous chapter it has been seen that such perceptions led some religious scholars to be very cynical about the caliphs and their intentions. However, while it may be that pronouncements of religious commit-

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over his Shī'a *as well as* "his books and his traditions" (*kutubahu wa riwāyatahu*) to Muḥammad b. 'Alī.

[59] Cf. *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1982–89), s.v. "Caliphate" (L. Conrad); P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 61ff.; H.A.R. Gibb, "Government and Islam under the Early 'Abbāsids: The political collapse of Islam", in *L'Èlaboration de l'Islam* (Paris, 1961), pp. 115–27.

ment on the part of the caliphs only exacerbated the sharpness of the contrast between grim reality and "pious" intentions, it is equally possible that the overall effect of the caliph's religious rhetoric was to *minimize* such a contrast. The very fact that the caliphs usually expressed their commitment to religious ideals so loudly and so frequently may have led many a scholar to take such claims seriously rather than simply to dismiss them. In other words, it was precisely this religious rhetoric which, rather than convincing everyone of the hypocrisy of the rulers, may have kept hopes alive for the 'ulamā''s vision of a "just" polity, truly based on "the Book of God and the *Sunna* of His Prophet". Such rhetoric may have served as the minimum basis on which many of the religious scholars could find some justification for continuing to maintain relations with the caliphs. At the same time, the caliphal aspiration to be counted among the scholars was a striking recognition of the latter's position, no less than it was a statement of the 'Abbāsid intent to patronize them.

IV.3 *'Abbāsid Interventions in Religious Life*

The persecution of the *zanādiqa* by al-Mahdī and his successors and that of the proto-Sunnī 'ulamā' by al-Ma'mūn and his immediate successors are two major episodes of early 'Abbāsid social and religious history. The two persecutions could scarcely be less similar so far as their victims were concerned: the former was directed against "heretics" of the worst imaginable sort, the latter against precisely those who defined themselves in opposition to "heretics", "innovators", and all those who followed mere whims and desires of their own. From the proto-Sunnī perspective, therefore, the former constituted the guardianship of the faith on the caliph's part, the latter nothing if not a sacrilege against it. Yet the two initiatives were not all that dissimilar. Both were "inquisitions", of course; and *both* involved the caliph's guardianship of the faith. Precisely what had to be defended, and against whom, could vary according to time and circumstance, but the role itself occupied a fundamental position in the caliph's religious rhetoric.

Zandaqa and the *Miḥna* have both been briefly discussed earlier in this work. These were clearly the most dramatic "inquisitions" of the early 'Abbāsid period, but they were not the only occasions when the caliphs intervened in religious life as self-conscious defenders of

the faith. Nor, of course, is this function peculiar to the early 'Abbāsid period. The Umayyads had already acted as such;[60] and later 'Abbāsid history, as well as other periods of Islamic history, are replete with instances of the guardianship of the faith on the part of the caliph or his deputies.[61] The first of the ten functions of the caliph, as al-Māwardī defines them, is "the preservation of religion according to its settled principles and [in accordance with] the consensus of the community's forbears. If an innovator appears or someone holding suspicious opinions deviates [from the religion as agreed upon] he [the caliph] should explain the proofs [of religion] and clarify the correct view to him, administer to him that which is suitable and impose the appropriate penalties, so that the religion may be preserved from injury and the community from errors."[62]

Thus the basic question here is not whether it was the caliph's business to intervene, for there is evidence that—given the ability and inclination—he did often intervene. In the context of early 'Abbāsid history, the question rather is whether any kind of pattern is discernible in

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[60] On the persecution of the Qadarites in the Umayyad period, see *EI(2)*, s.v. "Ḳadariyya" (J. van Ess); also cf. the letter from Marwān b. Muḥammad (then governor of Adharbayjan and Armenia, later Umayyad caliph) to the caliph Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik on the *qadariyya* in his army: Iḥsān 'Abbās, *'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyā al-kātib* (Amman, 1988), p. 207. But cf. F.W. Zimmermann's review of J. van Ess, *Anfänge muslimischer Theologie* (1977), in *IJMES*, XVI (1984), pp. 437–41, for the argument that the Umayyads may not necessarily have been Jabrites or that the Qadarites were not always anti-Umayyad.

[61] Numerous instances of varying significance can be adduced in this regard, though the following should suffice here. In 279/892, al-Mu'taḍid, not yet caliph, proscribed story tellers and astrologers from the streets of Baghdād and the Jāmi' mosque, and had book sellers swear not to sell books on philosophy and disputation (*jadal*) (Ibn Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-ẓāhira* (Cairo, 1929–72), III, p. 80). In 309/922, during the caliphate of al-Rāḍī, the celebrated mystic Ḥallāj was executed (Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi'l-ta'rīkh*, ed. C.J. Tornberg [Leiden, 1851–76, rep. Beirut, 1966], VIII, pp. 126ff.; the most detailed study of the trial and execution of Ḥallāj remains that of L. Massignon, *La Passion d'al-Ḥallāj* [Paris, 1975 edn.], I). Also executed during the reign of al-Rāḍī was the extremist Shī'ī al-Shalmaghānī, in 322 (Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VIII, pp. 290ff.); in the following year, the same caliph issued a blistering edict against the Ḥanbalīs (ibid., VIII, pp. 307ff.). In 408/1017, al-Qādir had the Ḥanafīs having Mu'tazilī proclivities repent of the latter, and "forbade them from the teaching and disputation of Mu'tazilī and Rāfiḍī doctrines and of [all other] doctrines opposed to Islam." (Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam* [Haydarabad, 1357–59 A.H.], VII, p. 287). In persecuting various groups in his territories, Maḥmūd of Ghazna "followed the *sunan*" of al-Qādir, and such persecutions "became a *sunna* in Islam". (Ibid., VII, p. 287; also cf. C.E. Bosworth, "The Imperial Policy of the Early Ghaznawids", *Islamic Studies*, I [1962], pp. 58f., 70ff.) Persecution of the philosophers was part of al-Nāṣir's religious policies, in the final phase of the 'Abbāsid period (*EI[2]*, s.v. "al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh" [A. Hartmann]). I owe most of these references, as well as the one which follows, to Dr. P. Crone.

[62] al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya*, ed. M. Enger (Bonn, 1853), p. 23.

the caliphs' interventions, and whether the caliph intervened to protect the religion as defined by himself or as defined by the scholars.[63] The following survey of early ʿAbbāsid interventions in religious life should indicate that, with the major exception of the *Miḥna*, it was the *proto-Sunnī* viewpoints in whose favour the interventions were usually made, and that it was often in *conjunction* with the ʿulamāʾ that the caliphs acted.

Of wayward doctrines, one of the most distasteful to the proto-Sunnīs was that of *qadar*. The Umayyads had already persecuted some of those associated with it, though attitudes towards *qadar* were still ill-defined at that time.[64] They were much less so by the time of al-Mahdī,[65] however, who is reported to have summoned a group of Medinese *qadarīs* to his court for interrogation. The interrogation did not turn into persecution: the caliph let himself be persuaded by one of those summoned that al-Manṣūr had himself been of the same conviction as they.[66] The incident suggests that al-Mahdī was trying to ceremoniously draw closer to the proto-Sunnīs—to give some recognition to their credal stance at the same time as asserting his own position as the guardian of "orthodox" religious life—by momentarily harassing some *qadarīs*, or at least appearing to do so. It is significant, moreover, that this harassment seems to have occurred under the influence of a Medinese scholar, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abī Salama al-Mājishūn (d. 164/780–81), who was then high in the caliph's favour.[67] The same caliph apparently also had a treatise compiled which listed the theological positions that were deemed objectionable. This measure seems to have aimed at intimidating the Shīʿa, for the proto-Imāmite imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim is reported to have instructed his followers to desist from *kalām*, so as not to be penalized.[68] We do not know the reaction of proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ to this

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[63] I am grateful to Dr. P. Crone for suggesting the latter question to me. She is in no way responsible, of course, for the way I have chosen to answer it.

[64] Zimmermann in *IJMES*, XVI (1984), p. 441.

[65] Van Ess, *Th&G*, II, pp. 687ff.

[66] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 534. On al-Manṣūr's relations with some *qadarīs* cf. J. van Ess, "Les Qadarites et la Ġailānīya de Yazīd III", *SI*, XXXI (1970), pp. 273, 285.

[67] Cf. van Ess, *Th&G*, II, pp. 690ff. On this scholar and his work, see M. Muranyi, *Ein altes Fragment medinensischer Jurisprudenz aus Qairawan: aus dem Kitāb al-Haǧǧ des ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿAbdallāh b. Abī Salama al-Māǧišūn (st. 164/780–81)* (Stuttgart, 1985). Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-thiqāt* (Haydarabad, 1973–82), VII, p. 111, describes him as "an adherent of the *madhhab* of . . . his ancestors (*aslāfihi*) from the two holy cities [sc. Mecca and Medina] . . ."

[68] *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, pp. 265f. (nr. 479).

move. They could scarcely have been displeased, however, for the caliph was only harassing a group deviant not just for its Shī'ism but also for its theological speculation.[69]

Hārūn al-Rashīd, very much in keeping with proto-Sunnī sentiment, abhorred "disputes over religious matters (*al-mirā' fi'l-dīn*), saying that it was a profitless exercise, and that, very probably, there was no heavenly reward for it."[70] The threat of the caliph's persecution is said to have forced the theologians Hishām b. al-Ḥakam[71] and Bishr al-Marīsī[72] into hiding. The reports to this effect are tendentious but it is significant nevertheless that these were some of the most distasteful of individuals to the proto-Sunnīs: Hishām was a Ṣaḥāba-hater (though this attitude of his, which he formalized into a doctrine, was apparently not the reason why he had to go into hiding),[73] while Bishr was remembered as among the earliest exponents of the createdness of the Qur'ān and the man who was later to influence al-Ma'mūn's official proclamation of it. Bishr is said to have suffered another round of tribulation during the transitory rule of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī, in the aftermath of the civil war between the forces of al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn.[74] He was reportedly required to make a public recantation of some of his doctrines, though it is rather unlikely that the principal doctrine in question on that occasion was that of the createdness of the Qur'ān: that doctrine had yet to acquire the notoriety the *Miḥna* bestowed upon it.[75] It is significant that the two men who reportedly took an active part in the proceedings of this event were the *mustamlīs* of Sufyān b. 'Uyayna (d. 196/811) and Yazīd b. Hārūn (d. 206/821)

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[69] Later, when al-Mutawakkil had a Rāfiḍī flogged, Ibn Ḥanbal was, for instance, seen to be visibly pleased, quoting to Abū Bakr al-Marwazī a statement of Abū Hurayra: "A single instance of inflicting a legal penalty . . . is better for the world than forty days of continuous rain." al-Khallāl, *Musnad min masā'il Abī 'Abdallāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal*, British Library MS. Or. 2675, fol. 4b.

[70] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 741, trans. as in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. XXX, tr. C.E. Bosworth, p. 306. Compare traditions according to which "*mirā' fi'l-Qur'ān* is unbelief": cited in Ibn Ḥanbal's letter to al-Mutawakkil, in al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 177a.

[71] *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, pp. 258–263 (nr. 477) and cf. ibid., pp. 266f. (nr. 480); *EI(2)*, s.v. "Hishām b. al-Ḥakam" (W. Madelung).

[72] Cf. al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 152a; *TB*, VII, p. 64 (nr. 3516); and *EI(2)*, s.v. "Bishr al-Marīsī" (J. Schacht et al.) for a note of scepticism about the stories of Bishr's persecution; Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 616f.

[73] On Hārūn's relations with the Shī'a see van Ess, *Th&G*, III, pp. 93ff.; also cf. al-Fasawī, *al-Ma'rifa*, I, p. 177 (the execution of Ḥāḍir and a companion of his, "*alā ra'yihimā fi'l-taraffuḍ*").

[74] Wakī', *Akhbār*, III, pp. 269f.; van Ess, *Th&G*, III, pp. 176f.

[75] Van Ess, *Th&G*, III, p. 178 and n. 20.

respectively, who are both recognizable as very prominent proto-Sunnī scholars.[76] These reports indicate proto-Sunnī interest in his persecution. Yazīd b. Hārūn is said even to have encouraged the people of Baghdad to have Bishr killed.[77] Conversely, Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī may have had this inquisition for no better reason than to ally the proto-Sunnī sentiment with his fragile rule.[78]

While the *Miḥna* was an assault on the proto-Sunnī 'ulamā', as we have seen, not everything which happened while it was formally in effect necessarily contravened proto-Sunnī viewpoints. An incident which took place in Kufa in the last days of al-Mu'taṣim's rule, or early in al-Wāthiq's, may, if anything, have contributed to further defining precisely one of those viewpoints. A man named Sālim was accused of having reviled 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. A complaint to this effect was filed with the *qāḍī* of Kufa, who convoked a council of the leading *fuqahā'* of the town to examine the matter. Representatives of the 'Abbāsid and the 'Alid families also attended the proceedings. It was suggested by some that Sālim's disrespect to 'Alī was only a covert expression of his hostility to the Prophet, and that this merited the death penalty. In the end, however, it was only with flogging and imprisonment that the sacrilege was punished.[79]

Sālim's expression of disrespect for 'Alī should probably be seen in the context of the notorious genre of the *mathālib*. Indulging in the *mathālib* of prominent individuals, or of families, tribes, a whole race, was nothing new; and several writers of the early 'Abbāsid period earned considerable notoriety for their skill in doing just that.[80] Such

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[76] On Sufyān b. 'Uyayna see *TB*, IX, pp. 174–84; on Yazīd b. Hārūn, see ibid., XIV, pp. 337–47.

[77] al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 150a; cf. al-Dārimī, *Kitāb al-radd 'ala'l-Ǧahmīya*, ed. G. Vitesam (Leiden, 1960), p. 98.

[78] On this event, and the "Gegenkalifat" of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī generally, cf. van Ess, *Th&G*, III, pp. 173ff.

[79] Wakī', *Akhbār*, III, pp. 191ff. No date for the incident is given, but it seems to have occurred sometime in caliphate of al-Mu'taṣim. The *qāḍī* presiding over the proceedings was an appointee of al-Mu'taṣim, though he continued in office until he was removed by al-Mutawakkil, in 235/849–50 (ibid., III, p. 194). One of the participants in the deliberations, Yaḥyā b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḥimmānī, most likely died in 228/842–3, a year after al-Mu'taṣim's death. (*TB*, XIV, p. 176 [nr. 7483]; on al-Ḥimmānī, see ibid., pp. 167–77; cf. ibid., p. 177: of the traditionists who came to Samarra, "he was the first to die there"—a statement which may signal caliphal patronage.) The likelihood then is that this incident took place sometime during the caliphate of al-Mu'taṣim, or very early in that of al-Wāthiq. The significance of the incident is not affected even if it is to be placed in the latter's caliphate.

[80] On the genre of the *mathālib*, cf. *EI(2)*, s.v. (Ch. Pellat).

indulgence could easily acquire dangerous religious or political overtones,[81] when, for example, the Prophet, or his Companions, or the tribe of Quraysh, or the ancestors of the 'Abbāsid caliphs were made the object of such attack. Whenever apprised of such insults, the 'Abbāsids appear to have acted with severity: al-Hādī, for instance, had a man executed for allegedly abusing the Quraysh, and the Prophet, who belonged to that tribe;[82] the historian al-Haytham b. 'Adī was imprisoned by Hārūn al-Rashīd apparently for too zealous an interest in *mathālib*;[83] and al-Mutawakkil had one Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Jahmī flogged for calumniating al-'Abbās besides the ancestors of the families of 'Umar and 'Uthmān.[84] It is not hard to see that in doing so, the caliphs would not only be protecting the honour of their own family but also defending the proto-Sunnīs against incursions on some of their most revered figures.

As for Sālim's inquisition, which his disrespect for 'Alī occasioned, there are several things which deserve notice. It is not surprising that the incident took place in Kufa, where pro-'Alid sentiment was strong; nor that it occurred during the *Miḥna*: al-Ma'mūn had, after all, declared that 'Alī was the best of men after the Prophet at the same time (212/827) as he proclaimed the createdness of the Qur'ān.[85] It is important to note, however, that, in Sālim's inquisition, the honour of 'Alī was apparently being defended not so much in his own right as for his being one of the Rāshidūn caliphs. One of those present emphasized that God had made all four of them equally virtuous. Distinguishing between *faḍl* and *khayr*, the representative of the 'Abbāsids asserted, rather ambiguously, that Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān were superior (*afḍal*) to 'Alī, but that all shared in virtue (*khayr*). The 'Alid representative was understandably much offended and emphasized that both *faḍl* and *khayr* were the preserve of the Banū Hāshim alone, and of 'Alī (and, by implication, his progeny) in particular. All agreed, however, that to defame 'Alī was a serious offence. What this report shows therefore is not only that proto-Sunnī circles had by this time come to recognize 'Alī as one of the Rāshidūn, but also that the 'Abbāsids were firmly backing that position.

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[81] Cf. al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, ed. 'Abd al-Sattār Aḥmad Farrāj et al. (Beirut, 1955–61), XX, pp. 21f., XXIII, pp. 390f.

[82] *TB*, XIII, p. 23 (nr. 6985).

[83] Cf. S. Leder, *Das Korpus al-Haiṭam ibn 'Adī* (Frankfurt, 1991), pp. 304ff.

[84] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud (Beirut, 1988), p. 124.

[85] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 1099.

Sālim was a non-entity, though his inquisition is hardly an insignificant affair. Public sentiment in Kufa is said to have run high in reaction to his disrespect for ʿAlī. The people would have liked to have him executed, and the police had to disperse the crowd before the *qāḍī* could leave the mosque where the trial took place. Clearly, this episode constitutes an early instance of popular involvement in religious disputes, a phenomenon which was to characterize the middle ʿAbbāsid period.[86] Earlier, in the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd, an indiscretion of Wakīʿ b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812), a noted figure among the Kufan *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, had created a situation which suggests some interesting parallels and contrasts with what Sālim found himself in. A tradition he reported in Mecca in 184 or 185/800 led to serious trouble, apparently owing to the somewhat scandalous content of that tradition. The following is an account of what is said to have happened.[87]

"When the Prophet of God died", Wakīʿ reported on the authority of one Ismāʿīl b. Abī Khālid al-Bahī, "he was not buried until his belly became swollen (*rabā baṭnuhu*) and his little finger bent . . ." The matter was reported to the governor, Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh b. Saʿīd al-ʿUthmānī, who had the traditionist imprisoned and intended, it is said, to have him crucified. Sufyān b. ʿUyayna (d. 196/811), a leading scholar of Mecca,[88] was able to intercede, however: "this man", Sufyān argued, "is a scholar (*min ahl al-ʿilm*), and he has kinsfolk (*ʿashīra*). If you were to proceed against him, the least that would happen is that his kinsfolk and sons would go to the caliph to complain against you and he [sc. the caliph] would summon you to confront them (*li-munāẓaratihim*)." Sufyān's warning had the desired effect and Wakīʿ was released. But that was not the end of the matter. For "the people of Mecca wrote to the people of Medina about what Wakīʿ, [Sufyān] Ibn ʿUyayna and [Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh] al-ʿUthmānī had done, and said: 'When [Wakīʿ] reaches Medina, do

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[86] See S. Sabari, *Mouvements populaires à Bagdād à l'époque ʿAbbāside, IXᵉ–XIᵉ siècles* (Paris, 1981).

[87] What follows is primarily based on al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa*, I, pp. 175f. Other accounts include: Ibn ʿAdī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ*, V, pp. 344f.; al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh al-Islām*, XII, pp. 451–54 (and p. 451 nn. 2 and 4 for further references); idem, *Mīzān al-iʿtidāl*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bajawī (Cairo, 1963), II, pp. 649f. (also noteworthy here and in the following work is al-Dhahabī's sharp criticism of anyone narrating such a tradition); idem, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb Arnaʾūṭ and Kāmil al-Kharrāṭ (Beirut, 1986), IX, pp. 159–65.

[88] Like Wakīʿ, Sufyān b. ʿUyayna was also originally from Kūfa: Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, V, pp. 497f.

not depend on the governor; stone him [sc. Wakī'] until you have killed him [on your own initiative].' So the Medinese determined to do that." Wakī', who had already set out for Medina, was, however, informed by well-wishers of what awaited him there. He therefore changed course and went to Kufa.

If this account is not simply someone's effort to malign Wakī', it can be taken to suggest a number of things. The reason why Wakī''s tradition should have raised a storm clearly is its not so subtle indictment of the Prophet's leading Companions: they failed to give him a timely burial (because they were too engrossed in settling the succession to him?). The tradition has a Shī'ite tendency, though its purport is not without some embarrassment for 'Alī's household either: for if no one else was interested or available, what stopped 'Alī from arranging an immediate burial? It is possible then that this is not necessarily a pro-Shī'ite tradition; but it certainly is a tradition which is unfavourable to the Companions, and also offensive perhaps in depicting the Prophet in a far from edifying state. The strong popular reaction against Wakī' is therefore scarcely surprising.

Another significant feature of the account relates to the question of the caliph's role in the controversy.[89] Sufyān b. 'Uyayna thinks that not only would Wakī''s kinsfolk bring the matter to the caliph's notice, they are likely to have success with him: Wakī' is after all a religious scholar. If this exegesis of Sufyān's remark is correct, it would seem that religious scholars were *known* to be influential at the caliphal court. But it was not simply being a religious scholar that counted. Wakī' was a prominent figure among the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, and Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn for one had "a strong attachment" to him.[90] The following report from Ibn Ma'īn suggests that such an attachment was shared by many others and that it could be supported with the threat of violence:

> I saw Marwān b. Mu'āwiya with a slate which had traditions (*aḥādīth*) written on it as well as the names of the scholars (*al-shuyūkh*): so and

[89] A variant of the above account has the incident take place in Mecca while Hārūn al-Rashīd himself was present in the town for pilgrimage. The matter was reported to him, whereupon he sought the advice of two scholars, 'Abd al-Majīd b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Abī Rawwād and Sufyān b. 'Uyayna. The former suggested that Wakī' be executed, while the latter counselled leniency. In the event, it was the latter's advice which carried the day. Cf. Ibn 'Adī, *Ḍu'afā'*, V, pp. 344f.; al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rīkh al-Islām*, XIII, p. 454; idem, *Mīzān*, II, p. 649; idem, *Siyar*, IX, p. 164.

[90] See Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn, *al-Ta'rīkh*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Nūr Sayf, *Yaḥyā ibn Ma'īn wa kitābuhu al-ta'rīkh* (Mecca, 1979), IV, p. 4 (nr. 2846).

> so is a Rāfiḍī and so and so is such and such. Then he went over a name and said: "Wakīʿ is a Rafiḍī". [Yaḥyā reports]: I said to Marwān b. Muʿāwiya: "Wakīʿ is better than you!" "Better than me?", Marwān exclaimed. "Yes", I said. [Later] Yaḥyā was asked if Marwān had not responded to that. Yaḥyā said: "If he had said anything [in return], the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* would have pounced (*wathaba*) on him and beaten him up."[91]

The tribulation of both Sālim and Wakīʿ was occasioned by their perceived disrespect for some early, revered figures of Islam; that the disrespect came from opposite backgrounds—Sālim was probably hostile to the Shīʿīs while Wakīʿ would have seemed to some as pro-Shīʿī—does not matter much. Neither case directly involved the caliph. What is really important however is that the authorities not only acted in conjunction with the scholars in *intervening* in religious life (Sālim's inquisition) but could also act in collusion with scholars (the case of Wakīʿ and Sufyān) in deciding *not* to intervene.

That caliphal interventions are interpretable as *favouring* proto-Sunnī viewpoints does not mean, however, that ʿulamāʾ were only or always the beneficiaries of such initiatives. There were occasions, in fact, when scholars more or less identifiable as proto-Sunnī were rather among the victims. Sharīk b. ʿAbdallāh al-Nakhaʿī (d. 187/803), a Kufan *qāḍī* who served al-Manṣūr, al-Mahdī and Hārūn, was, for instance, harassed by al-Mahdī for allegedly narrating a *ḥadīth* with a potentially activist, anti-Quraysh tendency;[92] Wakīʿ narrowly escaped punishment, as already seen; and Ismāʿīl b. ʿUlayya (d. 193/809), a *qāḍī* of Hārūn and al-Amīn, was forced by the latter to make a public recantation for some very crudely anthropomorphist remarks he was alleged to have made.[93] It should be noted, however, that while these are all fairly respectable ʿulamāʾ, each comes across as being reprimanded not for holding but for *deviating* from a proto-Sunnī viewpoint. Ibn Ḥanbal, for one, is on record as having expressed his doubts about the validity of precisely the *ḥadīth* which brought Sharīk some rough handling from the caliph's guards;[94] and it was Ibn Ḥanbal too

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[91] Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn, *al-Taʾrīkh*, III, p. 359 (nr. 1742). The Kufan *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* were often characterized as "Shīʿa" by other proto-Sunnīs because the former gave precedence to ʿAlī over ʿUthmān. See J. van Ess, *Frühe muʿtazilitische Häresiographie: Zwei Werke des Nāšiʾ al-Akbar (gest. 293 H.)* (Beirut, 1971), p. 65, para 110.

[92] Ibn ʿAdī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ*, IV, pp. 22f.

[93] *TB*, VI, p. 238 (nr. 3277).

[94] al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 9b.

who is reported to have hoped for al-Amīn's forgiveness in the hereafter *on the basis of* the latter's concern to have Ibn 'Ulayya repent.[95] But whatever the demonstration effect the caliphs may have achieved by reprimanding these scholars, it is noteworthy that neither Sharīk, nor Ibn 'Ulayya nor even Wakī' was actually punished.

In one of its aspects, the *Miḥna* itself was an instance of the collaboration of the caliph and some of the scholars, as suggested earlier;[96] it was a collaboration *against* the proto-Sunnīs, but a collaboration nonetheless. The latter, however, came back to official favour with al-Mutawakkil; and it is noteworthy that not only was their viewpoint now rehabilitated, it was also through the proto-Sunnī scholars themselves that this caliph had it officially disseminated:

> In the year 234/849, al-Mutawakkil sent for (*ashkhaṣa*) the *fuqahā'* and *muḥaddithūn*, including Muṣ'ab al-Zubayrī, Isḥāq b. Abī Isrā'īl, Ibrāhīm b. 'Abdallāh al-Harawī, and 'Abdallāh and 'Uthmān the Kufites, the sons of Muḥammad b. Abī Shayba. . . . Gifts (*jawā'iz*) were distributed among them and pensions (*arzāq*) issued to them. al-Mutawakkil ordered them to sit with the people (*an yajlisū li'l-nās*) and narrate to them *ḥadīth* refuting the Mu'tazila and the Jahmiyya, and to narrate *ḥadīth* on *ru'ya* . . .[97]

In thus collaborating with the 'ulamā', al-Mutawakkil was not initiating any new trend. In the pre-*Miḥna* period the caliphs were already intervening in favour of certain proto-Sunnī views, and, as will be observed in due course, were using the services of scholars—proto-Sunnī scholars—to regulate religious life. In the period before the *Miḥna*, as in that after it, the interventions in religious life do not amount to an assertion of the caliph's prerogative to define the faith; these interventions are generally in conformity with the emergent proto-Sunnī views and are to be understood as expressing 'Abbāsid patronage of those claiming to represent such views.

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[95] *TB*, VI, p. 238.

[96] Cf. H.F.S. Kasassebeh, "The Office of Qāḍī in the early 'Abbāsid Caliphate (132–247/750–861)", Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1990, pp. 131f.

[97] *TB*, X, p. 67 (nr. 5185); cf. van Ess, *Th&G*, III, p. 496. On Muṣ'ab b. 'Abdallāh al-Zubayrī (d. 236/851), a traditionist from the Zubayrid clan of the Quraysh residing in Medina, see *TB*, XIII, pp. 112–14; Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 271f.; on Ibrāhīm b. 'Abdallāh, a Basran traditionist, see Ibn Ḥibbān, *Thiqāt*, VIII, p. 65; Isḥāq b. Abī Isrā'īl was a traditionist from Marw who died in Baghdad in 245/859–60 (cf. al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 1440); on the Kufan *ḥadīth* scholar, Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849), see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 108f.; M.Q. Zaman, "*Maghāzī* and the *Muḥaddithūn*: Reconsidering the treatment of 'historical' materials in early collections of hadith", *IJMES*, XXVIII (1996), pp. 1–18.

Besides attesting to early ʿAbbāsid patronage of proto-Sunnī viewpoints and the caliphs' collaboration with the ʿulamāʾ, the foregoing review should also be seen as yet another facet of the caliphs' involvement in the religious life of the times. As noted in the previous chapter, it is often suggested that with the failure of the *Miḥna* the caliphs lost all initiative or ability to regulate the religious life of the community, and that the ʿulamāʾ effectively took over from the caliphs such functions as "ordering the good and forbidding evil" etc. But if the caliphs' interventions in religious life are any indication of their initiative to "order the good" or to try to regulate religious activities, then the aforementioned view has little to commend it. The caliphs of the middle ʿAbbāsid and later periods, it is true, rarely had sufficient ability to play an active role in *any* respect; but an inability to function in the religious sphere, as in others, does not signify a transfer of functions from the caliphs to the ʿulamāʾ. The sources attest to numerous instances of caliphal intervention in religious life in the post *Miḥna* period. Such instances make it quite clear that at no time did the caliphs relinquish the prerogative to intervene in religious life or hand over its regulation exclusively to the scholars. On occasion, a caliph might even act *against* some of the scholars and their supporters. al-Rāḍī's edict of 323/924 against the Ḥanbalīs was an attack as much on the riotous mob as on its religious leaders; it even went on to attack Ibn Ḥanbal himself, though without actually naming him.[98] It is also significant that this edict castigates the Ḥanbalī rioters in doctrinal terms: on various grounds they are shown to be guilty of *bidʿa*, a charge these rioters themselves typically bandied around with deadly effect. Very much in conformity with early ʿAbbāsid tradition, the caliph here is not claiming to *define* the faith, he seeks only to show how the rioters *deviate* from religious norms that are implicitly being represented as authoritative.

But the caliph may not only *defend* viewpoints deemed authoritative; he might also participate in the processes of articulating such viewpoints. An important instance from later ʿAbbāsid history is represented by the creed of the caliph al-Qādir. This creed, "comprising admonition, [statements on] the superiority of the *madhhab al-sunna*, an attack on the Muʿtazila and numerous reports from the Prophet, peace be on him, and the Companions [to similar effect]",

[98] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VIII, pp. 307–309. Cf. Sabari, *Mouvements populaires*, p. 106.

was produced by the caliph himself.[99] al-Qādir had the creed read on three different occasions at convocations of the scholars and notables that he convened.

That a caliph could, even in the fifth/eleventh century, play a pivotal role in the articulation—and not simply the proclamation—of a creed is significant. It is not a typical act, and is, to a certain extent, the product of a time when Sunnism had unmistakably crystallized. But while the initiative is unusual in the extent of the caliph's involvement, its essential character does not go beyond the earlier 'Abbāsid tradition: this caliph does not appear to claim any special authority to *define* afresh what his subjects must believe, he only articulates what is an already developed, and recognized, Sunnī world view; and he does so in collaboration with the Sunnī 'ulamā'. That in doing so he did go beyond most of his predecessors is not without some irony, however; for the initiative dates to a period when the 'Abbāsid caliphs are supposed to have long relinquished all religious functions to the 'ulamā'.

IV.4 *'Abbāsid Patronage of the 'Ulamā'*

IV.4.1

al-Ṭabarī reports that, in the year 161/777–8, Ya'qūb b. Dā'ūd, the confidant and later the wazīr of al-Mahdī,

> attached to himself a large number of the legal experts (*mutafaqqiha*) of Basra and of the people of Kufa and Syria. He appointed as chief of the Basrans and organizer of their affairs (*ra'īs al-baṣriyyīn wa'l-qā'im bi-amrihim*) Ismā'īl b. 'Ulayya al-'Asadī and Muḥammad b. Maymūn al-'Anbarī. He appointed 'Abd al-A'lā b. Mūsā al-Ḥalabī as chief (*ra'īs*) of the people of Kufa and the people of Syria.[100]

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[99] Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, VIII, p. 41; for the text of this creed see ibid., VIII, pp. 109–111. On this caliph and his measures also see G. Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqīl et la résurgence de l'Islam traditionaliste au XI^e siècle* (Damascus, 1963), pp. 299ff.; *EI(2)*, s.v. "al-Ḳādir bi'llāh" (D. Sourdel).

[100] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 486f.; translation as in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. XXIX, tr. H. Kennedy (Albany, 1990), p. 199 (with minor modifications). On Ismā'īl b. 'Ulayya, see *TB*, VI, pp. 229–40 (nr. 3277). Ibn al-Nadīm (*al-Fihrist*, p. 283) mentions him among the *fuqahā' aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, and lists the following as his writings: *Kitāb al-tafsīr*, *Kitāb al-ṭahāra*, *Kitāb al-ṣalāt*, and *Kitāb al-manāsik*. Nothing is known of the other two figures mentioned in al-Ṭabarī's report. It should be noted, however, that five figures with the

This report is reminiscent of a suggestion Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ had made in his *Risāla fi'l-ṣaḥāba*: to utilize the services of religious scholars to morally discipline and reform the people among whom they lived, and to have them supervise religious life there. The precise signification of the afore-mentioned report preserved in al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh* is not very clear, but it does suggest—as does Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's advice—that there was an official initiative to give some kind of a public recognition to certain prominent figures of religious life. To try to do so was not to make government officials out of those 'ulamā'—though Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, for one, may have wanted it that way; it was an effort rather to make the contours of the religious milieu more determinate, and perhaps more amenable to caliphal influence, by defining who its chief representatives were to be. The caliph was evidently trying not to "manufacture" the position and prestige of an *ʿālim*, but rather only to recognize certain prominent scholars as representatives, so to speak, of religious life.

Mālik b. Anas, probably the most distinguished Medinese jurist of his day, may be taken as an example of such caliphal recognition. He is said to have been one of the men whom al-Manṣūr sent to Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya's family to ask that the fugitive Muḥammad and Ibrāhīm be handed over to the caliph.[101] Having been the caliph's emissary did not apparently stop Mālik from backing—through a *fatwā*, it is said—the revolt itself, though he did not otherwise take any part in it. He remained under a cloud for some time after, and may have suffered some official persecution as well.[102] The

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name "Muḥammad b. Maymūn" are mentioned in Ibn Ḥajar's *Tahdhīb*, IX, pp. 485–87 (nrs. 788–93), though none has the *nisba* "al-ʿAnbarī" there. One of these, Abū Ḥamza Muḥammad b. Maymūn al-Marwazī al-Sukkarī (d. 168/784–85) is a rather remarkable figure: "'Abdallāh [b. al-Mubārak, the noted Khurāsānī scholar and ascetic] was asked about the imāms who are to be emulated (*al-aʾimma alladhīna yuqtadā bihim*); he mentioned Abū Bakr, ʿUmar [and so forth] until he came down to Abū Ḥamza [Muḥammad b. Maymūn]—and this was at a time when Abū Ḥamza was still alive!" (*TB*, III, p. 269 (nr. 1359); see ibid., p. 268, where Yaḥyā b. Aktham is quoted for a variant of this report.) While there is no indication that this Muḥammad b. Maymūn might be identical with the individual of that name mentioned by al-Ṭabarī, it is tempting nevertheless to posit that possibility.

[101] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 172f.

[102] Cf. al-Tamīmī, *Kitāb al-miḥan*, ed. Yaḥyā al-Jabbūrī (Beirut, 1983), pp. 319ff. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Maʿārif*, ed. Tharwat ʿUkāsha (Cairo, 1960), pp. 498f., after reporting that Jaʿfar b. Sulaymān, the governor of Medina, had Mālik flogged on suspicions of disloyalty to the ruling house, comments as follows: "after that flogging, Mālik always enjoyed a high rank (*ʿulūw*) and standing (*rifʿa*); it was as though that flogging was an ornament he had been adorned with". It is not clear whether this "high rank" refers to the respect

merits of cordial relations must have been evident to both sides, however, and Mālik was soon to be shown considerable favour by al-Manṣūr. At the pilgrimage of the year 148/766, it was proclaimed that no one would give *fatwās* to the people except Mālik b. Anas and 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Abī Salama al-Mājishūn.[103] The significance of such a proclamation is rather uncertain, though this report does seem to indicate an official recognition or endorsement of the said scholars' position.[104] Anecdotes that al-Manṣūr also proposed to give the sanction of law to Mālik's *Muwaṭṭā'* underscore very poignantly a manifestation of how official recognition of a scholar's position was supposed to function.

An anecdote has the caliph Manṣūr ask Mālik who from among the prominent scholars (*mashyakha*) of Medina was known to give *fatwās*. Mālik is said to have named three: Ibn Abī Dhi'b, Ibn Abī Salama, and Ibn Abī Sabra.[105] The story does not inspire much confidence, but its portrayal of a caliph's concern to know who the leading scholars at any given time and place were, perhaps to patronize and co-opt them and/or make sure of their loyalty to the regime, is credible. The anecdote is also interesting because it may be a retrospective reading of something which is attested elsewhere: that all three individuals who are named were in contact with the early 'Abbāsids. Ibn Abī Dhi'b the ascetic visited al-Mahdī,[106] Ibn Abī

Mālik's tribulation earned him in the community or to official patronage making up for earlier persecution.

[103] *TB*, X, p. 437 (nr. 5601). A similar practice is reported for the Umayyad period too: Ibrāhīm b. 'Umar b. Kaysān said: "I remember them [sc. the authorities?] in the time of the Umayyads having a crier announce to the pilgrims that no one would give *fatwās* (*yuftī*) to the people except 'Aṭā' b Abī Rabaḥ, and, if not he, then 'Abdallāh b. Abī Najīḥ." al-Fasawī, *al-Ma'rifa*, I, p. 702; Ibn 'Adī, *Ḍu'afā'*, I, p. 52; cf. Muranyi, *Medinensischer Jurisprudenz*, p. 31, n. 58. Also see al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-khiṭaṭ al-maqrīziyya* (Cairo, 1324–26), IV, p. 143: 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz "gave three individuals the authority to give *fatwās*: . . . Ja'far b. Rabī'a, . . . Yazīd b. Abī Ḥabīb and 'Abdallāh b. Abī Ja'far" (the latter two were *mawālī*), cited and discussed in E. Tyan, *Histoire de l'organisation judiciare en pays d'Islam*, I (Paris, 1938), pp. 326. On the *muftī* generally, see ibid., I, pp. 323ff. It should not be imagined, as Tyan also cautions, that the *muftīs* were necessarily, even usually, official functionaries. That we do have instances where such seems to be the case is, however, not without interest.

[104] In a letter to Mālik, al-Layth b. Sa'd reproached him for "instructing" (*amarta*) the governor of Medina, Zufar b. 'Āsim, to pray for rain *before* the sermon, which al-Layth regards as contravening the established practice, even in Medina itself, of praying after the *khuṭba*. See Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn, *al-Ta'rīkh*, IV, p. 495. Despite what al-Layth regards as Mālik's error here, it is noteworthy that it is Mālik's opinion the governor had followed.

[105] *TB*, XIV, p. 369 (nr. 7697).

[106] Ibid., II, pp. 296, 305.

Salama, already mentioned above, was closely associated with the same caliph, and Ibn Abī Sabra served as *qāḍī* in Baghdad for some time.[107] It is also important to recall that both Ibn Abī Dhi'b and Ibn Abī Sabra had been involved or implicated in the revolt of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya.[108] The 'Abbāsids may conceivably have been trying to co-opt these influential scholars. No less instructive is the anecdote's depiction of one distinguished scholar (in this case Mālik) being asked to identify other prominent ones.

Mālik's is not an isolated example of the phenomenon being discussed here. al-Layth b. Sa'd (d. 175/791), a leading jurist of his time and certainly the most influential of Egyptian scholars, seems to provide another instance of caliphal recognition. He enjoyed the patronage of al-Manṣūr, al-Mahdī and Hārūn al-Rashīd, and it was to this patronage that at least some of his fabulous wealth must have been due.[109] Thanks to the recognition accorded him by successive caliphs, he was able to exert his influence on—and if necessary, against—the provincial governor or the *qāḍī*.[110] He is said to have been "alone in his time to give *fatwā*s in Egypt".[111] An anecdote even has him admonish a holy man for preaching in a mosque in Egypt without *his* permission.[112] If taken seriously, this would illustrate al-Layth's supervision of religious life in his homeland, which is what scholars who were officially patronized might have been expected to do. It was al-Layth too whom later Sunnī opinion credited with having brought to an end the reviling of 'Uthmān in Egypt.[113]

Like numerous scholars of the day, al-Layth also visited Baghdad, probably on more than one occasion, and narrated *ḥadīth* there. One *muḥaddith* remembered having heard a particular tradition from him "*'alā bāb al-Mahdī*".[114] This may be a reference to a place in Baghdad; or it may well refer to a possible custom of narrating traditions at

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[107] Ibid., XIV, pp. 369, 371.

[108] See III.2.1, above.

[109] Cf. *TB*, XIII, p. 5; R.G. Khoury, "al-Layth b. Sa'd", *JNES*, XL (1981), pp. 191f.

[110] Cf. al-Kindī, *al-Quḍāt*, pp. 372f.; *TB*, XIII, p. 9; Khoury, "al-Layth b. Sa'd", p. 192.

[111] "... *wa kāna qad istaqalla bi'l-fatwā fī zamānihi bi-Miṣr.*" Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VII, 517. In a letter to al-Layth, Mālik b. Anas refers to "your leadership (*imāmatik*) and excellence (*faḍl*), your position among the people of your land, their need for you, and their confidence in you ..." Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn, *al-Ta'rīkh*, p. 499; and cf. al-Layth's response, ibid., IV, p. 488.

[112] "... *mā ḥamalaka an takallamta fī baladinā bi-ghayri amrinā*": *TB*, XIII, pp. 73f. (nr. 7052). The man thus admonished was Manṣūr b. 'Ammār al-Sulamī. On him see van Ess, *Th&G*, III, pp. 102–04.

[113] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, VIII, pp. 463f. (nr. 832); Khoury, "al-Layth b. Sa'd", p. 202.

[114] *TB*, XIII, p. 4.

(literally!) the doorstep of the caliphal residence.[115] Be that as it may, al-Mahdī himself endorsed al-Layth's reliability as a traditionist and scholar. He is reported to have instructed his wazīr, Ya'qūb b. Dā'ūd, to benefit from al-Layth, "for the Commander of the Faithful is certain that no one [now] remains who is more knowledgeable [than al-Layth] about what he transmits [lit. about what is acquired from him]."[116] This anecdote may well be an echo of the orthodox admiration for al-Layth though it is, in any case, significant that *the caliph* is represented here as endorsing the trustworthiness of a scholar. Such a representation suggests again that the former was seen as having pretensions to being an *'ālim*—which is why he could judge the reliability of other 'ulamā'; and further, that caliphal recognition of an *'ālim*'s position or eminence was a sufficiently well-known phenomenon to be made the subject of an anecdote.

One further instance of caliphal patronage of an *'ālim*'s activity is also worth noting. It relates to al-Mutawakkil, and is therefore rather late for the period under study here, but it may be indicative of similar ways in which some earlier caliphs also expressed support for scholars, "recognized" their stature and influence, and thus added to them. A traditionist named Isḥāq b. Buhlūl al-Tanūkhī (d. 252/866) was invited to the caliphal court at Samarra, where he narrated the Prophet's traditions to the caliph and authorized the transmission of much other *ḥadīth* that was read out to him. The caliph rewarded the scholar lavishly, and had a pulpit erected for him in the central mosque so that he could narrate *ḥadīth* to the people.[117] Isḥāq was a member of a family as distinguished for the large number of religious scholars it produced—who are all classified as Ḥanafīs by Ibn Abi'l-Wafā'—as for its social standing: the family claimed descent from "one of the kings of Tanūkh".[118] Isḥāq narrated traditions from his grandfather, Ḥassān b. Sinān (d. 180), who, as one of the *mu'ammarūn*, had

[115] Note that scholars were frequently to be found at the gates of the caliphal residence: cf. Ahmad, *Muslim Education*, pp. 244ff. Traditions might also be narrated, and discussions held, at the "gate" (*bāb*) of scholars' residences. Cf. *TB*, XIV p. 171 (nr. 7483), where a scholar's claim to have heard a tradition from Ibn Ḥanbal "*'alā bāb [Ismā'īl] Ibn 'Ulayya*" is reported; ibid., XIV, pp. 172, 173, where it is "'alā bāb Hushaym [b. Bashīr?]"; ibid., XIV, p. 153 (nr. 7467), where the grammarian al-Farrā' is depicted lecturing "at the gate [of his house]" (*'alā bābihi*).

[116] *TB*, XIII, p. 5.

[117] Ibid., VI, p. 368 (nr. 3390).

[118] Ibn Abi'l-Wafā', *al-Jawāhir al-muḍī'a fī ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafiyya* (Haydarabad, 1988–89), I, pp. 274f. On the Tanūkh, an Arab tribal confederation of Syria who were allies of Byzantium in pre-Islamic times, see I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1984), passim.

met, and heard a tradition from, the Prophet's Companion Anas b. Mālik.[119] The family thus enjoyed the prestige of having a "Successor" (*tābiʿī*) among their ancestors, who connected them to the first generations of Islam. Pre-Islamic nobility and impeccable Islamic claims to religious authority were thus united in this remarkable family.[120] It cannot have been fortuitous, therefore, that the caliph Mutawakkil should have wanted Isḥāq b. Buhlūl to narrate traditions to him and to the people. This scholar's prestige certainly lent itself well to be effectively paraded at, and on behalf of, the caliphal court, and the caliph's patronage would have further enhanced the scholar's social standing.

The little further that is known about Isḥāq b. Buhlūl is also of interest. At a time when all four of the Prophet's immediate successors were coming to be recognized as equally righteous, this scholar was active contributing his own share to the enforcement of this dogma. He seems to have been sufficiently influential in al-Anbār to have a certain traditionist—who was popular for his "high" *isnād*s, but who apparently did not adhere to the said dogma—disgraced and replaced by another. The latter was willing to narrate traditions on the virtues of all four of the Rāshidūn (the former had not considered ʿAlī to have been a member of this category); and Isḥāq b. Buhlūl gave a public demonstration of his own trust in him by writing down the traditions the new preacher was narrating. The latter's position—and traditions—having been thus authorized, others followed suit in writing down his traditions.[121]

This incident serves to illustrate one of the ways in which proto-Sunnī orthodoxy came to be "manufactured" and imposed; it also shows how an influential scholar could lend some of his authority to another scholar or—when necessary—deprive him of it. Perhaps more significantly, the case of Isḥāq b. Buhlūl shows how a scholar's eminence in religious life and society could earn him caliphal recognition. The scholar's influence, enhanced by such recognition, might then be used to propagate certain doctrines. The patronage of such scholars was one of the ways in which the state demonstrated its support for the doctrines those scholars espoused.

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[119] Ibn Abi'l-Wafā', *al-Jawāhir*, I, pp. 293f. (nr. 425). Ḥassān b. Sinān is said to have lived for 120 years. On the "age trick", whereby the coveted status of a Follower, even Companion, might be claimed, see Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, pp. 46ff.

[120] For prominent scholars from this family, see Ibn Abi'l-Wafā', *al-Jawāhir*, I, pp. 89–93, 274f., 293–95, 334f.

[121] *TB*, IX, p. 328 (nr. 4803).

IV.4.2

Of the varied expressions of caliphal patronage of the 'ulamā', that in terms of monetary assistance was perhaps the most tangible. Employment in government bureaus—above all the judiciary—was one of the forms of monetary patronage: whether motivated by purely economic exigencies, by some taste for prestige and power in society, or by the concern to promote the interests of the religious circles they hailed from, numerous individuals are likely to have always been available for the positions open to them. But stories about particular scholars stoutly refusing an appointment in the judiciary, or being coerced to accept it, are not necessarily fictitious either. For there certainly were scholars who were opposed to any form of association with an unjust and impious government, or they may have had other reasons to refuse an official appointment. Yet what the stories about such refusals indicate is not that no one was available for a certain position, but rather that the particular individual whom the caliph—for his own reasons—wanted to occupy that office was not always willing to do so.

The import of pious distrust of associating with the rulers or of accepting official appointments must not be exaggerated. It does not follow from such attitudes that the scholars who held them considered the state, or its rulers, to be illegitimate:[122] to be wary of the corrupting influences of power is not the same thing, after all, as regarding power itself to be illegitimate. Nor does the refusal to become a *qāḍī*, for instance, necessarily signify an indictment of the ruling establishment:[123] there were stories about the position of the judge being declined even in the time of the pious 'Umar I,[124] and the famous tradition that

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[122] Cf. P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 61ff., on the scholars regarding the state as illegitimate. Crone does not, however, specifically refer to the refusal of scholars to accept official appointments.

[123] Such refusal need not have been limited, of course, to the position of the judge. The Medinese notable 'Abdallāh b. Muṣ'ab al-Zubayrī, for instance, professed to be very reluctant in accepting the governorship of Medina that the caliph Hārūn wanted to thrust on him. Yet, it is striking that he never had any qualms about associating with the caliphs or enjoying their largesse. As he told someone in declining a gift, it was his principle to accept a gift *only* from a caliph or a crown prince. See al-Ẓubayr b. Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab Quraysh wa akhbārihā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo, 1381 A.H.), I, pp. 125f., 129ff.

[124] al-Kindī, *al-Quḍāt*, p. 302; Wakī', *Akhbār*, I, p. 16; R.G. Khoury, "Zur Ernennung von Richtern im Islam vom Anfang bis zum Aufkommen der Abbasiden", in H.R. Roemer and A. Noth, eds., *Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Vorderen Orients* (Leiden, 1981), p. 203.

"one who is made a *qāḍī* is slaughtered without a knife"[125] says more about the moral responsibility that the position of the judge entailed than it does about anything else. Thus it is not without interest to note that at least some of the individuals who figure in the *isnād*s of that tradition, or in those of other traditions which warn of the perils of the *qāḍī*'s position, were themselves judges.[126]

The men of religion whom the state employed, or who were willing to be so employed, may be assumed (in the absence of any statistics whatsoever) to have been outnumbered by those who were benefitted by other forms of monetary patronage from the state. The system of state-pensions has not so far been adequately explored in modern scholarship, which makes it difficult to form a precise idea of its working. It appears nevertheless that besides regular allowances to a rather large number of people in the holy cities, and probably only to the select elsewhere, sums of money were frequently distributed to benefit a wide base of religious life. The ʿAbbāsids had inherited the institution of the *ʿatā'* from the Umayyads.[127] Its operation had probably been more extensive, and its beneficiaries more numerous, under the latter; and not much is, in any case, heard of institution-

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[125] For this tradition and its variants see, for instance, Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, II, pp. 230, 365; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, II, p. 774 (nr. 2308); Ibn ʿAdī, *Ḍuʿafā'*, I, p. 222; al-Kindī, *al-Quḍāt*, p. 471; *TB*, VI, p. 151; and, most elaborately, Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, I, pp. 7–13.

[126] For the "*man juʿila qāḍiyan . . .*" tradition, such individuals include: ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Ābān (d. 207/822–3), *qāḍī* of Wāsit (Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, I, p. 12; on him, see *TB*, X, pp. 442–47); Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Taymī (d. 250/864), *qāḍī* of Basra (*TB*, VI, p. 151; on him, ibid., pp. 150–52); Ismāʿīl b. Isḥāq (d. 282/895) (Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, p. 9; on him, *TB*, VI, pp. 284–90); and perhaps others. Another terrifying tradition on the perils the *qāḍī* is exposed to features Muʿādh b. Jabal (d. 17–18/638–39), the Prophet's Companion who is said to have been sent as *qāḍī* to Yemen, and Shurayh (d. 78/697), the legendary *qāḍī* of ʿUmar I (Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, I, pp. 19f.; on Shurayḥ cf. Tyan, *L'Organisation*,[1] I, pp. 101ff.). Sharīk b. ʿAbdallāh (d. 187/803; on him, *TB*, IX, pp. 279–95) appears in variants of the tradition which states that two out of every three *qadī*s are in hell (Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, I, pp. 13f.; on Sharīk, see ibid., III, pp. 149–75); and ʿĪsā b. Hilāl al-Ṣāliḥī, a third century(?) *qāḍī* of Ḥimṣ figures in the *isnād* of a tradition which states that "after the judge (*ḥakam*) has died, every legal decision of his is presented to him in his grave; and if any anomaly (*khilāf*) is found, then he is beaten [so hard] with an iron rod that his grave coughs!" (Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, I, pp. 31f.; on this *qāḍī*, see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, VIII, p. 226 (nr. 418), and cf. ibid., p. 236). The foregoing notes are meant not to dismiss the significance of these traditions, but only to point out that their existence did not necessarily make people averse to occupying the position of the judge, and further, that one must be wary of generalizing about commonly held attitudes on the basis of such traditions.

[127] For a study of the *ʿaṭā'*, and related matters, in the Ḥijāz in the Rāshidūn, Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid periods, see Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad al-ʿAlī, *al-Ḥijāz fī ṣadr al-Islām* (Beirut, 1990), pp. 379–434; Khalīl ʿAthāmina, "al-Abʿād al-ijtimāʿiyya waʾl-siyāsiyya lī dīwān al-ʿaṭā'", *JSAI*, XIV (1991), pp. 1–39.

alized *'aṭā'* after the time of Hārūn al-Rashīd.[128] The early 'Abbāsids do appear, however, to have made much more of their pious munificence than their predecessors had.

The caliph's visit to a town may have brought with it the hope of monetary assistance to religious scholars and doubtless to many others; it may therefore have been eagerly awaited for this, if for no other reason. Hārūn al-Rashīd, for instance, is reported to have distributed 2000 dirhams each among the (leading?) *qurrā'* of Kufa on one of his visits there.[129] The display of largesse was often most spectacular on the occasion of caliphal visits to the holy cities of the Hijaz. All classes of people, not just the religious circles, benefitted there from a munificence which was plainly calculated to have massive demonstrative effect. Eighty thousand (*sic*!) inhabitants of Medina reportedly received al-Mahdī's *'aṭā'* in the year 164/780–81.[130] Of those entitled, the Banū Hāshim received the highest stipend; then followed, respectively, the Quraysh in general, the Anṣār, the other Arabs, and finally the *mawālī*.[131] Some of the Medinese considered this caliph's munificence in Medina tangible proof that he was truly the promised redeemer—the Mahdī. In his own way, Hārūn too made a mark on popular imagination—and thus on historical memory—with his monetary patronage. His visits to the holy cities were frequent, and must have been accompanied by gestures of munificence. The caliphal visit of the year 186/802 was particularly memorable, however: the settlement of royal succession was solemnized on this occasion, and to mark the event the people of Medina were awarded not one but three lavish *'aṭā'*'s, one each from the caliph and his two designated successors.[132] A special feature of the caliph's pious munificence on this occasion was the grant of allowances to 500 leading Medinese *mawālī* (*wujūh mawālī al-Madīna*), at least some of whom must have been prominent in religious life.[133]

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[128] al-'Alī, *al-Ḥijāz*, p. 416.

[129] *TB*, VIII, p. 352.

[130] al-Zubayr b. Bakkār, *Jamhara*, I, p. 111 (nr. 216); *TB*, XIII, p. 194 (nr. 7172); al-'Alī, *Ḥijāz*, p. 412.

[131] al-Zubayr b. Bakkār, *Jamhara*, p. 111 (nr. 216); al-'Alī, *Ḥijāz*, p. 412.

[132] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 762f.; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma (Leiden, 1883, reprinted 1969), II, p. 501; al-'Alī, *Ḥijāz*, pp. 414, 419.

[133] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 762f. al-Ṭabarī mentions three of the *mawālī* who received the highest payments (*sharaf al-'aṭā'*): Yaḥyā b. Miskīn, Abū 'Uthmān, and Mikhrāq (or Mukhāriq) the *mawlā* of Banū Tamīm. The first two are not described further, while Mikhrāq is said to have been a Qur'ān-reader.

The caliphs are also known to have occasionally sent sums of money to one of the scholars for distribution among the rest. al-Mahdī is reported to have sent 30,000 dirhams to Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776) of Basra to distribute the money there.[134] Manṣūr b. al-Mahdī,[135] a son of the caliph al-Mahdī who briefly served as al-Maʾmūn's representative in Baghdad after the civil war, was, for his part, "fond of *ḥadīth* and of those specializing in it. Yazīd b. Hārūn al-Wāsiṭī was a companion of his (*ṣāḥibuhu*). He used to send amounts of money to . . . [Yazīd], who then distributed them among the *muḥaddithūn* and the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*."[136] al-Maʾmūn, on one occasion, sent 50,000 dirhams to Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī (d. 215/830), a Ḥanafī jurist of Basra, to have the amount distributed among the *fuqahāʾ* of the town. Significantly, there is no indication here of any reluctance to accept this royal gift. This report speaks rather of rivalry among the local religious circles that wished to benefit from this grant and feared they might be excluded from it by rivals.[137]

Scholars who were beneficiaries of the patronage of caliphs or that of the leading functionaries of the state include some very illustrious names of the early ʿAbbāsid period. al-Layth b. Saʿd has already been mentioned as one such scholar. Ibn Abī Dhiʾb's asceticism, or his much admired ability to admonish the caliphs undaunted, does not seem to have prevented his acceptance of caliphal gifts, if only to redistribute them among the needy.[138] The Kufan *ḥadīth*-scholars Abū Bakr b. ʿAyyāsh and Wakīʿ b. al-Jarrāḥ were both given much money by Hārūn al-Rashīd.[139] The respected Murjiʾite traditionist from

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[134] *TB*, IX, p. 256 (nr. 4830). On Shuʿba, see ibid., IX, pp. 255–66.

[135] See on him, ibid., XIII, p. 82 (nr. 7055).

[136] Ibid., XIII, p. 82. The designations "*al-muḥaddithūn*" and "*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*" apparently refer to the same people. Note that Yazīd, besides being a prominent traditionist and Qurʾān-commentator, was also the imām of a mosque in Wasit. (Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn, *Taʾrikh*, IV, p. 391, nr. 4936). That position may have made him especially suited to disburse funds among fellow scholars. Money might also be distributed among scholars (and others) through the *qāḍī*. See ibid., III, pp. 306f. (nr. 1456) where the Kūfan *qāḍī* Ibn Shubruma (d. 144/761) reports that he offered a monthly allowance of 100 dirhams to one Jarīr b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Rāzī but the latter declined. The money apparently came from funds earmarked for the *qurrāʾ*: cf. ibid., III, p. 307 (nr. 1457).

[137] *TB*, V, p. 409 (nr. 2920).

[138] Cf. ibid., II, pp. 296–305 (nr. 787), esp. pp. 298, 305.

[139] Ibid., XIV, p. 375 (nr. 7698). On Wakīʿ, see above. On Abū Bakr b. ʿAyyāsh, see ibid., XIV, pp. 371–85 (nr. 7698), especially p. 375, where Mūsā b. ʿĪsā, the governor of Kūfa, once introduces him to a companion as "*faqīh al-fuqahāʾ waʾl-raʾs ʿinda ahl al-miṣr* [sc. Kūfa]". Also cf. al-Kindī, *Quḍāt*, p. 443, where Abū Bakr b. ʿAyyāsh is stated to have been one of those from whom a scholar heard "*al-ʿilm . . . fī dār al-Rashīd*". The

Khurasan Ibrāhīm b. Ṭahmān (d. 163/780) received a regular pension from the state, as the Basran traditionist 'Affān b. Muslim al-Ṣaffār (d. 220/835) also did.[140] We know about the latter fact because al-Ma'mūn threatened to, and eventually probably did, discontinue it for 'Affān's reticence on the question of the Qur'ān's createdness. Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767) had written his *Sīra* of the Prophet under the patronage of al-Manṣūr,[141] while al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823), no less illustrious a scholar of the Prophet's life and career, was to serve as *qāḍī* for Hārūn al-Rashīd and later for al-Ma'mūn.[142] Abū Yūsuf, the Ḥanafī chief *qāḍī*, wrote, as is well-known, his *Kitāb al-kharāj* for Hārūn al-Rashīd; but a massive *Kitāb al-jawāmi'* is also attributed to him, which he is said to have compiled for the celebrated wazīr Yaḥyā b. Khālid b. Barmak.[143] Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/838) seems to have been as versatile in his specializations—Arabic grammar and literature, *ḥadīth*, Qur'ānic exegesis, *fiqh*—as he was in his patrons. The latter included three governors: Harthama b. A'yan, whose sons he tutored; Thābit b. Naṣr b. Mālik al-Khuzā'ī, for whom he served as *qāḍī* of Ṭarasūs for nearly eighteen years (192/808–209/824); and 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir. Ibn Sallām is also said to have written his *Kitāb gharīb al-ḥadīth* for the caliph Ma'mūn.[144] al-Mutawakkil's patronage of some of the leading proto-Sunnī scholars of the age has already been mentioned. In short, as Shu'ba is remembered to have said, "all, except a few, of those from whom *ḥadīth* is reported used to receive *'aṭā'*".[145] The context indicates that Shu'ba had the Umayyad

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other two scholars named here are Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan (al-Shaybānī) and 'Īsā b. Yūnus.

[140] Ibrāhīm b. Ṭahmān: *TB*, VI, p. 110 (nr. 3143); 'Affān b. Muslim: ibid., XII, p. 271 (nr. 6715).

[141] Yāqūt, *Irshād al-arīb ilā ma'rifat al-adīb*, ed. D.S. Margoliouth (London, 1923–31), VI, p. 399; cf. *TB*, I, pp. 220f. (nr. 51); Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 287f.; Sellheim, "Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte". The following comment of Ibn 'Adī, *Ḍu'afā'*, VI, p. 112, is also worth quoting here for showing how someone known to have been associated with the 'Abbāsids may have been viewed by some at least of the piety-minded: "Even if there were no other grounds for the superiority of Ibn Isḥāq than that he turned the monarchs (*mulūk*) away from useless books and had them occupy themselves with the *maghāzī* of the Prophet of God, the beginnings of the creation (*mubtada' al-khalq*), and the Prophet's mission (*mab'ath*), that would be sufficient excellence for [him] . . . to surpass [others] . . ."

[142] Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, V, pp. 425–33; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 111; Wakī', *Akhbār*, III, pp. 270f.; *TB*, III, pp. 4, 19 (nr. 939).

[143] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 257.

[144] *TB*, XII, p. 408 (nr. 6868); al-Marzubānī, *Nūr al-qabas*, pp. 314–16.

[145] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-'ilal wa ma'rifat al-rijāl*, ed. Waṣī Allāh b. Muḥammad 'Abbās (Beirut, 1988), I, p. 379 (nr. 732).

period in mind; but the statement provides a precedent for the acceptance of pensions from the state, and may have been intended for precisely that purpose.

Yet, there always were those who would have nothing to do with the caliphs' gifts. In a rather tendentious account, the traditionists Sufyān b. ʿUyayna and ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām (d. 211/827) are shown as having their debts relieved by the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, while the ascetic Fuḍayl b. ʿIyāḍ (d. 187/802) stoutly refuses the caliph's largesse despite his need for it.[146] Fuḍayl evidently thought that the caliphs had no right to the money they dispensed. Another anecdote has him say as much to Sufyān b. ʿUyayna: "if [the money] were lawful for them it would have been lawful for me [too]".[147] That such attitudes of pious scruples are singled out suggests, however, that they were unusual. The same anecdote which explains Fuḍayl's refusal again mentions Sufyān's acceptance of the royal gift; and Fuḍayl, in any case, was an ascetic. Yet, according to this anecdote at least, Fuḍayl did go to al-Rashīd; and even as he turned down the caliph's largesse, he addressed him with the pious admonishments (*waʿẓ*) the caliphs found so congenial to their public image. Needless to say, the caliph wept. For Hārūn al-Rashīd, Fuḍayl's willingness to assist him do that much may have been good enough.

The scholars who have been mentioned in the foregoing, and others we shall subsequently encounter, included traditionists and jurists, Ḥanafīs and those opposed to them, mystics and judges, reputable scholars and disreputable ones, not to mention several who can barely be identified. Different centres of religious scholarship—Medina, Kufa, Basra, Damascus, Egypt, and Baghdad—are all represented here, complete with their peculiarities and mutual rivalries. These scholars belong to various, often competing, groups. Yet, as argued earlier, there are certain trends, certain attitudes, which do suggest an evolving consensus among precisely these different, and often bitterly differing, scholars. Despite the many rivalries among traditionists, all acknowledged the authority of *ḥadīth*;[148] the schools of law too in-

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[146] Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya*, VIII, pp. 105–08. On ʿAbd al-Razzāq, the compiler of one of the earliest extant *ḥadīth*-collections, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 99; H. Motzki, "The *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī as a Source of Authentic *aḥādīth* of the first century A.H.", *JNES*, L (1991), pp. 1–21. On Fuḍayl, see Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya*, VIII, pp. 84–139; Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 636.

[147] al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. C. Pellat (Beirut, 1965–79), IV, pp. 215f.

[148] Cf. the mutual rivalries and jealousies of 2nd century traditionists, though these

creasingly modified their methods of reasoning to accomodate that authority, or their methods to it. The way these scholars viewed the early history of Islam also had much in common: all agreed that the Companions of the Prophet were virtuous men, that Abū Bakr and 'Umar were legitimate caliphs. Some held all four of the Prophet's first successors to have been legitimate caliphs, others only the first three; and the Kufan *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* gave precedence to 'Alī over 'Uthmān. Yet these differences, significant as they were, can scarcely be regarded as quite as momentous as those which separated all these scholars from the Shī'a (or Rāfiḍa, in the parlance of these scholars), who did not recognize any of the first caliphs except 'Alī, or who considered the early community to have gone astray and as persisting in its error. Almost all of these scholars, moreover, had come to espouse political quietism, and, as I shall argue further in the following chapter, a favourable attitude towards the ruling house. Together with a certain willingness of many of them to benefit from the patronage of the ruling house, and for all their mutual conflicts, there was much that these scholars shared with one another. Broadly speaking, it is possible, then, not only to characterize these scholars as proto-Sunnīs but also to describe 'Abbāsid patronage as supporting those who espoused proto-Sunnī viewpoints. The promise of royal patronage may, furthermore, have brought the viewpoints espoused by these scholars closer to one another even as it may have exacerbated the competition among these scholars for the favour of a patron.[149]

IV.4.3

Visits by scholars to the caliphal court, several instances of which have been mentioned earlier, were—apart from other aspects of their importance—also occasions when the caliph's patronage of the 'ulamā' found expression. Not long after its foundation, Baghdad had become the centre of the religious and cultural life of the empire. Scholars from all over visited the capital. Many came to the capital on more than one occasion; some never left. For many of those who came there, the hope of caliphal patronage may not have been any less

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were hardly limited to Baghdād alone (Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, p. 165 and n. 9); nor could such jealousies have been peculiar only to the traditionists.

[149] Also cf. T. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 45, for some suggestive speculation on the early 'Abbāsids' sponsoring among scholars "a consensus which they could then control".

important than the desire to make the acquaintance of fellow scholars.

Among the numerous scholars who visited Baghdad, several are expressly stated to have been invited or summoned by the caliphs, or they are reported to have visited the caliphs while in Baghdad.[150] Many of those who came to the capital were also appointed to judicial and administrative positions.[151] Whether they were part of the caliph's entourage or his administration, such scholars were the typical recipients of caliphal patronage. It is hardly far-fetched to suppose that, apart from narrating *ḥadīth* at the court and in the mosque, and perhaps participating in other activities, these scholars would have kept the caliph informed of developments in the political and religious life of the regions they came from. Moreover, given that there was no institutionalized mechanism for the recruitment of officials in the administrative and judicial bureaucracies, the opinion of scholars visiting the caliph may have mattered considerably—and might even have been an informal mechanism—in identifying the people of a given city or province who ought to be appointed, say, as judges.[152] Anecdotes which depict the caliph insisting that if a given scholar would not himself serve in the administration then he must recommend someone who ought to, are to be interpreted in this light.[153]

Visits by scholars may also be taken as occasions when the caliph would not only seek to ascertain the scholar's commitment to his regime, but also to demonstrate the regime's commitment to Islam—and to the scholar as a representative of it. The caliph's interest in the religious sciences, especially in *ḥadīth*, his acting as a veritable scholar in his own right, was one aspect of such a demonstration; bestowing lavish material favours on the scholar visiting his court was doubtless another. The scholars' visits to the caliphal court may, in fact, be regarded as a more or less institutionalized medium of royal

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[150] For some random examples, see *TB*, II, p. 296 (nr. 787); III, p. 305 (nr. 1397); VI, p. 221 (nr. 3276); VIII, p. 266 (nr. 4365); IX, pp. 274f. (nr. 4836); XIII, p. 428 (nr. 7304); Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, I, p. 122 (nr. 216).

[151] The manner in which Ibn Sa'd describes many of such visits to Baghdād and a said scholar's appointment seems to posit a causal link between the two: see, for instance, *Ṭabaqāt*, VII, p. 323, on Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Ulātha: "*fa-qadima Baghdād fa-wallāhu al-Mahdī al-qaḍā' bi-'Askar al-Mahdī*". For other instances, see ibid., VII, pp. 327, 328, 329, 331, 332.

[152] The early 'Abbāsid caliphate was more like Rome during the Principate, where "emperors relied on a network of private connections to bring leading candidates to their attention", than the Chinese or Ottoman empires with their highly formalized systems of recruiting the administrative elite. See Saller, *Personal Patronage*, p. 205.

[153] Cf. Fasawī, *al-Ma'rifa*, II, pp. 441f.

patronage. Reports that many an *'ālim* was strongly opposed to such visits need not be a projection of later attitudes, however; it was precisely because the 'ulamā''s visits to the court were so common and frequent that those critical of this practice had to voice their opposition so loudly.

That numerous scholars were attracted or specially invited to Baghdad, and settled there or visited it several times, had important consequences.[154] It was a place to seek patrons, as already noted, and the caliph was not the only one to act as such. Members of the 'Abbāsid family, leading functionaries of the government, and not least, prominent 'ulamā' had their own circles of patronage. The fervour of Baghdad's intellectual life was not simply due to the presence there of very distinguished scholars from all over; it must also have owed something to the desire motivating many a scholar to outshine others and thus create the maximum effect on prospective patrons.

Precisely because Baghdad attracted so many scholars, there was, as van Ess has pointed out, a "brain-drain" elsewhere: by the beginning of the 3rd century, Basra, Kufa, and other previously prominent centres of learning had lost their importance to Baghdad. Secondly, van Ess notes, there was a "levelling" (*Nivellierung*) of theological differences in Baghdad: in being transported there, these differences lost some of their meaning and much of the intensity which had characterized them in their original milieux. It was in this climate of religious moderation that an "orthodoxy" evolved.[155]

Yet moderation, insofar as there was such, meant anything but indifference towards religious trends. As seen in the foregoing, the caliphs, and the ruling elite in general, were conspicuously supporting certain individuals rather than others, particular religious trends to the exclusion of others. These individuals and trends normally represented some shade of the emergent proto-Sunnism. We need not try to decide which trend within proto-Sunnism received greater favour: that question is probably unanswerable, not only for dearth of evidence but also because the boundaries between proto-Sunnī groups were, for all the self-perception of particular individuals among them,

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[154] "It is indeed striking", as Michael Cook has observed, "that Umayyad capital cities had exercised no comparable pull; Zuhrī, who divided his time between his native Ḥijāz and the political centre in Syria, was the exception rather than the rule, and even he was a long-range commuter rather than a migrant." Review of van Ess, *Th&G*, III, in *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, LII (1995), col. 179.

[155] Van Ess, *Th&G*, III, pp. 29f. The term "brain-drain" is van Ess'.

in fact neither always clear nor stable. It was typical for the early caliphs to patronize individuals rather than particular schools or groups, as van Ess has observed,[156] which means, for instance, that while many Ḥanafīs were patronized, so too were scholars of other persuasions. Yet, as I have tried to show, these persuasions do nevertheless fall within, rather than beyond, the purview of what I have defined as the evolving proto-Sunnism.

IV.5

While a considerable number of religious scholars must have depended on the caliph's patronage, there also were those who were sufficiently well-endowed to act as patrons in their own right. They did not act as patrons of fellow-scholars alone; but irrespective of whether the circle of patronage was wide or narrow, scholars were often to be found in it. The Basran Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj was characterized by a contemporary as "the father and mother of the poor".[157] The Egyptian al-Layth b. Saʿd was as famous for assisting the indigent as he was for the patronage of fellow-scholars. Among the latter, his beneficiaries included the Khurāsānī mystic Manṣūr b. ʿAmmār, the Egyptian *qāḍī* ʿAbdallāh b. Lahīʿa and the Medinese jurist Mālik b. Anas.[158] A Wāsiṭī scholar, Khālid b. ʿAbdallāh al-Ṭaḥḥān (d. 179/795 or 182/798), is reported—on the authority of Ibn Ḥanbal—to have "bought himself from God four times, by giving away silver equal to his own weight as charity on four occasions."[159] Of another *ḥadīth*-scholar, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb b. ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Thaqafī, it was said that he would spend all his considerable annual revenues on the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*.[160]

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[156] Ibid., III, pp. 9f.

[157] *TB*, IX, p. 261 (nr. 4830). Cf. the bishop's role and rhetoric in Late Antiquity as the "lover of the poor": Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (Madison, 1992), pp. 89ff. Cf. ibid., p. 96: "We do not know, region by region, what the Christian Church actually did for the poor in the cities of the late empire. What we do know, from our evidence, is how the care of the poor became a dramatic component of the Christian representation of the bishop's authority in the community."

[158] See Khoury, "al-Layth b. Saʿd", p. 193. For other instances of al-Layth's patronage, see Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn, *al-Taʾrīkh*, IV, p. 476; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-majrūḥīn*, ed. ʿAzīz Baig al-Qādirī (Haydarabad, 1970–77), II, pp. 33f.

[159] *TB*, VIII, p. 294 (nr. 4397); also cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-ʿIlal*, I, p. 434 (nr. 968). Comparing Khālid to Sufyān al-Thawrī, a scholar is said to have remarked: "Sufyān was his own man (*rajul nafsihi*) while Khālid was a man of the people (*rajul ʿāmma*)": *TB*, VIII, p. 294.

[160] *TB*, XI, p. 20 (nr. 5687).

Muḥammad b. Sallām b. Faraj (d. 227/841) claimed to have "spent 40,000 (dirhams?) in seeking knowledge and a similar amount in disseminating it";[161] Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn's father is supposed to have left him a legacy of a million and fifty thousand dirhams "all of which he spent on *ḥadīth*."[162]

Such figures, which biographical dictionaries delight in quoting, can hardly inspire much confidence. Yet if such claims are made with reference to barely more than a handful of scholars, the likelihood is that we are dealing with exaggerated figures but not a *topos*. The basic contention of such reports is important: the availability of extensive monetary resources *is recognized* to have played a part in the making of particular scholars, as is the part they played in financially contributing to the academic development of others. Spending money on the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* did not only signify entering into relations of patronage with them; it could also mean paying their fees to induce them to teach or narrate *ḥadīth* to their prospective student(s).[163] Traditionists were often unwilling to share their knowledge without remuneration.[164] This explains the afore-mentioned Shu'ba's complaint that "he who seeks *ḥadīth* becomes poor".[165] If, then, the quest for *ḥadīth*, and the decision to become an *'ālim* or a *muḥaddith* could be an expensive one, it was all the more important to patronize those who intended to adopt such a vocation.

Though little work has been done on the processes involved in the production and "publication" of books in early Islam, it can scarcely be doubted that these too would have required monetary resources which all scholars are unlikely to have possessed.[166] The same is true of acquiring books, only more so. al-Wāqidī's financial straits and his desperate (but eventually successful) search for a patron, so

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[161] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, IX, p. 212 (nr. 333).

[162] Ibid., XI, p. 282 (nr. 561).

[163] See, for instance, *TB*, XI, p. 447 (nr. 6348).

[164] On some of those who charged fees for narrating *ḥadīth* see al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Kifāya fī 'ilm al-riwāya*, ed. A. Hāshim (Beirut, 1986), pp. 187f.; on the dislike of many others to accept payment for *ḥadīth* see ibid., pp. 184ff.

[165] Ibn 'Adī, *Ḍu'afā'*, I, p. 70. To Shu'ba, otherwise "the father and mother of the poor", is also attributed the advice not to accept traditions from the poor, "for they will lie to you" (Ibn 'Adī, *Ḍu'afā'*, I, p. 67.); that is, they would be more concerned with the material gain involved in narrating *ḥadīth* than in the authenticity of their materials.

[166] H.Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A history of early Christian texts* (New Haven, 1995) suggestively addresses this (see p. 120) and many related issues with reference to the first centuries of Christianity. For early Islam, see Norman Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 161–97.

poignantly described by his *kātib*, Ibn Sa'd,[167] contrasts tellingly with reports that he bequeathed a library which, according to Nabia Abbott, was larger than that of any other scholar of the 2nd/8th century.[168] It is probably not unreasonable to suppose that the monetary patronage of Yaḥyā b. Khālid al-Barmakī and al-Ma'mūn that al-Wāqidī enjoyed (not to mention his position as *qāḍī*, itself a form of patronage) may not only have helped him relieve his debts,[169] but also to acquire his huge library, and, not least, to act as a patron in his own right.[170] Abbott has collected much evidence on the libraries of several other scholars too, among them Mālik b. Anas, 'Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām, Ibn Lahī'a, Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn, 'Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak, Ibn Ḥanbal, and many others.[171] These libraries obviously required considerable monetary resources, and it is surely not fortuitous that many of these scholars are known to have been the recepients, directly or indirectly, of the patronage of the ruling elite and/or of fellow scholars.

Many an aspirant to membership in the 'ulamā''s community would, in short, have needed financial assistance to *become* a scholar, and after that as well; it was from the state or from a more fortunate colleague that such assistance would probably have been expected to come. 'Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), once criticized for spending money on people of other lands while neglecting those of his own, is said to have remarked:

> I know the position of a people of virtue and truth who are [engaged] in the pursuit of *ḥadīth* and have excelled in that pursuit. They have become needy on account of the need of the people [for their vocation]. So if we abandon them, they would perish; but if we provide for them, they would [be able to] spread knowledge in the community of Muḥammad. I do not know of anything after prophethood [itself] which is superior to the dissemination of knowledge.[172]

Reports about the affluence of particular scholars sometimes also give clues, perhaps unwittingly, to where the wealth may have come from.

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[167] Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, V, pp. 425–33.

[168] Abbott, *Papyri*, II, p. 51; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 111.

[169] Wakī', *Akhbār*, III, pp. 270f. (Yaḥyā al-Barmakī's patronage); al-Marzubānī, *Nūr al-qabas al-mukhtaṣar min al-muqtabas*, ed. R. Sellheim (Wiesbaden, 1964), pp. 311f. (al-Ma'mūn's patronage).

[170] Ibid., pp. 311f.

[171] Abbott, *Papyri*, II, pp. 50ff. On Ibn Lahī'a's library, also see R.F. Khoury, *'Abd Allāh ibn Lahī'a* (Wiesbaden, 1986), pp. 27–36.

[172] *TB*, X, p. 160 (nr. 5306); also cf. T. Nagel, *Rechtleitung und Kalifat* (Bonn, 1975), p. 267. On Ibn al-Mubārak, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 95.

Many of the scholars who were able to act as patrons in their own right are themselves occasionally mentioned as beneficiaries of state patronage. Shu'ba, the "father and mother of the poor", for instance, has already been seen to have disbursed money on the caliph's behalf. The monetary help which al-Layth b. Sa'd was able to extend to others may have owed something to the patronage of three successive caliphs that he enjoyed. Wakī' b. al-Jarrāḥ is said to have inherited a hundred thousand (dirhams?) from his mother;[173] his father, it is also reported, had been in charge of the *bayt al-māl* for Hārūn.[174] The sources make no effort to relate these two pieces of information, and they do not, after all, have any necessary connection; conversely, it does not require much imagination to suspect that the two things were somehow related. The father of Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn, who left a million and fifty thousand dirhams to the latter, had been in charge of the *kharāj* of Rayy;[175] and 'Abdallāh b. 'Uthmān b. Jabala (d. 221/835), who is said to have given away a million dirhams as charity during his lifetime, was the *qāḍī* of Jurjan for 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir.[176] The origins of these scholars' affluence, and, in some cases, their fathers' scruples, appear in a rather unfortunate light in such anecdotes (though nowhere is any awareness shown of that). Nevertheless, these anecdotes do once again suggest that in the making of certain prominent scholars, or in the latter's material contribution to the academic careers of others, resources derived from the state could have played an important part.

Ironically, perhaps, such resources may have enabled some scholars not only to devote themselves to the pursuit of learning, but also to enjoy a greater autonomy vis-à-vis the political authorities than might have otherwise been possible. Thus Wakī' b. al-Jarrāḥ, for instance, could afford to turn down a judicial appointment[177] and Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn could devote himself entirely to *ḥadīth*, whereas the fathers of both had worked in the caliphal administration. Sufyān al-Thawrī, that paragon of ascetic withdrawal from all that smacked of officialdom, had no doubt about the importance of financial independence: "In the past", he is quoted as saying, "wealth (*al-māl*) was considered

[173] *TB*, XIII, p. 469.
[174] Ibid., XIII, pp. 467f.; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, II, p. 67 (nr. 108: s.v. al-Jarrāḥ b. Malīḥ).
[175] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, XI, p. 282 (nr. 561).
[176] Ibid., V, pp. 313f. (nr. 535). He is described as "*imām ahl al-ḥadīth bi baladihi*": ibid., p. 314.
[177] Wakī', *Akhbār*, III, p. 184.

undesirable, but today it is the believer's shield (*turs*)."[178] That is, as he explains in another remark, "were it not for these dīnārs [for whose possession someone had reproached him], these rulers would wipe us out (*tamandala binā*)."[179] But then Sufyān was also insistent that scholars "not depend on [other] Muslims" but rather earn their own living (an indirect testimony, perhaps, to increasing scholarly specialization?).[180] The evidence of biographical dictionaries suggests that many scholars did not heed his advice. For those who did not have Sufyān's financial independence,[181] it would have certainly been hard to do so.

IV.6

The foregoing discussion has sketched early ʿAbbāsid patronage of the proto-Sunnī religious elite. Though the impact of that patronage is impossible to measure with any precision, the ʿulamāʾ could scarcely have failed to benefit from the prestige and influence which the wholehearted caliphal recognition of the importance of their vocation gave to them. The caliphs did not have to be motivated by "pure", "sincere", even "religious" considerations; many might have had their own reasons for the patronage of the ʿulamāʾ. But that is secondary. Of the first importance is the point that the ʿulamāʾ—the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ—would have had a sense that in constructing an "orthodoxy" they had the backing of the state, and that the caliph claimed not just to be committed to their world view but also to share in their activities. It did not matter much if the caliph's religious pronouncements were not above suspicion; or if the relationship of individual scholars with the state was sometimes less than idyllic. Apart from the interlude of the *Miḥna*, it was increasingly apparent that ʿAbbāsid interests could best be served in promoting the proto-Sunnī scholars and that the latter had much to gain from caliphal patronage. As I shall further argue in the following chapter, there was a certain convergence between the interests of the caliphs and the religious scholars, a convergence which makes ʿAbbāsid patronage of these scholars and of what they represented intelligible and meaningful.

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[178] Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya*, VI, p. 381.
[179] Ibid., VI, p. 381.
[180] Ibid., VI, p. 382.
[181] According to an anonymous report in Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, VI, p. 372, Sufyān had some money invested in the Yemen, the proceeds of which he received every year.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RHETORIC OF RELIGIOUS POLICIES

V.1

The early ʿAbbāsids were faced almost from the very beginning with the challenge of establishing their legitimacy on bases very different from those on which their revolutionary propaganda had been conducted. They had to distance themselves from Shīʿism and all that it signified in its various forms, develop new foundations for their rule, and acquire both new allies and a new image for themselves. Why the pursuit of these purposes should have drawn them to proto-Sunnī scholars is at least partially understandable in terms of some of the factors we have discussed earlier. The proto-Sunnī scholars had gradually come to adopt a quietist political standpoint, for instance, which obviously accorded with ʿAbbāsid interests. As proto-Sunnī and Shīʿite trends evolved, moreover, the scholars associated with them became not just increasingly distant from but often hostile towards each other. It is conceivable that the caliphs would have seen in the patronage of the proto-Sunnīs the means of countering the ideological challenge of the ʿAlids. Despite their self-conscious divergence from other religious trends, however, proto-Sunnī scholars themselves represented a number of competing orientations and attitudes, which means that the patronage of these scholars could also allow the caliphs to appeal to broader segments of society than would have otherwise been possible. The caliphs' much vaunted interest in *ḥadīth* and the religious sciences, an expression of their religious rhetoric and of their quest for an "orthodox" image, likewise led them to the patronage of the scholars of *ḥadīth*, and the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ generally. Such patronage was after all one more expression of their commitment to the *sunna* and an affirmation of their link, both personal and religious, with the Prophet, who was not only the source of this normative tradition but also their most distinguished kinsman.

It is tempting to suppose that early ʿAbbāsid patronage of the proto-Sunnīs may also have had something to do with the perception that the latter enjoyed popular support. In his day, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868–9)

had observed that the ʿUthmāniyya are "more numerous in numbers and have the most *faqīh*s and *muḥaddith*s".[1] A generation later, Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) claimed popular support for the *ahl al-ḥadīth*: "If someone advocates the doctrines of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* . . . in assemblies . . . [of the people] and their markets, no one will be [seen as] opposed or averse to them; but if someone were to advocate what the *aṣḥāb al-kalām* believe, which is opposed . . . [to the consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*], it would cost him his life."[2] Such evidence, which dates from the middle of the third/ninth century, is impressive; but we must not exaggerate its import. It is not certain whether the *ʿāmma* of al-Maʾmūn's age should necessarily be equated with the proto-Sunnīs, nor whether a caliph would have been much concerned to appeal to the *ʿāmma* even if they should.[3] That proto-Sunnī scholars wielded increasing influence in society may well have been perceptible to at least some of the caliphs. Yet, it is rather unlikely that early ʿAbbāsid patronage of the proto-Sunnīs owed to nothing more than the perception that the latter were in the ascendant. For, in that case, the caliphs' patronage would have had to wait till the middle of the third/ninth century to be certain of the proto-Sunnī ascendancy.

The mere diversity of the likely reasons which underlay ʿAbbāsid patronage suggests that we should be wary of identifying any one of them as *the* reason explaining the phenomenon in question. This variety of factors should also alert us not to assume too readily, or rigidly, that the early ʿAbbāsids *had* to align themselves with the proto-Sunnī religious trends. Crone and Hinds argue, for instance, that Prophetic *sunna*, as a concept, had become so strong in early ʿAbbāsid times that the caliphs had no alternative but "to toe the line".[4] The Prophet's *sunna* is rather unlikely to have single-handedly achieved that much. Even if it did, it is crucial to view the ʿAbbāsid relationship with the *sunna* in the perspective not just of what this concept could have done

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[1] al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-ʿUthmāniyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo, 1955), p. 176.

[2] Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth* (Cairo, 1326 A.H.), p. 20.

[3] According to Ibn Ḥibbān, "al-Mutawakkil revealed [his] love of the *sunna* and [his] inclination towards it; . . . he raised the standing of the scholars (*shaʾn ahl al-ʿilm*) . . . *so that the hearts of the people (al-ʿawām) turned towards him.*" Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-thiqāt* (Haydarabad, 1973–82), II, p. 330, emphasis added. Yet al-Mutawakkil was probably as wary of the riotous rabble as al-Maʾmūn may have been: al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk*, ed. M.J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879–1901), III, p. 1413.

[4] P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 80ff.; the quotation is from p. 90.

to the caliphs' religious authority but also of the use to which they put the Prophet's *sunna* and *ḥadīth*. With the exception of al-Ma'mūn, however, the 'Abbāsids do not seem to have claimed religious authority over and above, still less against, the 'ulamā', so they are unlikely to have been affected adversely by the crystallization of the concept, and authority, of the Prophet's *sunna*. If anything, it was precisely by upholding that authority, demonstrating their own competence in *ḥadīth*, and patronizing its scholars that the caliphs were able to construct their religious image.

The various factors recapitulated above have considerable explanatory value. Yet the picture that they help to draw is still far from complete. In moving towards a clearer view of the problem, it is important also to realize that by the end of the first century of 'Abbāsid rule, there was a prominent, and probably quite influential, stream of pro-'Abbāsid sentiment among the proto-Sunnī scholars. This sentiment seems to have owed not a little to 'Abbāsid patronage. But it may also have been the consequence of some of the proto-Sunni viewpoints then developing. The latter reveal on examination a potential to safeguard, even promote 'Abbāsid interests, and/or indicate a certain convergence with those interests. Some of the implications of these viewpoints not only suggest another reason why the 'Abbāsids may have been drawn to the proto-Sunnīs but also why many of the latter gradually became pro-'Abbāsid.

V.2. *A Convergence of Interest*

V.2.1.a

As noted earlier in this study, it was with much hesitation that the *ahl al-sunna* were to recognize the legitimacy of 'Alī's caliphate, and his position as one of the Rāshidūn.[5] Ibn Ḥanbal was one of those who promoted the rehabilitation of 'Alī, and did so for various reasons. Someone once said to him: "I am surprised, and so are my companions, that you regard 'Alī as one of the [legitimate] caliphs." If 'Alī's legitimacy is not recognized, Ibn Ḥanbal reasoned, "how do I come to terms with his statement, 'I am the Commander of the Faithful', and the fact that [in his lifetime] he was addressed as such?

[5] See II.3.1, above.

What about the *ḥajj* he conducted . . . the legal judgements (*al-aḥkām*) [he handed down and implemented], the prayers he led, the [penalties of] death and mutilation he meted out? Is all this to be ignored . . .?"[6] In other words, it was inconceivable that the Muslim community could have been presided over, and the institutes of Islam given effect, by someone who was himself devoid of legitimacy. Ibn Ḥanbal's are perhaps among the earliest explicit articulations of the historically continuous righteousness of the community, which was to be the classical Sunnī view on the matter. The significance of such a reasoning is that it left hardly a doubt that the same reasons for which ʿAlī was legitimate also vouched for the legitimacy of all those who succeeded him in the caliphal office. The ʿAbbāsids might resent that the *ahl al-sunna* took a rather favourable view of the Umayyads, but the terms of the doctrine gave no less of a legitimacy to the ʿAbbāsid caliphs themselves.

Another of Ibn Ḥanbal's arguments for the legitimacy of ʿAlī's caliphate, and indeed for his inclusion in the privileged company of the preceding Rāshidūn, took the form of adducing the alleged statement of the Prophet: "the caliphate after me will last for thirty years". This *ḥadīth* is one of the most interesting expressions of the *ahl al-sunna*'s political attitudes in the second/eighth century, in which it appears at some time to have originated. If Ibn Ḥanbal's sense of the significance of this tradition, or its direct relevance to the proto-Sunnīs, is any indication, it may be quite representative of the latter's world view. This tradition therefore deserves some discussion.[7]

The point that this *ḥadīth* makes, and which apparently is its *raison d'être*, is that the six years of ʿAlī's rule are part of the thirty-year life that the caliphate is supposed to have had after the death of the Prophet. The *ḥadīth* does not only assure to ʿAlī a share in the righteous caliphate, it also locates a "golden age" in the same period, and

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[6] al-Khallāl, *al-Musnad min masāʾil Abī ʿAbdallāh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal*, MS. British Library Or. 2675, fols. 67a–67b; cf. ibid., fols. 66a, 66b; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-sunna* (Mecca, 1349 A.H.), p. 214.

[7] For this tradition see Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-fitan* (MS. British Library, Or. 9449), ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Mecca, 1991; references are to the latter edition), pp. 57, 418f.; al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fols. 65b–66b, 67b; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Cairo, 1313 A.H.) V, pp. 220, 221; idem, *Kitāb al-sunna*, pp. 214ff.; Abū Zurʿa, *Taʾrīkh*, ed. Shukr Allāh al-Qūjānī (Damascus, 1980), I, p. 456 (nr. 1158); Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Kāmil fī ḍuʿafāʾ al-rijāl* (Beirut, 1988), III, p. 401, VII, pp. 248f., 256; al-Lālakāʾī, *Sharḥ uṣūl iʿtiqād ahl al-sunna waʾl-jamāʿa*, Aḥmad al-Ghāmidī (Riyaḍ, 1994), VIII, pp. 1469f., 1475f.; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya waʾl-nihāya*, ed. Aḥmad Abū Milḥim et al. (Beirut, 1987), VI, pp. 204f.

makes sure that the termination of this golden age is as clearly asserted as is the fact of its having once existed. That the "caliphate" ceased to exist with the death of ʿAlī could be taken to mean that the subsequent rulers were not really caliphs but only "kings", as in fact is clearly stated by some of the variants of this *ḥadīth*. But this was probably meant only to emphasize the moral distance separating the Rāshidūn caliphs from the subsequent rulers, not to deny the latter's legitimacy. The tradition could scarcely have been accepted by the *ahl al-sunna* if it was perceived to have the latter implication.

It is difficult to determine precisely when the thirty-year *ḥadīth*, as I propose to call it, originated. To Ibn Ḥanbal, it was both well-known and of irreproachable authenticity. No doubts at all were to be countenanced about this *ḥadīth*. Asked about those who did have reservations regarding it, Ibn Ḥanbal's answer was uncompromising: "This is evil and useless talk. Those [indulging in it] are to be shunned and boycotted, and people are to be warned against them."[8] He once also had a man removed from his *majlis* for expressing doubts about the reliability of Saʿīd b. Jumhān (d. 136/753–4), a transmitter of this *ḥadīth*.[9] Saʿīd b. Jumhān was a Basran who is supposed to have heard this tradition from Safīna, a *mawla* of the Prophet.[10] From Saʿīd the tradition was reported by Ḥammād b. Salama (d. 167/783), a well-known traditionist of Basra.[11] Some *rijāl*-critics had reservations about the reliability of either Saʿīd or Ḥammād, though for Ibn Ḥanbal both were reliable.[12] Ḥammād is also known to have transmitted pro-ʿUthmān traditions,[13] but it is for this *ḥadīth* about the thirty-year caliphate that he may have been best remembered. In some of Ibn Ḥanbal's more striking formulations, the questions of ʿAlī's caliphate and of Ḥammad's reliability are settled in the same breath, and almost as corollaries: "'ʿAlī is among the *rāshidīn al-mahdiyyīn* to us; and Ḥammād b. Salama is trustworthy (*thiqa*) for us. Each [passing] day only adds to [our]

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[8] "*Hādha kalām sūʾ radīʾ, yujānabūn hāʾūlāʾ al-qawm wa lā yujālasūn wa yubayyan amruhum liʾl-nās.*" al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 66b.

[9] al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 66b. On Saʿīd b. Jumhān, see Ibn ʿAdī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ*, III, pp. 401f.; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* (Haydarabad, 1325–27 A.H.), IV, p. 14 (nr. 15).

[10] On Safīna, see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, IV, p. 125 (nr. 212).

[11] On Ḥammād b. Salama, see Ibn ʿAdī, *Ḍuʿāfāʾ*, II, pp. 253–266; Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt*, VI, 216f.; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, III, pp. 11–16 (nr. 14).

[12] Cf. al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fols. 66a, 66b. Saʿīd b. Jumhān is also characterized as "*thiqa*" in al-Fasawī, *Kitāb al-maʿrifa waʾl-taʾrikh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿUmarī (Medina, 1410 A.H.), II, p. 128.

[13] al-ʿUqaylī, *Kitāb al-ḍuʿafāʾ al-kabīr*, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī Qalʿajī (Beirut, 1984), IV, p. 238 (nr. 1832).

insight (*baṣīra*) in him."[14] The suggestion at the end of this statement about a "growing" confidence in Ḥammād is probably no more than a rhetorical motif, but it may yet underscore the increasing importance of this *ḥadīth* for the proto-Sunnīs, even as it suggests Ḥammād's role in it. If Ḥammād was really so important to this *ḥadīth*, and the *ḥadīth* to the community in which it circulated, then it is understandable that later Sunnī scholars like Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī (d. 354/965), a traditionist and *rijāl*-critic of great eminence, were not prepared to countenance any criticism of Ḥammad: "There was no one like him among Ḥammād's contemporaries in Basra in his excellence, faith, knowledge, piety, his gathering and writing down [of traditions], and in his steadfastness in *sunna* and the curbing of the people of *bidʿa*; none but a *qadarī* or a Jahmī innovator slandered him, on account of the authentic *sunan* he used to disseminate (*kāna yuẓhir*), and which the Muʿtazila disapproved."[15] Ḥammād is a strong candidate for the origination of this tradition, but it is impossible to be certain; and there are other candidates too.

For the thirty-year *ḥadīth* does not have only a Basran *isnād*; several of its versions also express a Wāsiṭī connection. Thus it is the Wāsiṭī al-ʿAwwām b. Ḥawshab who frequently appears as transmitting it from the Basran Saʿīd b. Jumhān. From al-ʿAwwām, it is in turn transmitted by Hushaym b. Bashīr (d. 183/799), a Wāsiṭī *faqīh* and *muḥaddith*[16] or, rarely, by the Wāsiṭī al-Ḥajjāj b. Farrūkh.[17] al-ʿAwwām is said to have been one of those who "used to incite [the Umayyad troops/the people?] to fight [the ʿAbbāsids]" during the siege of Wasit,[18] and he was later a participant in the revolt of the ʿAlid Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbdallāh.[19] That he should have shifted his support from the Umayyads to the ʿAlids is as noticeable here as is his opposition to the ʿAbbāsids on both of these occasions. If he was involved in something more than merely passing this tradition on, might he have

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[14] al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 66a.

[15] Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Thiqāt*, VI, 216f. On Ibn Ḥibbān, see F. Sezgin, *GAS* (Leiden, 1967), I, pp. 189–91.

[16] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-sunna*, p. 215. On Hushaym, see Ibn ʿAdī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ*, VII, pp. 134–38; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* [hereafter *TB*] (Cairo, 1931), XIV, pp. 85–94 (nr. 7436); Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 38.

[17] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-sunna*, p. 215; on al-Ḥajjāj b. Farrūkh—a very unreliable traditionist—see Ibn ʿAdī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ*, II, p. 233.

[18] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, III, pp. 95f.

[19] al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1949), p. 377; and cf. ibid., p. 359.

done so as an expression of some lingering doubts about the legitimacy of the ʿAbbāsids? This question is unanswerable, though it is worth noting that Hushaym b. Bashīr, who transmitted this tradition from al-ʿAwwām, is also said to have participated in Ibrāhīm's revolt.[20] Whatever its provenance, however, or the political affiliations of those who circulated it, this tradition seems to have been intended to rehabilitate ʿAlī[21] *not* to delegitimize the ʿAbbāsids.[22] For to exclude the ʿAbbāsids from the "true" caliphate was to do the same to the Umayyads, which al-ʿAwwām, for one, if he still harboured some affection for the latter, may not have wanted, nor would the *ahl al-sunna* have accepted that position. On the other hand, some pro-ʿAlī sentiment, for which many Wāsiṭī scholars of the time are known[23] and which is specifically attested by the participation of both al-ʿAwwām and Hushaym in an ʿAlid revolt, means that the thirty-year tradition could have originated in these Wāsiṭī circles. Yet its provenance must for now remain an open question. Fortunately, however, that question does not have to be settled here in order to say something more about this tradition.

The significance of the thirty-year *ḥadīth* is brought out more fully when considered in conjunction with a famous tradition from Ibn ʿUmar, which, leaving aside many variant versions, may be rendered as follows: "While the Prophet was still alive and his Companions numerous, we used to reckon (*naʿudd*) Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān [as his successors/the best of men after him] and we used to stop at that."[24] This tradition is unambiguous in assuring not only Abū Bakr and ʿUmar but also ʿUthmān the distinction of being the Prophet's undisputed successors; but it has no place for ʿAlī, and his absence is made the more conspicuous by Ibn ʿUmarʿs specifically noting the

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[20] Ibid., pp. 359, 363, 377.

[21] Cf. T. Nagel, *Rechtleitung und Kalifat* (Bonn, 1975), p. 232.

[22] Note that Hushaym is also known to have narrated traditions extolling the religious standing of Ibn ʿAbbās: cf. al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa*, I, pp. 515f. He is also said to have narrated a tradition from Ibn ʿAbbās to al-Maʾmūn: al-Marzubānī, *Nūr al-qabas al-mukhtaṣar min al-muqtabas*, ed. R. Sellheim (Wiesbaden, 1964), p. 100.

[23] Cf. al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 60a, where the generality of the Wāsiṭīs is said to have been Shīʿīs (*wa kāna ʿāmmat ahl Wāsiṭ yatashayyaʿūn*). As the context makes clear, the "Shīʿism" in question here means not considering ʿUthmān to be superior to ʿAlī.

[24] al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fols. 56a, 58a, 58b, 60b–61a; al-Lālakāʾī, *Sharḥ*, VIII, pp. 1445–47; W. Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin, 1965), p. 225. As quoted here, this tradition has the following *isnād*: Abū Muʿāwiya [Muḥammad b. Khāzim?]—Suhayl b. Abī Ṣāliḥ—his father—Ibn ʿUmar (al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 58a).

Companions' practice of stopping their enumeration with 'Uthmān. Several variants of this tradition, as well as the discussions in which it is usually adduced, suggest that what is at issue here is not merely the historical "fact" of who succeeded whom (people would have been expected to know that already), but a reckoning of who were the "legitimate" caliphs and, no less, their ranking in terms of religious merit (*tafḍīl*).[25] Also at issue here is the denial of any suggestion—by the Kufan *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, for instance—that 'Alī was part of this select group, let alone that he was actually superior to 'Uthmān.[26] Ibn 'Umar's tradition, which does not even mention 'Alī, refutes such claims while ranking those it does name in a fixed order of merit.

Yet, the way Ibn Ḥanbal at least is said to have interpreted Ibn 'Umar's tradition, it does not exclude 'Alī from having been a legitimate caliph, but only from being equal, or superior, to his predecessors. "Asked about the man who does not give precedence to (*lā yufaḍḍil*) 'Uthmān over 'Alī, [Ibn Ḥanbal] said: ''Uthmān ought to be given precedence over 'Alī; there was no disagreement among the Companions of the Prophet [on this]. . . .' Then he said: '[Ibn 'Umar's statement], "We used to say, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, and then stop", refers to *tafḍīl*; in the matter of the *khilāfa*, [the proper view] is rather: Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, and 'Alī. This refers to the caliphs and their sequence, and this was the opinion of the Companions of the Prophet.'"[27] In short, as Ibn Ḥanbal is said elsewhere to have remarked in harmonizing the thirty-year *ḥadīth* with Ibn 'Umar's, and in effect redefining the purport of the latter, "We use both traditions (*al-khabarayn*) together".[28] As the fourth of the Rāshidūn, 'Alī's contested reign was thus brought in to "complete" the Sunnī vision of the ideal caliphate.[29] What was accommodated was not only 'Alī's

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[25] For a discussion of issues of *tafḍīl*, see, for instance, al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fols. 56a–63b, passim.

[26] J. van Ess, *Frühe mu'tazilitische Häresiographie: zwei Werke des Nāši' al-Akbar (gest. 293 H.)* (Beirut, 1971), p. 65, para 110.

[27] al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 59b; compare al-Lālakā'ī, *Sharḥ*, VIII, p. 1453 (nr. 2625).

[28] Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Sīrat al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Fu'ād 'Abd al-Mun'im Aḥmad (Alexandria, 1981), p. 82.

[29] It is tempting to speculate that the recognition of the first four caliphs as unique, or rather the inclusion of Ali to make four of them, also has something to do with the influence of the number four, of fourfold schemas, in the thinking of the scholars of the second and third (and no doubt later) centuries. As Lawrence Conrad has observed, the number four, as well as "such numbers as 40, 400, 4000, 40,000, and so forth, are standard topoi of the narrative art in the medieval Near East". (L. Conrad, "The Conquest of Arwad". in A. Cameron and L.I. Conrad, eds., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, I: *Problems in the literary source material* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 354–58; the quotation

caliphate however, but, as Madelung has remarked, also the Kufan traditionists who were known especially to revere his memory.[30]

The relationship of the thirty-year *ḥadīth* to yet another prediction about the political successors of the Prophet also deserves some attention here. "After me", the Prophet is supposed to have said (in numerous, often quite significant variants), "there will be twelve caliphs".[31] This tradition seems modelled on a non-Islamic *Vorlage*,[32] though the symbolic significance of the number twelve is widely attested in

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is from p. 355) There is little wonder, therefore, that many of the traditions of the *faḍā'il* genre which occur in the biographical notices of prominent scholars should have been structured according to the fourfold schema. This literary technique often serves to locate some aspect of religious authority in a select group of four to the exclusion of all others. An example such as the following is not untypical: "Abu 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām said: The masters of knowledge (*rabbāniyyū al-'ilm*) are four: Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal was the most learned of them in matters of the forbidden and the permissible; the best in the order and presentation of *ḥadīth* was 'Alī b. al-Madīnī; the best in compiling a book was Ibn Abī Shayba; and the most learned in the soundness and unsoundness of *ḥadīth* was Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn." (al-Marzubānī, *Nūr al-qabas*, p. 315.) For some other examples, of which there are countless, see Yaḥyā b. Ma'īn, *al-Ta'rīkh*, in *Yaḥyā ibn Ma'īn wa kitābuhu al-ta'rīkh*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Nūr Sayf [Mecca, 1979], III, pp. 260f. [nr. 1224], 388 [nr. 1879]; Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (Beirut, 1985), VI, p. 344; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-thiqāt* [Haydarabad, 1973–82], VII, 647; Gerhard Conrad, *Die Quḍāt Dimašq und der Maḍhab al-Auzā'ī* [Beirut, 1994], pp. 455ff.) Considerations much more momentous than the appeal of a fourfold schema were at work in the eventual recognition of *four*, rather than three, or more than four, caliphs as rightly guided; and much further work needs to be done before the role of this motif in the articulation of the proto-Sunnī world view is properly understood. Yet, the possibility that such motifs may have exerted some influence should not be discounted. And it is noteworthy that the verb which is sometimes used to describe the evolving doctrine that 'Alī was one of the four best Companions is *tarbī'*—literally, "to make four" (cf. al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fols. 62a, 63b, 66b).

[30] Madelung, *Der Imām*, pp. 225ff.; *EI(2)*, s.v. "Imāmah" (W. Madelung); also cf. al-Khallāl, *Masā'il* fols. 56a–56b.

[31] For this *ḥadīth* and its variants, see Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, pp. 52f.; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Cairo, 1313 A.H.), I, p. 398, V, pp. 86ff.; Abū Dā'ūd, *Sunan*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt (Beirut, 1988), I, p. 508; Ibn 'Adī, *Ḍu'afā'*, IV, p. 208; Wakī', *Akhbār al-quḍāt*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz Muṣṭafa al-Marāghī (Cairo, 1947–50), III, p. 17; Bahshal, *Ta'rīkh Wāsiṭ*, ed. Kurkīs 'Awwād (Baghdad, 1967), p. 108; Ibn Balbān al-Fārisī, *al-Iḥsān fī taqrīb ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, ed. Sh. al-Arna'ūṭ (Beirut, 1991), XV, pp. 35–37, 43, 44, 45. For other references, see H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Princeton, 1993), p. 99 n. 246; and ibid., pp. 99ff. for a discussion of this *ḥadīth* with reference to the Imāmī Shī'a (or rather, the lack of any reference to it in their early works).

[32] The Syriac Apocalypse of John the Little, part of the Monophysite *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, predicts about the Muslims that "Twelve kings shall rise up from that people, according as it is written in the law when God talked with Abraham and said to him: 'Lo! concerning Ishmael thy son I have heard thee, and twelve princes shall he beget along with many other princesses'; and he, even he, is the people of the land of the South." Quoted from H.J.W. Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles: A Syriac apocalypse from the early Islamic period", in Cameron and Conrad, *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, I, p. 203. Drijvers makes a plausible case for dating the *Gospel* to "shortly after the end of the seventh century" (ibid., p. 213).

Muslim tradition as well. There was no consensus, among those who took this *ḥadīth* seriously, about who the twelve caliphs were. It could have been understood to refer to the Umayyad caliphs (who, excluding Muʿawiya II, happened to be twelve in number), though such a reckoning would be unacceptable to many for excluding all of the first four successors of the Prophet.[33] Certain variants of this *ḥadīth* therefore take the precaution of actually naming Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān as the first three of these twelve caliphs.[34] It is likely that the *ḥadīth* was more commonly understood as referring to "the good old time" preceding the *fitna* which began with the murder of Walīd II (126/744);[35] and it is in the period immediately following this caliph's death that it may have originated *as* a Prophetic *ḥadīth*. Excluding Muʿāwiya II, nine Umayyad caliphs had preceded Walīd II; these nine plus the first three of the Prophet's successors make up the twelve caliphs of which the *ḥadīth* speaks. ʿAlī is not one of these, which is hardly surprising: as we have seen, the *ahl al-sunna*, whose *ḥadīth* this is, did not initially regard him as one of the legitimate caliphs.

ʿAbbāsid propagandists could not have failed to realize that this *ḥadīth*, probably originating in the late Umayyad period, did not leave any room for their own caliphs. That there was an effort to counter this tradition is indicated by the remnants such an effort has left: a crude rejoinder attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās has him quote this tradition, disapprove of it, and add that the twelve caliphs are to be followed by three "from us"—al-Saffāḥ, al-Manṣūr, and al-Mahdī.[36] In the present

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[33] Note that the tone of the variants that do specify the twelve rulers as Umayyads makes it clear that they could not have originated in pro-Umayyad circles: Rushdīn b. Saʿd—Ibn Lahīʿa—Khālid b. Abī ʿImrān—Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān: "After ʿUthmān there will be twelve kings from the Banū Umayya. 'Caliphs', he was asked? [No,] 'kings', he said". Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, pp. 52f., 58, 75.

[34] Ibn ʿAdī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ*, V, p. 208.

[35] See J. Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1950), p. 72: "The civil war which began with the death of Walīd [II] and marked the beginning of the end of the Umaiyad dynasty, was a conventional date for the end of the 'good old time' and not only with regard to the *sunna*." G.H.A. Juynboll has argued ("The Date of the Great *Fitna*", *Arabica*, XX [1973], pp. 142–59; idem, "Muslim's Introduction to his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, translated with an excursus on the chronology of *fitna* and *bidʿa*", *JSAI*, V [1984], pp. 263–313, esp. 303ff.) that the *fitna* mentioned in a remark attributed to Ibn Sīrīn—which Schacht dismisses—refers to the *fitna* of Ibn al-Zubayr, not to the events following the murder of ʿUthmān (as is frequently supposed) nor to those following the murder of Walīd (as assumed by Schacht). But even if Juynboll is right, the civil war which began with Walīd's death would still be a "*fitna*"—though not the first—and the "good old time" can still be said to have terminated with that *fitna*.

[36] See Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, p. 53; Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb ʿuyūn al-akhbār* (Beirut,

form, this rejoinder could not have originated much before the caliphate of al-Mahdī, though it may have had some earlier incarnations.

Early ʿAbbāsid discomfort with the tradition which prophesied twelve caliphs and this tradition's refusal, apparently, to give recognition to ʿAlī's caliphate may be taken to indicate its relatively early origins—in relation, that is, to the thirty-year *ḥadīth*. The discord between the thirty-year tradition and the one about the twelve-caliphs is difficult to reconcile, as many a Sunnī scholar was aware.[37] Although both found their way in Sunnī collections of *ḥadīth*, as did the *ḥadīth* of Ibn ʿUmar, the conflict between their various claims is striking. But whereas Ibn ʿUmar's *ḥadīth* came to be effectively reconciled with the thirty-year tradition, as we have seen, the prediction concerning the twelve caliphs remained discordant. It is tempting to think, however, that the thirty-year *ḥadīth* supersedes and in a sense "abrogates" the one about the twelve caliphs, and though the latter continued to be a part of the Sunni collections, it did so without any of that doctrinal importance which was reserved for the former.

How does the thirty-year *ḥadīth* relate to the interests of the ʿAbbāsids? As a possible response to the tradition about the twelve caliphs, it removed the Umayyads from "the good old time". The ʿAbbāsids, it is true, were not thereby made a part of those idealized times but, in being confined only to the Rāshidūn, the ideal ceased to be threatening: The *ḥadīth* was not intended to suggest that the caliphs posterior to the Rāshidūn were illegitimate but rather that the age of the latter was inimitable. Once they drew closer to the proto-Sunnī camp, the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs would probably not have had much to quarrel with such a viewpoint.

I do not wish to suggest, of course, that the thirty-year tradition was coined to safeguard ʿAbbāsid interests or that it necessarily entered ʿAbbāsid thinking as the caliphs came to patronize the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ. The ʿAbbāsids would have already been in the process of accommodating their vision to that of the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ before this *ḥadīth* became widely accepted among the latter. Yet the case

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1925–30), I, p. 204; *Akhbār al-dawla al-ʿAbbāsiyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī and ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Muṭṭalibī (Beirut, 1971), p. 29. For a variant of this tradition cf. Ibn Abī Shayba, *al Kitāb al-muṣannaf*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt (Beirut, 1989), VII, p. 513 (nr. 37642).

[37] For efforts to harmonize the two traditions, cf. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, VI, p. 205. A more interesting attempt is that of Ibn Hibbān in Ibn Balbān's *al-Iḥsān*, XV, pp. 34–41, where the two traditions have been merged into one and are then explained (though the twelve caliph tradition also appears independently: ibid., XV, pp. 43–46).

of this *ḥadīth* may tentatively indicate that, in subtle ways, some of the developments which were taking place within the proto-Sunnī circles could promote, conform to, or at least avoid violating, ʿAbbāsid interests. The significance of this observation may be illustrated with some further examples.

V.2.1.b

Sunnī tradition goes to some length to emphasize that ʿAlī did not possess or even claim any special knowledge, any hidden "texts", which the Prophet might have bequeathed to him to the exclusion of all others. ʿAlī is represented as announcing that all he had, or read, was the Qurʾān—which was available to all, of course—and a *ṣaḥīfa*, whose contents, though described in many variants, did not exceed certain clauses in the so-called "Constitution of Medina",[38] Whatever the precise moment when this tradition came into existence, its use for the *ahl al-sunna* is transparent. Shīʿite legitimism is being directly assailed here: the Prophet did not leave any special *ʿilm* to ʿAlī, so the belief that he and his successors—the "imāms"—possessed it, as the basis of their rights to the political and spiritual headship of Islam, is unfounded. ʿAlī had no particular privilege, no special claim, to be the Prophet's immediate successor any more than ʿAlī's descendants have to his succession.[39]

This forceful tradition, expressing a proto-Sunnī agenda, was not without certain implications for ʿAbbāsid interests too. For their own

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[38] See, for instance, Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, I, pp. 81, 100, 118f.; idem, *Kitāb al-sunna*, pp. 187ff. For some speculation on the history of the preservation of the document see R.B. Serjeant, "The 'Constitution of Medina'", *Islamic Quarterly*, VIII (1964), pp. 4ff. (Serjeant suggests that it was in the possession of ʿAbdallāh b. Ḥasan b. Ḥasan, from whom Ibn Isḥāq may have acquired it for his *Sīra*; Imāmī tradition, however, depicts Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq as possessing it); also see M. Gil, "The Constitution of Medina: A reconsideration", *IOS*, IV (1974), pp. 46f., for further traditions on the preservation of this "constitution". Recently, M. Sharon, *Revolt: The social and military aspects of the ʿAbbāsid revolution* (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 165ff., has tried (not very successfully) to argue that the frequently encountered but elusive expression "*sunna* of the Prophet" may have referred to some of the documents comprising the "constitution of Medina"; that in calling people to the Prophet's *sunna* the ʿAbbāsids may, therefore, have been calling them to something concrete rather than abstract; and that these documents (= ʿAlī's *ṣaḥīfa*) may have been at the heart of the *ṣaḥīfa ṣafrāʾ* legend (on which see below).

[39] For one of the most articulate expressions of the argument that ʿAlī's qualifications and credentials to succeed the Prophet were inferior to those of Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān, and no better than those of the other Companions of the Prophet, see al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-ʿUthmāniyya*, pp. 87f., 94f., and passim. Note, however, that al-Jāḥiẓ was a Muʿtazilī, not one of the *ahl al-sunna*.

reasons, the ʿAbbāsids were concerned to deny that the ʿAlids had a claim to the Prophet's legacy superior to theirs. Any attack on ʿAlid legitimism could therefore contribute, without having to be an expression of pro-ʿAbbāsid sentiment, towards bolstering the ʿAbbāsid ideological defences.

Initially, the ʿAbbāsids had tried simply to claim for themselves what they denied for the ʿAlids: for example, the "testament" of Abū Hāshim stipulated a "transfer" of claims, with the claims remaining intact. In time, however, many of the claims themselves came to be abandoned, which is when the move towards the proto-Sunnī camp begins to be discernible. The "testament" of Abū Hāshim had brought with it a "yellow scroll", *ṣaḥīfa ṣafrāʾ*, which, in the conventional Shīʿī style, contained information about the past and future, and especially about matters relating to the forthcoming revolution. Subsequently, when the "testament" ceased to be used as a legitimating device, the *ṣaḥīfa* itself was supposed to have been lost.[40] It is tempting to think that this loss also symbolises the abandonment of some of those pretensions which were cultivated around the person of the Shīʿī imām, and of which the imām's *ʿilm*—of the past and future—was particularly prominent.[41] al-Manṣūr is, indeed, supposed to have bequeathed to his son and successor a box full of writings (*dafātir*) predicting the future.[42] But this same caliph is also reported already to have disclaimed any clairvoyance,[43] and the wills of subsequent caliphs were not, in any case, accompanied by such prophetic texts.[44] The kind of knowledge which the caliphs generally laid claim to was more akin to that of the ʿulamāʾ than it was to that of prophets or

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[40] Cf. M. Sharon, *Black Banners from the East* (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 139f. As Sharon puts it, "The fantasy which invented the *Ṣaḥīfa* also provided for its disappearance." (Ibid., p. 140) On the "testament" of Abū Hāshim, see ibid., pp. 121–40.

[41] As al-Jāḥiẓ sarcastically said of the Rāfiḍa: "They know nothing of the imām except that he knows what will be before it comes to be." *al-ʿUthmāniyya*, p. 215.

[42] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 443f. For a study of al-Mansūr's will see A. Dietrich, "Das politische Testament des zweiten ʿAbbasidenkalifen al-Mansūr", *Der Islam*, XXX (1952), pp. 133–65.

[43] al-Mansūr's letter to ʿUbayd Allāh al-ʿAnbarī regarding the latter's appointment as *qāḍī* reads, in part: "... God [alone] is responsible for the amelioration of your inner self. I do not know the hidden so I would not err, nor do I claim knowledge of what God has not taught me." Wakiʿ, *Akhbār*, II, p. 91. Unless we are over-interpreting this passage, there seems to be a polemical note here against those (sc. some of the ʿAlids) who did claim knowledge of the unseen.

[44] Cf. the instructions of al-Mahdī to his successor, Mūsa al-Hādī, which can, perhaps, be construed as fragments of a will: al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 549f., 588; and the more self-consciously designed, and better preserved, will of al-Maʾmūn: ibid., III, pp. 1138–40.

divinely inspired imāms, as we have seen.[45] As the proto-Sunnī tradition divested ʿAlī's *ṣaḥīfa* of any significant contents, the ʿAbbāsids divested themselves of the *ṣaḥīfa* itself. The two initiatives are not necessarily related. But they do show, perhaps, a certain convergence in the paths of the early ʿAbbāsids and the proto-Sunnī 'ulamā'.[46] This convergence is also to be observed in their attitudes towards messianic expectancy, which may be taken as the final example of the phenomenon being investigated here.

V.2.1.c

Messianic expectancy was strong at the time the ʿAbbāsids came to power, and it did not die out immediately after their advent.[47] Nor did the willingness of the ruling house to put messianic ideas to some use, as evidenced, for instance, by the titles of the first three ʿAbbāsid caliphs—"al-Saffāḥ", "al-Manṣūr", "al-Mahdī"—which were all charged with messianic connotations.[48] But while messianic and apocalyptic notions had their uses, they also had their dangers; and it does not require much imagination to suppose that, in the interest of political

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[45] See IV.2, above.

[46] The highly charged notion of *waṣiyya*, the means for the transmission of an imām's knowledge and authority in the Shīʿite world view, seems also to have been purged by the ʿAbbāsids of some of those connotations which made it so important for the Shīʿa. The point was made through a historical anecdote which described how ʿAlī b. ʿAbdallāh, an ancestor of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs, did not make his *waṣiyya* in favour of his son and successor Muḥammad b. ʿAlī (but rather for another son, Sulaymān), because he did not want to defile (*tadnīs*) Muḥammad with it; alternately, it was Muḥammad himself who refused to have the *waṣiyya* made in his favour (*Akhbār*, p. 158.) The context strongly suggests that the *waṣiyya* in question refers to overseeing matters of estate and inheritance, not to the question of succession, let alone that of esoteric knowledge. J. Lassner (*Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory* [New Haven, 1986], p. 54 n. 55) understands this report as indicating that the father and son did not have cordial relations with each other. But the report may rather have been intended to signify that the *waṣiyya*—to which the Shīʿa gave such fundamental importance was not all that important after all, that it was irrelevant to the question of actual succession. Nor is it without interest that it is Hārūn al-Rashīd—a caliph anything but well-disposed towards the Shīʿa—whom the *Akhbār* quotes as the authority for this report.

[47] Studies on messianic expectancy in the late Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid period include: B. Lewis, "The Regnal Titles of the First ʿAbbāsid Caliphs", in *Dr. Zakir Husain Presentation Volume* (New Delhi, 1968), pp. 13–22; ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī, "al-Fikra al-mahdiyya bayna'l-daʿwa al-ʿAbbāsiyya wa'l-ʿaṣr al-ʿAbbāsī al-awwal", in W. al-Qāḍī, ed., *Studia Arabica et Islamica: Festschrift for Iḥsān ʿAbbās* (Beirut, 1981), pp. 21–32; W. Madelung, "The Sufyānī between Tradition and History", *SI*, LXIII (1986), pp. 5–48; idem, "Apocalyptic Prophecies in Ḥimṣ", *JSS*, XXXI (1986), pp. 141–85; idem, "al-Mahdī" in *EI(2)*, S. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The problem of symbiosis under early Islam* (Princeton, 1995), pp. 47–89.

[48] Lewis, "Regnal Titles"; al-Dūrī, "al-Fikra al-mahdiyya".

stability, and given their (or, for that matter, anyone else's) inability to monopolize, still less live up to such notions, the early ʿAbbāsids would soon have wanted to see the appeal of messianism diminish.

In distancing themselves from the Shīʿite milieu, the caliphs were not only making overtures towards the proto-Sunnīs, but perhaps also renouncing the messianic expectations characteristic of (though by no means limited to) the Shīʿa. Conversely, one of the factors which may have drawn the ʿAbbāsids towards proto-Sunnism could conceivably have been the latter's minimal interest in chiliastic hopes. Before discussing what little is known of the attitudes of proto-Sunnī scholars towards messianism, a unique tradition in the anonymous *Akhbār al-dawla al-ʿAbbāsiyya* may be briefly discussed for the light it sheds on early ʿAbbāsid efforts to reduce messianic expectancy. This tradition takes us back to the pre-revolution history of the ʿAbbāsid family, and to Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās, at a time when the latter is supposed to have been directing the affairs of his Khurāsānī Shīʿa.[49] While certain reports—of pseudo- al-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar, for instance—speak of Muḥammad b. ʿAlī's having written to the Khurāsānīs, defining for them an "orthodox" Islamic position, the *Akhbār* also gives the text of three letters which he is supposed to have written to them, after the death of Khidāsh. One of these letters is simply a statement of dissociation from Khidāsh and his mischief;[50] another exhorts the Khurāsānīs to obey and follow Bukayr b. Māhān,[51] a Kufan Shīʿite whom historical tradition depicts as the architect of the ʿAbbāsid *daʿwa* organisation in Khurasan.[52] The third and longest of these letters, which is probably to be identified with the one the ʿAbbāsid patriarch supposedly wrote in the aftermath of the Khidāsh-affair in defining afresh the institutes of "orthodox" religion for his Shīʿa, is what concerns us here.[53] As will be observed, the single most remarkable feature of the contents of this letter is its emphasis on *other-worldly* salvation:

> Exert yourself in [the purpose] God has created you for; and God has not created you for anything but His worship. Be as sincere to God as you possibly can [and do so] by affiliating with His friends (*awliyāʾ*),

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[49] See II.2.2, above.

[50] *Akhbār*, pp. 212f.

[51] Ibid., p. 213; cf. Sharon, *Banners*, p. 189.

[52] On Bukayr see, in particular, *Akhbār*, pp. 191–250, passim; Sharon, *Banners*, index, s.v.

[53] *Akhbār*, pp. 208–212. Cf. van Ess, *Häresiographie*, p. 34 (para 50).

> fear God in private as well as public, and fear Him with all your heart. Draw close to Him through the goodness of your deeds; this is what you have been created for and commanded to do.... Through perseverance [in good deeds] . . . you will find relief from the hardship of the world (*rāḥa min naṣab al-dunyā*). Be satisfied with what you have been given, and be patient about what you have been denied of [this world's] embellishments (*zīna*). Do not [allow yourself to] be deceived by something of this world to be deprived of what God will benefit you with in the hereafter.... Do not make your religion (*dīn*) and God's right[s] (*ḥaqq*), of which He has informed you, subservient to the world, for the world has been created only as a trial (*balā'*) and temptation (*fitna*); a term has been set for it, and it will perish on reaching that term.... Verily, those who know and those who do not are not equal . . .; likewise one who exerts . . . for [this] world, seeking a reward which is . . . transitory cannot equal him who strives for the hereafter.... Be grateful to God for guiding you to His obedience, recognize His rights over you, and know that the most true account is the Book of God, the firmest *taqwā* is to maintain His rights, the best of the faiths (*milal*) is that of Ibrāhīm, the best *sunna* is that of Muḥammad, and the worst error is the error which comes after right guidance.[54]

This emphasis on other-worldly salvation seems to be much more in harmony with the need to *diminish* messianic expectancy in the early ʿAbbāsid society than it is with the aspirations of a messianically expectant revolutionary (or potentially revolutionary) movement in Khurasan. Much of the rest of the letter is concerned with emphasizing moral and ethical behaviour, presumably as paving the way for other-worldly salvation. The point of this letter is to curtail millenarian expectations through religious piety and ethical behaviour—through the suggestion, that is, that pious deeds rather than chiliastic hopes or activist aspirations would bring about the transformation one longs for in the millennium, or that such piety would at least hasten the messianic age. Curtailing messianic expectancy by emphasizing an ethico-religious orientation is scarcely an unusual strategy. Jacob Neusner has shown, for instance, that the Rabbis of early Sasanian Babylonia employed the same technique to effectively reduce messianic speculation among Babylonian Jewry.[55] The early ʿAbbāsids were apparently doing the same.

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[54] *Akhbār*, pp. 209–211.

[55] J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, II: *The Early Sasanian Period* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 52ff., 236ff.

It could be argued that the contents of this letter are to be interpreted simply as an effort to curtail the impatience of the Shīʿa—prior to the revolution—for messianic redemption. But it seems rather more likely that the letter expresses the concerns of the *early ʿAbbāsid times* to de-emphasize messianism and "routinize charisma". Likewise, when the author of the letter calls upon the Shīʿa to be well-intentioned towards those in authority, and to support them, such exhortation can conceivably be understood as referring to the leaders of the *daʿwa*. Yet the strong sense of quietist royalism which this exhortation conveys is perhaps better understood as referring to the duty of obedience to the rulers of the early ʿAbbāsid times.[56]

While the entire letter is full of interest, the last lines of the passage quoted above deserve, in particular, a closer look. The motifs found here are strikingly reminiscent of a famous *ḥadīth*, reported in many versions, of which one version is the following. The Prophet said: ". . . verily the most true account is the Book of God, the most superior (*afḍal*) guidance (*hady*) is the guidance of Muḥammad, the worst of things are the innovations (*muḥdathāt*), and every innovation (*bidʿa*) is an error (*ḍalāla*) . . ."[57] Also reminiscent of this *ḥadīth*, if rather more faintly, and of the related motifs in the afore-mentioned passage from the *Akhbār*, is the letter of the caliph al-Mahdī regarding the genealogy of Ziyād b. Abīhi.[58] With appropriate Qurʾānic quotations the dichotomy *hudā/ḍalāla* is effectively evoked here. The message is clear enough: he who follows his own desires, rather than the Book of God and the *sunna* of His Prophet, goes astray—as did Muʿāwiya; it was left to the caliph al-Mahdī to restore the *sunna* contravened by Muʿāwiya. The term *bidʿa* is not mentioned here any more than it is in the letter which al-Mahdī's grandfather, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, is supposed to have written to the Khurāsānī Shīʿa, though both contexts are strongly suggestive of that term (and notion). More to the point, both contexts are strongly suggestive of each other. This may be taken

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[56] *Akhbār*, p. 211: ". . . and do not disobey an imām . . . or open that which is shut, or shut that which is open, or deceive those who are in charge of your affairs; be sincere in assisting them and in safeguarding their affairs."

[57] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, III, p. 310. For similar and thematically related traditions see Muḥammad b. Waḍḍāh al-Qurṭubī, *Kitāb al-bidaʿ*, ed. Marie Isabel Fierro (Madrid, 1988), especially pp. 171ff. For other references in canonical *ḥadīth*, see A.J. Wensinck, *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition* (Leiden, 1927, repr. 1960), s.v. "Innovations". For a wide-ranging discussion of *bidʿa*, see Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi, *al-Iʿtiṣām*, ed. Muḥammad Rashid Riḍā (Cairo, n.d.); also cf. M. Talbi, "Les Bidaʿ", *SI*, XII (1960), pp. 43–77.

[58] See the text of this letter in al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 479–481.

as another indication that the letter attributed to Muḥammad b. ʿAlī originated in the early ʿAbbāsid period—possibly in that of al-Mahdī—and that it expresses some of the concerns of that age.

Proto-Sunnī attitudes (or those of any second-century scholars, for that matter) towards messianism, are little known. We do know that some of the Medinese *fuqahāʾ* who backed the revolt of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya took his claim to be the *mahdī* seriously,[59] though the same can almost certainly not be said of most. ʿAbdallāh b. Jaʿfar, one of those who did consider Muḥammad to have been the *mahdī*, was later rebuked by the ʿAbbāsid governor of Medina, Jaʿfar b. Sulaymān b. ʿAlī, for having done so *despite his ʿilm and fiqh*.[60] In other words, the scholar's *fiqh* should have enabled him to recognize that Muḥammad could not have been the true *mahdī*; or, alternatively, his *fiqh* should have taught him not to be swayed by messianic claims. To save his skin or else from genuine conviction, this scholar promptly promised that he would never again believe in any one's messianic claims.[61]

The revolt of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya showed, as had the ʿAbbāsid revolution too, that messianic expectancy and political activism went together. With their increasing commitment to political quietism, the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ could scarcely have been much drawn to chiliastic and messianic expectations. Asked for his opinion on the *mahdī*, Sufyān al-Thawrī is supposed to have said: "[Even] if he [sc. the *mahdī*] passes by your door, do not follow him until [all?] the people have come to agree upon him."[62]

This remark seems to have two implications. First, the community

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[59] al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 289 (Muḥammad b. ʿAjlān: *"faqīh ahl al-Madīna wa ʿābidihim"*); ibid., p. 291 (ʿAbdallāh b. Jaʿfar b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān: see the following two notes).

[60] Ibid., p. 291.

[61] Ibid., p. 291: "In rebelling with him, we had no doubt that he was the *mahdī*, on account of all that had been reported to us concerning him [sc. Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya]. I continued to regard him as such until I saw him killed. I will not be deceived by anyone after this."

[62] *"... in marra ʿalā bābik fa-lā takun minhu shayʾan ḥattā yajtamiʿ al-nās ʿalayhi"*. al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa*, I, p. 726; cf. *TB*, IX, p. 22 (nr. 4615). Compare Neusner, *History of the Jews of Babylonia*, II, p. 238, on Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Zakkai's effort to diminish messianic expectancy "in response to the destruction of the Temple. ... [emphasizing that only] when Israel obeys God, then they will have political prosperity, and obedience to God meant conformity to the ethical and moral imperatives of Scripture. Similarly ... he had affirmed the messianic hope, but in very sceptical terms: if you are planting a sapling, and men come and fell you that the Messiah has come, finish planting the sapling and then go forth to receive him."

was to be guarded against the disruptive potential of messianic claims: like all potential adventurers, the claimant to the *mahdī*'s calling would range the people for or against his claims and thus threaten the community with disunity and chaos. His profound cynicism towards the ʿAbbāsids notwithstanding, Sufyān al-Thawrī was known for his stringent quietism.[63] His misgivings about the *mahdī* are, therefore, hardly surprising. Second, if the *mahdī*'s advent was to be prevented from disrupting the community's religious life, it was the individual believer's conduct which had to be guarded: there was no need for any extraordinary enthusiasm about the *mahdī*, no place for the hope that the order of things would be reversed with his arrival. If anything, a tumultuous disruption of the order of things was to be prevented rather than hoped for or welcomed.

Sufyān al-Thawrī's was hardly the most drastic position on the matter. Some went further to deny that any such figure as the *mahdī* was to appear at all. This view, probably never widespread, was expressed in the tradition, "There is no *mahdī* except ʿĪsa", that is, Jesus is the *only* figure whose "return" is to be awaited near the end of time.[64]

Belief in the *mahdī*'s coming did, of course, survive in Sunnism but without a significance and function comparable to that in Shīʿism.[65] Sunnī collections of *ḥadīth* contain traditions on the *mahdī*, but often juxtapose them with, or bring them in the context of, *malāḥim wa'l-fitan*—apocalyptic battles and all kinds of chaotic occurrences.[66] The classic work of this genre, Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād's *Kitāb al-fitan*, contains

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[63] *TB*, IX, p. 22 (nr. 4615).

[64] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, IX, pp. 143f. (nr. 200: s.v. Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Janadī). Among those who transmitted this tradition from Muḥammad b. Khālid was al-Shāfiʿī as well; see *EI(2)*, s.v. "al-Mahdī". Also see Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, pp. 230f., 232. The text of the tradition in Ibn Māja, *Sunan* ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī (n.p. 1953), II, pp. 1340f. (nr. 4039), combines it with another tradition, variants of which occur independently as well (and which will briefly be discussed later): Yūnus b. ʿAbd al-Aʿlā—Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī—Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Janadī—Abān b. Ṣāliḥ—Hasan—Anas b. Mālik—the Prophet: "The [state of] affairs will only become more calamitous, the world will only regress, the people will only increase in want, the Hour of Resurrection will not come except on the most wicked of people, and there will be no *mahdī* except Jesus." (*"lā yazdād al-amr illā shiddatan wa lā al-dunyā illā idbāran wa lā al-nās illā shuḥḥan wa lā taqūm al-sāʿa illā ʿalā shirār al-nās, wa lā mahdī illā ʿĪsā."*) Also cf. Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, VII, p. 513 (nr. 37646).

[65] For a comparison of the two religious traditions on this, and other, scores, see H. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin, 1982), ch. 1.

[66] Cf. the "Kitāb al-fitan" of Ibn Abī Shayba's *al-Muṣannaf*, VII, pp. 446–531, where traditions on the *mahdī* are only a fraction (pp. 512–514) of those on the *fitan*. In the *Sunan* of Abū Dāʾūd, a "Kitāb al-mahdī" occurs (II, pp. 508–511) *between* a "Kitāb al-fitan wa'l-malāḥim" (II, pp. 495–507) and a second "Kitāb al-malāḥim" (II, pp. 512–529).

apocalyptic and messianic traditions of various tendencies—pro- and anti-ʿAlid, pro- and anti-Umayyad, pro- and anti-ʿAbbāsid, etc. Many of the traditions recorded there describe—with details which are frequently at odds with each other—the circumstances of the *mahdī*'s advent. While the *mahdī*'s time is one of prosperity and justice, the conditions which precede it, or pave the way for it, are typically the worst imaginable. As one tradition puts it: "The *mahdī* will not appear until seven out of every nine people have been killed".[67]

If the road to the *mahdī*'s advent was paved with chaos and bloodshed, it did not make good sense to long for it, as the Shīʿa did. Conversely, it can perhaps also be argued that the sense of apocalyptic chaos which the messianic traditions, taken as a whole, brought home may have served to discourage, or at least to caution against, too fervent an anticipation of the millennium.

But there was more to the distaste for a messianic redemption than the upheavals that were supposed to accompany it. Messianic expectations were not conducive to the scholars' authority any more than they were to political stability. Scholars who were engaged in articulating the law which would govern all aspects of life, in gathering and analyzing the traditions of the Prophet and trying to model their lives and those of their followers on his teachings, and in relentlessly defining group identities and structures of religious authority, are unlikely to have been much impressed by promises that all this effort would soon be swept away by an era of apocalyptic chaos. It was on their mastery and interpretation of religious texts that scholars typically based their authority, not on continually updating prophecies about an indeterminate future or even on retrospective "predictions" about events that had already taken place.[68] Significantly, such prophecies were themselves given the form of texts, as traditions of the Prophet and his Companions, so that they could be made subject to the scholars' methods of *ḥadīth*-criticism and, where necessary, appropriately marginalized. Even the Imāmī Shīʿī imāms, and especially the Imāmī jurists, were aware that the stability of their authority required discouraging messianic expectations, if only by the device of project-

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[67] Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan* p. 206; also cf. ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī (Beirut, 1970–1972), XI, pp. 372 (nr. 20771), 373 (nr. 20776).

[68] Cf. in this regard the observations of David Potter, *Prophets and Emperors: Human and divine authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), pp. 213–16, on which my analysis here is partly based.

ing them on to a remote future. As Steven Wasserstrom has aptly put it with reference to the Imāmīs, "[t]he deferral of eschatological finality . . . accompanies the practical reason that won jurists their center of power inside history."[69]

If it was an idealized past rather than a messianic future to which many a proto-Sunnī scholar would have wanted to look, how would the present itself be regarded? A widely-circulating *ḥadīth* had the Prophet predict that things would only go from bad to worse.[70] The tradition may superficially seem only to be an indictment of the present. It certainly is such an indictment, at the same time as it is a glorification of an ideal age irretrievably lost. It may also be read as a not very sophisticated attack on messianic expectancy, on the belief, that is, that things would change for the better after they have been bad for a long time. Yet there is something else as well which this *ḥadīth* seems to suggest: if things are constantly to degenerate, then the present—however remote from an ideal past—is still preferable to what it will give way to in the future.[71] Such an attitude not only rules out messianism, it also undergirds a certain commitment to the preservation of the present circumstances—and perhaps also to the existing regime.

That regime certainly fell short of the ideal, as the caliphs would themselves have admitted. But, as al-Ma'mūn also reminded his audience, if his conduct failed to conform to the *sīra* of 'Umar, the fault was not his alone: had any one of his subjects been the recipient of the Prophet's direct and transforming guidance as those whom 'Umar governed were?[72] Despite falling short of all ideals, the state was still the most concrete and convincing manifestation of the success of Islam in the world and therefore of the truth of Islam. One of the best statements of this sentiment is the long letter which a *faqīh* named

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[69] Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, p. 122. Also see S. Bashear, "Muslim Apocalypses and the Hour: A case-study in traditional reinterpretation", *IOS*, XIII (1993), pp. 75–99. A tradition such as the following expresses the postponement of "the Hour" (*al-sā'a*) in no uncertain terms: al-Mu'tamir b. Sulaymān—al-Layth [b. Sa'd]—Mujāhid—the Prophet: "The Hour will not come over anyone who says, 'There is not god but Allāh'. When the angel is about to blow the horn, but hears someone say, 'There is no god but Allāh', he shall postpone it for seventy falls (*kharīf*)." Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, p. 391.

[70] See n. 64, above; and see, for this tradition and its many variants, Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *Fitan*, pp. 20, 39; al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 5b; 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Khawlānī, *Ta'rīkh Dārayya* (Damascus, 1950), p. 74; *TB*, IV, pp. 220f.

[71] For a striking image of just how bad things might turn in some indeterminate future, cf. al-Fazārī, *Kitāb al-siyar*, ed. Fārūq Ḥammāda (Beirut, 1987), pp. 316f. (nr. 610).

[72] Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, *Kitāb Baghdād*, ed. M.Z. al-Kawtharī (Cairo, 1949), pp. 44f.

Abu'l-Rabīʿ Muḥammad b. al-Layth is said to have written on behalf of Hārūn al-Rashīd to the Byzantine emperor Constantine VI (780–797).[73] The letter is a long disquisition on why the emperor should convert to Islam, or failing which, what advantages would accrue from the payment of *jizya*. Neither of these suggestions, or the significance of the letter's elaborate attack on Christianity, need be discussed here. One characteristic of this letter ought to be mentioned nevertheless, for it cannot fail to make an impression no matter how superficially the document is read. This characteristic is the repeated emphasis on the success criterion[74] of the truth of Islam: the Prophet would not have succeeded, nor would the great powers of the world been humbled, if Islam were not the true faith. There is no hint here that the state has ceased being the embodiment of the worldly success and truth of Islam any more than that Islam itself has ceased to be either true or successful. Although written on the caliph's behalf and to the head of a foreign power, this letter was written by a religious scholar and may well have partly been intended for internal consumption.[75] Even if it was not, the letter gives us a certain sense of how the caliphate was ideally to be viewed, not just in the past but also in the present. It may represent the caliph's vision more than it does that of the religious elite; but then the latter's vision on the function of the caliphate and its significance was not much different from what this remarkable document says.

An episode from the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn is also worth recalling here. It is reported that a king of Tibet converted to Islam and, as a mark of his subservience to the caliph, sent him an idol studded with precious jewels and fitted on a throne (*sarīr*) of silver. The caliph had this sent to Mecca in 201/816–17, to be placed in the Kaʿba. Elaborate gifts to the House of God are attested for several rulers, before al-Ma'mūn and after him, but we shall confine ourselves here

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[73] Cf. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud (Beirut, 1988), p. 134. The text of the letter is preserved in Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, *Ikhtiyār al-manẓūm wa'l-manthūr*, Brit. Lib. Add. 18,532, fols. 85a–97a; published (from a different MS.) in Aḥmad Zakī Ṣafwat, *Jamharat rasā'il al-ʿarab* (Cairo, 1937), III, pp. 252–324. On this *risāla* and its author, see J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* [hereafter *Th&G*] (Berlin and New York, 1991–), III, pp. 24ff.; D.M. Dunlop, "A Letter of Hārūn ar-Rashīd to the Emperor Constantine VI", in M. Black and G. Fohrer, eds., *In Memoriam Paul Kahle* (Berlin, 1968), pp. 106–115.

[74] The expression comes from K. Cragg, *The Pen and the Faith: Eight modern Muslim writers and the Qur'ān* (London, 1985), p. 98.

[75] Note that Muḥammad b. al-Layth, the author of the letter, was a "*khaṭīb*"; it is also said of him that he was "*wāʿiẓan fī rasā'ilihi*": Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 134.

only to this particular gesture. During the *ḥajj* that year, this *sarīr* and its accompaniments were placed between Ṣafā and Marwa, the two hills which mark the distance which all pilgrims have to cover a number of times as part of the ritual of pilgrimage. This relic remained there for three days; the nephew of the person who had brought it from Khurasan (where al-Ma'mūn was at that time) would stand on the *sarīr* and twice a day, mornings and evenings, read out from a silver tablet a passage which described the provenance and significance of this exhibit. This passage described the capitulation and conversion of several rulers to the caliph, went on to announce that mosques had been built and the "*ḥudūd Allāh*" already instituted in some of them, and concluded by calling on "everyone who reads [sic] these lines to assist in the strengthening of Islam and the denigration of unbelief (*shirk*) by word and act; for when the *a'imma* take it upon themselves to [strengthen religion], it also becomes obligatory on the people [to assist them in doing so]. . . ."[76]

If the state was the manifestation of the might of Islam, as the foregoing examples indicate, then it is not hard to see why the fugitive Sufyān al-Thawrī should have been reminded by a colleague that "his withdrawal from the *sulṭān* [was] . . . an act [characteristic] of the innovators."[77] Who the innovators were is not disclosed. It should be noted, however, that one of the things which sometimes raised suspicions of *zandaqa* was precisely an individual's renunciation of the world; and the (somewhat later) "Ṣūfiyyat al-Mu'tazila", who believed in *taḥrīm al-makāsib*—effectively a boycott of society and a denunciation of its norms—and who held that having a government was detrimental rather than conducive to the interests of religion,[78] would have been innovators equally from the viewpoint of the state, of the proto-Sunnī 'ulamā' and even of the other Mu'tazila. While it was quite respectable to decide not to have anything to do with the rulers, a stance based on or implying a rejection of the existing order was at once politically subversive and religiously unacceptable. On the need to marginalize such attitudes, the representatives of the state and those of the proto-Sunnī 'ulamā' would again have agreed.

The instances discussed above provide no more than a glimpse of

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[76] al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, ed. Rushdī al-Ṣāliḥ Malḥas (Beirut, 1983), I, pp. 225–31; the quotation is from p. 231.

[77] ". . . *fa kallamahu Ḥammād ibn Zayd fī tanaḥḥīhi 'an al-sulṭān wa qāla hādhā fi'l ahl al-bid'a.*" Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, VI, p. 373. Also cf. al-Fasawī, *al-Ma'rifa*, I, p. 720.

[78] J. van Ess, *Frühe mu'tazilitische Häresiographie* (Beirut, 1971), pp. 49f., paras 82f.

certain evolving proto-Sunnī viewpoints and their implications. That even before al-Ma'mūn's *Miḥna* the ʿAbbāsids had drawn towards the proto-Sunnī camp means that there was a sufficiently strong perception on the caliphs' part that their interests lay in that direction. On the other hand, even the *Miḥna* did not shake the ʿulamā''s faith in the ʿAbbāsid regime; if anything, it made them more conscious of the need for a "good" caliph.

V.2.2

If the caliphs' patronage of the proto-Sunnī trends, and of the scholars associated with them, was informed by a sense of where ʿAbbāsid interests lay, the proto-Sunnī scholars too were not ignorant of what caliphal patronage might mean for their own interests. A scholar such as Sufyān al-Thawrī might remain very cynical in his attitude towards the ʿAbbāsids.[79] But if Sufyān was not unique in his (passive) opposition to the ʿAbbāsids, he was not typical either. The monetary and other forms of royal patronage, the caliphs' guardianship of religious life, and—not least—the various other ways in which caliphal interests coalesced with those of the scholars meant that the latter did not necessarily lead a life of cynical indifference towards the rulers, or that it was not the scruples of political quietism alone which prevented them from active revolt.

Ibn Ḥanbal was asked about Friday prayers, apparently to ascertain if the ʿAbbāsids did not conduct them too early in the day. Allaying all apprehensions, he is said to have replied: "The ʿAbbāsids [lit. the children of al-ʿAbbās] are more steadfast in [conducting] prayer and firmer in their commitment to it than others."[80] This answer is unfortunately not without some ambiguity. It is not clear whom he is comparing the ʿAbbāsid religious commitment to, and why. If the comparison is with the Umayyads, it should be of some interest that Ibn Ḥanbal rates ʿAbbāsid religiosity higher than theirs. *Why* such a

[79] Cf. G.H.A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 207ff., where Sufyān is considered as the prime suspect for having fabricated a well-known anti-ʿAbbāsid tradition predicting the imminent destruction of Baghdād.

[80] al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 3b: "*Walad al-ʿAbbās aqwam li'l-ṣalāt wa ashadd muʿāhadan li'l-ṣalāt min ghayrihim.*" Cf. *TB*, XIV, p. 375 (nr. 7798), where an explicit comparison between the Umayyads and the ʿAbbāsids, attributed to the Kufan *ḥadīth*-scholar Abū Bakr b. ʿAyyāsh, is made in very similar terms: "They were more beneficial to the people while you are more steadfast in prayer." Needless to say, Hārūn al-Rashīd—in whose presence, and on whose query—this comparison was made richly rewarded the scholar.

comparison is being made might be explicable as an assertion of ʿAbbāsid legitimacy and the merits of obedience to them. Such an assertion would be odd, however, given that—to Ibn Ḥanbal—obedience was necessary even when the ruler was not the most pious, or not pious at all. In any case, it is to be remarked that Ibn Ḥanbal's is (at least here) not a passive and indifferent quietism but a quietism supported by the recognition that the ʿAbbāsids were not merely tolerable but better than "others".

The ascetic al-Fuḍayl b. ʿIyāḍ is said to have prayed for the longevity of Hārūn al-Rashīd's life.[81] This rather unusual act of his is explained with the gloss that "he feared someone worse than [Hārūn] might succeed him".[82] Whether al-Fuḍayl did in fact pray for Hārūn is impossible to determine; but the gloss, which purports to come from Ibn Ḥanbal, seems to forecast the travails of the ʿulamāʾ in al-Maʾmūn's time and is therefore tendentious. Yet the matter does not quite seem to have been settled even with such a gloss. In Abū Nuʿaym's *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, al-Fuḍayl himself clarifies the matter: "There is no one on the face of the earth who is more hateful to me than Hārūn; yet there is none I would like to [see] live longer. If I were asked to shorten my life to have his prolonged, I would do it; and if given a choice between his death and that of this [son of mine] . . . I would prefer the latter's death." Again, the tendentious gloss is added—this time by a certain Muḥammad b. Abī ʿUthmān—that al-Fuḍayl feared "the strife (*balāʾ*) which would follow Hārūn['s death]".[83] This digression into al-Fuḍayl's prayer does not merely illustrate how a tradition sometimes grew in dimension; so much concern to explain (or explain away) just why this ascetic prayed for Hārūn may also raise the suspicion that he may, after all, have been favourably disposed towards the caliph! But more importantly, what this tradition and its glosses show is a recognition of how important it was to have a caliph who (despite Fuḍayl's strictures) was generally seen as a patron of the proto-Sunnīs, and of the difference between him and one whom the latter saw as anything but that.[84]

As regards the caliph al-Mutawakkil, one Ibrahīm b. Muḥammad

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[81] al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 4a. On al-Fuḍayl, see Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* (Cairo, 1932–1938), VIII, pp. 84–139; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, VIII, pp. 294–96; Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 636, where it is noted that "In Baġdād bei dem Kalifen Hārūn war er hochangesehen."

[82] al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 4a.

[83] Also cf. Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya*, VIII, pp. 104f.

[84] *Pace* P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 63f.

al-Taymī believed that there were only three caliphs (worthy of name?): Abū Bakr (for suppressing the Ridda), ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (for redressing the wrongs of his predecessors), and al-Mutawakkil (for restoring the people to adherence to the *sunna*).[85] For his part, Ibn Ḥanbal too was unreserved in extolling al-Mutawakkil's services.[86] Such praise for al-Mutawakkil illustrates how much the proto-Sunnī 'ulamā' valued his termination of the *Miḥna*; by the same token, it shows their deep resentment of that Inquisition and the strong impact the latter had on them. But this appreciation also makes a more general point: once again, it indicates the 'ulamā''s perception that caliphal policies had the potential to affect them seriously, and that a "good" caliph was therefore to be whole-heartedly supported.[87] In the company of such attitudes, we are very far indeed from the passionate hostility with which the *ahl al-sunna* are sometimes supposed to have viewed the ʿAbbāsids even in the late second and early third centuries.[88] To say this is not to deny that many scholars might have unfavourable attitudes towards the ruling elite, but only that such attitudes are representative of the proto-Sunnīs.

Apart from the scholars and men of religion who were supportive of the ʿAbbāsids from a distance, so to speak, there were those who were

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[85] Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, II, p. 180.

[86] al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 176b (Ibn Ḥanbal's letter to al-Mutawakkil); and cf. ibid., fol. 5a.

[87] That Ibn Ḥanbal comes across in the sources as very concerned to keep his distance from al-Mutawakkil and very unhappy when constrained to visit him and accept his gifts does not suggest any doubts on his part about the caliph's legitimacy or on the need to support him. (On Ibn Ḥanbal in relation to al-Mutawakkil, see Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Sīra*, pp. 90–133, passim; Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq, *Dhikr miḥnat al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Muḥammad Naghash (Cairo, 1977), pp. 84–113, passim; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* [Cairo, n.d.], pp. 356–79; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, X, pp. 351–54.) Such aversion was not unique to him, and it is perfectly understandable: any self-respecting scholar would have found it hard to condone all that a caliph did; and someone like Ibn Ḥanbal would definitely have wanted to avoid becoming a plaything in the caliph's hands. But, as emphasized earlier (see IV.4.2, above), to maintain a polite distance from those in power is not to indict that power or those holding it; and, at any rate, not every scholar maintained such distance. Nor could Ibn Ḥanbal, for all his scruples, avoid the caliph's incessant incursions on his privacy. As Ibn Kathīr tells us, virtually "every day [from the time Ibn Ḥanbal visited al-Mutawakkil in Sāmarrā in 237/851–2 till the former's death in 241/855] al-Mutawakkil would make inquiries from him, dispatching [someone] to consult him about [various] affairs and asking his advice about matters which came up." (*al-Bidāya*, X, p. 354; cf. Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Sīra*, p. 133.) If Ibn Ḥanbal could resist the *Miḥna*, as we are made to believe (for some doubt whether he did, cf. *EI(2)*, s.v. "Miḥna" [M. Hinds]) it is rather odd that he should not have been able to resist al-Mutawakkil's favours if they were really so unwelcome.

[88] See Nagel, *Rechtleitung*, pp. 242ff. and passim.

more directly involved in promoting the interests of the ruling family or of particular caliphs. Who these individuals were is usually not known, though some traces of their activities have survived. These range from pro-ʿAbbāsid traditions—often in the form of *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet or his Companions—to extensive historical narratives, of which the anonymous 3rd/9th century compilation, *Akhbār al-dawla al-ʿAbbāsiyya*, is one precious example. The purpose here is not to analyze these texts—that task has often received scholarly attention,[89] if not yet very systematically—but to form some idea of the (human) resources available to the ruling house in propagating its various causes.

The complaint of an Umayyad preacher, dismissed when the ʿAbbāsids came to power, is illustrative, perhaps, of more than his personal attitude: "Why should you dismiss me", he asked, "for I am only a preacher. If you ask me to add something to my stories, I will do so; and if you ask me to take something out of them, I will do so. So why do you have to dismiss me?"[90] Many a preacher active in propaganda *against* al-Maʾmūn during the civil war simply changed sides "to praise [him] the way he praised Jesus and Muḥammad" after al-Maʾmūn turned out to be victorious.[91] It is indicative of the nature of things here that al-Maʾmūn, who is supposed to have made this comment, should have been sufficiently cynical to allow this *volte face* to these preachers. Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), the Khurāsānī Qurʾān exegete, is said to have fabricated *ḥadīth*, or volunteered to do so, in support of al-Manṣūr's claim that his son was the *mahdī*. Ironically, this secret is frequently divulged in reports which have al-Manṣūr warn al-Mahdī that Muqātil was a notorious forger of *ḥadīth*.[92] In suggesting that the caliphs' commitment to the Prophet's *ḥadīth* was too sincere to countenance forgers (and ʿAbbāsid claims were too well-founded to need their services), such reports may already indicate that the activities of pro-regime intellectuals were not only wide-ranging but also notorious enough to require an apology.

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[89] For example, T. Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des Abbasiden Kalifates* (Bonn, 1972); J. Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*; Cl. Gilliot, "Portrait 'mythique' d'Ibn 'Abbās", *Arabica*, XXXII (1985), pp. 127–84.

[90] al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa*, II, p. 436.

[91] Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, *Kitāb Baghdād*, p. 15.

[92] Cf. Abū Zurʿa, *Taʾrikh*, II, p. 550 (nr. 1499). On Muqātil, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 36f.

Other examples can be added to this random sample. A Shīʿī, Hishām b. Ibrāhim, was called "al-ʿAbbāsī" because he had written a book on "The Proofs of the imamate of al-ʿAbbās" (*Āyāt imāmat al-ʿAbbās*); he is supposed to have done so to save his life, and remained in hiding until the work had reached ʿAbbāsid authorities and he was pardoned.[93] A man captured after the massacre of Fakhkh was spared by al-Hādī because he promised to put to good use, in the caliph's service, his intimate knowledge of the ʿAlid household.[94] ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abān (d. 207/822), who for some time was *qāḍī* of Wasit, is known to have narrated pro-Ma'mūnid *ḥadīth* which played upon the significance of this caliph's being the seventh ruler of the line. In a somewhat obscure passage, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abān is described as having a *ṣaḥīfa*, on which Ibn Ḥanbal, who examined it, found the words "*kitāb ʿatīq aṣfar*" at the top, and "*kitāb aṣfar ʿatīq*" at the bottom;[95] an effort may well have been under way here to revive the legend of the *ṣaḥīfa al-ṣafrāʾ*, "the yellow scroll"!

In the appointment of *qāḍīs* some consideration seems also to have been given to their ability to articulate and disseminate pro-regime ideas.[96] A Medinese notable, Hishām b. ʿAbdallāh al-Makhzūmī, so pleased Hārūn al-Rashīd with his words and *waʿẓ* that the caliph, besides rewarding him handsomely, appointed him the *qāḍī* of Medina.[97] In Hishām's eloquence the caliph may possibly have seen some expression of pro-ʿAbbāsid (or pro-Hārūn) sentiment, and certainly a potential to promote the regime's interests. Such individuals could be useful to the dynasty; appointment to the *qaḍāʾ* was both a recognition of services already rendered and an invitation to their continuance. al-Ma'mūn had a scholar, ʿAbdallāh b. Ṣāliḥ al-Asadī al-Kūfī, summoned to his court to have him narrate reports about some of the conversations which supposedly took place between Ibn ʿAbbās and

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[93] al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār maʿrifat al-rijāl*, (hereafter *Rijāl al-Kashshī*), ed. Ḥasan al-Muṣṭafawī (Mashshad 1348 H.sh.), pp. 501f. (nr. 961).

[94] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 560.

[95] Wakīʿ, Akhbār, III, p. 314. On ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abān see *TB*, X, pp. 442–447 (nr. 5604). On the symbolic significance of the number seven, see L.I. Conrad, "Seven and the *tasbīʿ*: On the implications of numerical symbolism for the study of medieval Islamic history", *JESHO*, XXXI (1988), pp. 42–73.

[96] Note that in Egypt as late as 204/820, the functions of *qaḍāʾ* and *qaṣaṣ* could still be combined in the same person: al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-wulāt wa kitāb al-quḍāt*, ed. R. Guest (London, 1912), p. 427.

[97] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, V, pp. 422f. That Hishām was a notable belonging to the influential Makhzūm clan of the Quraysh, and that he had a reputation for *al-amr biʾl-maʿrūf* etc. (ibid.), must also have guided the caliph's decision.

Muʿāwiya.[98] These reports, of which this scholar is said to have been the sole repository, are all tendentious; they seek, *inter alia*, to argue for ʿAbbāsid legitimism as against the claims of Muʿāwiya and ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr.[99] al-Maʾmūn, evidently pleased, appointed the narrator as the *qāḍī* of Fars, a position he retained until his death.[100] Here again, we have an instance where the appointment seems not only to have been a reward for services rendered but is also to be seen as the provision of a platform from which pro-regime propaganda could continue. The qualities which, according to a report of Ibn al-Nadīm, an (unnamed) ʿAbbāsid caliph once sought in a *qāḍī* are unusual but significant nevertheless:

> From among the *fuqahāʾ* [he is supposed to have instructed a confidant], find me someone who has written [down] *ḥadīth* and has mastered it, and [who possesses the ability for] individual judgement (*kataba'l-ḥadīth wa tafaqqaha bihi maʿa'l-raʾy*). He ought to be of an imposing height, have a pleasant disposition, be of Khurāsānī origin, and have been brought up under the auspices of our *dawla* so that he gives his support to our rule (*li-yuḥāmī ʿalā mulkinā*).[101]

If the report is genuine, the caliph would seem to have been a very demanding one. Unfortunately, however, its authenticity is rather suspect: it goes on to locate all the desired qualities in Muḥammad b. Shujāʿ ibn al-Thaljī (d. 257/870), a prominent Ḥanafī scholar of Muʿtazilī leanings, so that it is in his honour that the whole image would seem to have been conjured.[102] However, the possibly fictitious character of this report does not invalidate its rather incidental testimony that *qāḍī*s may have been required to further the dynasty's ideological interests. Nor is it without significance that *qāḍī*s were often suspected of mendacity in *ḥadīth*.[103] But that was scarcely confined to the *qāḍī*s alone.

Of all centres of *ḥadīth* scholarship, Baghdad was probably the most notorious for fabrication.[104] This notoriety may be attributable as much to the fact that Baghdad was host to traditionists of all colour, or that the prolific proportions of *ḥadīth* scholarship there compromised the

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[98] *Akhbār*, pp. 83f.
[99] Cf. ibid., pp. 53ff., 58ff.
[100] Ibid., p. 83.
[101] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 259.
[102] Ibid., pp. 259f.; on this scholar, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 436.
[103] On the mendacity of Baghdādian *qāḍī*s, see Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, pp. 89f.
[104] Cf. *TB*, I, p. 43.

quality of some of the materials handled, as to its being the centre of caliphal patronage. The temptations which the latter exercised were not necessarily irresistible but they were certainly momentous. The facility with which Ibn Abī Du'ād, the Mu'tazilī chief *qāḍī*, bought the services of 'Alī b. al-Madīnī (d. 234/849), the famous scholar of *ḥadīth* and *rijāl*, is instructive: rendered helpless by poverty, Ibn al-Madīnī is said to have assisted the chief *qāḍī* in the inquisition of Ibn Ḥanbal.[105] The inadvertent moral of the story is that with religious scholars under control the *religious texts*—on one of which the issue of an altercation between Ibn Abī Du'ād and Ibn Ḥanbal is said to have hinged—could always be manipulated; and to procure the services of the religious scholars could at no time have been very difficult. The latter may partially explain both the frequency of visits by scholars to Baghdad (and to the caliph's court) and reports to the effect that particular scholars lost their reputations on account of such visits.[106]

Such instances can be multiplied. Those already noted should suffice, however, to show that the intellectual resources which the early 'Abbāsid caliphs had at their disposal were considerable. That this should have been the case is significant though hardly unexpected. More remarkable perhaps are indications that while numerous pro-'Abbāsid forgeries in *ḥadīth* might be recognized for what they were, and their originators squarely discredited by Sunnī *rijāl*-critics, pro-'Abbāsid motifs in *ḥadīth* and elsewhere could still freely circulate and end up in quite respectable places. The conspicuous presence of traditions extolling al-'Abbās and Ibn 'Abbās and variously promoting the cause of 'Abbāsid legitimism in *ḥadīth* and classical historiography has been noted earlier.[107] Only one other example will be given here to further illustrate the point.

In al-Khallāl's *Masā'il* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, there is a series of traditions, preceded *inter alia* by Ibn Ḥanbal's exhortations to political quietism, which have a decidedly pro-'Abbāsid character. The most glaringly tendentious of these traditions is perhaps the 'Abbāsid adaptation of the equally tendentious Shī'ī *ḥadīth* regarding the *ahl al-kisā'*. The Prophet is supposed to have covered the quintessential *ahl al-bayt*—'Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn—with a cloak and prayed for them. The 'Abbāsid adaptation has al-'Abbās and his children

[105] *TB*, XI, pp. 466f. (nr. 6349). On Ibn al-Madīnī, see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 108.
[106] Cf. *TB*, X, p. 229 (nr. 5359).
[107] See I.3, above.

replace the ʿAlid *dramatis personae* while the tradition remains otherwise unaltered.[108] Other traditions of the pro-ʿAbbāsid series in the *Masāʾil* are less provocative but affirm ʿAbbāsid legitimism no less. Ibn Ḥanbal should not perhaps be accused of giving credence to such traditions. The *isnād*s with which these traditions are introduced there do not mention him, which gives rise to the suspicion that the compiler of the *Masāʾil*, or someone else, introduced this material into the work. It should be noted, however, that at least some of these traditions, or their variants, do occur in Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad*; in the latter work, the traditions in question do obviously have Ibn Ḥanbal's name in the *isnād*. In any case, even, if the presence of the pro-ʿAbbāsid traditions in the *Masāʾil* does not reflect Ibn Ḥanbal's approval of them, their presence there is still significant:[109] the proto-Sunnī—and not just the Ḥanbalī—circles, whose evolving attitudes the *Masāʾil* echoes, need not have been opposed to the message these traditions sought to convey.[110]

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[108] al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 5a; cf. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, III, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī (Wiesbaden, 1978), p. 4 (for a rather remote variant of this tradition); also cf. J. van Ess, "Les Qadarites et la Ġailānīya de Yazīd III", *SI*, XXXI (1970), p. 285, n. 2. For the Shīʿī tradition regarding the *ahl al-kisāʾ* see *EI(2)*, s.vv. "*Ahl al-kisāʾ*" (A.S. Tritton), "*Ahl al-bayt*" (I. Goldziher et al.), "Mubāhala" (W. Schmucker); *EIr*, s.v. "*Āl-e ʿAbā*" (H. Algar).

[109] The following is a paraphrase of these traditions, and an indication of some of the sources (besides the *Masāʾil*) they occur in:

(1) To condemn and hurt al-ʿAbbās is to condemn and hurt the Prophet: al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 5a; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, I, p. 300; Wensinck, *Handbook*, s.v. al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, III, pp. 2, 9.

(2) al-ʿAbbās is the twin-brother (*ṣinw*) of the Prophet's father: al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 5a; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, I, pp. 207f., II, p. 322.

(3) ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb successfully prayed for rain by invoking al-ʿAbbās' close kinship with the Prophet: al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 5b; Wensinck, *Handbook*, s.v. al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, III, p. 7.

For other traditions extolling al-ʿAbbās see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, III, pp. 1–22; for those extolling ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās see ibid., pp. 27–55. al-Balādburī shares many of the traditions on Ibn ʿAbbās with Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, II, pp. 365–72; also see al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa*, I, pp. 493–542. For an illuminating semiotic analysis of the forty-four traditions which occur in Ibn Saʿd's *tarjama* of Ibn ʿAbbās, see Cl. Gilliot, "Portrait 'mythique' d'Ibn ʿAbbās", pp. 127–84.

[110] If the *isnād*s of traditions extolling al-ʿAbbās are any indication, proto-Sunnī scholars would seem to be strongly associated with that kind of material. In al-Balādhurī's collection of traditions on al-ʿAbbās, for instance (*Ansāb*, III, pp. 1ff.), the following prominent names are frequently encountered in the *isnād*s: Abū Bakr b. ʿAyyāsh (d. 193/809: *TB*, XIV, pp. 371–85); Abū Muʿāwiya Muḥammad b. Khāzim al-Ḍarīr (d. 194/810: ibid., V, pp. 242–249); Ismāʿīl b. ʿAyyāsh (d. 182/798: ibid., VI, pp. 221–228); Khālid b. ʿAbdallāh al-Wāsiṭī (d. 182/798: ibid., VIII, pp. 294f.); al-Walīd b. Muslim (d. 195/810: Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, XI, pp. 151–155); Wahb b. Baqiyya al-Wāsiṭī (d. 239/853–4: *TB*, XIII, pp. 457f.); Wakīʿ b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812: ibid., XIII, pp. 466–481); Yaḥyā b. Ādam (d. 203/818:

Also worth noting is Ibn Ḥanbal's invocation of the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās in defending his own stance during the *Miḥna*, and in further defining it in the aftermath of the Inquisition. In al-Muʿtaṣim's court, he not only insisted on his adherence to that which "the son of your uncle (*ibn ʿammik*), the Prophet" had preached, but also adduced a tradition narrated by "your forefather (*jaddik*), Ibn ʿAbbās".[111] The suggestion was plain and powerful: in prosecuting the *Miḥna*, the caliph was not only abandoning the right path, he was even contravening the authority of his own ancestors, through whom his title to political headship was derived. Later, in a letter to the caliph Mutawakkil, Ibn Ḥanbal again invoked the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās to articulate his own distaste for disputations on the Qur'ān, and to show that it was to Ibn ʿAbbās that even the caliph ʿUmar owed his recognition of the dangers of such disputations.[112] How the image of Ibn ʿAbbās, a figure of great authority for the proto-Sunnīs and of immense prestige for the ruling house, may have been constructed under the ʿAbbāsids is a question which must be left aside here. There need not be a necessary correlation between the scholars' recognition of Ibn ʿAbbās' religious authority and their support for the ʿAbbāsids. But pending further work, it does not seem far-fetched to suppose that, in a milieu where both the caliphs and many scholars were narrating *ḥadīth* through Ibn ʿAbbās, the development of the latter's image, the caliphs' patronage of the proto-Sunnī scholars, and an increasing awareness of shared interests between the caliphs and those scholars probably went together.

The conclusion towards which the foregoing discussion points is not that by Ibn Ḥanbal's time the proto-Sunnī scholars had all become pro-ʿAbbāsid, but only that there was a strong current of pro-ʿAbbāsid sentiment in the proto-Sunnī camp by that time.[113] This sentiment owed itself not only to ʿAbbāsid religious policies but also, it seems,

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Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, XI, pp. 175f.); Yazīd b. Hārūn (d. 206/821: *TB*, XIV, pp. 337ff.). Many of these scholars have figured in the previous pages; and not a few of them are known to have been in contact with the ʿAbbāsids: for Abū Bakr b. ʿAyyāsh, Abū Muʿāwiya, Wakiʿ b. al-Jarrāḥ, Yaḥyā b. Ādam, Yazīd b. Hārūn, see chapters III and IV, above; for Ismāʿil b. ʿAyyāsh, see *TB*, VI, pp. 221f.; for Khālid al-Wāsiṭī, see ibid., VIII, p. 294.

[111] Ḥanbal b. Isḥāq, *Dhikr miḥna*, p. 47.

[112] al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fols. 176b–177a.

[113] The view that "it was in traditions marginal to mainstream Islam that the ʿAbbāsids found their intellectual resources" (Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, p. 64) is therefore off the mark (though the "traditions" in this statement do not of course simply mean *ḥadīth* or *akhbār*).

to a recognition, on the part of both the ʿAbbāsids and the ʿulamāʾ, that there was a substantial concordance in their mutual interests.

V.3. *The Limits of Effective Power*

Hārūn al-Rashīd's letter to the emperor Constantine VI is a powerful statement of the caliphate's might. The early ʿAbbāsid empire did have very considerable resources. But the wide extent of the caliph's sway and his despotic powers should not be allowed to conceal the weaknesses from which the empire suffered even at its height. A distinction between "despotic" and "infrastructural" power is pertinent here, and as Michael Mann has reminded us, it applies to *all* pre-modern states: "*Despotic power* refers to the range of actions that the ruler and his staff are empowered to attempt to implement without routine, institutionalized negotiation with civil society groups.... *Infrastructural power* refers to the capacity to actually penetrate society and to implement logistically political decisions. What should be immediately obvious about the despots of historic empires is the weakness of their infrastructural powers..."[114] Grandiose statements of caliphal intentions and claims should always be balanced, therefore, with some assessment of how effective the caliph's measures might actually have been. The following is an attempt to consider briefly what this sobering note signifies for ʿAbbāsid religious policies.

We have discussed earlier al-Mahdī's letter to the governor of Basra regarding Ziyād b. Abīhi, in which the caliph had very ceremoniously presented himself as the restorer of the Prophet's *sunna* after it had been violated by the founder of the Umayyad dynasty. Having reproduced this letter in full, al-Ṭabarī appends the following report to it: "When the letter reached Muḥammad b. Sulaymān [the governor of Basra] he set out putting it into effect, but then representations were made on... behalf [of the family of Ziyād, which would be adversely affected by the decree] and he did not proceed. ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ẓubyān al-Numayrī had been sent a letter like the one to Muḥammad [b. Sulaymān],[115] but he did not put it into effect because of his

[114] M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, I (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 169f. (italics in the original).

[115] ʿAbd al-Malik al-Numayrī, a former governor of Basra, was in charge of the public

relationship to Qays and his dislike of any of his people leaving it for another group."[116]

This report can be interpreted in either of two ways. It may be taken to indicate that the caliph himself was not particularly keen to have his decree implemented: if the decree was intended to be read out to the public, the caliph's achievement as restorer of the *sunna* might be thought to have been sufficiently impressed on the public imagination without having to actually implement the specific instructions which were supposed to illustrate that role.[117] Conversely, the foregoing report can also be interpreted as evidence that caliphal decrees could, without much difficult, be circumvented or ignored in view of local interests. That this could happen somewhere as near the seat of ʿAbbāsid power as Basra gives a rather grim picture of the effectiveness of ʿAbbāsid decrees further afield; many a provincial governor may simply have been incapable, when not unwilling, to agitate the powerful local interests he had to contend with.[118] One reluctant appointee to the governorship of Medina, ʿAbdallāh b. Muṣʿab al-Zubayrī, is even said to have had al-Rashīd concede to the following condition for his appointment: "I will enforce only those of your

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prayers at the time the letter was sent to him (cf. al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 466). His being a recipient of this letter strongly suggests that it was meant to be read out to the public on the occasion of congregational prayers.

[116] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 482; translation as in Kennedy, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXIX, p. 193. Already Abu'l-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ, the first ʿAbbāsid caliph, had written to his Basran governor, Sulaymān b. ʿAlī, to confiscate the property of the Banū Ziyād; but the governor's compliance with this directive had been only partial. See al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, III, p. 91.

[117] Cf. P. Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical sociology and political pluralism*, tr. B. Pearce (London, 1990), p. 300 (on the Theodosian Code, and the edicts of the Roman emperors generally): "It was as if the Emperor was concerned not so much to be obeyed as to prove to his people that he shared the principles and the sufferings of his subjects; as if the law was not essentially imperative but aimed also at bearing witness (the same could be said of the edicts of the Chinese emperors or of the papal bulls of the Middle Ages)."

[118] Cf. H. Kennedy, *The Early ʿAbbāsid Caliphate* (London, 1981), p. 195: "The powers of both the caliph and his governor were severely circumscribed by local forces, and successful government was the result of negotiation and compromise, as much as the exercise of authority." Idem, "Central Government and Provincial Elites in the early 'Abbāsid Caliphate", *BSOAS*, XLIV (1981), pp. 26–38. On similar constraints on the emperor's effective power in the late Roman empire see J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and imperial administration in the late Roman empire* (London, 1972), pp. 106f.: ". . . while the idea of the [Roman] emperor loomed powerfully and fearfully over Antioch, the reality was a long way away at Constantinople. The emperor might send a letter conveying commands which were of absolutely overriding authority, but it would depend on the attitude of the governors whether the commands were obeyed." Also see Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (Madison, 1992), pp. 3–34, especially pp. 24ff.

commands (*kutubik*) that I see fit, and will stand aside from those I do not (*wa aqif ʿammā lā arā*)!"[119]

The caliphs certainly liked to keep themselves well-informed of developments in the provinces. Postmasters wrote day and night (quite literally, as al-Ṭabarī would have it) to al-Manṣūr, reporting, among other things, on the prices and—significantly—on the *qāḍī*s' decisions.[120] The same caliph once had a *qāḍī* of Mawṣil flogged to death for reasons which have not been recorded.[121] But the actual control which the caliphs were able to exercise on even the *qāḍī*, or what they knew of his activities or attitudes, was probably limited. The case of the Egyptian *qāḍī* ʿAbdallāh b. Lahīʿa (d. 174/790) is an instructive if somewhat atypical example. He was appointed by al-Manṣūr—"*ʿalā ḍuʿfi ʿaqlihi wa sūʾi madhhabihi*"[122]—and continued in office under al-Mahdī. Ibn Lahīʿa's waywardness (*sūʾ madhhabihi*) is often understood as consisting in his Shīʿite proclivities,[123] though some doubt has been expressed about that.[124] But some sort of mildly Shīʿite inclinations were not unusual for a *qāḍī* in early ʿAbbāsid times. What is rather more remarkable is that Ibn Lahīʿa also figures prominently in *isnād*s of numerous messianic and apocalyptic traditions—traditions which have all sorts of tendencies, ʿAlid, ʿAbbāsid, and perhaps anti-ʿAbbāsid.[125] Now if a *qāḍī* such as Sharīk b. ʿAbdallāh (d. 187/803) could be harassed by al-Mahdī for narrating a tradition deemed to have unfavourable implications for the ruling house,[126] one might have expected something similar for Ibn Lahīʿa for transmitting or

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[119] al-Zubayr b. Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab Quraysh wa akhbārihā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo, 1381 A.H.), I, p. 130.

[120] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 435.

[121] al-Azdī, *Taʾrīkh Mawsil*, ed. ʿAlī Ḥabība (Cairo, 1967), p. 216; Kennedy, "Central Government and Provincial Elites", p. 29 n. 23, suggests that the punishment may have been due to the failure of this *qāḍī*, who was also in charge of taxation in the area, in the latter sphere. Also cf. Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, III, p. 304 (Hārūn's *qāḍī* of al-Madāʾin terrorized and forced to flee for non-conformity to the caliph's directives).

[122] al-Kindī, *al-Quḍāt*, p. 369; cf. R.G. Khoury, *ʿAbd Allāh ibn Lahīʿa* (Wiesbaden, 1986), p. 47.

[123] Cf. van Ess, *Th&G*, II, p. 717. For some specimens of the "Shīʿī" traditions transmitted by Ibn Lahīʿa, see Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-majrūḥīn*, II (Aleppo, 1975), p. 14; *TB*, XI, pp. 112f. (nr. 5805).

[124] Khoury, *ʿAbd Allāh ibn Lahīʿa*, pp. 46ff., dismisses (rather unconvincingly) both the remark and the suspicion that the *qāḍī* was a Shīʿī. Madelung, too, thinks that "Ibn Lahīʿa was not a Shīʿite . . .": "The Sufyānī", p. 36. The question hinges, of course, on what one means by a "Shīʿī".

[125] Cf. Madelung, "The Sufyānī", pp. 30ff.

[126] Ibn ʿAdī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ*, IV, pp. 22f.

authorizing traditions uncomplimentary to the ʿAbbāsids.[127] That, however, is not the case. It does not necessarily follow from such traditions that Ibn Lahīʿa was anti-ʿAbbāsid, however, any more than the pro-ʿAbbāsid traditions would prove his having been pro-ʿAbbāsid.[128] That a *qāḍī* (of all people) *could* lend his authority to *ḥadīth* materials at least some of which had unfavourable overtones for the ruling house does nevertheless tell us something about constraints on the rulers' ability to keep a close watch on the activities of their subjects.

The ʿAbbāsid state probably lacked the infrastructural and intensive power necessary to implement its religious policies effectively.[129] There is little indication, however, that before al-Maʾmūn's institution of the *Miḥna*, the caliphs had ever tried to do so.[130] Patronizing the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ and many of their viewpoints was hardly the same thing as trying to *implement* those viewpoints. Early ʿAbbāsid interventions in religious life were, for their part, more in the nature of symbolic statements of support for proto-Sunnīs than serious attempts to impose some form of a proto-Sunnī creed as the ideology of the state. Such symbolic statements may have had considerable significance;[131] but of an effort to impose a state religion, so to speak, there is little evidence.[132] The only attempt made in the early ʿAbbāsid period to enforce a particular doctrine was that of al-Maʾmūn.

What made al-Maʾmūn's association with the doctrine of *khalq al-Qurʾān* so distasteful was not only the doctrine itself nor the caliph's advocacy of it, but rather the effort to *impose* it. Such an initiative was an innovation, or so at least the ʿulamāʾ thought. Abū Ḥassān al-Ziyādī, a Ḥanafī scholar who was among those the governor of Baghdad summoned for questioning on the doctrine, said: "[This] might be the doctrine of the Commander of the Faithful, yet he might not [necessarily] command the people to [adopt] it. But if you tell me

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[127] Cf. Madelung, "The Sufyānī", pp. 33, 37.

[128] Cf. ibid., p. 32.

[129] Cf. Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, p. 23, on the late Roman Empire: "The failure of the emperors to impose their religious policies on large regions of the empire is a measure of the silent powers of resistance of which a late Roman provincial society remained capable."

[130] The caliphs were usually careful not even to appoint *qāḍīs* who lacked local support, and they were known frequently to dismiss those whom influential local sentiment wanted to see removed. N. Tsafrir, "The Spread of the Ḥanafī School in the Western Regions of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate up to the End of the Third Century A.H.", Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1993, pp. 71, 86, 138–66, and passim.

[131] See V.4, below.

[132] Also cf. van Ess, *Th&G*, III, p. 9.

that the Commander of the Faithful has *ordered* you that I must acquiesce in it, I will say what you ask me to."[133] ʿAlī b. Abī Muqātil, another scholar whose belief was being examined, opined that al-Maʾmūn's commitment to the doctrine in question "might be . . . like the disagreement (*ikhtilāf*) of the Companions of the Prophet in [matters pertaining to] shares in estate (*farāʾiḍ*) and inheritance (*mawārīth*). [The Companions disagreed among themselves, but] they did not force their views on the people."[134] The reasoning of Yaḥyā b. Aktham, al-Maʾmūn's chief *qāḍī* in the pre-*Miḥna* period, in dissuading the caliph from his intention to have Muʿāwiya publicly cursed also bears some similarity to the views just quoted: "The people, especially those of Khurasan, will not bear this [sc. cursing of Muʿāwiya]; there is no guarantee against their having a strong aversion to it, nor can you tell what that would lead to. Sound judgement is to leave the people as they are and not to reveal to them that you are inclined in favour of one of the *firaq*. Such [a course] is politically better and is more sagacious."[135] Later, the caliph Muʿtaḍid allowed himself to be persuaded that a similar proclamation against Muʿāwiya was ill-advised, though ostensibly not because it would cause a public commotion, but rather because an attack on the Umayyad caliph would enhance the public image of the ʿAlids to the detriment of the ʿAbbāsids.[136]

None of the statements quoted above actually says that the caliph *cannot* implement whatever he chooses to; to say so would have been too offensive, and probably even unintelligible.[137] The suggestion rather is that it is not sound policy to enforce something on which there is disagreement and which is likely to be offensive to many people. The point is not that the caliph should have nothing to do with religious life, only that it is better to go along with the people than against them. al-Maʾmūn took the advice against the cursing of Muʿāwiya, but not against the *Miḥna*, though even that initiative did not succeed for long. The failure of the *Miḥna* may, perhaps, be viewed as a result of the growing influence and authority of the ʿulamāʾ in ʿAbbāsid society, though one can scarcely ignore the fact that most of the ʿulamāʾ,

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[133] al Ṭabarī, III, p. 1123. Emphasis added. On Abū Ḥassān (d. 242/857), who was later to serve as *qāḍī* of the Sharqiyya quarter of Baghdād for al-Mutawakkil, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 123; *TB*, VII, pp. 356–61 (nr. 3877); Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 316.

[134] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 1123.

[135] Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, *Kitāb Baghdād*, p. 54.

[136] al-Ṭabarī, III, pp. 2177f.

[137] As it was to al-Muʿtaḍid, for instance: al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 2178.

even Ibn Ḥanbal according to some Mu'tazilī accounts,[138] had acquiesced in the caliph's decree. If the *Miḥna* still came to an ignominious end, however, it is hardly unreasonable to see in that failure yet another illustration of the infrastructural weakness of the state to effectively implement, or implement for long, *any* policy.[139]

The termination of the *Miḥna* was in many ways a return to the more familiar pattern of caliphal patronage of the proto-Sunnīs. However, if al-Mutawakkil seems to have gone beyond his pre-Ma'mūnid predecessors in also trying to *implement* some of the proto-Sunnī positions, that was not only because the latter had by then been more fully articulated but also because in a sense this caliph was himself a child of the *Miḥna*: the concern to implement—rather than only ceremoniously endorse—a viewpoint was an innovation, a legacy of the *Miḥna*, which al-Mutawakkil adopted to a certain extent.

V.4. *The Significance of 'Abbāsid Rhetoric*

What did the early 'Abbāsids contribute to the development of proto-Sunnism? It is unlikely that a definitive answer to this question can ever be given. However, there are at least two ways of approaching the problem. One is to identify some of the more prominent expressions of 'Abbāsid patronage, though there is no way—with the available resources—of determining the precise impact which this patronage had on contemporary religious life. That numerous scholars visited the 'Abbāsid court, regularly associated with the caliphs, and benefitted from monetary patronage, or that certain prominent scholars were "recognized" as representatives of religious life in their areas of influence, does nevertheless tell us much about the engagement of the 'Abbāsids with religious life—with proto-Sunnī trends, specifically—and the scholars' dependence (to what extent, it is impossible

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[138] Cf. *EI(2)*, s.v. "*Miḥna*" (M. Hinds).

[139] The case of al-Ma'mūn's coinage reform of 206/821 is also instructive. It took "a decade for the caliph's command to go around the caliphate and it . . . [did] not become effective at all in a few places . . ." T. El-Hibri, "Coinage Reform under the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Ma'mūn", *JESHO*, XXXVI (1993), pp. 58–83; the quote is from p. 76. The inefficiency of this reform need not be attributed exclusively to the adverse effects, on central authority, of the civil war between al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn (as Hibri does), but might simply have been a function of the limits on state power at any given time; the civil war may, however, have made such limits crippling.

to say) on the caliph's. As the guardians of the faith, moreover, the caliphs expressed support for particular religious trends and those representing them, combatted "heresies" and various kinds of religious and political threats, and provided a self-confident religious milieu in which an "orthodoxy" could be articulated. Such expressions of caliphal patronage have been surveyed at some length in the previous chapter. Another way of looking at the question under consideration is to regard the various expressions of ʿAbbāsid patronage, and the diverse facets of the caliphs' religious policies, as constituents of a religious rhetoric. The significance of the caliph's religious rhetoric has been touched upon in certain contexts earlier, but the problem deserves some further consideration.

The caliph's function as guardian of the faith is, of course, one of the prime instances of religious rhetoric. Not only were occasions of caliphal interventions in religious life justified as constituting such guardianship, some of the caliph's measures may have been intended precisely to assert that role. The caliph's measures were also a symbolic expression of his power, a power which otherwise laboured under many a constraint.[140] ʿAbbāsid measures affecting religious life were erratic, often not very effective, perhaps not even meant to be so. They did constitute a symbolic statement of the caliph's intent and commitments, however, and for that reason are likely to have been an increment to the social weight of those whose viewpoint they upheld.

Then there was religious rhetoric of a more general character. It was not only that the caliphs were keenly interested in *ḥadīth*, or patronized *ḥadīth* scholars. The ʿAbbāsids gave to their commitment to the Prophet and his *sunna* a very *public* expression: official documents of al-Mahdī and Hārūn were one expression of it,[141] al-Mahdī's architectural initiatives in Medina and Mecca are another example. In the year 160/776–7, al-Mahdī had the Prophet's Mosque in Medina enlarged and its *maqṣūra* removed.[142] The latter was an "innovation" which the Umayyads had introduced in the architecture of the mosque

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[140] The significance of military triumphs against external or internal foes for the caliphal rhetoric of early ʿAbbāsid times will not be studied here. An excellent example of the lines along which an enquiry into this aspect of caliphal rhetoric can be explored however is Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986); also cf. S.P. Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the ʿAbbāsid Age* (Leiden, 1991), pt. 2 (pp. 109–235).

[141] See IV.2.1, IV.2.2, above.

[142] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 483. On the *maqṣūra*, see *EI(2)*, s.v. "Masdjid", pt. i (I. Pedersen and R. Hillenbrand).

to separate and guard themselves from the rest of the congregation.[143] In having it removed now, a return to the pristine purity of the first days of Islam was being effected, and a *sunna* being rehabilitated. The caliph also "wanted to reduce the height of the pulpit (*minbar*) . . . and restore it to its original state, removing from it what Muʿāwiya had added. It is said on the authority of Mālik b. Anas that he took advice about this but was told that the nails had passed into the wood which Muʿāwiya had added (*aḥdatha*) and into the original wood—now very old—so that if the nails were to be taken out, and [the pulpit] rocked, it might break. al-Mahdī therefore left it as it was."[144] In Mecca, two inscriptions, both of the year 167/783–4, recorded respectively al-Mahdī's extension of the gate through which the Prophet passed on his way to Mount Ṣafāʾ, and the caliph's order "to turn a [certain] rivulet (*al-wādī*) to the course it had followed in the time of his father (*abīhi*!) Ibrāhīm, the peace and blessings of God be on him . . ."[145]

Rather than dismiss such religious rhetoric for what it was—a prop of ʿAbbāsid legitimism—it should be seen as a contribution, in some cases perhaps an inadvertent one, to religious discourse: if the caliph could not, or did not wish to, impose a proto-Sunnī ideology, he could at least symbolically proclaim the commitment of his state to the *sunna* and to those who, like himself, were engaged in reviving it. The state was not only representing itself as "orthodox", it was thereby also helping give a *concrete* expression to the notion of an "orthodoxy". Certain beliefs were being made visible, to adapt a phrase of Clifford Geertz,[146] and so was the caliph's support for them.

This concern with an "orthodoxy" is further discernible in certain other specimens of religious rhetoric. The letter of Muḥammad b. ʿAlī to the Shīʿa in Khurasan, which seems to be the product of early ʿAbbāsid pseudo-epigraphy, and the letter of al-Mahdī regarding Ziyād b. Abīhi both illustrate that preoccupation. In the former, the attack on religious waywardness (of Khidāsh, presumably) is only implicit

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[143] Cf. I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, tr. C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern (London, 1967–1971), II, p. 50.

[144] al-Ṭabarī, III, p. 483; translation based on H. Kennedy, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXIX (Albany, 1990), pp. 194f. (with several modifications).

[145] E. Combe et al., *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, I (Cairo, 1931–), p. 40 (nrs. 50 and 51 respectively). Cf. al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, II, pp. 78–81.

[146] C. Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the symbolics of power", in idem, *Local Knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology* (New York, 1983), p. 129.

but all the attention which is devoted to righteous behaviour—its manifestations and importance—clearly evokes the dichotomy between rectitude and error; that dichotomy is made explicit in al-Mahdī's letter, as already noted. Implicitly and explicitly, both documents stress the *sunna* of the Prophet as the guide to correct behaviour and are very close in spirit to the standard Sunnī *ḥadīth* on *bidʿa*. These documents do not only echo a proto-Sunnī viewpoint; they also endorse—and, perhaps, help construct—a certain *conception* of an "orthodoxy". al-Mahdī's persecution of the *zanādiqa* was yet another assertion not simply of 'Abbāsid "orthodoxy", or of the caliph's prerogative to uphold it, but also of the conviction that there was an "orthodoxy" to be so upheld. al-Mahdī's inquisition could not have failed to create, or at least dramatically heighten, the sense of a social and religious anti-thesis, the "other" against which the "orthodoxy" of the proto-Sunnīs would stand in sharp relief. Conversely, in *challenging* the proto-Sunnīs and prescribing conformity to a particular doctrine anathematic to them, the *Miḥna* too appealed (and may therefore have contributed) no less to the notion of an "orthodoxy" than its proto-Sunnī victims did in their own terms.[147]

[147] See III.4.1. The *Miḥna* also contributed, of course, to the development of proto-Sunnī theology—to the belief, for instance, that the Qur'ān is not merely the speech of God but that it is *un*created. W. Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy concerning the Creation of the Koran", in *Orientalia hispanica sive studia F.M. Pareja octogenario dicata*, ed. J.M. Banal, I (Leiden, 1974), pp. 504–25.

CONCLUSION

This study has sought to challenge the notion, frequently repeated in recent scholarship, that a "separation" or "divorce" of religion and politics took place in the early ʿAbbāsid period.[1] Some of the more influential formulations of this notion then go on to suggest that this separation or divorce set the pattern for much of subsequent Islamic history.[2] It has not been my purpose here to investigate whether this model of religion and the state holds up for pre-modern Muslim societies in general, let alone what it contributes to a better understanding, or a more sophisticated comparative assessment, of those societies. My concern has been more modest: to examine certain religious developments in early ʿAbbāsid society in the context of the relationship between the scholars associated with those developments and the caliphs. What emerges from this study is not a picture of the separation of religion and the state, however, but one which reveals the caliphs and the ʿulamāʾ in close mutual dependence. The religious scholars described here were not hostile to the regime, or convinced of its illegitimacy, or concerned only to save whatever they deemed precious from its contaminating touch.[3] Rather, they were among the beneficiaries of the extensive, multifaceted patronage of the state; and the caliphs' support for the viewpoints they represented gave them definite stakes in associating with the ʿAbbāsid state, not in separating themselves from it.

Within the broad framework of religious life and politics under the early ʿAbbāsids, this study has concentrated on the attitudes and activities of those I have described as "proto-Sunnīs". Though it is generally assumed that the ʿAbbāsids came to ally themselves with the Sunnīs,[4] the actual process through which this momentous devel-

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[1] I.M. Lapidus, "The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society", *IJMES*, VI (1975), pp. 363–85; P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The evolution of the Islamic polity* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 85 uses the term "divorce". Also see I.2, above.

[2] Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, pp. 61–91; Ira M. Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, 1988).

[3] Contrast Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, p. 63: ". . . the Muslims saw . . . [power] as illegitimate in the most literal sense of the word."

[4] Cf. J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* [hereafter *Th&G*] (Berlin and New York,

opment gradually took shape has been little studied. This book has attempted to shed some light on the complexities of this process, and has sought to examine how (and why) the ʿAbbāsids aligned themselves with proto-Sunnism, and what this meant for both the ruling house and for the scholars. In doing so, I have also examined various aspects of the emergence of the proto-Sunnī elite and the articulation of some of their most distinctive doctrines. The social and political context of this evolution has been lacking in the scholarship on the first centuries of Islam, and though this study is not a history of early Sunnism, it should, in supplying some of that context, contribute towards the possibility of eventually writing one.

Except for the *Miḥna*—which was neither the culmination of a long standing conflict between the caliphs and the ʿulamāʾ, nor a watershed in ʿAbbāsid, and Islamic history, as it is so often portrayed to be[5]—the social and political milieu in which proto-Sunnī viewpoints evolved was characterized not by a conflict between the caliphs and the ʿulamāʾ but rather by a growing collaboration. The case for a conflict usually rests on positing a competition over religious authority between the caliphs and the scholars.[6] There is little evidence, however, that with the exception of al-Maʾmūn the early ʿAbbāsids laid claims to religious authority for themselves—to the authority, over and above that of the scholars, to define the law or lay down the beliefs according to which their subjects must live. The caliphs, I have argued, were part of religious life, before the *Miḥna* and after it; the failure of the Inquisition did not change that at all. Apart from acting as patrons of the scholars, they fostered an image of themselves as scholars in their own right; for their part, the jurists spoke of the caliph's *ijtihād*, and expected him, together with other jurists, to participate in resolving legal and other problems. The caliph's role as the guardian of the community's religious life, his function of *al-amr biʾl-maʿrūf*, continued, moreover, to be recognized, and exercised, after the Inquisition as it was before it. The *Miḥna* was a challenge to the proto-Sunnī scholars; but far from setting a seal on the separation of religion and

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1991–), III, p. 10: "Man hatte die Revolution zum Erfolg geführt, indem man sich von den Ambitionen und Träumen der Šiʿiten hatte tragen lassen; konsolidieren konnte man sie nur, indem man die Sunniten gewann." Also cf. Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, pp. 62ff. and especially p. 69 on the ʿAbbāsid "trek towards the Sunnī camp".

[5] For instance, see *EI(2)*, s.v. "*Miḥna*" (M. Hinds).

[6] The most articulate account of this competition is P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious authority in the first centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, 1986).

the state, its failure did not alter, only confirmed, the terms on which the relationship between the caliphs and the scholars had come to be based. In general, it is in collaboration with the 'ulamā', not in opposition to them, nor even independently of them, that the early 'Abbāsid caliphs appear to have acted; and it was crucial to their religious image to be *seen* as so acting.

The *Miḥna* of al-Ma'mūn was also uncharacteristic of the period in that it was the only attempt in early 'Abbāsid times to impose a particular doctrine by caliphal decree. The caliphs did, on various occasions, intervene in religious life, usually in favour of viewpoints which were, or would eventually be, associated with the proto-Sunnīs. But these interventions were less in the nature of religious persecutions and more in that of erratic but self-conscious and very public statements of support for or opposition to particular viewpoints.[7] Yet they should not be supposed to have been insignificant for being erratic. At a time when the state—any pre-modern state, for that matter—had insufficient infrastructural means to effectively implement *any* policies for long, if at all, the caliph's religious interventions are likely to have had considerable demonstrative effect. Likewise, the perception that particular scholars were in contact with the caliph and enjoyed his support are likely to have given the religious trends represented by such scholars considerable advantage over rival ones. What Peter Brown has observed as regards the rise of the Christians to a socially dominant position in Late Antique society applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the emergence of the proto-Sunnī elite in relation to the early 'Abbāsids too: "It was the flesh and bone of access to the imperial power that came to count in the fifth century", Brown writes. "A groundswell of confidence that Christians enjoyed access to the powerful spelled the end of polytheism far more effectively than did any imperial law or the closing of any temple."[8] While the precise effect of 'Abbāsid patronage on the proto-Sunnī religious trends can hardly be measured, it does not seem extravagant to think that such access to the powerful contributed something to the influence the proto-Sunnī scholars—many of whom were known to be in contact with, supportive of, or patronized by the caliphs—came to enjoy in society.

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[7] Compare M. Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 167–75, on the absence of any "legally constituted or socially authorized agencies" for the suppression of heresy in medieval Damascus. (The quotation is from p. 174.)

[8] P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (Madison, 1992), p. 136.

The patronage of the proto-Sunnīs did not usually mean preference for a particular proto-Sunnī viewpoint to the neglect or exclusion of others, however. The various religious groups and affiliations broadly characterized here as "proto-Sunnī" could be very antagonistic to each other during the period under study: the *ahl al-ḥadīth*, for instance, opposed the *aṣḥāb al-ra'y*, in particular the school of Abū Ḥanīfa; to make matters worse, many early Ḥanafīs had Murji'ī leanings too, while the *ahl al-ḥadīth* were bitterly opposed to the Murji'a. Yet the Ḥanafīs were very prominent in ʿAbbāsid judicial administration. But the *ahl al-ḥadīth* were equally the beneficiaries of caliphal patronage, and, besides much else, many of them also served as *qāḍī*s for the ʿAbbāsids.[9]

In general, the early ʿAbbāsids appear not to have interfered with variation and differences among the proto-Sunnīs, nor to have looked for uniformity where none existed.[10] Yet it is tempting to think that in patronizing different shades of the emergent proto-Sunnism the caliphs may in fact have contributed to bringing them closer. By coming to live in a cosmopolitan Baghdad, away from the regional centres where particular doctrinal controversies had been born or were still cherished, the scholars probably came closer to a more tolerant view of each other, as van Ess has suggested.[11] Something similar may have happened when ʿulamā' of various persuasions found themselves visiting, or serving, or being assisted by, the same patrons. There remained much variation, many disagreements within proto-Sunnism; and the definition of religious identities was in many ways an ongoing process. Yet in associating themselves with the proto-Sunnī religious elite—their ideals, their *ḥadīth*, their conceptions of authority, their views even of the caliph's own position and function, in short, with

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[9] Early ʿAbbāsid *qāḍī*s from the *ahl al-ḥadīth* include: ʿĀṣim b. Sulaymān al-Aḥwal (d. 142/759–60: al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, (*Ta'rīkh Baghdād* [Cairo, 1931], XII, pp. 243–47): Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd al-Anṣārī (d. 143/760: ibid., XIV, pp. 101–106); al-Ḥajjāj b. Arṭāt (d. ca. 144/761–2: ibid., VIII, pp. 230–36); Yaḥyā b. Zakariyyā b. Abī Zā'ida (d. 183 or 184/799–800: ibid., XIV, pp. 114–119); Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth (d. 194/810: ibid., VIII, pp. 188–200); Muʿādh b. Muʿādh al-ʿAnbarī (d. 196/812: ibid., XIII, pp. 131–34); Mūsā b. Dā'ūd al-Khalaqānī (d. 217/832: ibid., XIII, pp. 33f.).

[10] The caliphs found it politic to respect local sentiment, and their *qāḍī*s, for instance, frequently were locally acceptable people: cf. H. Kennedy, "Central Government and Provincial Elites in the Early ʿAbbāsid Caliphate", *BSOAS*, XLIV (1981), pp. 29f.; N. Tsafrir, "The Spread of the Ḥanafī School in the Western Regions of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate up to the End of the Third Century A.H.", Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1993, pp. 39f., 70ff., 158, etc.

[11] Van Ess, *Th&G*, III, pp. 29f.

the evolution of their "authorizing discourses"[12]—the early ʿAbbāsids may have given greater coherence to the proto-Sunnī world view than it may otherwise have possessed. Conversely, the very persistence of several tendencies among the proto-Sunnī scholars meant that even in patronizing one broadly defined religious trend among many, the state was assured of a fairly extensive base of support, with a resonance in many different quarters.

It has not been my purpose in this book to trace continuities between the early ʿAbbāsid period and what went before and came after it. Yet, if they have not usually been emphasized here, that certainly does not mean that they are either absent or not worth studying. Both the Umayyad and the ʿAbbāsid empires were part of the Late Antique world, and many of the institutions of that world—social, political, and religious—continued, even as they were transformed, in the first centuries of Islam.[13] On the other hand, many of the religious trends and developments we encounter in early ʿAbbāsid society, including some of those which went into the making of proto-Sunnism, originated in the late Umayyad period. The early ʿAbbāsids were hardly the first to have religious scholars in their entourage, or to act as their patrons; the Umayyads too sometimes come across in our sources as intervening in religious life; and we already have individuals in the Umayyad period who were characterized as *ahl al-sunna*, though for the proto-Sunnī world view, or the systematic patronage of scholars espousing it, we must wait till the early ʿAbbāsid era.

For purposes of this study, however, the *rhetoric* of continuity has been of greater interest than the substantive continuities themselves. As we have seen, nowhere did this notion of continuity have more importance than in the doctrines of the *ahl al-sunna*: the very enterprise of self-definition was, in their case, predicated on claiming to uphold the *sunna*, on their insistence that the *fitna*s of early Islam had not compromised the continuity of the community's righteous existence, and on their conviction that they alone represented and guaranteed this continuity. The *ahl al-sunna*'s veneration for Muʿāwiya—which caused much distress to al-Maʾmūn and, later, to al-Muʿtaḍid—but above all, their gradual recognition of ʿAlī as the fourth of the Rāshidūn

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[12] I have borrowed this phrase from Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore, 1993), p. 37.

[13] Cf. G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993).

caliphs were entailed by a similar logic. In these instances, but also in many others, the rhetoric of historical continuity was paramount—a rhetoric which was sustained at least as much by the "invention of tradition" as by its preservation.[14]

Ḥadīth, in the study of which the ʿAbbāsids too were enthusiastic participants, similarly affirmed this sense of continuity: it bound the community of scholars with the Prophet and his Companions, the scholars with each other, and the caliphs not just with the Prophet, or their own predecessors, but also with the scholars.[15] Significantly, some of the continuities between the early ʿAbbāsid and later periods can also be traced with reference to the study of *ḥadīth*. In many cases, later caliphs too continued to cultivate an ʿulamāʾ-like image for themselves. So did many functionaries of the state, many *amīr*s and notables, in Būyid Iraq and Iran, in Ayyūbid and Mamlūk Damascus, in Mamlūk Cairo, and probably elsewhere as well.[16] Conversely, as Michael Chamberlain has shown, the skills and accomplishments of the ʿulamāʾ themselves, of medieval Damascus at least, were often depicted in terms usually employed for the military and the ruling elite.[17] All this does not suggest a world in which a separation or divorce of religion and the state has been effected; rather, this conjures the image of a society where, from statecraft to scholarship, religion and politics interpenetrate and not only remain mutually dependent but are also *recognized* to be so.

Yet it would be hazardous to try replacing one overarching model—of separation between religion and the state—by another one, for the relationship of religion and politics, of the religious elite and the rulers, could and did differ, sometimes significantly, from one Muslim society to another. Among the things this study has demonstrated is, however, that if there ever was a divorce of religion and the state, it did not occur in, nor was it the product of, the early ʿAbbāsid times.

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[14] Cf. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

[15] For a wide-ranging discussion of the "*isnād* paradigm . . . [which underlies] a personally guaranteed connection with a model past, and especially with model persons", see William A. Graham, "Traditionalism in Islam: An essay in interpretation", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIII (1993), pp. 495–522; the quotation is from p. 522.

[16] Cf. the case of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs al-Qādir (r. 381/991–422/1031): *EI(2)*, s.v. "al-Ḳādir bi'llāh (D. Sourdel), and al-Nāṣir (r. 575/1180–622/1225): *EI(2)*, s.v. "al-Nāṣir li-dīn Allāh [A. Hartmann]). On Būyid Iraq and Iran, see R.P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 143f.; on medieval Damascus, see Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, pp. 108–51 and passim; on Mamlūk Cairo, see J. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A social history of Islamic education* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 146ff.

[17] Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, pp. 153f.

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