NOTICE

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EARLY `ABBASID RELIGIOUS POLICIES

AND THE PROTO-SUNNI `ULAMA'

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies the evolving relationship of the early `Abbāsid caliphs with the proto-Sunnī `ulamā'. By the time of Hārūn al-Rashīd, the `Abbāsids had aligned themselves with the emergent proto-Sunnī trends; a pattern of state - `ulamā' relations, with the caliph's view of his function approaching that of the `ulamā', had begun to emerge. al-Ma'mūn was uncharacteristic of the early `Abbāsids in claiming religious authority for himself, apparently to challenge the `ulamā's influence and authority. That effort proved abortive, and confirmed in its failure the earlier pattern of state - `ulamā' relations. The pattern was one of collaboration between the caliphs and the `ulamā'. Proto-Sunnī scholars were among the beneficiaries of extensive caliphal patronage, and it was their viewpoints which caliphal interventions in religious life upheld. Owing perhaps to the effects of `Abbāsid patronage, but also to the implications of certain proto-Sunnī viewpoints, proto-Sunnīs were generally favourable towards the `Abbāsids. A convergence is discernible in the interests of the caliphs and the `ulamā', and partly explains not only the latter's pro-`Abbāsid sentiment but also why it was the proto-Sunnī viewpoints that the `Abbāsids came to patronize.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette dissertation est une étude de l'évolution des relations entre les califes du début de l'ère `abbāside et les `ulamā' proto-sunnites. Du temps de Hārūn al-Rashîd, les `abbāsides s'étaient alignés sur les nouvelles tendances proto-sunnites; dans le type de relations état - `ulamā' qui se développait, l'idée que le calife se faisait de ses fonctions se rapprochait de celle que s'en faisaient les `ulamā'. Mais al-Ma'mūn se distingua des premiers califes `abbāsides par sa prétention à l'autorité religieuse, afin de défier l'autorité et l'influence des `ulamā'. Néanmoins cet effort avorta, et l'ancien type de relation état - `ulamā' qui reposait sur la collaboration entre le calife et les `ulamā' fut réinstitué. Les intellectuels proto-sunnites étaient parmi les bénéficiaires du vaste patronage mené par les califes, et leurs jugements étaient souvent soutenus par les interventions califales dans la vie religieuse. En général, le sentiment proto-sunnite se montrait favorable aux `abbāsides en raison non seulment de leur patronage mais également de l'émergence de certaines tendances proto-sunnites. Une telle convergence d'intérêts discernable entre les califes et les `ulamā' peut expliquer partiellement l'appui des `ulamā' pour les `abbāsides mais aussi pourquoi ce sont les opinions proto-sunnites que les `abbāsides en vinrent à promouvoir.

CONTENTS

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   F. 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-.

Note on Transliteration

All Arabic words which occur in this dissertation are transliterated and most italicized. Those not italicized are certain terms of very frequent occurrence, such as `ulamā' and imām. 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.

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Chapter I

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

I.1

This dissertation studies the religious policies of the early `Abbāsid caliphs and tries to relate them to proto-Sunnī religious trends. "Early `Abbāsid" is understood here as the period from the inception of `Abbāsid rule in 132/749 to approximately the death of al-Ma'mūn 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 `Abbāsids; it is essentially limited to those trends which seem to have called forth or significantly affected `Abbāsid initiatives in religious life.

"Proto-Sunnī" designates those groups of late second and third centuries who saw themselves as the adherents of the *sunna* of the Prophet and claimed to stand aloof from the various political and doctrinal controversies of early Islam and to follow and continue the practice of the earliest community. While no group would have admitted that it was not true to the Prophet's *sunna*, the proto-Sunnīs are often (but not invariably) also recognizable by their recognition of the binding authority of *hadīth*, an authority which -- together with the content of *hadīth* -- grew throughout the course of the 2nd century A.H. and later. Rather more specifically, and from a somewhat different perspective, the term "proto-Sunnī" may be taken to designate those who believed in the rectitude and political legitimacy of the first two successors of the Prophet Muhammad, and gradually also came to accept the doctrine that all four of his immediate successors were legitimate and

rightly guided. The latter development was slow to crystallize, though towards the end of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's life the doctrine had become firmly established if still not universally accepted.[1]

It is not only the so-called "*ahl al-sunna*" who will be characterized as proto-Sunnīs. The Murji'a will also be included here because they contributed their share to the evolution of the proto-Sunnī view of early Islam, and also because many a moderate Murji'ī eventually came to be rehabilitated by Sunnī consensus.[2] This consensus never worked to the benefit of the Muʿtazila, however, even though certain Muʿtazilī viewpoints also contributed to the development of what were to be recognized as distinctively Sunnī doctrines.[3]

The view of proto-Sunnī religious trends taken here is admittedly a very limited one. Yet the focus on the ʿulamā's attitudes towards the past (the early history of Islam) *and* the present (the ʿAbbāsid state) should help delineate some of the processes which went into the construction of the proto-Sunnī world-view and to relate the trends constitutive of the latter with early ʿAbbāsid politics and policies.

The term "ʿulamā'" (singular: *ʿālim*) refers here 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 "ʿulamā'" 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, litterateurs and so forth within its range of signification. Any reference to the "ʿulamā'" during the period under study here, the second and early third centuries of Islam, posits the claim, of

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[1] See II.3, especially II.3.i and II.3.ii, below.

[2] See II.3.iii, below.

[3] See II.3.iv, below.

course, that there already existed individuals who are recognizable as such. 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.

A final caveat about the scope of this dissertation is in order. `Abbāsid patronage of the proto-Sunnîs will be studied here at length, but such a focus should not be taken to mean that those recognizable as proto-Sunnî scholars were the only ones to exercise some influence over the caliphs or to be patronized. The caliphs' companions, the *Ṣaḥāba*[4] and others, were not necessarily scholars, much less proto-Sunnî scholars. Poets were always prominent in the royal entourage, the secretaries (*kuttāb*) are likely to have exercised considerable influence over the caliphs,[5] and non-Muslims too were often patronized.[6] A history of the `Abbāsid relationship with the proto-Sunnîs, even if all facets of that relationship were explored (which is certainly not the case in this dissertation), would still be only a *part* of the religious, intellectual and social history of early `Abbāsid times and of the caliphs' position in it. Even as only a part of a bigger and more complex picture, however, `Abbāsid relations with and patronage of proto-Sunnî scholars constitute dominant themes of `Abbāsid religious policies in general and, for that reason, are crucial for any understanding of the early `Abbāsid period as a whole.

1.2. THE STATE OF THE FIELD

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[4] On the *Ṣaḥāba*, see chapter III n. 68, below.

[5] 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*.

[6] Cf. J. M. Fiey, *Chrétiens Syriaques sous les Abbasides surtout à Bagdad (749-1258)* (*Louvain, 1980*), *passim*.

Religious trends in early ˋAbbāsid 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*[7] 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 ˋAbbāsid 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.[8] Though fundamental to any future study of Islamic thought in the first centuries, and relevant in sundry ways to the early ˋAbbāsid 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 ˋAbbāsid involvement with the proto-Sunnîs.

Conversely, studies devoted to the early ˋAbbāsids, which are not many,[9] have not been much interested in religious policies and related questions either. Fārūq ˋUmar has contributed several brief studies on matters bearing on ˋAbbāsid religious policies;[10] Lassner and Sharon have studied questions of ˋAbbāsid legitimism and propaganda,[11] and

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

[8] J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denken im frühen Islam* (Berlin and New York, 1991-).

[9] F. Omar (= Fārūq ˋUmar), *The Abbasid Caliphate, 132/750-170/786* (Baghdad, 1969) and note 10, below; 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).

[10] F. ˋUmar, *al-ˋAbbāsiyyūn al-Awā'il* (Beirut, 1970-73); idem, "Some Aspects of the ˋAbbāsid - Husaynid Relations during the early ˋAbbāsid Period, 132-193/750-809", *Arabica*, XXII (1975), pp. 170-79; idem, *Buhūth fi'l-Ta'rīkh al-ˋAbbāsī* (Beirut, 1977); idem, *al-Ta'rīkh al-Islāmī wa Fikr al-Qarn al-ˋIshrīn* (Beirut, 1985).

[11] Lassner, *Shaping of Abbasid Rule*; idem, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory* (New Haven, 1986); on the latter work, see below. M. Sharon's *Black Banners from the East* (Leiden, 1983) and *Revolt: the social and military aspects of the ˋAbbāsid revolution* (Jerusalem, 1990), though both concerned with the ˋAbbāsid revolution,

several scholars have briefly studied `Alid revolts in the early `Abbāsid period.[12] Some

work has also been done on problems pertaining to individual caliphs; of such studies, the

reign and policies of al-Ma'mūn have clearly had the lion's share.[13] Any effort to place

the early `Abbāsids in the religious life of the times has continued to be a desideratum,

however.

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.[14] 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 `Abbāsids 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

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do sometimes digress to remark on aspects of the post-revolution legitimist propaganda.

[12] See, for example, Kennedy, *Early Abbasid Caliphate*, especially pp. 198-213; Lassner, *Shaping of Abbasid Rule*, pp. 69-87; `Umar, `*Abbāsid Caliphate*, ch. 4.

[13] Cf. A. Dietrich, "Das politische Testament des zweiten `Abbasidenkalifen al-Manṣūr", *Der Islam*, XXX (1952), pp. 133-65; S. Moscati, "Studi storici sul califfato di al-Mahdi", *Orientalia*, XIV (1945), pp. 300-54; idem, "Nuovi studi storici sul califfato di al-Mahdi", *Orientalia*, XV (1946), pp. 155-79 [an inability to read Italian has precluded my use of any works in this language]; F. Omar, "Some Observations on the Reign of the `Abbāsid Caliph al-Mahdī", *Arabica*, XXI (1974), pp. 139-50; S. Moscati, "Le Califat d'al-Hādî", *Studia Orientalia*, XIII (1946), pp. 3-28. The question of the succession to Hārūn al-Rashīd has stimulated much more interest than has his reign itself: see F. Gabrieli, "La successione di Hārūn al-Rashīd e la guerra fra al-Amīn e al-Ma'mūn", *RSO*, XI (1926-28), pp. 341-97; R. A. Kimber, "Hārūn al-Rashīd's Meccan Settlement of A.H. 186/A.D. 802", *Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies*, University of St. Andrews, I (Edinburgh, 1986), pp. 55-79; idem, "Hārūn al-Rashīd and the `Abbāsid Succession", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1989 (not available to the present writer); T. El-Hibri, "Harun al-Rashid and the Mecca Protocol of 802: a plan for division or succession", *IJMES*, XXIV (1992), pp. 461-80.

On al-Ma'mūn, see, *inter alia*, F. Gabrieli, *al-Ma'mūn e gli `Alidi* (Leipzig, 1929); D. Sourdel, "La politique religieuse du calife `abbaside al-Ma'mūn", *REI*,

legacy is yet to be claimed.[15] A recent development of great promise is, however, the attention being given by scholars to messianic and apocalyptic *hadīth* materials. These materials resonate with echoes of the attitudes and events of the times, the first two centuries of Islam, when they originated. Wilferd Madelung has recently analyzed such materials from the late Umayyad and the early `Abbāsid periods.[16] Though his studies are not concerned with `Abbāsid politics and history, they do serve to illustrate the religious and political attitudes which those associated with these materials held.

Pro-`Abbāsid historiography has received rather more attention than *hadīth* echoing ideological concerns has. R. Sellheim's study of the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq suggests the existence of a layer of pro-`Abbāsid propaganda in that work.[17] In analyzing the historiography of the `Alī-Mu`āwiya conflict, E. L. Petersen illustrates the creation or manipulation of *akhbār* on that conflict to express pro-`Abbāsid viewpoints. These *akhbār*, Petersen suggests, may not be worth much on that conflict itself but they do tell us something about shifts in `Abbāsid ideological positions.[18] T. Nagel has done important work in explicating facets of `Abbāsid ideological legitimation, and has tried, beside much else, to retrieve some of the contents of al-Haytham b. `Adī's lost *Kitāb al-*

XXX (1962), pp. 27-48; A. Arazi and 'A. El'ad, "'L'Épître à l'armée': al-Ma'mūn et la second da`wa", *SI*, LXVI (1987), pp. 27-70, LXVII (1988), pp. 29-73. For further references see *EI*(2), s.vv. "al-Ma'mūn" (M. Rekaya) and "Mihna" (M. Hinds).

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

[15] One rather modest yet noteworthy exception is the critical edition, translation, and study of al-Suyūtī's collection of pro-`Abbāsid *hadīth*: A. Arazi and A. El'ad, "al-Ināfa fī rutbat al-xilāfa de Galāl al-Dīn al-Suyūtī", *IOS*, VIII (1978), pp. 230-65.

[16] W. Madelung, "The Sufyānī between Tradition and History", *SI*, LXIII (1986), pp. 5-48; idem, "Apocalyptic Prophecies in Hims", *JSS*, XXXI (1986), pp. 141-85.

[17] R. Sellheim, "Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte. Die Muhammed Biographie des Ibn Ishāq", *Oriens*, XVIII-XIX (1967), pp. 33-91.

[18] E. L. Petersen, `Alī *and* Mu`āwiya *in early Arabic Tradition* (Copenhagen, 1964), pp. 67-187 passim.

Dawla, a work serving the cause of such legitimation in the early ʿAbbāsid period.[19] J. Lassner's *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*,[20] 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 dissertation. Among other things, these studies show that the intellectual resources available to the ʿAbbāsids for the promotion of their legitimist interests were quite considerable, and that scholars frequently worked under the direct patronage of the caliphs.[21] This point will be taken up, albeit not specifically in the context of ʿAbbāsid historiography, at a later stage in this dissertation.

Studies which focus on the history of the caliphate as a religious institution, or the

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[19] 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, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III, pp. 18f.; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. R. Tajaddud, 3rd edn. (Beirut, 1988), p. 120). Ibn al-Nadīm says that al-Rāwandī's work comprised "about two thousand leaves" ("*nahw alfay waraqa*" -- not *one* thousand, as van Ess says: *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III, p. 18). On al-Haytham, also see S. Leder, *Das Korpus al-Haitam ibn ʿAdī* (Frankfurt, 1991), especially pp. 304ff.

[20] New Haven, 1986. Cf. the review of E. L. Daniel in *IJMES*, XXI (1989), pp. 578-83 on this book and on Sharon's *Black Banners from the East*.

[21] Cf. Petersen, *ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya*, p. 184: " From the very earliest formation of tradition ... traditionists like Ṣāliḥ b. Kaysān and al-Zuhrī acted as spokesmen for the caliphs in Damascus; Muḥammad b. Isḥāq's last days were spent writing for al-Manṣūr's court; Abū Bakr al-Hudhalī is referred to as this caliph's *nadīm* (boon companion); al-Wāqidī -- apparently heavily indebted -- was attracted to Yaḥyā b. Khālid al-Barmakī's and al-Maʾmūn's, Balādhurī to al-Mutawakkil's court; and al-Yaʿqūbī wrote under the auspices of the Ṭāhirids. This does not mean, of course, that all historical work in Islam's classical period must necessarily be interpreted in terms of the will of the caliphal court or its most influential opponents.... However, the consonance between the prevailing currents and the views of the historians is generally so marked that it cannot be ascribed to mere coincidence." Despite the

place of Islam in and the significance of its relationship with the state, are few, as already noted. One such work is the pioneering study of Emile Tyan on the caliphate.[22] This is a detailed treatment of the character and religious significance of the caliphal office and the range of the functions associated with it. Besides much else, this is also a study of the ways in which the caliph's person, or the caliphate, was perceived in society and the religious claims which were made by or on behalf of the caliphs.

The early `Abbāsid caliphs were unable, however, to live up to or to sustain the "myth" of the caliphate; this argument is central to Hamilton Gibb's analysis of the "political collapse of Islam".[23] The `Abbāsids, he argues, began with some important initiatives towards building religious, bureaucratic and military institutions. But "the Caliphate ... was gradually emptied of its 'real' content by the expansion and growing independence of the very institutions that the `Abbāsids had set up for its support." The reason why this happened was the caliphs' failure to integrate these institutions into some kind of an overall Islamic framework, which would also give credence and credibility to the myth of the theocratic state. The 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.

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disclaimer, however, Petersen probably exaggerates the point. Historians such as al-Balādhurī could be in close contact with the `Abbāsids and yet have many a pro-Umayyad traditions in their works. The same is true of al-Balādhurī's sources -- al-Madā'inī and al-Haytham b. `Adī for instance -- who often report pro-Umayyad traditions though both were patronized by protégés of the `Abbāsids On different but coexisting tendencies in the works of al-Balādhurī and in that of his sources, see Kh. Athamina, "The Sources of al-Balādhurī", *JSAI*, V (1984), pp. 237-62; on al-Madā'inī see also *EI*(2), s.v (U. Sezgin); on al-Haytham b. `Adī see S. Leder, *Das Korpus al-Haiṭam ibn `Adī*, passim (and ibid., pp. 291f. on his relations with al-Ḥasan b. Sahl).

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

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

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.[24] Focussing on events in Baghdad 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.[25] 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.

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[24] 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 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.

[25] 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.

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".[26] The Umayyad caliphs enjoyed religious authority, it is argued, as also did the early ʿAbbāsids. However, by the time the ʿAbbāsids came to power, the ʿulamāʾ, 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-Maʾmūn, but "the fact that the ʿulamāʾ had managed to produce even al-Shāfiʿī before the collision came evidently meant that al-Maʾmūn's chances of winning were slim";[27] "under the leadership of Ibn Ḥanbal ... ["the vulgar masses"] rejected caliphal guidance in religious matters once and for all."[28]

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.[29] 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 *sharīʿaʾs* 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

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[26] P. Crone and M. Hinds, *Gods Caliph: religious authority in the first centuries of Islam*, (Cambridge, 1986). Cf. the reviews of N. Calder in *JSS*, XXXII (1987), pp. 375-78 and T. Nagel in *Orientalische Literaturzeitung*, LIV (1989), pp. 442f.

[27] Ibid., p. 93.

[28] Ibid., p. 96.

[29] P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses: the evolution of the medieval polity*, (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 61-91. For a very critical evaluation of this work, cf. F. M. Donner's review in *JAOS*, CII (1982), pp. 367-71.

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 `ulamā' it was no longer a competitor, and its very presence soon became sporadic."[30]

Besides the broad based interpretive studies reviewed above, certain other works, which have a narrower focus but are relevant to questions of `Abbāsid religious policies, also merit notice. These include studies on the zanādiqa by Vajda,[31] Gabrieli,[32] van Ess[33] and others,[34] on Iranian "extremist" revolts of the early `Abbāsid period by Sadighi,[35] Daniel,[36] and others, on Shī`ism (from a host of perspectives, many directly concerning the `Abbāsids) by Gabrieli,[37] Moscati,[38] Cahen,[39] Watt,[40] `Umar,[41] Sharon,[42] and van Ess.[43] etc., on `Abbāsid ceremonial by Sourdel,[44] and on `Abbāsid regnal titles by

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[30] 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."

[31] G. Vajda, "Les *zindiqs* en pays d'Islam", *RSO*, XVII (1938), pp. 173-229.

[32] F. Gabrieli, "La 'zandaqa' au 1er siècle abbaside" in *L'Élaboration de l'Islam* (Paris, 1961), pp. 23-38.

[33] van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, pp. 416-56, II, pp. 4-41.

[34] For further references, see chapter II n. 128, below.

[35] G. H. Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens au IIe et au IIIe siècles de l'hégire* (Paris, 1938).

[36] Daniel, *Khurasan*, ch. 4. Daniel cautions, however, that "the heterodox aspects of the revolt are far less interesting, or useful for an understanding of the phenomenon, than the examples of class conflict, social reform, and simple religious syncretism which invariably accompanied them." Ibid., pp. 125f.

[37] F. Gabrieli, *al-Ma'mūn e gli `Alidi.*

Lewis[45] and Dūrī.[46]

Works on the ʿulamāʾ and their milieu include Patton's study of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal,[47] studies of the materials relevant to religious education in al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* and Ibn ʿAsākir's *Taʾrīkh Madīnat Dimashq* by M. D. Ahmad and M. Abiad respectively,[48] Cohen's study of the economic activities of the ʿulamāʾ,[49] and an important recent work by Raif Khoury on the well-known Egyptian judge ʿAbdallāh b. Lahīʿa.[50] The evolution of the office of the *qāḍī* from Umayyad into ʿAbbāsid times has been studied by Blay-Abramski[51] and the history of this office in the early ʿAbbāsid period by Kasassebeh.[52] The standard general work on judicial organization remains that of Tyan, however.[53]

The conclusions reached in this dissertation will frequently be seen to be at variance with those reached by earlier scholars: that the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs (except al-Maʾmūn)

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[38] S. Moscati, "Il testamento di Abū Hasim", *RSO*, XXVII (1952), pp. 29-34, 44-46; idem, "Per una Storia dell'Antica Šīʿa", *RSO*, XXX (1955), pp. 251-67.

[39] C. Cahen, "Points de vue sur la ʾrevolution ʾabbaside'", *Revue Historique*, CCXXX (1963), pp. 295-338.

[40] W. M. Watt, *Early Islam: collected articles* (Edinburgh, 1990), part B; idem, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973).

[41] See n. 10, above.

[42] See n. 11, above; and M. Sharon, "Ahl al-Bayt -- People of the House", *JSAI*, VIII (1986), pp. 169-84.

[43] van Ess, *Theolgie und Gesellschaft*, I, pp. 233-403 and passim, II, pp. 423-29, 716-18 and passim, III, pp. 10-19, 28-30 and passim.

[44] D. Sourdel, "Questions de ceremonial ʾabbaside", *REI*, XXVIII (1960), pp. 121-48.

[45] B. Lewis, "The Regnal Titles of the First Abbasid Caliphs" in *Dr. Zakir Husain Presentation Volume* (New Delhi, 1968), pp. 13-22.

[46] ʿA.-ʿA. 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.

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 some revision; nor does Nagel's view that the proto-Sunnī `ulamā' were irrevocably hostile to the `Abbāsids until the failure of the *Miḥna* seem to carry much conviction. These and other disagreements, major as well as minor, will be seen to shape the arguments in the the course of the present undertaking.

This dissertation demonstrates the deep involvement of the early `Abbāsid caliphs in the religious life of the times. It is argued that, while always in contact with the `ulamā', the caliphs gradually came to align themselves with the proto-Sunnī trends, a development which crystallized in the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (chapter II). A rudimentary pattern of state - `ulamā' relations, with the caliph's view of his function approaching that of the `ulamā', had already been established before al-Ma'mūn came to

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

[48] M. D. Ahmad, *Muslim Education and the Scholars' Social Status up to the 5th century Muslim era in the light of ta'rīkh Baghdād* (Zurich, 1968); M. Abiad, *Culture et education Arabo-Islamiques au Šam pendant les trois premiers siècles de l'Islam, d'après Tārīḫ Madīnat Dimašq d'Ibn `Asākir (499/1105-571/1176)* (Damascus, 1981).

[49] 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.

[50] R. G. Khoury, *`Abdallāh ibn Lahī`a* (Wiesbaden, 1986).

[51] I. I. Blay-Abramski, "From Damascus to Baghdad: the `Abbāsid administrative system as a product of the Umayyad heritage, 41/661-320/932", Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1982, ch. 3; (revised and published as) idem, "The Judiciary (*Qāḍīs*) as a Governmental Tool in Early Islam", *JESHO*, XXXV (1992), pp.40-71.

[52] H. F. S. Kasassebeh, "The Office of Qāḍī in the Early `Abbāsid Caliphate (132-247/750-861)", Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1990.

[53] *Histoire de l'organisation judiciare en pays d'Islam.* (Paris, 1938-43).

power. al-Ma'mūn was the only caliph who laid definite claims to religious authority over and above the `ulamā'. His effort to curb the latter's influence and to assert his religious authority turned out to be unsuccessful, and confirmed in its failure the pattern of state - `ulamā' relations that was emerging before al-Ma'mūn instituted his inquisition (chapter III). This was a pattern of collaboration between the caliphs and the `ulamā', not that of a divorce between them. Elaborate, multi-faceted channels of patronage defined the relations of the caliphs with the `ulamā' (chapter IV). While cynicism towards the rulers was not absent among the `ulamā' any more than were `Abbāsid suspicions about the intentions and influence of the latter, the proto-Sunnī sentiment was in general favourable to the `Abbāsids. Why this should have been so is due in no small measure to `Abbāsid patronage, of course, but it must also be explained in terms of the implications of certain emerging proto-Sunnī viewpoints. A convergence of interest between the `Abbāsids and the `ulamā' may help explain not only why the latter came to be supportive of the regime but also why it was the proto-Sunnīs with whom the early `Abbāsids came to identify (chapter V).

I.3. A SURVEY OF THE SOURCES

The classical and medieval Islamic sources are rich in materials pertaining to religious and intellectual life in the early `Abbāsid period. The religious concerns and policies of the caliphs, their relationship with and patronage of the `ulamā', and the latter's attitudes towards the caliphs are among problems which, however, are nowhere systematically addressed in our sources. Yet the sources do contain numerous indications which point towards answers and invite systematic reflection. Such indications are scattered over a very vast corpus of literature. In principle, *all* classical and medieval Islamic texts with any bearing on the early `Abbāsid period comprise the source material which ought to be consulted in investigating the caliphs' religious policies and related

issues. In practice, however, the constraints of both time and space have prescribed more modest aspirations, limited to the use of the principal texts. The following is a brief description of the kinds of materials which are directly relevant to the problems broached in this dissertation.[54]

Chronicles and annals comprise one broad category of major importance. The texts which belong in this category range from "universal" histories (such as the *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk* of al-Ṭabarī [d. 310/923])[55] to histories focussing on particular cities (as Ibn Abī Ṭāhir's [d. 280/893] *Kitāb Baghdād*[56] and al-Azdī's [d. 334/946] *Ta'rīkh Mawṣil*),[57] or those organized around families of notables (the most important examples being al-Balādhurī's [d. 279/892] monumental *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*[58] and the anonymous *Akhbār al-Dawla al-ʿAbbāsiyya*,[59] and perhaps also Iṣfahānī's [d. 356/967] *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*).[60] Such chronicles usually are composite works, which is to say that they do not have "authors" but compilers, who drew on sources which themselves were often

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54 Useful surveys of sources relevant to various aspects of early ʿAbbāsid history include: R. S. Humphreys, *Islamic History: a framework for inquiry* (Princeton, 1991), pp. 111ff. (on the ʿAbbāsid revolution); D. Sourdel, *Le vizirat ʿabbāside*, I, pp. 1-40; F. Omar, *The ʿAbbāsid Caliphate, 132/750-170/786*, pp. 12-55; E. L. Daniel, "Iran's Awakening: a study of local rebellions in the eastern provinces of the Islamic empire, 126-227 A.H. (743-842 A.D.), Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1978, pp. 9-63; H. Kennedy, *The Early ʿAbbāsid Caliphate*, pp. 214-21; idem, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (London, 1986), pp. 364ff.

55 al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk*, ed. M. J. De Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879-1901). On al-Ṭabarī see F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums [GAS]*, I (Leiden, 1967), pp. 322ff. (and ibid., pp. 303-38 for a general survey of "Welt- und Reichgeschichte"); F. Rosenthal's "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 *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk* on the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad", Ph.D. diss. Temple University, 1988. On the sources of his *Ta'rīkh* see J. ʿAlī's useful but incomplete "Mawārid Ta'rīkh 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.

56 Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 348f.

57 Ed. A. Ḥabība (Cairo, 1967). Cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 350. See ibid., pp. 339ff. on "Lokal- und Stadtgeschichte" in general.

compilations of earlier material.

This character of the chronicles, and indeed of other compilations, suggests several things. First, a chronicle preserves materials which are much earlier than the time to which the final compilation itself dates.[61] In other words, even late chronicles frequently contain, and may sometimes be the only source for, early but lost materials. Secondly, though the *akhbār*, viz. the historical reports, traditions and anecdotes which comprise the compilation, come from earlier sources, they are often subject to a continuous adaptation and reformulation at the hands of their transmitters or compilers.[62] Thirdly, although the "classical" compilations too necessarily imposed their "general interpretive frameworks" on the historical tradition which they incorporated,[63] they also helped stabilize that tradition.[64] To a certain extent, they also mark the achievement of a historiographical consensus on what was fit to be remembered by being included in these compilations,[65] though inclusion can hardly be taken to necessarily signal the compiler's

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[58] *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, ed. `A.-`A. al-Dūrī (Wiesbaden, 1978), is devoted to "al-`Abbās b. `Abd al-Muṭṭalib wa waladuhu". al-Balādhurī does not go much beyond the time of al-Manṣūr, however; for the rather perfunctory reports which relate to, or include reference to the immediate successors of al-Manṣūr, see index, under the names of the early `Abbāsid caliphs. For a discussion of some of al-Balādhurī's sources (with reference, however, to an earlier volume), cf. K. Athamina, "The Sources of al-Balādhurī", pp. 237-62. On Balādhurī see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 320f.; *EI*(2), s.v. (C. H. Becker and F. Rosenthal).

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

[60] Ed. A. Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1949). On al-Iṣfahānī, see *EI*(2), s.v. "Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī" (M. Nallino); *EIr*, s.v. (K. Abu Deeb). On the sources of the *Maqātil* see S. Gunther, *Quellenuntersuchungen zu den Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn des Abu'l-Farag al-Isfahānī (gest. 356/967)*, (Zurich, 1991).

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

[62] 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 Xalid 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*

approval of particular contents. Finally, this consensus of sorts did not therefore eliminate the diversity of viewpoints represented by particular reports; if any thing, it confirmed such diversity. Thus the *akhbār* often express different, mutually inconsistent viewpoints or tendencies on a single event or series of events. It is not only the "facts" which are to be retrieved from these materials if and when possible, the viewpoints and tendencies which guided the construction or presentation of these "facts" also reveal as much about the political and religious trends of the time as the "facts" purport to. The diversity of viewpoints which informs the *akhbār* may therefore permit a relatively more complete, if not much clearer or more accurate, picture of the events being portrayed.

The interest of the chronicles clearly goes beyond "political" history in the conventional sense; even where it doesn't, there is much which has important implications for religious policies and religious life, or the interaction of religion and politics. The accounts of Shīʿī revolts, for instance, are as much political as religious history. And if the detailed account of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya's revolt in al-Ṭabarī's chronicle seems essentially occupied with describing the course of the revolt,[66]

(Princeton, 1992), pp. 277-315; and idem, *Das Korpus al-Haitam ibn ʿAdī*. 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 Arwad", passim, especially pp. 391ff.

[63] The phrase comes from 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 is another study which pays some attention to narrative structures and interpretive frameworks - a problem still little studied with reference to early Islamic historiography.

[64] Conrad, "Conquest of Arwād", p. 392.

[65] On the historiographical consensus, 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 ʿAbbāsid Period* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 196ff.; P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, pp. 10f.

that in al-Isfahānī's *Maqātil* also preserves echoes of the propaganda on the rebel's behalf which aimed at presenting him as a messianic figure.[67] The chronicles are indispensable, among a host of other things, on the persecution of the *zanādiqa* in early ʿAbbāsid times, on the presence of religious scholars in ʿAbbāsid administration,[68] on vigilante movements in Baghdād in the aftermath of the civil war between al-Amīn al-Maʾmūn,[69] and on the *Miḥna*.[70]

The chronicles also preserve numerous documents which shed much light on early ʿAbbāsid religious policies. al-Ṭabarī's chronicle is the main but not the only source of such documents.[71] Documents of particular interest to the subject of this dissertation include the letters which the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Manṣūr and al-Nafs al-Zakiyya are said to have exchanged,[72] al-Mahdī's letter to his governor of Basra regarding the family of Ziyād b. Abīhi,[73] the letters of al-Mahdī and Hārūn al-Rashīd to Khārijī rebels,[74] Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn's letter of advice to his son (one of the earliest specimens of the

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[66] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 189-265.

[67] al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 232ff., 237ff., 245ff.

[68] Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. A. D. al-ʿUmarī (Najaf, 1967), and usually al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, among others, provide lists of important functionaries of the state, including *qāḍīs*, for each year.

[69] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 1008-1012, 1023-25, is the main chronicle dealing with these movements; studies include Lapidus, "Separation of State and Religion" (see ibid., p. 374 n. 1 for further sources); Madelung, "The Vigilante Movement of Sahl b. Salāma Reconsidered", *Journal of Turkish Studies*, XIV (1991), pp. 331-37.

[70] For the sources on the *Miḥna* see *EI*(2), s.v. (M. Hinds).

[71] The sources mentioned here should not be taken to mean that they are necessarily the only ones in which documents are preserved nor should the documents mentioned here be taken as the only ones which may be found in the sources.

[72] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 208ff.

[73] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 479ff. Cf. chapter IV n. 5, below.

[74] al-Mahdī's letter: Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Ta'rīkh*, pp. 475f.; al-Azdī, *Ta'rīkh Mawṣil*, p. 238. Hārūn's letter: anon., *Ta'rīkh-i Sīstān*, ed. Malik al-Shuʿarāʾ Bahār (Tehran,

Fürstenspiegel genre),[75] and al-Ma'mūn's letters to his governor of Baghdād regarding the

Mihna[76] Not all such documents can withstand critical scrutiny,[77] though there are no

compelling reasons to think that most have been tampered with or are fabricated.

A second distinct category of sources comprises *firaq* or "heresiographical"

literature. These materials exhibit many problems. The relentless proliferation of sects

depicted here is too schematized to be very accurate, though that is not to say of course

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 shown to subsist thereafter.[78] 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."[79] For these and other reasons *firaq* traditions are often

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1314 H.s.), pp. 162-64; ibid., pp. 164ff. for the response of the Khārijī rebel to Hārūn's letter; G. Scarcia, "Lo scambio di lettere tra Hārūn al-Rasid e Hamza al-Hārigi secondo il 'Ta'rīh Sīstān'", *Annali dell' Instituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, new ser. XIV (1964), pp. 622-45 (pp. 633-39 for the Arabic text of the letters).

[75] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 1046ff.; see chapter III n. 142, below, for further references.

[76] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 1112ff., 1117ff., 1125ff., 1131f.

[77] Cf. T. Nagel, "Ein früher Bericht über den Aufstand von Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh im Jahre 145h", *Der Islam*, XLVI (1970), pp. 247 (on the letters exchanged between al-Manṣūr and al-Nafs al-Zakiyya); A. Dietrich, "Das politische Testament des zweiten 'Abbasidenkalifen al-Manṣūr", *Der Islam*, XXX (1952), pp. 133-65; El-Hibri, "Hārūn al-Rashīd and the Mecca Protocol of 802".

[78] Cf. W. M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, (Edinburgh, 1973), p. 3, and generally pp. 1ff. for the assumptions which tend to inform *firaq* works.

[79] K. Lewinstein, "The Azāriqa in Islamic Heresiography", *BSOAS*, LIV (1991), p. 268. Lewenstein continues: "The fragmentary nature of the material renders problematic any study which takes for granted the literary integrity of the extant presentations." Ibid., loc. cit. Also see idem, "Making and Unmaking a Sect: the heresiographers and the Ṣufriyya", *SI*, LXXXVI (1992), pp. 75-96.

suspect. However, individual reports cannot be deemed fictitious simply because they are preserved in a schematic framework or are presented alongside other traditions which are recognizable as tendentious. The extant *firaq* literature has preserved, as have the chronicles and other works, much earlier sources which are otherwise lost. The *Kitāb Firaq al-Shīʿa* of al-Nawbakhtī (d. ca. 300/912)[80] and the *Kitāb al-Maqālāt wa'l-Firaq* of Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh al-Qummī (d. 301/914)[81] are partly based, for instance, on a heresiographical work which must have been composed towards the end of the second century and probably during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd.[82] *Firaq* works are valuable both because they often provide a rather different perspective on many of the same events and individuals which are treated in chronicles etc. and because they help fill some of the lacunae in the latter.[83] The most explicit statements on the shift in ʿAbbāsid legitimist claims, for instance, come from heresiographers such as al-Nawbakhtī, Saʿd al-Qummī and pseudo- al-Nāshiʾ;[84] and there is no question that our overall understanding of religious trends in the early ʿAbbāsid period would be much poorer were the *firaq* literature not at hand.

Literary compositions and compilations belonging to *belles-lettristic* genres constitute another category of sources.[85] If they have not been used extensively in this

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

[81] Ed. M. J. Mashkūr (Tehran, 1963); on the author cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 538.

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

[83] For a succinct survey of the *firaq* tradition with reference to the Kaysāniyya see W. al-Qādī, *al-Kaysāniyya fī'l-Tārīkh wa'l-Adab* (Beirut, 1974), pp. 14ff.

[84] Cf. chapter II nn. 48-50, below.

[85] On such sources in general see J. Ashtiany et al., eds., *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: ʿAbbāsid belle-lettres*, (Cambridge, 1990).

dissertation the reason only is constraint of time, not the reticence of these sources. A few words about their importance for an enquiry such as the present one are in order, however.

Early ʿAbbāsid poetry, for instance, is an important source of insight into the social, moral, and religious attitudes of the times. Several prominent poets who lived in that period were, after all, accused of *zandaqa*, and, whatever the justification, it was their poetry that was adduced to support the charge. Such poetry may therefore tell us something about how *zandaqa* was popularly perceived. No less important is the panegyric poetry which was addressed to the caliphs. While hardly a very reliable guide to what people actually *believed* about the caliphs, it certainly is a catalogue of some of the things the latter wanted to hear about themselves or to have disseminated among the people.[86] Certain themes of early ʿAbbāsid legitimist propaganda -- inheriting the rule from the Prophet via his uncle al-ʿAbbās, for instance -- are attested in, and appear to have been popularized through, contemporary poetry.

In addition to the *dīwāns* of individual poets, some classical anthologies of Arabic verse are also extant; of these the most famous is the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* of Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī.[87] This monumental work is not simply a collection of famous poems, however, but also an anthology of anecdotes relating to pre-Islamic and early Islamic (including early ʿAbbāsid) poets, their adventures, their patrons, and their milieu in general. It has features of a biographical dictionary, and, as has recently been argued, can also be used to retrieve autobiographical fragments.[88]

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[86] See S. Sperl, "Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the early 9th Century", *JAL*, VIII (1977), pp. 20-35; S. P. Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the ʿAbbāsid Age* (Leiden, 1991), especially pp. 109-235.

[87] Ed. ʿA. A. Farrāj et al. (Beirut, 1955-60).

[88] For a preliminary comparison of Iṣfahānī's *Aghānī* with his *Maqātil*, see H. Kilpatrick, "Song or Sticky Ends: alternative approaches to biography in the works of Abu'l-Farag al-Iṣfahānī", *Union européene d'arabisants: Actas del XII Congress*

Early Arabic literary prose is also full of interest for our purposes.[89] Among its earliest examples are the writings of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Yaḥyā (d. 132/750), the *kātib* of the last Umayyad caliph. Usually reckoned as the founder of the Arabic epistolagraphic genre, a collection of his *rasāʾil* has recently become available in a critical edition.[90] While these epistles are fundamental to the study of early Arabic prose or to that of Umayyad politics and administration, some of them also of direct interest to the ʿAbbāsid historian: they offer an insider's perspective, so to speak, on the crises of the last days of Umayyad rule. Several epistles are concerned with the theme of *fitna*[91] of which one speaks specifically of the *fitna* in Khurāsān.[92]

The *Risāla fiʾl-Ṣaḥāba* of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 136/756) or the numerous writings of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868-69) are elegant examples of early ʿAbbāsid literary prose; but they are also fundamental for information and insight into the religious, social, and political trends of the time. Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's *Risāla* will be discussed in a later chapter.[93] About al-Jāḥiẓ it may only be remarked here that his writings are not only a register of the religio-political and intellectual issues being debated in the society he lived in, they were also meant as *contributions* to the ongoing debates.[94] His testimony is hardly that of an

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de la UEAI, 1984, (Madrid, 1986), pp. 403-421. For the *Aghānī* as a source for retrieving autobiographical narratives, see idem, "Autobiography and Classical Arabic Literature", *JAL*, XXII (1991), pp. 1-20.

[89] For an illuminating survey see S. Leder and H. Kilpatrick, "Classical Arabic Prose Literature: a researcher's sketch map", *JAL*, XXIII (1992), pp. 2-26.

[90] I. ʿAbbās, *ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Yaḥyā al-Kātib wa mā tabaqqā min rasāʾilihi wa rasāʾil Sālim Abīʾl-ʿAlāʾ*, (Amman, 1988). A strong case for the authenticity of these *rasāʾil* is made by W. al-Qāḍī, "Early Islamic State Letters: the question of authenticity", in Cameron and Conrad, eds., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, pp. 215-75.

[91] ʿAbbās, *ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd*, pp. 198ff., 209ff., 280.

[92] Ibid., pp. 198ff. Also see W. al-Qāḍī, "The Earliest 'Nābita' and the Paradigmatic 'Nawābit'", *SI*, LXXVIII (1993), pp. 27-61.

[93] See III.3.i, below.

[94] On al-Jāḥiẓ see C. Pellat, *Le milieu Basrien et la formation de Ǧāḥiẓ* (Paris, 1953);

impartial observer, but it is valuable nevertheless. al-Jāḥiẓ's advocacy of `Abbāsid legitimism makes his oeuvre more, not less, interesting: for it is not only the cultural milieu that is echoed there, but also some of the concerns of the ruling elite who patronized his work.[95]

Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), active a generation after al-Jāḥiẓ, is important for reasons not dissimilar to those which make the latter so significant. Besides his wide-ranging *adab* works, Ibn Qutayba's theological writings are of great interest. Like al-Jāḥiẓ, he too did at least some of his work under royal patronage. Unlike the Mu`tazilī al-Jāḥiẓ, though, Ibn Qutayba was "an eminent representative, if not the exclusive spokesman, of the *ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Djamā`a*".[96] The proto-Sunnī outlook of Ibn Qutayba is best expressed in his *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*;[97] but it is also echoed in his *adab* works.[98] As with al-Jāḥiẓ, his biases only serve to heighten the significance of his writings.[99]

The fourth category of works used here comprises political, ideological, sectarian or apocalyptic *ḥadīth* materials. Pro-`Abbāsid traditions are frequently encountered in

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idem, *The Life and Works of Jahiz* tr. D. M. Hawke (London, 1969); idem, *Études sur l'histoire socio-culturelle de l'Islam*, Variorum reprints (London, 1976), no. I-VI; M. Zahniser, "Insights from the `Uthmāniyya* of al-Jāḥiẓ into the Religious Policy of al-Ma'mūn", *MW*, LXIX (1979), pp. 8-17.

[95] Cf. the famous passage in al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa'l-Tabyīn* ed. `A. Abū Mulḥim (Beirut , 1988), III, pp. 243f., where the author reports al-Ma'mūn's praise of his books.

[96] *EI*(2), s.v. "Ibn Kutayba" (G. Lecomte).

[97] Miṣr, 1326 A.H.

[98] Lecomte (*EI[2]*, s.v. "Ibn Kutayba") has drawn attention to the "eclectic professions of faith" in Ibn Qutayba's introductions to two of his *adab* works: *Adab al-Kātib*, ed. M. al-Dālī (Beirut, 1982), pp. 5-20; idem, *Kitāb `Uyūn al-Akhbār* (Cairo, 1925-30), I, pp. "ṭ'" - "rā'".

[99] A detailed study of Ibn Qutayba is G. Lecomte, *Ibn Qutayba (mort en 276/889): l'homme, son oeuvre, ses idées* (Damascus, 1965).

collections of *ḥadīth*, as indeed are those which are unfavorable or hostile to them. Nor are chronicles always innocent of them. In al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, for instance, the sections which are devoted to al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib -- the uncle of the Prophet and the founder of the ʿAbbāsid family -- and to his son ʿAbdallāh contain a cascade of traditions which confirm their kinship with the Prophet, extol their piety and sagacity, and prognosticate the political fortunes of their descendants.[100] Such traditions obviously tell us less about al-ʿAbbās or his son and far more about the legitimist concerns of the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs.

Among *ḥadīth* materials, messianic and apocalyptic traditions are of particular interest. Of these the single most important collection is undoubtedly the *Kitāb al-Fitan* of Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād (d. 228/844).[101] These traditions not only bear witness to the messianic expectancy which characterized the milieu in which they originated,[102] but are also a register of some of the religio-political issues and controversies of the time. While it is perhaps an exaggeration to think of them as "chronicles written in the future tense",[103] apocalyptic materials do often echo contemporary events. Such echoes may or may not supplement the accounts of the conventional historical sources[104] but they do illustrate how certain momentous events of the recent past become translated into a

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[100]   al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, pp. 1-22 (al-ʿAbbās), 27-55 (Ibn ʿAbbās).

[101]   Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, British Library Or. 9449; cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 104f.

[102]   Cf. P. J. Alexander, "Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources", *American Historical Review*, LXXIII (1968), p. 1002: "The emergence of apocalyptic texts ... at particular moments in history ... may serve as a kind of barometer for the measuring of eschatological pressures at a given time in history."

[103]   Alexander, "Medieval Apocalypses", p. 1018.

[104]   Alexander, "Medieval Apocalypses", p. 1009; S. Bashear, "Apocalyptic and other Materials on early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: a review of Arabic sources", *JRAS*, third ser. I (1991), pp. 173-208. Bashear argues that early historical information sometimes not provided by historiographical sources can be retrieved from apocalyptic *ḥadīth*.

messianic idiom or how their significance is assessed by near contemporaries.

Works of a juristic or doctrinal interest are also of direct relevance to the subject of this dissertation. They form a fairly broad corpus, though little would be achieved by simply listing the relevant titles. Two of them are of rather special interest, however, and may be mentioned here. One is the *Kitāb al-Kharāj* of the Ḥanafī chief *qāḍī* Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798). Its contents bear on matters not only of administrative practice but also on questions of the caliph's function and role and of ʿAbbāsid legitimism. This treatise will be studied at some length later in this dissertation.[105] The other is a collection of the responsa attributed to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. This work, partially preserved and still in manuscript,[106] purports to record the attitudes and opinions of Ibn Ḥanbal on a variety, indeed virtually the entire spectrum, of political and theological controversies of the time. It is a document of fundamental interest for any history not just of Ibn Ḥanbal's thought or of the Ḥanbalīs, but of early Sunnīs as a whole.

The final, but in many ways the most important, category of sources to be discussed here comprises biographical dictionaries.[107] The need to know about and assess those

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[105] See III.3.iii, below.

[106] al-Khallāl, *al-Musnad min Masāʾil Abī ʿAbdallāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbal*, British Library Or. 2675. On the compiler cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 511f.; on the work itself cf. H. Laoust, "Les premiers professions de foi Ḥanbalites" in *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, III (Damascus, 1957), pp. 17ff.

[107] On biographical dictionaries see, *inter alia*, 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), p. 95-111; M. J. L. Young, "Arabic Biographical Writing" in *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Religion, learning and science in the ʿAbbāsid period*, pp. 168-87; M. K. Hermansen, "Interdisciplinary Approaches to Islamic Biographical Materials", *Religion*, XVIII (1988), pp. 163-182 (and the bibliography to that article). For a survey of the ways biographical literature has been used by modern scholars, see Humphreys, *Islamic History*, pp. 188ff.

involved in the transmission of *ḥadīth* is generally believed to have led to the growth, in the second century A.H., of *ʿilm al-rijāl*, the knowledge pertaining to the credentials of the transmitters. Of the numerous works of this genre, Ibn Ḥajar's (d. 852/1449) *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* represents the high-point of Sunnī *rijāl* criticism, a culmination of centuries of scholarship in this genre.[108] The Shīʿī scholars produced their own compendia of *rijāl*. The most significant of these for the early ʿAbbāsid period is doubtless the compilation of al-Kashshī (d. ca. 340/951).[109] It is important not only because it is largely concerned with the *imāms* and their followers who lived under the early ʿAbbāsids, or because it is probably the earliest Shīʿī compilation of its kind, but also because it has managed to resist to some extent later efforts to expunge it of material not considered to be in conformity with the developed Imāmī world-view.[110]

Not all biographical dictionaries were concerned exclusively, or even primarily, with the traditionists. But even those that were had different criteria for defining their scope and organization. The earliest biographical dictionary which is extant, the *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr* of Muḥammad b. Saʿd (d. 230/845),[111] is ordered according to *al-sābiqiyya liʾl-Islam*: it begins with the Prophet Muḥammad and then describes the leading figures of the first generations of Islam.[112] A sub-genre of biographical

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[108] *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, (Haydarabad, 1325-27 A.H.). On Ibn Ḥajar see *EI*(2), s.v., (F. Rosenthal); also see S. M. ʿAbd al-Munʿim, *Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī wa dirāsat muṣannafātihi wa manhajihi wa mawāridihi fī kitābihi al-Iṣāba*, (Baghdād, 1978). On the importance of Ibn Ḥajar's *Tahdhīb* as a repository of early materials, and some of its perils, see G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 134-60.

[109] Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār Maʿrifat al-Rijāl, al-maʿrūf bi Rijāl al-Kashshī*, ed. H. Muṣṭafwī (Mashhad, 1348 H.s.). Cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 185.

[110] See A. A. Sachedina, "The Significance of Kashshī's Rijāl in understanding the early role of the Shīʿite *Fuqahāʾ*", in R. M. Savory and D. A. Agius, eds., *Logos Islamikos* (Toronto, 1984), pp. 183-206.

[111] Ed. E. Sachau et al. (Leiden, 1905-40).

[112] See I. Hafsi, "Recherches sur le genre Ṭabaqāt", *Arabica*, XXIII (1976), pp. 242ff.; on the *ṭabaqāt* genre in general, see ibid., pp.227-65, XXIV (1977), pp. 1-41,

dictionaries deals exclusively with "weak" or unrealiable traditionists; of such works, Ibn 'Adī's (d. 365/976) *al-Kāmil fī Du'afā' al-Rijāl*[113] is an important example.[114] Some compilations were organized in geographical terms: al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's (d. 463/1071) *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*[115] is exclusively concerned with traditionists, scholars in general, and other prominent individuals who lived in, visited, or were somehow associated with the 'Abbāsid capital.[116] This is a massive work, comprising nearly eight thousand biographies of very unequal length.[117] Ibn 'Asākir's (d. 571/1176) *Ta'rīkh Madīnat Dimashq* focuses on Damascus; it is bigger in volume than the *Ta'rīkh Baghdād* but is organized along similar lines.[118] Then there are "Books of Judges", of which Wakī''s (d. 306/918) *Akhbār al-Quḍah*[119] and al-Kindī's (d. 350/961) *Kitāb al-Quḍāt* (concerned exclusively with Egypt)[120] are particularly relevant to this dissertation. The judges, of course, came in frequent contact with the caliphs or the governors. Reports about such contacts are among the things which make the works devoted to the judges important. They also shed light on the attitudes of the religious elite towards the

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[113] 3rd edn., Beirut, 1988.

[114] Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 198.

[115] Cairo, 1931. On the author see *EI*(2), s.v., (R. Sellheim).

[116] For al-Baghdādī's definition of the scope of this work and of the categories of people to be described see *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, I, pp. 212f.

[117] For a study of its sources see A. D. al-'Umarī, *Mawārid al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī fī Ta'rīkh Baghdād* (Beirut, 1975). A rather elementary attempt at systematically exploiting the richness of this biographical dictionary is M. D. Ahmad, *Muslim Education and Scholars' Social Status*.

[118] On the author see *EI*(2), s.v. (N. Elisséeff). A facsimile edition of the Zāhiriyya Library MS. has been published by Muḥammad b. Rizq b. al-Ṭarhūnī (n.p.: Dār al-Bashīr, n.d.). A study based on the materials of the *Ta'rīkh Madīnat Dimashq* is M. Abiad, *Culture et education Arabo-Islamiques*.

[119] Ed. 'A.-'A. M. al-Marāghī (Cairo, 1947-50). Cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 376.

[120] Published together with al-Kindī's "Book of Governors [of Egypt]", *Kitāb al-Wulāt wa Kitāb al-Quḍāt*, ed. R. Guest (London, 1912). On the author and his sources,

government, and towards the judicial office itself.[121] Their fundamental importance lies, however, in the glimpses they provide into the practice of law and of those responsible for its implementation in the first centuries of Islam.

While *rijāl* works such as those of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Ibn ʿAsākir and Ibn Ḥajar etc. are rich in materials pertaining to individuals who lived in the early ʿAbbāsid period, they are far removed in time from that period. Biographical notices do have a tendency to grow with time, the more so when they deal with prominent scholars.[122] The anecdotes which make up the bulk of biographical notices are not only tendentious, it is also very hard to determine when they may have originated. The methods of dealing with such material as best one can will be discussed in the next section. It may, however, be remarked here that compilations such as *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* or *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* are manifestly based on sources which are very much earlier than these compilations themselves,[123] a phenomenon not peculiar of course to biographical dictionaries, as already noted. Questions concerning the principles of selectivity and presentation which guided the later compilers in their use of earlier sources can scarcely be wished away;[124]

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see Guest's "Introduction", pp. 1-60; also cf. Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 358.

[121] Cf. Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, I, pp. 1-83, for a catalogue of attitudes towards the *qāḍī*'s office and admonitions to those who find themselves holding it.

[122] Cf. M. D. Bonner, "The Emergence of the *'Thughūr'*: the Arab-Byzantine frontier in the early ʿAbbāsid age", unpublished Ph.D. diss. (Princeton, 1987), pp. 223-69 passim; F. Malti-Douglas, "Controversy and its effects in the Biographical Tradition of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī", *SI*, XLVI (1977), pp. 115-31.

[123] See Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, pp. 134-60; ibid., pp. 237-41 for a list of some of the sources Ibn Ḥajar used in his *Tahdhīb*; ʿUmari, *Mawārid al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī*, passim.

[124] Cf. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, pp. 174f.: "... in his selection of quotes concerning a certain controversial but on the whole reputable transmitter, Ibn Ḥajar takes pains to leave those quotes unmentioned which could be taken as disparaging, whereas he does not bother to apply the same method when disparaging qualifications of that same person crop up in a *tarjama* devoted to someone different." Also cf. H. Kilpatrick, "Context and the enhancement of the meaning of *aḫbār* in the *Kitāb al-Aġānī*", *Arabica*, XXXVIII (1991), pp. 351-68.

but it is very unlikely that we are faced, in the later compilations, with large-scale fabrication of what purports to be early material. Where early works have survived, comparisons of their contents with extracts from them in later compilations have tended to confirm the latter's credibility.[125]

I.4. NOTES ON METHOD

The materials on which the present enquiry is based pose many problems. These range from the dearth of information in many areas to difficulties in determining the validity of what the sources do actually say. That the traditions which comprise the historical and religious literature relating to the period are frequently tendentious has already been noted. While all tendentious traditions are by definition suspect, they are not for that reason necessarily rendered worthless. Though hardly a record of the "fact" or "event" they purport to describe, such traditions may reveal some of the concerns which brought them into circulation. Deciding whether a particular report bears a partisan viewpoint is frequently to be able to say what that viewpoint might be, which in turn may provide important indications about the milieu in which that report originated.

Not all reports need be tendentious however. To distinguish fact from fiction, early from late material, involves analyzing each tradition separately; it also involves studying the available materials at several levels of analysis. The contents of the biographical notices devoted to the `ulamā' are especially amenable to such multi-level analysis, as the following observations will show.[126]

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[125] See R. G. Khoury, "L'importance de l'Iṣāba d'Ibn Ḥagar 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. 115-46; 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.

[126] These observations owe much to J. Neusner, Development of a Legend: studies on the traditions concerning Yohanan ben Zakkai (Leiden, 1970), especially pp. 300f.

To begin with, a biographical notice typically contains a few "facts" of a biographical character. Dates of birth and death, with some margin of error (often indicated by the source itself), are likely to be fairly close approximations to reality, as are lists of a scholar's teachers and students. Important episodes in life -- a visit to Baghdad or to the caliph's court, acceptance of a royal gift or an official appointment -- may also have been correctly reported: if the eventual scholarly consensus was *against* visiting the rulers or accepting their gifts and appointments, reports that certain respected scholars willingly did so are unlikely to have been fabricated. Such materials are woefully inadequate and often too problematic to encourage any attempt towards a biography of individual scholars[127] but they give certain indications about their attitudes and life-patterns, both individually and collectively, and are useful for that reason.

The biographical notices of scholars also contain evaluations of their credentials, their reliability as transmitters of *hadīth* for instance, by their colleagues. These can range from the laudatory to the vituperative. What the different scholars have to say about a particular individual need not be correct or fair, and may not tell us very much about him; but it does tell us something about the ways in which that individual was regarded by his contemporaries or came to be regarded by his successors. It is certainly possible that many of these evaluative comments have themselves been only retrospectively attributed to the scholars who are now supposed to have made them. These comments are an invaluable guide nonetheless to the mutual perceptions of scholars, to the exemplification -- and in being such, the definition -- of "orthodox" attitudes with reference to reputable scholars, and so forth. It is indeed tempting to think that the beginnings of `ilm al-rijāl in the second century A.H.[128] mark a contribution not only to the sifting of *hadīth* materials

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[127] Cf. Humphreys, *Islamic History*, pp. 191ff. For an example of the problems encountered in the biographical tradition see W. al-Qādī, "Riḥlat al-Shāfi'ī ila'l-Yaman bayna'l-ustūra wa'l-wāqi`", in M. M. Ibrāhīm, ed., *Arabian Studies in Honour of Maḥmūd Ghūl* (Wiesbaden, 1989), pp. 127-41.

[128] Cf. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, pp. 163ff.

but also to the social construction of proper belief and behavior. Anecdotes about scholars seem increasingly to have formed part of his evaluation by others, and to have been transmitted among scholars much the way *ḥadīth* itself was.[129]

An especially interesting characteristic of many a *tarjama*, to which Juynboll has drawn attention, is the contradictory character of the evaluations the same scholar gets in being compared to others. 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*."[130] Juynboll concludes therefore that "even the experts did not know",[131] which may well have been the case. But there surely is more to the scholars' evaluations than what Juynboll grants. What is at work here is in fact the effort to build and enhance the individual and collective authority of prominent scholars. Recognizing scholar A as more learned or as a greater authority than scholar B in one context, and having the superiority of the latter over the former asserted in another context could have been meant to suggest that *both* represented the religious tradition which claimed them. Comparison of one scholar with another not only helped define their own authority, but also that of the values they were claimed to represent. It is also important not to view such comparative evaluations as an isolated phenomenon. *Tarjamas* of many a prominent scholar sometimes also contain characterizations such as his being the "*amīr al-mu'minīn fī'l-ḥadīth*", etc.[132] Whatever else such a characterization may tell us, it constitutes a statement of the authoritative

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[129] Cf. *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, X, p. 240 (nr. 5366), ad ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Mahdī (d. 198): "... 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." ("... *wa kāna min al-rabbāniyyīn fī'l-ʿilm wa ahad al-madhkūrīn bi'l-ḥifẓ wa mimman barīʿa fī maʿrifat al-athar wa ṭuruq al-riwāya wa aḥwāl al-shuyūkh*.")

[130] 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.

[131] "Arabic Prose", p. 172.

[132] See chapter III n. 59.

status that particular scholars were deemed to possess or merit. Then there are anecdotes in which the Prophet himself appears in a dream to authenticate some tradition of his or to affirm a scholar's credentials.[133] Such features of a scholar's *tarjama* do not evidently tell us much about the man himself, but they do have much to reveal about the construction of his image (perhaps already in his life time or soon afterwards, in some of the cases at least), and the defining or settling of controversial issues in terms of his biography.

An effort has been made in this dissertation to delineate broad trends and to document shared attitudes. It is of course individual instances which must shape any interpretation of such attitudes; but, for purposes of the present enquiry, it seems less important to be able to determine whether a particular scholar did in fact hold a particular opinion, or did utter the words attributed to him, than to have a fair sample of credible instances which attest to the existence of a certain attitude or trend at a particular time. In attempting to discern such attitudes and trends, a wide range of sources has been used, as already indicated. The picture of early ʿAbbāsid society which emerges from the chronicles and *firaq* works is clearly an incomplete one; and we will be far from a complete view even with exhaustive use of the biographical dictionaries. But with materials coming from different genres a certain amount of complexity is added to the subject matter; and when these materials come close to, or converge in, identifying the existence of certain attitudes, it becomes very likely that the latter did exist. The scholars' proverbial disdain for accepting official appointments is a case in point. If such disdain is formulated in very predictable terms and is frequently encountered in the sources, it does not necessarily follow that the basic contention of these reports is fictitious. There is,

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[133] Cf. L. Kinberg, "The Legitimization of the *Madhāhib* through Dreams", *Arabica*, XXXII (1985), pp. 47-79. Kinberg notes "the similarity between the dream and the *ḥadīth* as a means of authority in Islam." (Ibid., p. 47.) He dates the origins of these legitimating dreams to the third century A.H.

after all, a strong likelihood that many a scholar would have been opposed to working as a *qāḍī*. While the particular manner in which a scholar is depicted as rejecting an invitation to become a *qāḍī* need not inspire much confidence, it is hardly extravagant to assume that the caliph would have wanted to associate particular scholars with the administration and some of the latter would have refused. Conversely, there also are numerous reports regarding the scholars' *acceptance* of official appointments or royal gifts, as already noted. The scholars' disdain of royal favours is not simply a *topos*, and their *acceptance* of such favours is even less likely to be one.

The trends, attitudes and practices which are discernible in early ʿAbbāsid society are not necessarily unique to that milieu. There obviously were continuities with the Umayyad period,[134] but perhaps even more significant for historiographical purposes are the continuities with Late Antiquity.[135] Occasional comparison with certain institutions or trends of Late Antiquity permits a better evaluation of what the Muslim sources say on similar trends in the Islamic period. Such a procedure may not lead to a dramatic rehabilitation of the Muslim sources, but it may help salvage certain kinds of information we would otherwise have dismissed as mere *topoi*. The case of the "holy man" should illustrate the point. In Late Antiquity, the holy man performed a variety of functions,[136] of

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[134] A study which focuses on such continuities is Blay-Abramski, "From Damascus to Baghdad".

[135] In defining Late Antiquity with simultaneous reference to the late Roman Empire and Islam, Clover and Humphreys identify "two creative epochs that overlap but do not coincide.... The Roman Empire ... underwent dramatic change between A.D. 400 and 700, whereas the foundations of Islamic civilization were laid between about 600 and 900." F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys, "Toward a Definition of Late Antiquity", in Clover and Humphreys, eds., *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, p. 15, and generally pp. 3-19. Also see Peter Brown, "Late Antiquity and Islam: parallels and contrasts", in B. D. Metcalf, ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: the place of adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 23-37. The continuities of Late Antiquity into early Islam are studied, with reference to Iraq, in M. G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, 1984).

[136] See Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity", *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXI (1971), pp. 80-101; idem, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978); idem, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late

which his occasional admonishment of the ruling authorities or his acting as a mediator between the rulers and the ruled are instances. That the early `Abbāsid society had "holy men" in the precise Late Antique sense is not being suggested here. Nevertheless, it is hard to ignore, in the chronicles but especially in biographical dictionaries, the existence of men, many of them `ulamā' of varying stature, whose activities are strikingly reminiscent of the holy men of Late Antiquity. While every anecdote which depicts a "Muslim holy man", so to speak, as admonishing the governor or the caliph, or interceding for someone, or mediating between his community and the authorities, is scarcely credible, there do not seem to be good reasons to think that such men did not exist, or did not act in the manner described, or that the rulers were not suspicious of their influence in their community.[137]

Antiquity", in J. S. Hawley, ed., *Saints and Virtues* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 3-14. Also cf. Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: the quest for the holy man* (Berkeley, 1983).

[137] See chapter III nn. 41, 55, 58, 60; chapter IV, nn. 1f., 111, below. Also cf. *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, IX, pp. 274f. (nr. 4836).

Chapter II

RELIGIOUS TRENDS IN EARLY `ABBASID SOCIETY

II.1

The first centuries of Islam witnessed a wide spectrum of religious trends and tendencies. Their inner development and mutual relations have continually attracted the interest of scholars ranging from medieval Muslim heresiographers to modern Western Islamicists. These religious trends comprise too broad and ill-defined a subject to be surveyed here even within the confines of the early `Abbāsid period, which is the focus of this dissertation. What *can* be attempted here is rather a delineation of those aspects of religious life, or of religio-political attitudes, which would help put in context our subsequent discussion of the religious policies of the early `Abbāsid caliphs. A particular focus of the following account would, therefore, be on tracing some of the implications of these religious trends for `Abbāsid politics and policies.

II.2 SHĪ'ISM AND THE `ABBASIDS

II.2.i

It was a Shī`ite movement,[1] calling for the rights of "the family of the Prophet" (*ahl al-bayt*) which brought the `Abbāsids 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 `Abbāsids took great pains to emphasize their position as the kin of the Prophet and members of his household.[2] Whether they were generally regarded as belonging to the

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[1] Unless defined or qualified otherwise, the terms "Shī`ism", "Shī`a", "Shī`ite", etc. will be used in this dissertation to designate those tendencies and groups which, in some form, recognized that `Alī and his descendants were the best/only ones entitled to succeed the Prophet, and/or claimed their own political rights through `Alī. In speaking of "Shī`ism" 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 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 Shī`ite context, one must use that prefix -- hence "Shī`ite" but "proto-Imāmiyya". Also cf. nn. 7f., 11, and chapter III n. 38, below.

[2] Cf. M. Sharon, *Black Banners from the East: the establishment of the `Abbāsid state -*

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 `Alī enjoyed better standing as the *ahl al-bayt*, owing to a closer kinship with the Prophet.[3] The many uncertainties about the `Abbāsid position in the Prophet's household do not, however, bring in question the Shī`ite character of the movement which brought them to power. This Shī`ite 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 `Alī as the sole legitimate successor of the Prophet. In building the ideological bases of their legitimacy, the `Abbāsids eventually tried to bypass `Alī 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-`Abbāsiyya*, speak of a "testament" from Abū Hāshim (a son of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya, and a grandson of `Alī) to Muḥammad b. `Alī (the grandson of the Prophet's uncle al-`Abbās, and the father of the first two `Abbāsid caliphs) whereby he transferred the imamate and the leadership of his Shī`a to Muḥammad b. `Alī.[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

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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 `Alī" (*Black Banners*, p. 79), is perhaps too dogmatic. For a critique and some evidence that the Banū `Abbās and the Banū Muṭṭalib were, together with the household of `Ali, also regarded as part of the *ahl al-bayt*, see W. Madelung, "The Hāshimiyyāt of al-Kumayt and Hāshimī Shī`ism", *SI*, LXX (1989), pp.5-26.

[4] *Akhbār al-dawla al-`Abbāsiyya* (hereafter *Akhbār*), ed. `A.-`A. al-Dūrī and A.-J. al-Muṭṭalibī (Beirut, 1971), pp. 184ff. The most detailed study so far of "the testament of Abū Hāshim" is Sharon, *Black 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 `Alid *imāmah* to the `Abbāsids arisen." (Ibid., p. 127.)

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 for some time in the early years of the ʿAbbāsid

caliphate as the basis on which the new dynasty's claim to legitimacy was staked.[6] For

our purposes here, the fact that the ʿAbbāsids are known to have used this story for

legitimist propaganda once is of interest for two reasons. First, it shows that the

ʿAbbāsids claimed for themselves the position and prerogatives of a Shīʿite imām;[7] they

later came to abandon such claims, probably during the caliphate of al-Mahdī, though

some of them were briefly revived -- albeit on a rather different basis -- under al-Maʾmūn.

To claim or to abandon the position of a Shīʿite imām had important implications for

ʿAbbāsid relations with the Shīʿa no less than for the caliphs' conception of their own

position; it bore on the question of religious authority, to which we shall return in the

following chapter.

Secondly, the story of the testament of Abū Hāshim reminds us -- as does much else

in Shīʿite trends pertaining to the period ca. 750 A.D. -- that in speaking of Shīʿism at

this time, we are still only speaking of certain broadly recognizable tendencies, often in

mutual conflict, with much fluidity about them.[8] There were competing claims to the

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[5] For a case *against* the historicity of the "testament", see T. Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung der abbasidischen Kalifates* (Bonn, 1972); and more recently, P. Crone, "The Meaning of the ʿAbbāsid 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, *Black Banners*, pp. 138ff.; Crone, "The ʿAbbāsid Call", pp. 104, 110f. n. 50.

[7] For further indications of the pretention to *imāma* on the part of the first ʿAbbāsids, see II.2.ii, below (and cf. nn. 48, 50). It should be noted, however, that there was no single view on the position and function of a Shīʿite imām: the followers of the various Shīʿite 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 infallible and as indispensable for salvation to deifying him or believing that to know the imām was to be exonerated from all further religious obligation.

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.[9] 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,[10] 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 Imāmī 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.[11] What political implications a prominent 'Alid's being regarded as the "imām" entailed in the early

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[8] The kind of Shī'ism with which the 'Abbāsids were apparently associated prior to the revolution is usually designated as "Hāshimī" Shī'ism. Some scholars have suggested that the nisba "Hāshimī" derives from Abū Hāshim, who allegedly transferred the imamate together with his followers to the 'Abbāsid Muḥammad b. 'Alī. (For this view, cf. EI(2), s.v. "'Abbāsids" (B. Lewis); Sharon, Black Banners, ch. 5). The other view is that "Hāshimī" refers, in fact, to the clan of Hāshim as a whole, whose legitimist claims the Shī'a in general stood for. (Cf. E. L. Daniel, "The Anonymous 'History of the 'Abbāsid Family' and its Place in Islamic Historiography", IJMES, XIV (1982), p. 430; Crone, "The 'Abbāsid Call", pp. 102ff.). If the latter view is taken, all the Shī'a of the Umayyad and early 'Abbāsid period could be designated by the nisba "Hāshimī", though it does not follow that the Shī'ites constituted a single or uniform bloc or movement.

[9] Cf. F. 'Umar, al-'Abbāsiyyūn al-Awā'il (Beirut, 1970), I, p. 169.

[10] 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, Black Banners, p. 148.

[11] On Ja'far, see, inter alia, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, Ikhtiyār ma'rifat al-rijāl, al-ma'rūf bi-rijāl al-Kashshi (hereafter Rijāl al-Kashshī), ed. H. al-Muṣṭafawī (Mashhad 1348 H.s.), index, s.v.; EI(2), s.v. (M. Hodgson); H. Halm, Die islamische Gnosis: die extreme Schia und die 'Alawiten (Zurich, 1982), index, s.v.; idem, Shī'ism (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 29f. In the extraordinarily rich store of traditions concerning him, Ja'far is particularly associated with efforts towards defining the position of the imām, maintaining and justifying a quietist political

`Abbāsid period is uncertain. While Ja`far, for one, comes across in our sources as maintaining a quietist political stance, it is noteworthy that such a stance was unacceptable to many of his followers.[12] In contrast to Ja`far's political stance, Muhammad b. `Abdallāh "al-Nafs al-Zakiyya", another prominent `Alid of the time, clearly did not subscribe to a quietist view; he led an abortive revolt against the `Abbāsids early in the reign of al-Mansūr.[13] This revolt is important, *inter alia*, because support for it came not from a particular `Alid group but from people belonging to different branches of the `Alid family, which shows, as Tilman Nagel has argued, that an "activist" and "quietist" stance had not yet been associated with particular `Alid groups.[14] The revolt is also important for the support it received from some of those religious scholars who apparently were not Shī`ite; this latter point, and some of its implications will be taken up in the following chapter.

That political activism or quietism had, in the early `Abbāsid period, not yet come to

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stance, and seeking to exercise some measure of discipline over his "extremist" followers. Such a role, though undoubtedly exaggerated in the Shī`ite tradition, does nevertheless suggest that he had a following over which he hoped to exercise his influence and that this following recognized him as the imām. (The same cannot probably be said about those of Ja`far's predecessors whom the Imāmī tradition recognizes as imāms: cf. Halm, *Shī`ism*, p. 29.) The serious disputes over the succession to Ja`far further point to the strong likelihood that he was already regarded as an imām.

The beginnings of an "Imāmī" community may be traced to the time of Ja`far (cf. Halm, *Shī`ism*, 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.). The term "Imāmiyya" became synonymous with "Ithnā `ashariyya" after the doctrine of the twelve imāms, the last of whom being in concealment, crystallized towards the middle of the 4th/10th century (cf. E. Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā `Ashariyya", *BSOAS* XXXIX (1976), p. 521, and generally, pp. 521-34, passim). Those who seem to have regarded Ja`far and his successors in linear descent as the imāms, and generally maintained a quietist political stance (and were eventually claimed for the Ithnā `ashariyya) will be characterized here as the proto-Imāmiyya. The term "al-Rāfida", used by opponents of the Shī`a from the 2nd/8th century, is to be understood as referring primarily, but not exclusively, to the proto-Imāmiyya. On this term, see n. 35, below.

12 For instance, Abu'l-Khattāb, once a close associate and confidant of Ja`far, led a

be associated with particular Shî'ite groups is one of the several indications that Shî'ism

was still an ill-defined phenomenon. The fluidity characterizing Shî'ite 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 (or was thought to consist in)

different things at different times in the evolution of Shî'ite trends,[15] though it is

noteworthy that certain individuals could be characterized as "extremists" (*ghulāt*)[16] even

at a time when an "orthodox" stance itself was still in the process of articulation.[17]

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[18] -- that the proto-Imāmiyya, for instance, defined their own

"moderation".

Imāmî sources recognize that the followers of the imāms included many

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revolt in Kufa during the reign of the caliph al-Manṣūr, to be repudiated by Ja'far presumably before the event itself. On Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb, see *Rijāl al-Kashshî*, pp. 290-308, and index, s.v.; Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtî, *Kitāb Firaq al-Shî'a*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931), pp. 38-40, 58-60; Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh al-Ash'arî al-Qummî, *Kitāb al-Maqālāt wa'l-Firaq*, ed. M. J. Mashkūr (Tehran, 1963), pp. 81-83; Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 199ff.; *EIr*, s.v. (A.-A. Sachedina).

13 On this revolt, see al-Ṭabarî, *Ta'rîkh*, III, 189-265; al-Iṣfahānî, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyîn*, ed. A. Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1949), pp. 260-99. For further references, see chapter III n.23, below.

14 T. Nagel, "Ein früher Bericht über den Aufstand des Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh im Jahre 145 h", *Der Islam*, (1970), pp. 256ff., 262; also cf. J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin and New York, 1991-), I, p. 321.

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

16 On the *ghulāt*, see, *inter alia*, al-Nawbakhtî, *Firaq*, pp. 35, 41, 61ff., and passim; al-Qummî, *al-Maqālāt*, pp. 26-70, 77ff., and passim; Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alî al-Ash'arî, *Kitāb Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyîn*, ed. H. Ritter (2nd edn., Wiesbaden, 1963), pp. 5-16, and index; etc. Studies include: Halm, *Gnosis*; idem, *Shî'ism*, ch. 3; F. Daftary, *The Ismā'îlîs: their history and doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 58ff.; M. Moosa, *Extremist Shî'ites: the ghulāt sects* (New York, 1988), pp. xiii-xxiii, 77-101, and

"extremists".[19] 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. It does not follow, however, that all those whose beliefs approximated to some form of "extremism" were *ipso facto* repudiated. That there was considerable fluidity of religious belief, and a variety of attitudes on a given matter, is acknowledged by Imāmī sources themselves.[20] To institute an inquisition of religious belief and attempt to purge suspect followers could scarcely be possible at a time when the imām's authority was itself uncertain, the consolidation of the community had only begun, and when even some of those leading Shī'ites whom later tradition recognized as architects of Imāmī theology and jurisprudence were themselves frequently in conflict with their imāms.[21]

When extremists were, in fact, repudiated, it was not merely because the individuals

passim (the book deals essentially with modern times); E. Kohlberg, "Barā'a in Shī'ī Doctrine, *JSAI*, VII (1986), pp. 163ff.; S. Wassertrom, "The Moving Finger Writes: Mughīra b. Sa'īd and the institutionalization of the Dajjāl myth", *History of Religions*, XXV (1985), pp. 1-29. 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 Mansūr al-'Ijlī and the Mansūriyya: a study in medieval terrorism", *Der Islam*, LIV (1977), pp. 66-76; idem, "Abdallāh b. Mu'āwiya and the Janāhiyya: rebels and ideologues of the late Umayyad period", *SI*, LI (1980), pp. 39-57; W. al-Qādī, *al-Kaysāniyya fi'l-ta'rīkh wa'l-adab* (Beirut, 1974), passim; A.-S. Sāmarrā'ī, *al-Ghulū wa'l-firaq al-ghāliya fi'l-hadāra al-Islāmiyya* (Baghdad, 1972); M. G. S. Hodgson, "How did the Early Shī'a become Sectarian", *JAOS*, LXXV (1955), pp. 1-13;idem, *EI*(2), s.v. "Ghulāt".

[17] Shī'ite extremism is denounced, for instance, in the *Kitāb al-irjā'* of Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Hanafiyya (d. 100/719), which van Ess regards as one of the earliest extant theological epistles: see J. van Ess, "Das *Kitāb al-Irjā'* des Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Hanafiyya", *Arabica*, XXI (1974), pp. 23f. (The term "*ghulū*" itself, or its cognates, does not occur in this epistle, however.) Note, too, that in the *Risāla fi'l-Sahāba* of Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 142/759) (ed. and tr. C. Pellat, *Ibn al-Muqaffa'; "conseilleur"du calife* [Paris, 1976], para 10, pp. 23, 25) the term "*ghālin*" occurs, in a sense which seems to approximate to heresiographical usage.

[18] Halm, *Shī'ism*, p. 156.

concerned were perceived to have heretical beliefs; differently put, it was not the fact of

having certain extremist beliefs alone which made one into a "heretic". The repudiation

of an extremist seems, in many instances, to have been occasioned by the perception of a

threat from him to the position of the imām or to his community. For all the exaggerated

beliefs about the imāms, many an extremist did after all turn rather easily from endorsing

someone else's claims to proclaiming his own imāmate, even prophethood[22] if not

divinity. Such individuals could have been seen as representing an alternative leadership

to that of the imāms, and may have been repudiated for that reason.[23] Alternatively, an

extremist could have been repudiated for an "activist" stance on his part: such "activism"

might take the form of calling others to his extremist convictions[24] (thereby threatening

the "moderates", or jeopardising the reputation, even security, of the entire community

which housed or tolerated such an extremist); or, the activism in question might be

expressed in the form of an actual call to arms on the part of the extremists (exposing the

community as a whole to the danger of persecution by governmental authorities that were

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

[20] 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. from *al-Uṣūl al-arba'umi'a*, Tehran Univ. MS 962, fol. 41b.

[21] Cf. Kohlberg, "Barā'a", pp. 158ff.; A. A. Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shī'ite Islam* (New York, 1988), pp. 42ff.

[22] Cf. the case of the extremist Shī'ite Mughīra b. Sa'īd, ad Tucker, "Rebels and Gnostics", pp. 37ff.; Wasserstrom, "The Moving Finger Writes", p. 15.

[23] Cf. Sachedina, *Just Ruler*, pp. 41f.

[24] Cf. the distinction which Sunnī traditionalists came to make -- probably at a rather developed stage of their doctrinal history -- between individuals believed to have only followed a certain *bid'a* (e.g. Irjā', *qadar*, etc.) and those who had supposedly been active in propagating it. The formers' transmission of *ḥadīth* could usually be accepted, but the latter were to be completely rejected. Cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* (Haydarabad, 1325-27 A.H.), II, p. 97 (nr. 145), VI, p. 382 (nr. 721). Such distinctions were often motivated by concerns to retrospectively rehabilitate or

known to be suspicious and hostile).[25]

To what has been said above, it may also be added that as the articulation of the Imāmī dogma proceeded apace, not only is tolerance for the extremists likely to have progressively diminished within the Imāmī community, the extremists themselves seem to have had effectively separated to become, as Heinz Halm puts it, an independent religion.[26] On the other hand, not only did extremist ideas contribute to Shī'ite thought in the formative period -- both positively[27] and by evoking the "moderate" reaction -- the (selective) *repudiation* of extremism also helped define the imām's position and his image.

II.2.ii

Historical tradition depicts the 'Abbāsids too as having to face, both before and after the revolution, the problem of "extremism" among their followers. Muḥammad b. 'Alī, for whom Abū Hāshim allegedly made his testament, is said to have dissociated, in 736, from a man named Khidāsh, who apparently was in charge of the *da'wa* organization in Khurāsān.[28] The episode of this disavowal is unusually obscure, and what our sources have to say about Khidāsh is often tendentious. Khidāsh is said to have betrayed the guidelines set for him by the imām, not only preaching "Khurramī" ideas[29] to those over

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denounce various earlier figures; nevertheless, a recognition that *professing* an unacceptable doctrine and actively *promoting* it demanded different attitudes towards those involved seems relevant here.

[25] Cf. Sachedina, *Just Ruler*, pp. 41f.; *EIr*, s.v. "Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb".

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

[27] Cf. Hodgson, "The Early Shī'a", passim.

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

[29] 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 Shī'ite and Gnostic ideas in various proportions. In the early 'Abbāsid

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-Nāshi' al-Akbar, the Khurāsānī Shī'ite leaders, when they realized their error in having followed Khidāsh, requested the 'Abbāsid patriarch "to write for them a document (*kitāb*) containing the ordinances (*sharā'i'*) and the prescripts (*ahkām*) which God sent with Muḥammad. So he [sc. Muḥammad b. 'Alī] wrote a document (*kitāb*) for them, explaining in it the ordinances (*sharā'i'*) of Islam, and its statutes (*hudūd*) and prescripts (*ahkām*); he [also] expressed in it his condemnation and repudiation of Khidāsh."[30]

The foregoing tradition presupposes, of course, that the 'Abbāsid patriarch, Muḥammad b. 'Alī, was already directing the Shī'ite movement in Khurāsān, a movement whose leadership he had inherited from Abū Hāshim. That Muḥammad b. 'Alī was recognized as an imām by the Khurasānī Shī'a, is problematic and uncertain. Two things are of interest in the present context: first, that historical and heresiographical tradition presents him as an "imām", all complete with his "Shī'a"; second, that he is presented as dissociating from his extremist and wayward followers. Both probably tell us more about the early 'Abbāsid times than either does about the time it purports to speak of. The significance of the former will be discussed in due course; the latter deserves a brief comment here.

Whatever the reality of Khidāsh's extremism may have been, the story had an important message to convey in the early 'Abbāsid period; this message is well-conveyed by pseudo- al-Nāshi's account. It is noteworthy that the tradition here is concerned not so

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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.

[30] J. van Ess, *Frühe Mu'tazilitische Häresiographie: zwei Werke des Nāší al-Akbar (gest. 293 H.)* (Beirut, 1971), p. 34 (of the Arabic text), para 50.

much with Khidāsh's heresy itself as with the ʿAbbāsid patriarch's defence of an "orthodoxy" as against it. That Khidāsh *deviated* from the "imām's" position suggests that the latter position was already sufficiently well-defined for such a deviation to have been recognizable; the ʿAbbāsid patriarch, for his part, 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; in doing so, however, it also betrays some of the motives which may have brought such a tradition into circulation. The likelihood, therefore, is that this tradition came into being around the time when the ʿAbbāsid caliphs began to strive for an "orthodox" image for themselves, and sought to gain the favour of the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ. This point will be illustrated further when we return to this tradition in due course.

That the name of Khidāsh should have lent itself, in the early ʿAbbāsid period, to use in the processes of ʿAbbāsid ideological adjustments 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.[31] The problem rather is that we are unsure in what relationship, if any, the ʿAbbāsid Muḥammad b. ʿAlī stood vis-a-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",

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[31] There seems no compelling reason why Khidāsh could not have professed -- even preached -- ideas of a "Khurramī", or Mazdakite, nature and provenance, which our traditional sources invariably accuse him of. Mazkakite 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 form 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; Yarshater, "Mazdakism" in *CHIr*, III(2), pp. 1001ff.

such extremism being perceived as a political no less (if not more) than a religious threat.

The Khurāsānī Shī'a evidently retained some of their extremist beliefs even after the date when the repudiation of Khidāsh and fresh directives from Muḥammad b. 'Alī might have been expected to chasten them. Thus, a few years after the 'Abbāsid revolution, Ibn al-Muqaffa', a secretary of the caliph al-Manṣūr, could still use the metaphor of a man riding the lion, to characterize the caliph's relationship with his extremist followers. Ibn al-Muqaffa''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 the 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.[32]

Ibn al-Muqaffa''s testimony should suffice at least to raise the question whether the first 'Abbāsids were regarded, by some of their followers, as "imāms" in the Shī'ī sense of the term. How else would they be regarded by the Rāwandiyya, an extremist group among their followers?[33] But the Rāwandiyya, who presumably held the views the foregoing passage reports, were not the only Shī'ites among the supporters of the 'Abbāsids; and the characterization as "Shī'a" 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 Shī'ite motifs of *'ilm*, *imāma*, and, of course, *waṣiyya*; nor was the "lexique technique" of the extremists among 'Abbāsid supporters distinguishable from that of the supporters of any other Shī'ī imāms. Such extremists -- the Rāwandiyya in case of the 'Abbāsids -- were as much of a

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[32] Ibn al-Muqaffa, *Risāla fī'l-Ṣaḥāba*, para 12, p. 25.

[33] On the Rāwandiyya, see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 129ff., 418f.; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 29f.,41f.,46f.; al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, p. 39f. (para 81), 64f. (paras 127ff.), 69f. (para 134); *EI*(2), s.v. "Kaysāniyya" (W. Madelung); F. 'Umar, *al-'Abbāsiyyūn al-Awā'il* (Beirut, 1970), II, pp. 85ff.; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III, pp. 10-17.

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 al-Manṣūr decided to give precedence

in the matter of succession to his son al-Mahdī over his nephew ʿĪsā b. Mūsā is very

instructive and deserves to be quoted in full:

> At that moment his Shīʿa were divided and became turbulent. Theyʿ disapproved
> of what [al-Manṣūr] proposed and refused to give allegiance (bayʿa) to al-Mahdī
> and [to recognize] his precedence over ʿĪsā b. Mūsā. To those theyʿ were arguing
> with (aṣḥābihim) theyʿ 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 al-Manṣūr?" Theyʿʿ 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)." Theyʿ said: "[But] Abu'l-ʿAbbās had been the muftaraḍ al-ṭāʿa
> from God before ... [al-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 to al-
> Mahdī over him?" Theyʿʿ 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-
> qāʾim), [and only] for so long as he lives." Theyʿ said: "If al-Manṣūr died ... and
> people were to reject ... [his] command [regarding succession], just as you have
> rejected that of Abu'l-ʿAbbās, would that be justified?" Theyʿʿ replied: "No ... for
> an oath has [now] been pledged to ... [al-Mahdī]." Theyʿ said: "But how could you
> justify deferring ʿĪsā and giving precedence to someone you [previously] had not
> [even] given allegiance to?" Theyʿʿ replied: "ʿĪsā has willingly sold ... [his own
> rights]; we have accepted for him what he has agreed to for himself." On this a
> groupʿ separated from themʿʿ.[34]

The purpose of the foregoing digression on the ʿAbbāsid imāms and their supporters

has been to note that since the ʿAbbāsids came from a Shīʿite milieu, the problems they

faced in defining their position as imāms and in disciplining their followers had certain

affinities with the case of those ʿAlids who were regarded as imāms by their followers.

The paths of the ʿAlids and the ʿAbbāsids began to diverge, however, after the latter

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[34] al-Qummī, al-Maqālāt, p. 68 (the superscript marks are intended to distinguish the statements of the contending parties). Cf. W. Madelung, "Bemerkungen zur imamitischen Firaq-Literatur", Der Islam, XLIII (1967), p. 41.

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 mainstream Muslim community. In seeking the approval of the community at large, it was necessary for the `Abbāsids not only to distance themselves from their extremist Shī`ite followers, but also perhaps to modify their own religious and political standpoint, which they had hitherto shared with other Shī`ite groups. One of the most conspicuous expressions of this standpoint was the Shī`ite view of the early Muslim community and its history.

II.2.iii

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.[35] For all the uncertainty about it, the term was evidently one of abuse, and is often explained as referring to the Shī`ite repudiation of Abū Bakr and `Umar, the first two successors of the Prophet and two of the most revered Companions in Sunnī estimation. With the exception of the Zaydīs, the Shī`ites generally regarded the caliphates of Abū Bakr, `Umar, and `Uthmān as based on a usurpation of the right of `Alī to succeed the Prophet, and condemned the vast majority of the Prophet's Companions for their complicity in this usurpation.[36] This Shī`ite attitude towards the Companions has, historically, been a cause of much friction and ill-will between them and the non-Shī`ites; and apparently, it already was such during the period under study here.[37] Many among the Zaydī Shī`a, for their part, are reported to have

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[35] For the meanings and history of this term, and those denoted by it, see I. Friedlander, "The Heterodoxies of of Shiites 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.

[36] See van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, pp. 308ff.

[37] Cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, p. 309.

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 du'āt of the movement in Khurāsān 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.[38] Naṣr b. Sayyār, the last Umayyad governor of Khurāsān, 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).[39] The Shīʿite revolutionaries' attitude towards ʿUmar I may have been as hostile as towards the Umayyad ʿUmar. Naṣr could conceivably have hoped to attract non-Shīʿite men of religion 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 Abu'l-ʿAbbās, asserted in his speech that the latter was the only caliph apart from ʿAlī to legimately occupy the caliphal position. While such a statement amounts to charging all other caliphs with usurpatory rule -- a charge which clearly expresses the Shīʿite view on the matter -- it is noteworthy that in his own brief speech earlier, Abu'l-ʿAbbās not

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[38] 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 *du'āt* called to, and claimed to follow, all three. While this evidence for an explicit call to a revival of ʿAlī's *sunna* -- whatever that may have meant -- is admittedly inadequate, such a call would not be surprising given the Shīʿite orientation of the movement.

[39] Note, however, that "al-ʿUmarayn" could also signify *Abū Bakr* and ʿUmar I, as in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 759f. Contrast ibid., III, pp. 749f.

merely spared the Companions but praised them, reserving his ire only for the Umayyads:

> When God took ... [Muhammad] 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...[40]

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.[41] If the foregoing statement attributed to him is authentic, 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 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. Such commitment, however, was to prove short-lived.

A very different attitude towards 'Alī finds expression in a letter which al-Manṣūr is said 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.[42] It is suggested that if 'Alī was bypassed on three different occasions, it was only because he was not

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

[41] 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.

[42] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 213f.

considered by the early community to be best suited for the caliphate (the unstated implication being that it was `Alī's own deficiencies rather than the electors' usurpation of his rights which is to blame). Further, not only was it with difficulty that `Alī finally managed to become caliph, he was -- in the process -- implicated in the murder of his predecessor `Uthmān, and later lost what legitimacy he had by being deposed in the arbitration between him and Mu`āwiya.[43]

There is some doubt about the authenticity of some of the contents of al-Manṣūr's letter to Muḥammad.[44] Given, however, that the letter purports to belong to a historical moment when the caliph was engaged in a bitter struggle with the `Alids, his attack on `Alī as a way of attacking the legitimist pretensions of his opponents makes good sense, and should be counted among the letter's authentic parts.[45] al-Manṣūr's attack on `Alī also leads to the assertion, in the same letter, that the `Abbāsids derive their political rights from al-`Abbās -- the uncle of the Prophet -- to whose descendants (sc. the `Abbāsids) rather than `Alī's, the inheritance of the Prophet (including the caliphate) rightfully belongs.[46]

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

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[43] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 213ff.

[44] Cf. 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.: cf. ibid., pp. 255f.

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

[46] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 213ff.

If the meagre information provided by some of our sources is to be trusted, the caliph al-Mahdî seems to have made a succession of responses to certain religio-political trends of the time. Early in his reign, he reportedly wrote to a Khārijite rebel -- `Abd al Salām al-Yashkurî -- reminding him that in slandering `Alî, the Khārijite was guilty of disobedience to God and His Prophet, for the Prophet had clearly stated: "He whose *mawlā* I am, `Alî is his *mawlā*."[47] The position al-Mahdî takes here conforms to his generally lenient policy towards the `Alids; it also conforms to the Shî`ite milieu to which the `Abbāsids themselves had belonged. But it contrasts rather sharply with the attack on `Alî's special merit which is attributed to al-Manṣūr. While there is no particular reason to doubt al-Mahdî's seriousness in coming to the defence of `Alî, his espousal - if it may be called such - of `Alî's cause evidently did not remain a continuing concern: he is, after all, credited with the attempt to place `Abbāsid legitimism on a new footing.

al-Manṣūr had gone only so far as to argue that al-`Abbās 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 `Alî -- since the latter was a woman, while for purposes of inheritance the uncle was like the father: the descendants of al-`Abbās were thus the true successors/inheritors of the Prophet. al-Mahdî, for his part, put forth the claim that al-`Abbās had been the Prophet's successor in more than the formal or legal sense: al-`Abbās, in fact, was the imām -- the legatee of the Prophet and his successor as the community's guide.[48] With such a position, the Shî`ite world-view -- stressing ideas of

47 al-Azdî, *Ta'rîkh al-Mawṣil*, ed. A. Ḥabîba (Cairo, 1967), p. 238. Accepting such a tradition does not necessarily make one some kind of a "Shî`î" however. The same *hadîth* was to enter Sunnî compilations, where it naturally did not have the same meaning as it did for the Shî`a. See, for example, Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Cairo, 1313 A.H.), I, pp. 84, 118, 119, 152, 330; IV, 281, 368, 370, 372; V, 347, 350, 350, 361, 366, 370, 419 (ad A. J. Wensinck, *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition* [Leiden, 1927], s.v. `Alî).

48 See al-Qummî, *Maqālāt*, p. 65: al-Mahdî "affirmed that after the [death of the] Prophet of God, al-`Abbās was the imām. He [sc. al-Mahdî] summoned them [sc. the

waṣiyya and *imāma* -- was not immediately renounced, only the ˋAlid *dramatis personae* were replaced by ˋAbbāsid ones: the imamate no longer had to be derived from ˋAlī through Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya and Abū Hāshim, but could directly be traced back to al-ˋAbbās himself. The question once again arises: if al-ˋAbbās and his successors were the imāms all along, would not the "rightly-guided" caliphs who actually succeeded Muhammad have been illegitimate? A group of the ˋAbbāsid Shīˋa 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.[49]

The ideological shift sponsored by al-Mahdī may be interpreted as an effort not only to challenge the legitimist claims of the ˋAlids, but also to define the position of the ˋAbbāsid Shīˋa as completely distinct from other Shīˋite groups. But the ˋAbbāsids were apparently seeking not only to be sure of their devoted followers, but also to cultivate an "orthodox" image for themselves in the Muslim community at large. Replacing ˋAlī with al-ˋAbbās as the first legitimate imām might be an argument against the ˋAlids; but it was scarcely interpretable as a step towards proto-Sunnism. Since the ˋAbbāsids did aim at a moderate, broadly acceptable position, it appears that they never explicitly drew the implications of al-ˋAbbās' having been the imām -- or if they did, they never acknowledged this, as al-Qummī's report suggests. The claim about al-ˋAbbās having inherited from the Prophet as his sole surviving uncle soon came to be an expression probably of no more than the ˋAbbāsid claim to close kinship with the Prophet. In other words, the idea that al-ˋAbbās was the imām after the Prophet -- with all that this implied -- may have been toyed with only briefly, to be abandoned already, perhaps, during al-

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supporters of the ˋAbbāsids] to that [doctrine], received the oath of their allegiance on that basis, and said: 'al-ˋAbbās was the uncle [of the Prophet], his heir, and the [person] most entitled to succeed him." ("... *wa athbata (al-Mahdī) al-imāma baˋda rasūl Allāh li'l-ˋAbbās b. ˋAbd al-Muṭṭalib wa daˋāhum ilayhā 'wa akhadha bayˋatahum ˋalayhā, wa qāla: kāna'l-ˋAbbās ˋammahu wa wārithahu wa awlā al-nās bihi.*") Also see *Akhbār*, p. 165.

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

Mahdî's caliphate.[50] 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.[51]

al-Qummî's report that the ʿAbbāsid Shîʿa of al-Mahdî's time discreetly refrained from condemning Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, while believing the ʿAbbāsids to have been the imāms all along, has been noted previously. An anecdote recorded by al-Ṭabarî suggests that by the end of his reign, al-Mahdî may have distanced himself completely from any criticism of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, distancing himself thereby from the Shîʿite milieu to which the ʿAbbāsids themselves had belonged.[52] The anecdote, which takes the form of a conversation between al-Mahdî and the veteran ʿAbbāsid general Abū ʿAwn (the latter being on his death-bed) may be quoted *in extenso*:

> al-Mahdî 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. Abî ʿAwn and summon him, for your anger against him has lasted a long time." Al-

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[50] "Extremist" views on the imām's position and function seem to have been on their way out, in circles of the ʿAbbāsid Shîʿa, already before the implications of al-ʿAbbās' imamate were themselves moderated or the idea altogether jettisoned as a serious claim. Thus, some of the same people who came to believe, during al-Mahdî's caliphate, that the imamate had all along been in the ʿAbbāsid line seem also to have taken a view of the imām's position -- presumably on official goading -- which is a far-cry from "extremist" notions such as those of the Rāwandiyya. (The Rizāmiyya, who held the following view, are stated by pseudo- al-Nāshî' to have been a sub-sect of the Hurayriyya, who in turn were the ones subscribing to the view that al-ʿAbbās had been the first imām after the Prophet's death.) According to pseudo- al-Nāshî' (van Ess, *Häresiographie*, p. 36 of the Arabic text, para 54), the Rizāmiyya "asserted that loyalty to anyone from among the children of al-ʿAbbās who assumes the imamate is obligatory, and the fact of his being the imām is certain. The community must submit to him, and have recourse to him whenever there is disagreement on knowledge of religion. For God imprints right solution on the imām's mind, inspires an understanding of the matter in him, and makes such an understanding seem preferable to him so that matters may only be decided accordingly.... So the imām does not express anything except that with which he has been inspired -- even though prior to recourse being had to him, the imām may have been questioned regarding such [divinely-inspired] knowledge and he may not have possessed it. So the imām, according to them, 'knows' when he needs to by virtue of a knowledge which God imprints on his mind and inspires him with."

[51] This motif occurs frequently in ʿAbbāsid poetry: cf., for instance, al-Ṭabarî, *Taʾrîkh*, III, pp. 742f. (Marwān b. Abî Ḥafṣa's panegyric to al-Rashîd).

Mahdī replied, "O Abū `Awn, he is on the wrong road and is against our belief and your belief. He defames the two *shaykhs*, Abū Bakr and `Umar, and uses evil language about them." Abū `Awn said, "He is, by God, O Commander of the 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*),[53] order us to do what you wish, so that we can obey you."[54]

The authenticity of this anecdote is not provable, of course, though the likelihood that it correctly depicts al-Mahdī's position towards the end of his reign is strong.[55] The recognition, in the anecdote, that the ideology of the `Abbāsid revolutionaries had certain elements which were later considered embarrassing may, in particular, be treated as an argument for the authenticity of its essential theme.

That al-Mahdī should have, in a span of about ten years, probed a series of religio-political attitudes is striking but not implausible.[56] What these modifications in his perspective illustrate is, above all, that it was very gradually and with much

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[52] In polemicizing against `Alid 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 [overall the rest]. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 213.

[53] 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 effected. 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.

[54] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 537; translation as in H. Kennedy, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXIX (Albany, 1990), pp. 256f. (with minor modifications). Kennedy's translation of this passage is to be preferred to that of J. A. Williams, *The Early `Abbāsī Caliphate*, II (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 129f.

[55] 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.

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 Hārūn, as we would see in due course. By the "proto-Sunnī" position is meant here the attitudes which the *ahl al-sunna* (to be discussed in the following section) espoused. The Murji'ites (on whom, see further below) would also be included among the proto-Sunnīs, though the term "traditionalist" -- when used -- would normally refer only to those who, for all their affinity to certain Murji'ite political attitudes, were very critical of the Murji'ites.

II.3 TOWARDS PROTO-SUNNISM

In gradually distancing themselves from the Shī'ite circles in which the `Abbāsid revolution originated, the early `Abbāsids 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 `ulamā', and `Abbāsid 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-a-vis the early `Abbāsids.

II.3.i

The term "*ahl al-sunna*" seems to have made one of its earliest, if not *the* earliest, appearances in a statement by Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (d. 728), who is

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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."[57]

The "*fitna*" mentioned in this statement refers, according to Juynboll, to what is often characterized as the Second Civil War (684-692), which witnessed, *inter alia*, 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 -- sc. 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 Khārijites, the Rāfiḍites, and the Murji'ites.[58] The "*ahl al-sunna*" also regarded themselves as representing and holding on to the "original" practice of the primeval Muslim community. That these individuals saw themselves as distinct from the Qadariyya, the Rāfiḍites, the Khārijites, the Murji'ites, etc., -- 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. They were, for instance, normally known for a favourable stance towards the Umayyad regime, and for political quietism. They retained both of these positions into ʿAbbāsid times.[59]

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[57] Quoted in G. H. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: studies in chronology, provenance and authorship of early hadīth* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 17f., fro:¬ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. M. F. ʿAbd al-Bāqī (Cairo, 1955-56), I, p. 15. On Ibn Sīrīn, cf. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, pp. 52ff., and index, s.v.

[58] 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.

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

A favourable attitude towards the Umayyads -- which, some time in the early `Abbāsid period, came to be typically expressed in the form of veneration for Mu`āwiya -- did not, however, amount to denying the legitimacy of `Abbāsid rule. Rather, this attitude is to be seen as an assertion that, contrary to early `Abbāsid 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 menaced by the Umayyads (any more than it was by the `Abbāsids).

As regards the political quietism which the *ahl al-sunna* generally 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. Even quietism in the former sense need not have been 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 alternative in the early `Abbāsid period; for their part, the "Nābita"[60] (who formed the "popular -- and agressive -- front", so to speak, of the *ahl al-sunna*) too were apparently under some suspicion for their will or potential to subvert al-Ma'mūn's government.[61] On the other hand, while individuals who took it upon themselves to "enjoin the good and forbid evil" came from various groups, many from among the *ahl al-sunna* were also prominent in doing so; this was an activity which al-Ma'mūn, at one stage, perceived to be sufficiently menacing to public order and to the security of his government to have it proscribed.[62] A generation or so later, it was to become a hall-mark of political

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[60] On the Nābita see n. 73, below.

[61] Cf. chapter III n. 58, below.

Hanbalism.

What was perhaps most distinctive of the *ahl al-sunna*, a defining feature of their developing world-view, was their attitude towards some of the most prominent, but controversial, Companions of the Prophet. Any criticism of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar was, for the *ahl al-sunna*, tantamount to heresy,[63] which is hardly surprising if it was part of the *sunna* to love the *shaykhayn* and to recognize their virtue.[64] 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.[65] The *ahl al-sunna's* attitude towards ʿUthmān was also generally favourable; ʿAlī was more controversial to them, however, and their attitudes towards him continued to be quite sharply divided in the early ʿAbbāsid period. Attitudes critical of ʿAlī were common among the *ahl al-sunna*, so that many would not recognize him as a legitimate caliph at all;[66] but there also were those who were more favourably inclined towards ʿAlī.[67] In spite of much hesitation among the *ahl al-sunna*, it was in terms of the rectitude and righteousness of *all four* of the immediate successors of the Prophet that the Sunnī world-view was soon to be defined, a development which had apparently begun to mature by the later years of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and one in which he definitely had a role to play.[68] The classic

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[62] Cf. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* (Cairo, 1931), VII, p. 331; XII, p. 350.

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

[64] al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa waʾl-Taʾrīkh*, ed. A. D. al-ʿUmarī (Baghdād, 1974-76), II, p. 813.

[65] Cf. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XIV, p. 376.

[66] Cf. van Ess, *Häresiographie*, p. 66 (of the Arabic text), para 113.

[67] van Ess, *Häresiographie*, pp. 65f. (of the Arabic text), paras 110f.

[68] Cf. al-Khallāl, *al-Musnad min Masāʾil Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, British Library MS. Or. 2675, fols. 66 b - 67b; also cf. Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim*, pp. 225ff.

hadīth epitomizing this world-view, "the caliphate after me [sc. the Prophet] will last for thirty years", seems already to have come about in the generation immediately preceding Ibn Hanbal's, and was given emphatic support by the latter. This tradition will be studied at some length in chapter V; *inter alia*, it will be argued then that the tradition is not an indictment of the rulers who followed the Rāshidūn, but rather a celebration of the "golden age" under the first four successors of the Prophet and an affirmation that this "golden age" encompassed the reigns of all four of them.[69]

It was in the generation prior to Ibn Hanbal's too that Sunnī tradition itself placed the crystallization -- or more accurately, the diffusion -- of the *ahl al-sunna's* position: "... the people of Egypt used to disparage ʿUthmān, until al-Layth [b. Saʿd] arose amongst them and narrated to them the merits of ʿUthmān so that they stopped [disparaging him]; and the people of Hims used to disparage ʿAlī, until Ismāʿīl b. ʿAyyāsh arose among them and narrated to them the merits of ʿAlī so that they stopped doing that."[70]

Heresiographical and other sources 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 *"ashāb al-hadīth"* are one such group. The *ahl al-sunna* counted the *ashāb al-hadīth* among their ranks, but the two terms were not identical. The latter were so called because they insisted on the

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[69] See V.2.ii.1, below.

[70] Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, VIII, pp. 463f. (nr. 832). Also cf. al-Kindī, *Qudāt*, p. 372, where al-Layth b. Saʿd invokes, in support of *ahbās*, the uninterrupted practice of "the Prophet of God -- may God be pleased with him -- Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, ʿAlī, Talha, al-Zubayr, and those who survived them". On al-Layth (d. 175), see, *inter alia*, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, XIII, pp. 3-14; Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, VIII, pp. 459-65 (nr. 832); 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; idem, *ʿAbdallāh ibn Lahīʿa* (Wiesbaden, 1986), index, s.v. On Ismāʿīl b. ʿAyyāsh (d. 182) see *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, VI, pp. 221-28 (nr. 3276); Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, I, pp. 321-26 (nr. 584).

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 the "traditionists" among the *ahl al-sunna*. (Inasmuch as the latter shared the outlook of the former, the *ahl al-sunna* may, for their part, be conveniently characterized as "traditionalists" -- a category, therefore, which should be understood to comprise the "traditionists" without being identical with it.)[71]

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, characterizing them rather differently. One common term which was used by them was "*al-Ḥashwiyya*" (lit.: "the stuffers").[72] 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 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 `Abbāsid -- period, the *ahl al-sunna* had come to (or were beginning to) have 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,

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[71] The terms *ahl al-sunna* and *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* were, however, frequently used as identical: 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*..." ("... *fa-inna rajulan ... law istadalla `alā' ahl al-sunna la-dallūhu `alā' aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*...") *Aṣḥāb* or (*Ahl*)-*ḥadīth* could, probably later, also be used as a broader of the two categories: cf. al-Sha`rānī, *Kitāb al-Mīzān* (Cairo, 1862-63), I, p. 63, quoted in G. Makdisi, "The Significance of the Sunnī Schools of Law in Islamic Religious History", *IJMES*, X (1979), p. 4.

[72] On this term and those it designated, see A. S. Halkin, "The Ḥashwiyya", *JAOS*, LIV (1934), pp. 1-28; F. `Umar, *al-Khilāfa al-`Abbāsiyya fī `aṣr al-fawḍā' al-`askariyya, 247-334/861-946* (Baghdad, 1977), pp. 175ff.

apparently denoted the same people.[73] 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.[74]

The *ahl al-sunna* / *al-Hashwiyya* / *al-Nābita* seem to be closely related to another group called the "'Uthmāniyya". The 'Uthmāniyya represented the cause of 'Uthmān against attacks from the partisans of 'Alī; in doing so, the former also affirmed the legitimacy and the merit of 'Uthmān's two predecessors, Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Their critical attitude towards 'Alī was gradually toned down -- by the time of al-Jāhiz at any rate, who wrote a *Kitāb al-'Uthmāniyya*[75] though he himself was a Mu'tazilite -- to a denial of the Rāfidite position that 'Alī 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.[76] The 'Uthmāniyya, therefore, had virtually the same attitudes, and may often have been the same people as, the *ahl al-sunna*. It should be noted,

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[73] On the Nābita, see al-Jāhiz, "*Risāla fī'l-nābita*" in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. 'A.-S. 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; Wadād al-Qādī, "The Earliest 'Nābita' and the Paradigmatic 'Nawābit'", *SI*, LXXVIII (1993), pp. 27-61. According to al-Qādī, "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-Qādī shows, the term "Nābita" had already been applied by 'Abd al-Hamīd b. Yahyā, the secretary of the last Umayyad caliph, to those associated with the clandestine ('Abbāsid) movement in Khurāsān (I. 'Abbās, *'Abd al-Hamīd b. Yahyā al-Kātib wa mā tabaqqā min Rasā'ilihi wa Rasā'il Sālim Abī al-'Alā'* [Amman, 1988], letter nr. 8, pp. 198-201; al-Qādī, "Earliest 'Nābita'", pp. 29ff. and passim.); it was used, a century later, by al-Jāhiz for the opponents of the Mu'tazila (al-Qādī, "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-Qādī adduces. As al-Jāhiz uses the term, however, it refers unambiguously to the traditionalist opponents of the Mu'tazila and the rabble following them. Several writers who came after al-Jāhiz show a similar understanding (possibly under his influence), as al-Qādī concedes (ibid., pp. 28f., 59). In the present context, the Nābita are to be understood essentially as those characterized as such by al-Jāhiz

however, that the former were often critical of the Umayyads, differing in this respect from the *ahl al-sunna* etc. who were normally well-disposed towards the fallen dynasty.[77]

II.3.ii

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. The relationship of the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs and the ʿulamāʾ forms the subject of subsequent chapters; some of those traditions and anecdotes which show the early ʿAbbāsids in relation with the *ahl al-sunna* deserve notice here, however. A move towards the proto-Sunnī position having already been made by al-Mahdī, Hārūn's reign witnessed an endorsement of that position, as the following reports relating to him would indicate.

One anecdote describes a conversation between Hārūn and a Murjiʾite scholar named Abū Muʿāwiya Muḥammad b. Khāzim (d. 194),[78] and is reported by the latter:

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[74] In defending the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, 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 Hashwiyya 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 *aṣḥāb 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.)

[75] Ed. ʿA.-S. Hārūn (Cairo, 1955).

[76] 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.

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

[78] On him, see van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, pp. 216-18.

Abū Mu`āwiya said: I entered into the presence of Hārūn, the Commander of the Faithful, and he said to me, "O Abū Mu`āwiya, I intend to severely punish [lit.: to do such and such to] whosoever affirms the caliphate of `Alī [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 `Adī 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-khulafā') from amongst us.'[79] So where is your share of the khilāfa, O Banū Hāshim? By God, it is none but `Alī who has placed you in it [sc. the khilāfa]." So he [sc. Hārūn] said, "By God, O Abū Mu`āwiya, if I [now] hear about anyone not affirming [the legitimacy of] `Alī's caliphate, I would punish him severely!"[80]

The authenticity of this anecdote is open to question. Nevertheless, there are at least two things in the alleged conversation which are of interest here, and probably do reflect reality irrespective of the anecdote's historicity. The attitude which is attributed to Hārūn in the beginning of the anecdote corresponds to the critical attitude which the ahl al-sunna and the `Uthmāniyya initially had regarding `Alī. On the other hand, Hārūn's changed attitude towards `Alī, following Abū Mu`āwiya's observations, may be read not so much as a prefiguration of later proto-Sunnī views as an echo of the earlier `Abbāsid position, based on the claim of having inherited the imamate ultimately from `Alī. That such an echo is discernible here certainly does not mean that Hārūn reverted to the earlier `Abbāsid position. What the anecdote shows rather is only that by the time of Hārūn, the `Abbāsids had moved markedly away from their initial Shī`ite basis of legitimation. This aspect of the anecdote's testimony is confirmed by what we have already discussed with reference to al-Mahdī.

Another anecdote which deserves to be noted here, though rather inferior in its dramatic effect, is illustrative nonetheless of the lines along which Hārūn was thinking. It

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[79] The claims refer, of course, to Abū Bakr, `Umar, and `Uthmān, who were from the Taym, `Adī, and Umayya clans of the Quraysh respectively.

[80] Ta'rīkh Baghdād, V, p. 244.

purports to report a conversation between Hārūn and ʿAbdallāh b. Muṣʿab al-Zubayrī,[81] whom the former once asked:

> "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-shiaʿ), 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."[82]

Anecdotes such as those discussed in the foregoing 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 four immediate successors of the Prophet.[83] 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.[84] The presence of traditions

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[81] On ʿAbdallāh b. Muṣʿab, see *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, X, pp. 173-76 (nr. 5313).

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

[83] *Akhbār*, pp. 70-72.

[84] 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 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 ʿAʾisha, the favourite wife of the Prophet and a highly regarded figure in Sunnī tradition, to a blistering attack.

with such drastically opposed tendencies means of course that the *Akhbār* is a composite work, without a coherent vision in certain crucial matters though it may have one in others. More significantly for our purposes, the *Akhbār* also seems to reflect, if in patently tendentious terms, some of those religious trends -- *in early `Abbāsid society* -- with which we have been dealing here. In the disparate traditions about the attitudes of Ibn `Abbās regarding the first successors of the Prophet may, for instance, be seen precisely that ideological transition which the early `Abbasid period actually witnessed: a transition, that is, from `Alid legitimism -- the basis of the first `Abbāsid 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 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-jamā`a* -- the *ahl al-sunna* were only one among several religious-political groups in late Umayyad and early `Abbāsid society. Among the groups to which *ahl al-sunna* are known to have been very hostile were the Murji'a and the Mu`tazila. Ironically, both of these seem to have played a major part in helping shape that proto-Sunnī world-view which the *ahl al-sunna* came to represent. The following is a brief discussion of the respective contribution of these two groups or, more correctly, movements.

II.3.iii

The Murji'ites stood for a deferring of judgement, to God Himself, on the alleged sinfulness of certain Companions of the Prophet in the first "*Fitna*" of Islam -- the events leading to the murder of `Uthmān and its aftermath and culminating in the assassination of `Alī. As noted already, this *Fitna* had divided Muslims deeply in their attitudes to those involved in it. The Murji'a refused to take the side of either `Uthmān or `Alī: in thus representing an early attitude of moderation on an issue as sensitive and divisive as the first *Fitna*, they sought to achieve a broad reconciliation of mutually hostile groups and to base it on such moderation.[85]

Among those to whom the Murji'ite position was not acceptable were the Shī`a, and relations between them were apparently also embittered by the fact that one stream of Murji'ite opinion was definitely pro-Umayyad.[86] All Murji'ites, however, were not pro-Umayyad[87] anymore than they were all necessarily anti-Shī`ite[88]

The Murji'ite stance on the events of the first *Fitna* had similarities with that of the *ahl al-sunna*, with the difference that the latter were favourably disposed towards `Uthmān while the former suspended judgement on him. The *ahl al-sunna's* opposition to the Murji'ites however was apparently based, not on the rather different way in which

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[85] Modern studies on the Murji'a include: A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed* (Cambridge, 1932); W. M. Watt, *Formative Period*, index, s.v.; J. Givony, "The Murji'a and the Theological School of Abū Ḥanīfa: a historical and theological study", D.Phil diss., Edinburgh, 1977; M. Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma* (Cambridge, 1981); H. `Atwān, "al-Murji'a bi-Khurāsān fi'l-`aṣr al-Umawī", *Majallat Majma` al-Lugha al-`Arabiyya al-Urdunī*, XXVIII-XXIX (1985), pp. 55-106; W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, 1988), ch. 2; K. `Athamina, "The Early Murji'a: some notes", *JSS*, XXXV (1990), pp. 109-30; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, pp. 152-233, II, pp. 164-86, 493-544, 659-63, etc; *EI(2)*, s.v. (W. Madelung), where further references may be found.

[86] Cf. Athamina, "Early Murji'a".

[87] Cf. Cook, *Dogma*, who argues, in fact, for viewing the Murji'ites of the Umayyad period as being opposed to the regime: pp. 33ff.

[88] Cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, p. 180; and see ibid., I, pp. 319ff. for notes on certain "pro-murği'itische Gruppen" amongst the Shī`a.

each perceived the past, but on certain theological views associated with the Murji'a. That faith (*īmān*) was definitive of an individual's status as a believer (*mu'min*) irrespective of his acts, that one's faith could exist in ignorance of fundamental beliefs and religiously prescribed obligations, and that good acts did not enhance faith nor bad ones diminish it, were among the Murji'ite doctrines which called forth much opposition from the *ahl al-sunna*. In spite of this opposition -- which was often justified by an unfair representation of Murji'ite doctrines as condoning moral laxity -- it is important to note that the Murji'ite plea not to exclude the grave sinner from the community of believers and the effort to arrive at the minimum definition of a Muslim are views characteristic of Sunnism itself. The broadly tolerant view that the Sunnīs came to take of religious deviance may have owed something to the Murji'ite view on this matter.

During the period under study here, Murji'ism continued, however, to be violently opposed by many among the *ahl al-sunna*. Abū Ḥanīfa, the eponym of the Ḥanafī *madhhab* -- which later came to be recognized as one of the "orthodox" Sunnī schools of law -- himself espoused Murji'ite doctrines: though he disowned the name "Murji'ī", he was characterized as, and condemned for being, such;[89] and his school of law was long under attack not only for the use of *ra'y* but also for the suspicion of being tainted with Murji'ism.[90] Not all among the *ahl al-sunna* should be supposed to have been equally

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[89] The Kūfan traditionalist Sufyān al-Thawrī, who was particularly volatile in his opposition to the Murji'ites, is reported to have remarked on Abū Ḥanīfa's death: "... by God, Abū Ḥanīfa was more efficient in reducing the firm bond of Islam to shreds than was Qaḥṭaba al-Ṭā'ī with his sword." ("... *wa'llāh la-kāna Abū Ḥanīfa aqṭaʿ li-ʿurwat al-Islām ʿurwatan ʿurwatan min Qaḥṭaba al-Ṭā'ī bi-sayfihi*"): Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-majrūḥīn*, ed. M. I. Zā'id (Aleppo, 1396 A.H.), III, p. 66. On the ʿAbbāsid general Qaḥṭaba, who commanded the revolutionary Khurāsānīs' march on Umayyad Iraq, see *EI*(2), s.v. Kaḥṭaba b. Shabīb, (M. Sharon). The foregoing report is also interesting in revealing Sufyān's attitude towards the ʿAbbāsids.

[90] Thus, the criticism of some leading traditionalist 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. Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt* ed. ʿA. ʿA. M. al-Marāghī (Cairo, 1947-50), III, p. 261; *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIV, pp. 256, 257, 260 (nr. 7558).

hostile to the Murji'a, however. *Hadīth* with Murji'ite tendencies could often find its way into the compilations of scholars opposed to them;[91] and Murji'ites were not necessarily considered untrustworthy transmitters.[92] It is also hard to suppose that Hanafite scholars, often with a Murji'ite background, would have figured prominently among those patronized by the early ʿAbbāsids if the Murji'a were generally regarded as "heretical".

In any case, the *ahl al-sunna's* opposition to the Murji'a -- whether stringently or mildly expressed -- remained sufficiently potent to deny an "orthodox" status to Murji'ism, though individual Murji'ites might be retrospectively rehabilitated by an informal consensus on the part of later Sunnī *rijāl* critics.[93] Scholars with Murji'ite leanings, or suspect for a Murji'ite "past", themselves worked, of course, for such rehabilitation. Abū Hanīfa had already disowned the appellation "Murji'ite"; and Abū Yūsuf -- to some at least a *sāhib sunna* --[94] energetically strove to improve the image of his *madhhab*, trying to distance it from the stigma of Murji'ism[95] at the same time as

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[91] Cf. W. Madelung, "Early Sunnī Doctrine concerning Faith as reflected in the *Kitāb al-īmān* of Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/839)", *SI*, XXXII (1970), p. 241. Also cf. Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, VI, p. 382 (nr. 721), where Ibn Hanbal is said to have narrated traditions from Murji'ites unless they were propagators of their cause or disputed for it.

[92] Cf. al-Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, tr. and annot. D. Gimaret and G. Monnot (Leuven, 1986), p. 433 n. 116.

[93] Cf. *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, VI, p. 109: "Abu'l-Salt said, speaking of the Murji'ite Ibrāhīm b. Tahmān and his likes: "Their *Irjā'* was not like this repulsive doctrine (*al-madhhab al-khabīth*) that faith is words (*qawl*) without acts (ʿamal), and that abandoning the acts does not adversely affect the faith. Their *Irjā'* rather was that they hoped (*yarjūn*) for the forgiveness of grave sinners, as opposed to the Khawārij who considered people unbelievers on account of their sins. So they [sc. Ibn Tahmān and his likes] hoped [for the sinners' forgiveness in the hereafter], and did not regard them as infidels on account of their sins; and we [sc. the Sunnī traditionalists] do likewise."

[94] Cf. *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIV, p. 253 (nr. 7558).

[95] According to a rather tendentious report, Abū Yūsuf went so far in redeeming his own reputation, and that of the *madhhab* to which he belonged, as to distinguish between his master's theological and juridical views and to make the point that Abū Hanīfa's "Jahmite" views did not taint his *fiqh*, which is all that Abū Yūsuf took from

bringing it into increasing conformity with the traditionists' position on the authority of

Prophetic ḥadīth.

We shall briefly return to the Murji'a in the next chapter, where some instances of

Murji'ite political activism -- in the later phases of the ʿAbbāsid movement and after --

will be noted.[96] Generally, however, the Murji'a remained politically quiescent in the

ʿAbbāsid period, reinforcing and - in this way as well - contributing to the proto-Sunnī

position.

II.3.iv

Another religio-political movement which faced severe criticism from, but which

contributed to the standpoint of, the *ahl al-sunna* was that of the Muʿtazila.[97] The early

Muʿtazila were motivated by certain socio-political and religious aspirations of an

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him: Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, III, p. 258. The tendencies of the foregoing report may be contrasted with those of such other reports according to which Abū Yūsuf tries to make the *madhhab* respectable not by disclaiming Abū Ḥanīfa's theology but by bringing the master into the orthodox fold. Abū Yūsuf is said to have asserted, for instance, that Abū Ḥanīfa was the *first* to maintain that the Qur'ān was the "uncreated" word of God: Wakīʿ, *Akhbar al-Quḍāt*, III, p. 258; the traditionalist detractors of Abū Ḥanīfa took a very different view of his position on the question: cf. Ibn Ḥibbān, *al-Majrūḥīn*, 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: Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, III, p. 257.

[96] Such Murji'ite "activism" as was evidenced in the milieu of the ʿAbbāsid revolution was rather limited however (cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, pp. 181f.); and it essentially was an expression of moral indignation at perceived injustice or wrong-doing rather than of a will to revolt and over-throw the government.

[97] On the Muʿtazila, see *inter alia*, the following studies: Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim*, passim; W. M. Watt, "The Political Attitudes of the Muʿtazila", *JRAS*, (1963), pp. 38-57; idem, *Formative Period*, ch. 8, and index, s.v.; van Ess, "Une lecture à rebours de l'histoire du muʿtazilisme", *REI*, XLVI (1978), pp. 163-240, XLVII (1979), pp. 19-69; idem, "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. 211-26; idem, "Muʿtazila" in *The*

"activist" character:[98] a generally moderate stance on such controversial matters as the first *Fitna*;[99] the defence and explication of Islam in rational terms; a commitment to *al-amr bi'l-ma`rūf wa'l-nahy `an al-munkar*; and emphasis on the justice of God and human responsibility, etc. The Mu`tazila came to official favour during the reigns of al-Ma'mūn and his two successors. During this period of their political ascendancy, they became associated with the doctrine of the "created" Qur'ān, which al-Ma'mūn officially promulgated, and with the *Miḥna* which this caliph instituted to test the conformity of the traditionalist `ulamā' to this doctrine. By the time the *Miḥna* was instituted, the *ahl al-sunna* may already have been influential among the populace, and on the way to becoming a popular movement, as already noted.[100] It was probably to curtail the influence of the proto-Sunnī `ulamā' that the *Miḥna* appears to have been instituted. Conversely, it was apparently a recognition of this influence of the `ulamā' in society which eventually led al-Mutawakkil to discontinue the *Miḥna* and revert to a policy of patronizing these `ulamā'. These considerations belong, however, to a later chapter. Here, it may only be noted that the inquisition with which the Mu`tazilites were associated, served not only to heighten the *ahl al-sunna's* opposition to them, but -- perhaps more significantly -- also to strengthen the ranks and position of the latter, by virtue of the challenge they successfully faced. This aspect of the Mu`tazila's contribution

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Encyclopaedia of Religion (New York, 1987), X, pp. 220-29; idem, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, pp. 233-342, 382-423, etc.; *EI*(2), s.v. (D. Gimaret), where further references may be found.

[98] Cf. S. Pines, "A Note on an Early Meaning of the Term *Mutakallim*", *IOS*, I (1971), pp. 224-40, where attention is drawn to the social function of the early *mutakallimūn* (among whom the first Mu`tazilites are also to be counted). It is argued that the *mutakallimūn* were as much a part of the politico-religious establishment as the *fuqahā'* and the *muḥaddithūn*; and that their function was the rational refutation of viewpoints contrary or hostile to Islam.

[99] See nn. 101ff., below.

[100] Also cf. al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-`Uthmāniyya*, p. 176, where the `Uthmāniyya are characterized as "more numerous in numbers and having the most legal experts and traditionists". ("... *aktharu `adadan wa aktharuhum faqīhan wa muḥaddithan...*")

to proto-Sunnîsm was inadvertent; but it was not their only contribution to it.

In the words of van Ess, the Mu`tazila "offered a concept of Islam which, by its rationality, transcended the divisions among the old theologico-political factions (Shî'ah, Murji'ah, and others) and therefore had broad appeal, at least among the intellectuals. The Mu`tazilah thus became the first 'orthodox' school of theology."[101] The Mu`tazila differed considerably among themselves on historical-political, no less than theological-philosophical questions. Nevertheless, 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.[102] 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 Baghdād regarded `Alī to have been all along the "*afḍal*".[103] On the other hand, the Mu`tazilite attitude towards `Alī was normally much more favourable than what the Nābita 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

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[101] *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, s.v. "Mu`tazilah", p. 222.

[102] 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, no less than that of the Rāfiḍa is. 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." ("... *takhrīj af āl aṣḥāb rasūl Allāh `alā' aḥsanihā ḥattā yaslamū `alayhim; am takhrīj al-Rāfiḍa li-af ālihim fī ḥāl al-ijtimā` wa'l-ulfa `alā aqbaḥihā ḥattā barī'ū minhum wa-akfarūhum fa-lam yanjū minhum fī ḥāl al-ijtimā` wa-lā fī ḥāl al-ikhtilāf.*")

[103] Cf. Watt, *Formative Period*, pp. 224ff.

"rightly-guided".[104] As precursors of such a position, the Mu`tazila evidently also went beyond the Murji'ite stance -- suspension of judgement on the *dramatis personae* of the first *Fitna* -- for all that Mu`tazilites also frequently resorted to the conciliatory device of leaving the matter undecided where adopting a definite position on it would have been too controversial and divisive.[105] Unlike the Nābita and many of the Murji'a, the Mu`tazilite attitude towards the Umayyads was harsh; the latter were generally considered by the Mu`tazila to have been illegitimate.[106]

The Mu`tazilite contribution to the crystallization of certain characteristic Sunnī attitudes thus seems to be quite considerable. This contribution is in addition to the endeavour of several leading Mu`tazilite figures to refute Manichaean and other doctrines perceived as threats to Islam.[107] Such refutations served of course to define the Muslim position no less than they helped refute intellectual attack on it.

But, for all their contribution, it was not the Mu`tazila but the *ahl al-sunna* who emerged as the popularly acknowledged "orthodoxy" of Islam. It was surely ironic that the Mu`tazila, who had been active in combatting the Manichaean and other perceived challenges to Islam, were themselves denounced, by the traditionalists, as "Magians" and "*Zanādiqa*"! The justification for such a denunciation was theological: Mu`tazilite affirmation of *qadar* (free will, which was construed by the traditionalist opponents of the doctrine as compromising the omnipotence of God), and the doctrine of the "created"

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

[105]   Cf. al-Khayyāṭ, *al-Intiṣār*, pp. 97f.

[106]   Cf., for instance, al-Khayyāṭ, *al-Intiṣār*, p. 139.

[107]   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 authors do not however offer convincing proof for their argument that the Mu`tazilite attacks on the *Mujbira*, the pre-determinationists (among Muslims, and generally) was inspired by a concern to combat the determinist Manichaean anthropology).

Qur'ān,[108] which followed from the Mu'tazilite denial of the divine attributes. But the *ahl al-sunna's* opposition was not only theological; it was also political, inspired by the Mu'tazila's association with the *Miḥna*, which seems to have hurt their popular image just as it served to enhance that of the persecuted. Proto-Sunnī 'ulamā' moreover already had a popular appeal which Mu'tazilite theologians did not have, and about which the latter seem no longer to have cared. The proto-Sunnī position was strengthened and its support-base widened still further, as Nagel has observed, once the *ahl al-sunna* generally accepted 'Alī as one of the "rightly-guided" caliphs. That all four of the Prophet's immediate successors were "rightly guided" was a view which, apparently, some of the early Mu'tazilites were instrumental in developing, as a middle course between the extremes of the Rāfida and the Nābita. But in becoming more widely accepted, it ceased to be a specifically *Mu'tazilī* doctrine; and it was as characteristic of the Sunnīs, rather than of certain Mu'tazilite circles, that this doctrine was to be remembered.[109]

II.3.v

That the early 'Abbāsid society was witness to a very considerable fluidity of religious trends should be evident from the foregoing discussion. To examine what influence various religious trends were exercising on each other, or how each group defined itself in response or reaction to such influences, would take us too far afield;

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[108] For such denunciations, cf. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Radd 'alā'l-Zanādiqa wa'l-Jahmiyya*, ed. M. F. 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., p. 32, and *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 'alā'l-zanādiqa*; al-Dārimī, *al-Radd 'alā'l-Jahmiyya*, ed. G. Vitestam (Leiden, 1960), especially pp. 100, 103, etc. A more common traditionalist term of abuse for the Mu'tazila, however, was "Magians", in accordance with a famous tradition attributed to the Prophet: cf. F. Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (Karachi, 1965), pp. 62f.

[109] Nagel, "Orthodoxie", pp. 41ff.

some of the indications to this effect in the foregoing must, therefore, suffice here. Nevertheless, it needs to be stressed that not only were a variety of different or opposing positions on any given matter being espoused at this time; the groups or factions which went under a certain name, or were (then or later) associated with certain trends, also reveal a variation of opinion *within* their own ranks which is sometimes quite remarkable.

Of such expressions of religious fluidity, only a few instances (some of which have already been alluded to) need be mentioned here. The Shīʿite extremists, for instance, not only interacted with the proto-Imāmiyya but, at least for much of the second century and part of the third, were *part* of the proto-Imāmiyya, and were tolerated by the imāms.[110] To take another example: there were Murjiʾites who had been pro-Umayyad and hostile to the Shīʿa; conversely, some other Murjiʾite circles had been opposed to the Umayyads -- and later, to the ʿAbbāsids -- and were rather favourably inclined towards the Shīʿites.[111] Certain individuals among the Shīʿites themselves were believed to have Murjiʾite tendencies.[112] Then, there were those among the traditionalists who were rabidly opposed to the Shīʿites, at the same time as certain traditionalists, especially in Kufa, are known to have been very close to moderate (perhaps Zaydī) forms of Shīʿism.[113] Certain Muʿtazilī circles were closer to the Shīʿites than were others; and some Murjiʾites had Muʿtazilī inclinations and vice versa,[114] while other Murjiʾites were hostile to the Muʿtazila. Such examples can be multiplied, but those noted here should suffice to make the point about the fluidity and diversity of religious trends and tendencies in early

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[110]   Cf. nn. 19f., above.

[111]   See chapter III nn. 20f., below.

[112]   See n. 88, above.

[113]   Cf. pseudo- al-Nāshiʾ in van Ess, *Häresiographie*, p. 65, para 110, on the "*tashayyuʿ aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth min al-Kūfiyyīn*".

[114]   al-Shahrastānī (tr. Gimaret and Monnot), *Livre des religions*, pp. 219 n. 90, 416f. nn. 22ff.

`Abbāsid society. Despite, or rather because of, this diversity, there was much hostility with which various religious circles often viewed one another, each claiming to represent the correct (if not the exclusively correct) understanding of the faith.

The question of how far the proto-Sunnî trends may have been influenced by `Abbāsid policies -- by virtue of the fact that the caliphs identified themselves early with some of those trends, and owing to `Abbāsid patronage of those representing them -- will be posed later in this dissertation. But before this chapter is concluded, certain other expressions, or aspects, of religio-political life in early `Abbāsid society also need to be briefly commented on. The following pages address the place and significance of messianism and *zandaqa* in early `Abbāsid society.

II.4 MESSIANISM

II.4.i

The milieu in which the `Abbāsid revolution took place was marked by strong chiliastic beliefs and messianic expectations.[115] Given the varied religious and ethnic backgrounds and commitments of the people who took messianic beliefs seriously, it is scarcely to be wondered at that diferent groups or communities of people awaited their own particular messiahs, tailored to redress their own particular version of grievances.

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[115] Studies on messianic expectancy and apocalyptic ideas in the late Umayyad and early `Abbāsid period include: W. Madelung, "The Sufyānî between Tradition and History", *SI*, LXIII (1986), pp. 5-48; idem, "Apocalyptic Prophecies in Hims", *JSS*, XXXI (1986), pp. 141-85; A.-A. al-Dūrî, "al-Fikra al-mahdiyya bayna'l-da`wa al-`Abbāsiyya wa'l-`asr al-`Abbāsî al-awwal", in W. al-Qādî, ed., *Studia Arabica et Islamica: Festschrift for Ihsān `Abbās* (Beirut, 1981), pp. 21-32; B. Lewis, "The Regnal Titles of the First `Abbāsid Caliphs", in *Dr. Zakir Husain Presentation Volume* (New Delhi, 1968), pp. 13-22; idem, "An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History", *BSOAS*, XIII (1950), pp. 308-38; G. van Vloten, *Recherches sur la domination arabe* (Amsterdam, 1894); and see n. 16, above, (for references to Shî`ite extremists, who typically operated within a framework of messianic expectancy and promise). More generally, for messianic ideas in Islam, see A. A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: the idea of the Mahdî in Twelver Shî`ism* (Albany, 1981); *EI(2)*, s.v. "al-Mahdî" (W. Madelung), where further references may be found.

The Shī'a considered the Umayyads as having usurped the rights of the Prophet's family to the political headship of Islam; they awaited the advent of a "rightly-guided" deliverer, "the Mahdī", who would terminate the era of oppression, restore their rights, and inaugurate a time of justice. Belief in the Mahdī's return was later to become definitive of the "Ithnā 'asharī" Shī'ite belief; but in the early second century of Islam, Shī'ite groups were hardly unique in their messianic expectations.

Thus, Syrian Arabs belonging to the "Yemenite" or "Southern Arabian" tribes awaited their "Qaḥṭānī", whose advent was promised by numerous traditions originating in Ḥimṣ in late Umayyad and the early 'Abbāsid periods. Prophecies about the Qaḥṭānī envisioned a glorious future for the Southern tribes, often in the form of hopes about the replacement of Qurayshite by Yemenite hegemony.[116] Yet another brand of apocalyptic traditions, most of which date to early 'Abbāsid times, relate to a figure designated as "the Sufyānī". The origins of this legend remain uncertain, though as Madelung has argued, the Sufyānī must have be⸱ �già well-known as an apocalyptic figure aleady in the late Umayyad period.[117] As shown by Madelung again, the Sufyānī legend plays an especially important role in Shī'ite apocalyptic traditions of the early 'Abbāsid period: there, he figures as the opponent of the 'Alid Mahdī; at the same time, he also serves, in these traditions, as the agent of the destruction of the 'Abbāsid dynasty. In turn, the 'Alid Mahdī was expected, in such traditions, to destroy the Sufyānī, and to usher in the millennium.[118]

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[116] See Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies", pp. 149ff., and 141-85, passim. On the sense and nuances of the term "apocalyptic", cf. R. L. Webbs, "'Apocalyptic': observations on a slippery term", *JNES*, XLIX (1990), pp. 115-26. For some comparitive perspectives on apocalyptic materials, see *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, ed. D. Hellholm (Tubingen, 1983) -- a monumental work, but disappointing in showing no interest at all in Islamic apocalyptic materials.

[117] Madelung, "The Sufyānī", p. 14; on the Sufyānī legend generally, and its development, see ibid., passim.

[118] Madelung, "The Sufyānī", passim.

Obviously, not only did particlar traditions *promise* the messianic age, various individuals also *claimed* to be the embodiment of the messianic promise. From a decade or so prior to the `Abbāsid revolution to several decades after it was a period particularly fertile in such individuals. The Shī`ite revolutionaries of Khurāsan themselves, of course, made use of messianic expectancy in propagating the cause of their movement; and, following the revolution, the first `Abbāsids tried to conform, in some measure, to the climate of such expectations.[119] al-Manṣūr's son and designated successor, for example, was not only designated as the "Mahdī"; al-Manṣūr -- whose own messianic title had evident messianic connotations -- is also reported to have warmly approved of a sycophant's suggestion that the latter (i.e. his son, al-Mahdī) was the awaited Qaḥṭānī as well![120] The messianic claims of the `Alid Muḥammad b. `Abdallāh al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, for their part, antedated the establishment of the `Abbāsid state. Muḥammad was already regarded as the Mahdī by Mughīra b. Sa`īd al-`Ijlī, a noted extremist Shī`ite and Gnostic, who eventually claimed to be a prophet and was killed in 736 after an unsuccessful revolt against Umayyad authority.[121] Muḥammad's messianic appeal was apparently one of the reasons why his revolt, during the early years of al-Manṣūr, perturbed the latter so much.

Examples of messianic expectancy and of messianic and related claims from the early `Abbāsid period can be multiplied at will. Only three, rather disparate, examples need be noted here. A Syrian rebel of 751 was "recognized" as the Sufyānī, suggesting -- as already noted -- expectations in certain quarters for the appearance of this apocalyptic figure as a "redeemer" of some sort.[122] The Iranian peasant revolts of the early `Abbāsid period likewise illustrate the popular appeal of messianic and millenarian ideas: socio-

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[119] Cf. Lewis, "Regnal Titles"; al-Dūrī, "al-Fikra al-mahdiyya".

[120] Azdī, *Ta'rīkh Mawṣil*, p. 214.

[121] On Mughīra b. Sa`īd, see Wasserstrom, "The Moving Finger Writes"; Tucker, "Rebels and Gnostics".

[122] Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 53; Madelung, "The Sufyānī", p. 14.

economic, political, and other grievances -- often expressed through syncretisms of Mazdakite, Gnostic, and extremist Shīʿite notions -- were typically articulated in terms of messianic, or more radical, claims on the part of the leaders of such revolts.[123] Finally, our period also provides an instance of Jewish messianism, with Abū ʿĪsā al-Iṣfahānī combining a doctrine of tolerance for all religions with messianic claims for himself; his career came to an end when he was killed during the reign of caliph al-Manṣūr, though his followers seem to have continued in existence, and patiently awaited his return for several centuries after his death.[124]

The foregoing observations should serve to indicate the wide diffusion and diverse expression of messianic expectancy at the time of the ʿAbbāsid revolution and in the decades following it. Such expectancy occupied a particularly important place in Shīʿite circles, though it was not confined to these circles, as already noted. The paradox of messianic expectancy's simultaneously cohesive and disruptive potential was also best illstrated in Shīʿite circles. For, while messianic hopes, focused on a particular individual (who was usually regarded as the imām as well), could help unite his followers in loyalty to him, his death -- without fulfilling his messianic promise -- often raised among his followers the dilemma of whether to await his "return" in the fulness of time or to acknowledge the transference of the imamate -- and often of messianic expectancy -- to

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[123] Cf. Daniel, *Khurasan*, ch. 4; G. H. Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens du IIe et IIIe siècle de l'hégire* (Paris, 1938). That it is primarily (but certainly not exclusively) the disprivileged, especially among the socially marginalized and rootless, who are most susceptible to the appeal of messianic movements is brilliantly shown (with reference to Western Europe from the 11th to the 16th century) in N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 3rd edn. (London, 1970).

[124] On Abū ʿĪsā and his followers, see S. Wasserstrom, "The ʿĪsawiyya Revisited", *SI*, LXXV (1992), pp. 57-80; I. Friedlander, "Jewish Arabic Studies", *Jewish Quarterly Review*, new ser., I (1910-11), pp. 203ff., II (1911-12), pp. 489f., III (1912-13), pp. 235-300, passim. Friedlander, in his study, tried to place Abū ʿĪsā's Jewish sectarianism within the wider context of religious, especially messianic, trends of the time, arguing for Shīʿite influences on Abū ʿĪsā. Shīʿite "heterodoxy", for its part, was seen by Friedlander as a receptacle for Manichaean, Gnostic, and various other ancient religious trends.

someone who claimed to be his successor.

The heresiographical tradition is, of course, very schematized, and implausibly precise, in cataloguing the various "sects" into which the death of an imām divided his followers. Nevertheless, disputes among the imām's followers in the aftermath of his death cannot also be dismissed as mere literary fiction: some such disputes, for example that surrounding the death of Mūsā b. Jaʿfar al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799: the seventh imām in the Imāmī-Ithnā ʿasharī reckoning), left too deep a mark on the proto-Imāmiyya to have been fictitious. In this particular instance, the dispute was not so much over who Mūsā's successor was as on whether Mūsa had in fact died -- with the "Wāqifa" asserting that he had not, and awaiting his reappearance.[125] Messianic expectancy was, among the proto-Imāmiyya, rarely as clearly expressed as it was with Mūsā's death; messianic expectancy continued, however, to be nurtured until it was finally enshrined, and institutionalized, in the doctrine of the return of the twelfth imām. Besides the proto-Imāmiyya, the other major Shīʿite group of the 3rd/9th century onward was the Ismāʿīliyya -- tracing its origins to another son of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. They also nurtured strong messianic expectations though to describe them in the present context would take us too far afield, the purpose here being only to illustrate the existence of messianic expectancy as a major religio-political trend of the period.

II.4.ii

How did the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs react to the fact that the society over which they presided took messianic expectancy so seriously? One early response clearly was to try to

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[125] The *wuqūf* on Mūsā's death is clearly the most significant instance of this phenomenon, though other deceased Shīʿite imāms are also said to have had their respective *wāqifa* (cf. al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, p. 69). For the *Wāqifa* on Mūsā's death, see ibid., pp.68f.; al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, pp. 89f.; *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, pp. 455ff. (nr. 860ff.) and index, s.v. "al-Wāqifa"; W. M. Watt, "Sidelights on Early Imāmite Doctrine", *SI*, XXXI (1970), pp. 295ff.; Halm, *Shīʿism*, pp. 31-33. *EI*(2), s.v. "Mūsā al-Kāẓim" (E. Kohlberg).

focus such expectations on themselves, and to present themselves in the guise of the long-awaited redeemers.[126] Such a strategy is difficult to work in the long run, however: the pressure on a *ruler* with mesianic claims is much greater to live up to his claims than it is on to a revolutionary visionary, whose messianic promise can lie in a more vaguely defined future. The early `Abbāsids also had to come to terms with the fact that a very considerable proportion of the apocalyptic and messianic traditions circulating in society at the time had violently anti-`Abbāsid tendencies, forecasting a destruction of their rule in the near future. Apart from early efforts to propagate pro-`Abbāsid traditions in a messianic idiom and to refute anti-`Abbāsid ones, an effort seems also to have been made to defuse messianic expectancy itself, with its manifestly destabilizing potential in society. The latter effort seems related in turn to the `Abbāsids' distancing themselves -- from the time of al-Mahdī -- from the Shī`ite milieu. In striving to diminish messianic expectations, no less than in distancing themselves from the Shī`a, the caliphs seem to have found an ally in the proto-Sunnī `ulamā'. Some of the developments alluded to here will be taken up later in this dissertation.[127]

II.5 *ZANDAQA*

Like many other much used terms, "*zandaqa*" was a highly charged but ill-defined term in the early `Abbāsid society. "*Zindīq*" -- the person to whom *zandaqa* was imputed (pl. *zanādiqa*) -- primarily signified a Manichaean. Manichaeism did, of course, survive into `Abbāsid times, and it was the actual or presumed adherents of this "heresy" who were the primary victims of persecution, as *zanādiqa*, in early `Abbāsid times.[128] Many of

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[126] Cf. Lewis, "Regnal Titles"; al-Dūrī, "al-Fikra al-mahdiyya".

[127] See chapter V, especially V.2.ii.2 and V.2.ii.3, below.

[128] Most of the texts relating to *zandaqa* and the *zanādiqa* in medieval Islamic sources have been conveniently brought together in A. A. Shīrāzī, *Mūtūn `Arabī va Fārsī dar bāra-i Mānī va Mānaviyyat*, published together with S. H. Taqīzādeh's *Mānī va*

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 being 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 `Abbāsid times with a licentious way of life could therefore be accused of *zandaqa*[29] as much as an actual Manichaean could.

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-Mahdī, 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,

dīn-i ū, (Tehran, 1335 H.s.). Studies on the subject include: van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, pp. 416-56; II, pp. 4-41; F. `Umar, "al-Zandaqa fi'l-mafhūm al-naqdī" in idem, *al-Ta'rīkh al-Islāmī wa fikr al-qarn al-`ishrīn* (Beirut, 1985), pp. 191-215; G. Monnot, *Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes: `Abd al-Jabbār et ses devanciers* (Paris, 1974), pp. 88ff. and passim. F. Gabrieli, "La 'zandaqa' au ler siècle abbaside" in *L'Élaboration de l'Islam* (Paris, 1961), pp. 23-38; G. Vajda, "Les *zindiqs* en pays d'Islam", *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, (1938); Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux*, pp. 84ff. Two recent dissertations on *zandaqa* are: M. Chokr, "Zandaqa et zindiqs en Islam jusqu'a la fin du IIe/VIIIe siècle" (Paris, 1988), and A. Taheri-Iraqi, "Zandaqa in the early `Abbāsid Period, with special reference to the (sic) poetry", Ph.D. diss., Edinburgh Univ., 1982; both were unavailable to the present writer.

Bibliography on Manichaeism is extensive. A recent contribution of wide-ranging proportions is S. N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: a historical survey*, (Manchester, 1985); also cf. 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, cf. Lieu, *Manichaeism*, pp. 78-85, especially pp. 82ff.; G. Widengren, "Manichaeaism and its Iranian Background" in *CHIr*, III(2), pp. 965-90; M. Morony, *Iraq after Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 404ff., and 637f.; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, pp. 418ff.

It should be noted that *zandaqa* is not Manichaeism *tout court*. Ideas attributed

though those who could serve as the conspicuous objects of such persecution may not have. In any case, al-Ma'mūn'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 were the *zanādiqa* persecuted in the early `Abbāsid period? In very broad terms, the following two possibilities, which need not be mutually exclusive, may contribute towards an answer.

First, *zandaqa* was viewed as a threat to Islam, and to Muslim society and state. After all, Islam as a religious system was still in the process of articulation, Muslims were still a rather small minority in the areas which they ruled, many Muslims were very imperfectly Islamized, converts not infrequently had a Manichaean past, and Manichaeism itself had witnessed something of a resurgence in the early phases of Muslim rule; given such circumstances, it is not surprising that the Manichaeans should have been perceived as a threat to the Muslims. The threat was particularly to be seen in the rational, quasi-scientific manner in which the Manichaeans defended their intricate and attractive world-view, and attacked that of their opponents.[130] The Manichaean intellectual challenge evoked a far-reaching response from Muslim, as it once had from Christian, theologians.[131] There is no doubt, however, that for many a "secularly-

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to the *zanādiqa* often drew from a wide variety of sources (cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, p. 425), although it was usually as Manichaeans that the *zanādiqa* tended to be denounced. Cf., however, Yarshater, "Mazdakism" in *CHIr*, III(2), p. 997, where, following al-Bīrūnī, it is asserted that it were the Mazdakites, *not* the Manichaeans, who "came to be considered the *Zindīqs par excellence...*"

[129] On such poets, who in only rather rare cases were actually charged with or persecuted for *zandaqa*, see van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, pp. 443ff., II, pp. 4ff.; C. Pellat, *Le milieu basrien et la formation de Ǧāḥiẓ* (Paris, 1953), pp. 178ff; Y. Khulayf, *Ḥayāt al-Shi`r fi'l-Kūfa ilā nihāyat al-qarn al-thānī li'l-hijri* (Cairo, 1968), pp. 224ff., 607-642 passim, especially pp. 618ff.

[130] Cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, pp. 424f.

[131] Cf. S. Stroumsa and G. G. Stroumsa, "Anti-Manichaean Polemics in Late Antiquity

inclined" intellectual of early `Abbāsid society, Manichaean ideas did exercise considerable fascination -- at least as a way of protesting against the established order, if for no better reason.

Religious, ethical or social non-conformity has obvious political implications.[132] While there seems to have been no connexion at all between the Iranian peasant revolts of the early `Abbāsid period and *zandaqa*, both could arguably be seen as aiming to undermine Islam -- the Iranian revolts by threatening the Muslim community and polity, occasionally in terms of explicitly anti-Islamic discourse, *zandaqa* by questioning the validity of the Islamic faith and thereby attacking the ideological bases of the state. All this, of course, is a matter of perception: the Manichaeans need not have worked for the destruction of the state any more than the "scoffers" of religion need be secret Manichaeans. Nevertheless, there is a likelihood that, at least in some of the cases where the *zanādiqa* were persecuted, the measures in question were inspired by a perception that these individuals were somehow a threat to the established order. At the same time, individuals who were considered undesirable by the rulers could conveniently be labelled as *zindīqs* and efficiently eliminated by being charged as such.

Secondly, whether or not the *zanādiqa* were persecuted owing to a genuine perception of a threat they were seen to represent to the `Abbāsid state and society, the question of political and ideological advantages that such a persecution brought to the `Abbāsids surely merits some speculation. In persecuting *zandaqa*, caliph al-Mahdī and his immediate successors could no doubt hope to establish the credentials of the `Abbāsid

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and Early Islam", passim.; Lieu, "Later Roman anti-Manichaean Polemics", passim.

[132] Cf. Morony, *Iraq*, pp. 406-408: "The challenge of Manichaeism [in Sasanian times] was in its social implications -- in its rejection of material values, work, and violence.... Although other issues were involved in the eighth century, Islamic rulers seem to have applied the same sanctions for the same reasons against Manichaeans that had been applied by the Sasanians."

state as the defender of Islam against any insidious heresy. Moreover, the movement

through which they came to power having originated in an extremist Shīʿite milieu, the

ʿAbbāsids could now demonstrate their own rectitude by persecuting the zanādiqa.[133]

That through this persecution, the ʿAbbāsids were striving to achieve an "orthodox"

image for themselves is further indicated by their dissociation from the Shīʿite milieu,

which took place at about the same time as their suppression of zandaqa. Extremist

Shīʿism was not zandaqa, but, on occasion, the two could overlap or might be perceived

to do so (owing not only to the ambiguity of the latter term, but also to the syncretism

often involved in the former).[134] Some of those accused of zandaqa did, after all, have

Shīʿite inclinations;[135] and there also are indications that al-Mahdī's inquisition was

viewed with apprehension in certain Shīʿite circles.[136] 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.[137]

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133   On persecution of heresy as a means of gaining, consolidating, and legitimating
       political power and influence, R. I. Moore's study -- for all the difference in time
       and milieu -- has important insights to offer: *The Formation of a Persecuting
       Society: power and deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (Oxford, 1987),
       especially ch. 4.

134   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.

135   Cf. Vajda, "Les *zindiqs*", p. 221, and passim; *EI(2)*, s.v. "Muṭīʿ b. ʿIyās"; van Ess,
       Theologie und Gesellschaft, I, p. 439 (Ṣāliḥ b. ʿAbd al-Quddūs).

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

137   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. For further reflections on the letter

Muḥammad b. ʿAlī supposedly wrote to his partisans in Khurāsān, see V.2.ii.3, below.

Chapter III

THE EARLY `ABBASIDS AND THE `ULAMA'
Defining a Relationship

III.1

This chapter is concerned with the mutual perceptions of the early `Abbāsid caliphs and the `ulamā' and with efforts at defining their relationship with each other. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part surveys various expressions of the `ulamā's actual or perceived opposition to the early `Abbāsid caliphs, and the latter's suspicions on this account. The second part studies some notable attempts towards defining the role and religious function of the caliphs and their relationship vis-a-vis the `ulamā'. It is argued here that by the time of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, the caliph's vision of his function had come largely to coincide with that of the `ulamā' on this matter. The *Miḥna*, instituted under al-Ma'mūn, was a protest against this vision. The third part of this chapter briefly considers al-Ma'mūn's initiative, and its aftermath. The *Miḥna* marked a break with the previous `Abbāsid style of dealing with the `ulamā', though it is also to be seen as a climax of earlier efforts towards exercising some control over the `ulamā'. In its failure, however, the *Miḥna* only reconfirmed what the caliphs before al-Ma'mūn had already come to acknowledge, viz. that it was from the `ulamā' that they had to derive their legitimacy.

III.2 CALIPHS AND `ULAMA': Mutual Suspicions

III.2.i

`Abbāsid concern to seek the support of members of the religious circles goes back to the milieu in which the `Abbāsid revolution took place. It seems expedient therefore to discuss briefly, as a prelude, such meagre information as we have on the relations of the `Abbāsid revolutionaries with some men of religion. There is evidence to suggest that the `Abbāsid *du`āt* actively sought to cultivate the favour of the religious circles; their concern 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.[1] The

du'āt appear to have been successful with some from among the religious circles[2] 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.[3] 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. Such information as there is may therefore be briefly noted.

It is noteworthy that much of the opposition that the revolutionaries faced from

religious circles in Khurasān came from the Murji'ites.[4] Wilferd Madelung has drawn

attention to some evidence on Murji'ite opposition to Abū Muslim Khurāsānī, during the

militant phase of the `Abbāsid *da'wa*, in Ṭukhāristān and Khurāsān. In Balkh, there was

an uprising against the `Abbāsids after the city had fallen to their troops. Leaders of the

revolt included Murji'ites such as Muqātil b. Ḥayyān al-Nabaṭī, Mutawakkil b. Ḥumrān,

and Ibn al-Rammāḥ.[5] Besides the popular opposition in Balkh, which continued into

`Abbāsid times, some Murji'ites also came into conflict with Abū Muslim in Marw itself.

Two leading Murji'ites, Ibrāhīm b. Maymūn al-Ṣā'igh al-Marwazī and Yazīd b. Abī Sa'īd

al-Naḥwī al-Marwazī, were both killed there, on Abū Muslim's orders, in 131 A.H. Little

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[1] For such accusations, cf. *Akhbār al-dawla al-`Abbāsiyya wa fīhi akhbār al-`Abbās wa waladihi*, ed. `A. `A. al-Dūrī and A.-J. al-Muṭṭalibī (Beirut, 1971), pp. 282, 290, 292, 313f., etc.

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

[3] Cf. *Akhbār*, pp. 284, 290.

[4] In addition to what follows on the Murji'ites, see also the brief discussion in II.3.iii, above.

[5] W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, 1988), p. 20. Note that Muqātil b. Ḥayyān had previously been associated with Naṣr b. Sayyār, together with the exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān. Both had assisted the Umayyad governor in his negotiations with the Murji'ite rebel al-Ḥārith b. Surayj.

is known about either of the two men except that both had a reputation for ordering what is proper (*amr bi'l-ma'rūf*).[6] They are reported to have admonished Abū Muslim on his conduct, which is what seems to have cost them their lives.

Biographical dictionaries also mention the names of a few others, belonging to religious circles, who appear not to have been on the right side of the revolutionary movement, and who suffered in consequence. Khālid b. Salama al-Makhzūmī was one such person. He was a leading Murji'ite who fled from Kufa to Wasit after the former came under ʿAbbāsid control. After Wasit too capitulated to the ʿAbbāsid troops, Ibn Salama was among those who were refused amnesty, and later killed.[7] He may have been involved in propaganda against the ʿAbbāsids and possibly in support of the Umayyads, though such is not mentioned as the reason for his execution. However, it is stated about two others who were publicly refused amnesty along with Ibn Salama on the fall of Wasit that they "used to incite [the troops/the people?] to fight [the ʿAbbāsids]."[8] The nature of Ibn Salama's activities may have been similar, hence also his having to flee Kufa on ʿAbbāsid arrival there. Of these two other men, there is little that we know. One, ʿUmar b. Dharr was a Kufan, and was weak in *hadīth*.[9] He is also said to have functioned as a *qāṣṣ*, and may have employed some of his skills in exhorting people against the

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[6] Cf. Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Majrūhīn*, ed. M. I. Zā'id (Aleppo, 1396 A.H.), I, p. 157. (on Ibrāhīm al-Ṣā'igh); Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* (Haydarabad, 1325-27 A.H.), I, pp. 172f. (nr. 314: s.v. Ibrāhīm al-Ṣā'igh); ibid., XI, p. 332 (nr. 633: s.v. Yazīd al-Nahwī); also see W. Madelung, "The Early Murji'a in Khurasān and Transoxania and the Spread of Hanafism", *Der Islam*, LIX (1982), p. 35; idem, *Religious Trends*, p. 20; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin and New York, 1991-), II, p. 549.

[7] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, III, pp. 95f. (nr. 181); cf. Tabari, III, pp. 69f. He is also said to have been hostile to ʿAlī, and to have "recited to Banū Marwān verses which satirized the Prophet." (Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, III, pp. 96.) The report about his attitude to ʿAlī may or may not be true, but it seems more than likely that the latter report about satirical verses is an effort to malign him.

[8] Ibn Ḥajar, *loc. cit.*

[9] Ibid., VII, pp. 444f. (nr. 731).

That most of the instances of religious opposition noted above involve the Murji'ites calls for a brief comment on Murji'ite politics. Murji'ite political attitudes under the Umayyads have traditionally been considered by Islamicists as quietist and supportive of the regime. Michael Cook has, however, challenged this "consensus" (as he puts it), and argued for viewing the Murji'ites as being essentially opposed to the Umayyads.[18] More recently, though, Khalil Athamina has given a rather more plausible account of Murji'ite politics, distinguishing a quietist and an activist stream among them.[19] Whichever view one adopts, it is clear at least that not all Murji'ites were pro-Umayyad, so that all of those who reportedly came into conflict with the `Abbāsid revolutionaries need not be assumed to have done so out of an affection for the Umayyad regime. Some may only have been scandalized by what they perceived as the revolutionaries' unacceptable behaviour (especially the unjust shedding of blood), or may have seen in the movement an invitation to civil strife. At the same time, for all their admonition of the `Abbāsid revolutionaries, most of these Murji'ites may not have been politically activist. Be that as it may, the point that deserves notice here is that already in the milieu of the `Abbāsid revolution, there were considerable misgivings among certain religious circles as regards the `Abbāsids.[20] Such misgivings were to continue into the `Abbāsid period.

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[16] "kāna yukhāṣimu fi'l-irjā' dā`iyatan wa huwa mutamāsik": Ibn Ḥajar, Tahdhīb, s.v., III, p. 442.

[17] He may also have been involved in al-amr bi'l-ma`rūf, etc. He 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. Muhammad b. Waḍḍāḥ al-Qurṭubī, Kitāb al-bida`, ed. and tr. I. Fierro (Madrid, 1988), p. 230 (nr. xii.58).

[18] M. Cook, Early Muslim Dogma (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 33ff.

[19] Khalil Athamina, "The early Murji'a: some notes", JSS, XXXV (1990), pp. 109-130.

[20] If the impression that the Murji'ites were rather more prominent in opposing the `Abbāsid revolutionaries than members of other religious circles is correct, it may in part be accounted for in terms of Murji'ite opposition to the Shī`ites (on which, cf. Athamina, "Early Murji'a", pp. 119ff.). The `Abbāsids, after all, came to power through a Shī`ite movement, for all that they eventually became the patrons of proto-Sunnism. Murji'ite - Shī`ite opposition should not, however, be considered as a

After the `Abbāsid revolution, there were many among the Murji'a, as there were in other religious circles, who remained critical of the `Abbāsids, considered associating with them illicit, and sometimes did not even desist from an activist political stance. A quietist stance was to become, however, characteristic of nascent Sunnism's political orthodoxy under the early `Abbāsids. Quietism received support from Murji'ite-Ḥanafite circles, as it did from the proto-Sunnī traditionalists; a similar stance was also adhered to by the moderate Shī`a. Nevertheless, that a quietist stance was the best course to adopt was not yet, in the milieu and aftermath of the `Abbāsid revolution, a settled matter any more than an understanding of the implications of quietism itself was. Conflicting views on the question of quietism are, for instance, attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa, a Murji'ite and the eponym of the Ḥanafite *madhhab*;[21] for his pupil, Abū Yūsuf, on the other hand, there was no question of a good Muslim's adopting any but the quietist stance. A generation later, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal was to endorse this view, in more forceful terms and under more trying circumstances. We will have occasion later to return briefly to the quietist tendencies of nascent Sunnī orthodoxy.

III.2.ii

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neatly defined and unequivocal attitude, any more than other religio-political attitudes at this time should: there are instances of some Murji'ites supporting Shī`ite revolts (see the following note).

[21] Cf. the quietist position attributed to him in *al-Fiqh al-Absat*, (published together with *al-`Alim wa'l-muta`allim* and *Risāla ilā `Uthmān al-Battī*, ed. M. Z. al-Kawtharī (Cairo, 1348), p. 44 (ll. 10ff.), cited in Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, p. 172, n. 7. Contrast reports about Abū Ḥanīfa's favouring an activist stance, in al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād* (Cairo, 1931), XIII, pp. 384ff. He is also said to have approved of the revolts of Zayd b. `Alī (al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 146f.; cf. C. van Arendonck, *Les débuts de l'imamat Zaidite*, tr. J. Ryckmans (Leiden, 1960), p. 307) and of Ibrāhīm b. `Abdallāh (Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 361, 364, 365, 378f.; van Arendonck, *L'imāmat*, p. 315). Some, at least, of these latter reports seem tendentious and may represent an attempt to malign Abū Ḥanīfa (cf. especially *Maqātil*, pp. 366f.), though others cannot be lightly explained away (cf. Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, p. 172, n. 7). It is also of some interest to note that the Murj'ia are said to have been critical of the moral support that Abū Ḥanīfa and Mis`ar b. Kidām, another leading Murji'ite, gave to the revolt of Ibrāhīm b. `Abdallāh (*Maqātil*, pp. 361, 366).

That the founders of the `Abbāsid state harboured suspicions as regards the `ulamā' is likely. al-Manṣūr, in particular, seems to have suspected their loyalties, which is not surprising and clearly had more to it than his allegedly untrusting nature: several `ulamā' had after all been (and some still were) pro-Umayyad;[22] and there apparently were many others with a pro-`Alid sentiment. Some of the latter were also to come out in support of the revolt of the Ḥasanid rebel Muḥammad b. `Abdallāh "al-Nafs al-Zakiyya" and his brother Ibrāhīm.[23] Nor could the distinct scepticism with which many from the community of religious scholars viewed expressions of `Abbāsid commitment to Islam have done much towards reassuring the caliph about the `ulamā's support for the regime.[24]

Having mildly pro-`Alid inclinations was, in itself, not an expression of opposition to the new regime. There was the possibility, nevertheless, that veneration for the `Alid household could turn into support for an `Alid aspirant to the caliphate; this possibility was actualized when Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and his brother Ibrāhīm revolted in Medina and Basra respectively.

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[22] Cf. W. Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 223f.

[23] Ibrāhīm's revolt in Basra, though politically more dangerous 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, *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk*, ed. M. J. De Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879-1901), III, pp. 189-265 (Muḥammad's revolt), 282-318 (Ibrāhīm's revolt); al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 260-299 (Muḥammad's revolt), 315-86 (Ibrāhīm's revolt). Studies include: T. Nagel, "Ein früher Bericht über den Aufstand des Muḥammad b. `Abdallāh im Jahre 145 h", *Der Islam*, (1970), pp. 227-62; J. Lassner, *The Shaping of `Abbāsid Rule* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 69ff., 79ff.; H. Kennedy, *The Early `Abbāsid Caliphate* (London, 1981), pp. 67ff., 200ff.; `A. `A. 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 *Ta'rīkh*, *Der Kalif al-Manṣūr im Anfang seines Kalifats*, (136/754 bis 145/762) (Frankfurt, 1987), p. 377, n. 1564.

[24] Cf. nn. 39-41, 52, below.

Among the *fuqahā'* who are usually mentioned as having supported the revolt,[25] were some prominent figures including Mālik b. Anas,[26] Muhammad b. ʿAjlān,[27] ʿAbdallāh b. Yazīd b. Hurmuz,[28] ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. al-Muṭṭalib al-Makhzūmī,[29] Abū Bakr b. Abī Sabra,[30] ʿAbdallāh b. Jaʿfar b. ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Miswar,[31] Abū Hanīfa[32] and Misʿar b. Kidām.[33] etc. Some of the Muʿtazila are also said to have backed the revolt in Basra,[34] though they had previously tended to be, and were henceforward to remain, politically quiescent.[35] The participation from religious circles, in the ʿAlid revolt of A.H. 145, would seem then to have been quite impressive.[36]

Various kinds of concrete unredressed grievances (e.g. a sense of being excluded from royal patronage?) seem to have brought individuals from diverse backgrounds -- even from families not otherwise known for their pro-ʿAlid sentiment -- to join the revolt.[37] The concern here is not with Muhammad's support base in general, however, but only with the question why several prominent individuals from the religious circles

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25 al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 277ff.,354ff.

26 Malik, the eponym of the Mālikite *madhhab*, is said to have given the ruling that the people were justified in contravening their oath of fealty to the ʿAbbāsids because this oath had been exacted from them under duress. See al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III, p. 200; al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 283.

27 al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III, pp. 227, 251f.,259; al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 289. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, pp. 678ff. discusses him along with the other Qadarites such as ʿAbd al-Hamīd b. Jaʿfar b. ʿAbdallāh and Ibn Abi Dhiʾb, who are known to have participated in al-Nafs al-Zakiyya's revolt. On Ibn ʿAjlān, see ibid., pp. 678-81.

28 al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III, pp. 251f.; al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 289. van Arendonck, *L'imamat*, p. 313; Muth, *Der Kalif al-Mansūr*, pp. 466f., n. 2357. In supporting Muhammad's revolt, Ibn Hurmuz wanted to be an example to others (cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III, pp. 251f.), which suggests that he may have enjoyed an eminent position in Medina.

29 al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 282. His support for Muhammad ended, however, before the revolt in Medina itself did. On him, also cf. Ibn Hajar (who does not, however, note his relationship with Muhammad's revolt), *Tahdhīb*, VI, pp. 357f. (nr. 682). al-Makhzūmī had served as *qādī* of Medina for al-Manṣūr, prior to the revolt (cf. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Taʾrīkh*, ed. Akram Diyāʾ al-ʿUmarī [Najaf, 1967], pp. 465f.), and is also said to have been appointed, at one stage, as the governor of Medina by

should have been drawn to the uprising. That there was an "ideological" basis to such opposition, in the sense of the `Abbāsids not being regarded as the most rightful claimants to the caliphate, might explain the support of those who had Shī`ite inclinations, but not that of others.[38] As for those men of religion who do not seem to have had Shī`ite inclinations in any unmistakable sense, it seems probable that their participation was more clearly inspired by the conduct rather than the credentials of the new regime. It was apparently the way the new regime conducted its business which made them unhappy,[39] just as some were once perturbed by the conduct of the `Abbāsid movement itself or, for that matter, of the Umayyad state.[40] That the `ulamā' in question did not shirk an activist, militant stance, means that not only were they sufficiently disillusioned with the `Abbāsids[41] to support a revolt against them,[42] but that they were also sufficiently optimistic about the potential of the revolt to change things for the better.

III.2.iii

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the same caliph (cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 159). He briefly served as the *qāḍī* for the rebel Muḥammad as well, before returning to the `Abbāsid fold (cf. Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 282). He was again the *qāḍī* of Medina for some time during the caliphate of al-Mahdī (Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Ta'rīkh*, p, 474).

[30] al-Ṭabarī, Ta'rīkh, III, p. 259; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 285; Muḥammad b. Khalaf Wakī', *Akhbār Quḍāt*, ed. `A. `A. M. al-Marāghī (Cairo, 1947), I, p. 201; van Arendonck, *L'imamat*, p. 312; Muth, *Der Kalif al-Manṣūr*, pp. 437f. n. 2092. The position that this *faqīh* enjoyed in Medina is illustrated by his role in pacifying the revolt of black slaves there, soon after the termination of Muḥammad's uprising. Ibn Abī Ṣabra, imprisoned after Muḥammad's revolt was crushed, was taken out of the prison by the rioters, but he counselled loyalty to the caliph and exerted his considerable influence to pacify the rebels! al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 265ff.

[31] al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 291; van Arendonck, *L'imāmat*, p. 312; Muth, *Der Kalif al-Manṣūr*, p. 394, n. 1718. He was one of those who had taken Muḥammad to be the Mahdī (al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 291). On him, also see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, V, pp. 171-73 (nr. 295).

[32] See n. 21, above. The support of Abū Ḥanīfa, as also that of Mālik b. Anas, was strictly moral, rather than one involving active participation. Cf. al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 364f. (on Abū Ḥanīfa); al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 200 (on Mālik). The same would doubtless have been true of many other, though not all, religious scholars.

[33] See n. 21, above.

Fortunately for the `Abbāsids, subsequent Shī`ite (or for that matter, any other) revolts did not attract the support or even sympathy of the proto-Sunnī `ulamā'. Intimidation by the rulers, a time honoured device which was certainly not foreign to the `Abbāsids, must have played a part in the aftermath of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya's uprising:[43] the punishments inflicted on several `ulamā' included executions, mutilation, flogging, and imprisonment. But there probably was more to the `ulamā's subsequent quietism than the effects of intimidation. Given that this revolt had represented a massive threat to `Abbāsid 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 `ulamā', and though the evidence is meagre there is no reason why such efforts should not have had some success.

It is also clear that for all the respect that an `Alid notable might command in society, proto-Sunnī attitudes towards the Shī`a were, even at the popular level, becoming more

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34 See *Faḍl al-i`tizāl*, ed. F. Sayyid (Tunis, 1974), p. 226: "... *hum wujūh al-mu`tazila...*" For Mu`tazilite participation in Ibrāhīm's revolt, see van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, pp. 327-335. Among the Mu`tazila, Bashīr al-Raḥḥāl, a noted ascetic, is said to have been especially prominent: cf. van Ess, ibid., II, pp. 328ff; idem, "Une lecture à rebours de l'histoire du mu`tazilisme", *REI*, XLVII (1979), pp. 61f.

35 See van Ess, "Une lecture" (1979), pp. 65ff. Many among the Mu`tazila continued, of course, to maintain their quietist commitment during Ibrāhīm's revolt as well: see ibid. (1979), pp. 62ff.

36 The claim "... *lam yatakhallaf aḥad min al-fuqahā' [sc.* from the revolt of Ibrāhīm]" (al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 359), is hardly credible, however. Also cf. ibid., p. 377: "... the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* all rebelled together with him (sc. Ibrāhīm)". The "*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*" whom the *rāwī*, Isḥāq b. Shāhīn -- al-Iṣfahānī's source for this report -- actually mentions are: Shu`ba b. al-Ḥajjāj (cf. on him, Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, IV, pp. 338-46 [nr. 580]), Hushaym b. Bashīr (cf. on him, Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, XI, pp. 59-64, nr. 100), `Abbād b. al-`Awwām (cf. on him, Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, V, pp. 99f. [nr. 168]), and Yazīd b. Hārūn (cf. on him, Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, XI, pp. 366-69 [nr. 711]). (Note, however, that the political involvement of none of these men is mentioned by Ibn Ḥajar, though this silence does not in itself invalidate the report in al-Iṣfahānī)

A report from the same *rāwī*, Ibn Shāhīn, also brings attention to those men of religion who abstained from backing the revolt. Cf. his statement (*Maqātil*, p. 377): "Khālid b. `Abdallāh al-Wāsiṭī belonged to the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamā`a*; people

defined and perhaps less favourable. The followers of Husayn b. `Alī, 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;[44] and if there were any doubts about how the `Alids would behave, were they to come to power, the high-handedness of `Alid rebels who momentarily gained control in the Yemen and Mecca during the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn removed them.[45]

The caliphs' much vaunted role as the defenders of Islam and the Muslim community[46] against internal and external threats -- of which the early `Abbāsid period witnessed several -- and as the patrons of "orthodoxy", would undoubtedly have convinced many of the `ulamā' that many of their interests coincided with those of the caliphs, and that they had a stake in the continued existence of the regime. This of course is another basic reason why political quietism soon became the standard view.

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other than he revolted with Ibrāhīm, but he kept to his house [sc. abstained]" (on this Khālid, cf. Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, III, pp. 100f. [nr. 187]). Even among the `Alids, there were many who were opposed to Muhammad's revolt (cf. Kennedy, *Early `Abbāsid Caliphate*, p. 202), and 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 would surely have led many to abstain from participating in or approving of the revolt. Cf., for instance, Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, VII, p. 40, nr. 71 (s.v. `Ubaydallāh b. `Umar b. Hafs, one of the seven leading faqīhs of Medina: he is reported to have kept away from Muhammad's revolt in Medina).

[37] Kennedy, *Early `Abbāsid Caliphate*, pp. 202f.

[38] The reference to Shī`ism here is, of course, imprecise: first, because at this time Shī`ism was still in the process of defining itself; and secondly, because it signified not one particular movement but rather a conglomerate of often conflicting groups and tendencies with certain shared assumptions, but not always easy to distinguish from each other. Because proto-Sunnī trends too were in the process of self articulation, it is sometimes no less hard to be able to say whether or not a particular individual should be characterized as proto-Sunnī. Nevertheless, there often are indications -- e.g., in the biographical dictionaries, which for all their problems do contain some early material -- whereby to form an idea whether or not, for instance, a certain individual had a reputation for strong "Shī`ite" inclinations. Most of the *fuqahā'* mentioned above are those whom posterity did not regard as having had such

If, then, the proto-Sunnī 'ulamā' are not usually seen as participating in any further uprising,[47] 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 religious scholars. Factors such as those noted above may have aided it in becoming such. 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 clearly seeking, in that treatise, to advocate 'Abbāsid legitimism, as will be shown later.

Whatever other reasons may have been involved in a strengthening of the quietist stance, the point that it is only with the advantage of hindsight that we can observe its emergence as the standard view among Sunnī *fuqahā'*, needs some emphasis. It could thus not have been self-evident to al-Manṣūr, perhaps not even to his contemporaries

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"Shī'ite" inclinations.

[39] Cf. *Fadl al-i'tizāl*, p. 226: the ascetic Bashīr al-Raḥḥāl (on whom see n. 34, above) 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. See ibid., pp. 226f.

[40] As al-'Aṭā' b. 'Utba of Ḥimṣ reportedly complained to a fellow scholar, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalḥa, in the wake of 'Abbāsid massacres of their Umayyad rivals: "... we loved the family ('āl) of Muhammad only because of the love for him [sc. Muhammad]; but if they oppose his *sīra* and act in contravention of his *sunna*, they are the most hateful of people to us." Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, VII, p. 341 (nr. 567).

[41] Which is not necessarily to say, of course, that they had ever been idealistic about the 'Abbāsids! Cf., however, a probably tendential, but intriguing, remark Sufyān al-Thawrī is supposed to have addressed to the caliph al-Manṣūr, in complaining about his harsh measures against the people of Ḥijāz: "Fear God! For you have acquired this position and reached this state with the swords of the *Muhājirīn* and the *Anṣār*..." Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-jarḥ wa'l-ta'dīl* (Beirut, 1952-53), I, p. 106.

[42] Cf., for such disillusionment, al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 252, ll. 5ff.

among the ʿulamāʾ, that the latter would not support another revolt against the ʿAbbāsid

regime. It is perfectly understandable therefore that many of the ʿulamāʾ were often under

suspicion on the part of al-Manṣūr and his successors.

III.2.iv

There are several anecdotes which throw some light on the ʿAbbāsid caliphs'

suspicions regarding the ʿulamāʾ.[48] It goes without saying that the caliphs always had at

their side ʿulamāʾ who were favourably disposed towards them. These men of religion,

many of whom served as *qāḍīs*, assisted in propagating pro-ʿAbbāsid viewpoints,

especially through *ḥadīth*;[49] visited and accompanied the caliphs, endorsed or helped

contravene (as the case may be) royal guarantees, and assisted the rulers in various other

ways.[50] But having such ʿulamāʾ in their service, while it certainly secured some religious

prestige and aided in reinforcing the dynasty's legitimacy, seems never to have put the

caliphs' suspicions at rest. The latter could scarcely ignore that there always were those

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[43] Ibn Abī Sabra was already preaching loyalty to the caliph when he was brought out of prison by rioters in the course of the negro revolt of A.H. 145: see n. 30, above. His argument was that Medina could not bear the consequences of another wave of retribution by caliphal authorities, which the slave revolt would inevitably bring, after one brought about by the abortive uprising of Muḥammad was already in effect.

[44] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III, p. 556. Also cf. ibid., III, p. 989, where ʿAlid rebels in the time of al-Maʾmūn are said to have denuded the holy mosque of Mecca of some of its precious materials. One would do well to keep in mind the possibility of pro-ʿAbbāsid tendentiousness in reports such as these. Conversely, it is not unlikely that, whatever their veracity, such reports were taken seriously by many people, which would serve to indicate their hostile perceptions regarding the Shīʿites.

[45] Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III, pp. 987ff. The murderous activities of Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā -- a son of Mūsā b. Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad, whom the later Ithnā ʿashariyya recognized as their seventh imām -- who rebelled in the Yemen, earned for him the nickname *al-jazzār*, "the butcher" (al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 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 belonging to the ʿAbbāsid family burnt down: such reputation was reflected in his nickname, Zayd *al-nār*, Zayd "the fire" (ibid., p. 986). In Mecca, Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad -- a son of the sixth imām in Ithnā ʿasharite 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.).

among the `ulamā' who were less favourably inclined towards them.

The mere refusal of a religious scholar to associate himself with the government by, for instance, accepting a judicial position may have been seen, and often intended, as an affront to the much publicized religious commitments of the caliphs. It could equally have been perceived, or intended, as an adverse comment on the legitimacy of the ruling establishment. The refusal of religious scholars to accept official appointments is of course a standard motif of biographical dictionaries;[51] it is not a mere *topos* however, and may often express cynicism in the religious circles.

Such cynicism comes across quite strongly in the biographical notices of several scholars.[52] The scholar is often shown as stringently avoiding any contact with the rulers, while the latter are portrayed as equally eager to have him associate with themselves. The refusal to associate with the caliph may have been intended as an indictment of the latter's sincerity of purpose, and a determination not to condone his actions. It may also

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

[47] If certain reports about al-Shāfi`ī's politically activist involvements are at all credible, he should probably be regarded as something of an exception. Some Zaydī sources claim that he supported Yahyā' b. `Abdallāh b. al-Hasan, a half-brother of Muhammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, who rebelled in Daylam in 176/792-93. Cf. the section of the *Kitāb al-maṣābih*, by Abu'l-`Abbās al-Hasanī (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-hadā'iq al-wardiyya*, by Humayd b. Ahmad al-Muhallī (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 Yahyā' see al-Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 612ff. al-Shāfi`ī is also said to have had some political involvements while in Yemen: see W. al-Qādī, "Rihlat al-Shāfi`ī ilā'l-Yaman bayna'l-usṭūra wa'l-wāqi`", in M. Ibrahīm, ed., *Arabian Studies in Honour of Mahmūd Ghūl* (Wiesbaden, 1989), pp. 127-41.

[48] See nn. 55, 58, below. Also cf. M. D. Ahmad, *Muslim Education and the Scholars' Social Status up to the 5th century Muslim era in the light of Ta'rīkh Baghdād* (Zurich, 1968), pp. 237ff., for the argument that the religious scholars were not appointed (in the `Abbāsid period) to any important administrative (as distinguished from purely judicial) positions -- not because they were necessarily reluctant to be so appointed but -- because the rulers feared that these scholars might become too powerful, were they able to combine religious with political influence.

have expressed the scholar's determination to retain an independence and autonomy in society which he evidently saw as being compromised by associating with the caliph.[53] Conversely, it was precisely this jealously guaided autonomy in society which the rulers might often have viewed as potentially subversive.[54] For all the tendentious material that these notices contain, it is hard to avoid the impression that they do echo some of those strains which marked caliphal relations with the *fuqahā*'.

If there is any worth in such anecdotes at all, they would indicate how fragile the `Abbāsids themselves conceived the bases of their legitimacy to be, and how much stock they laid by the `ulamā's ability to refurbish or undermine it. Some of the points made above are nicely underscored by two reports in al-Tabarī, which show Hārūn worrying about the subversive potential of an ascetic from the family of `Umar b. al-Khattāb. 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

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[49] See V.2.iii, below.

[50] For a few instances, cf. al-Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 614, 619, 654, 665, 666, 704, 709, 741, 1136, etc.; Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 89 n. 198. Also cf. M. D. Ahmad, *Scholars' Social Status*, pp. 233ff., for some pertinent references to the *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*.

[51] Such anecdotes have received considerable scholarly attention. 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*, pp. 196-213; N. J. Coulson, "Doctrine and Practice in Islamic Law", *BSOAS*, XVIII (1956), pp. 211-26.

[52] Biographical notices of Sufyān al-Thawrī, for instance, contain some striking expressions of such cynicism: cf. Ibn Abī Hātim, *al-Jarh*, I, pp. 107ff.; T. Nagel, *Rechtleitung und Kalifat* (Bonn, 1975), pp. 108, 273f. Sufyān, however, is an unusually enigmatic figure and, as H.-P. Raddatz has noted (*Die Stellung und Bedeutung des Sufyān al-Taurī* [Bonn, 1967], p. 37 n. 1), there is reason to suspect tendentiousness in anecdotes which depict him in violent opposition to the early `Abbāsids. Nevertheless, there is no indication that he had any affection for the `Abbāsid caliphs, and, among other things, his arrest in the last year of the reign of al-Mansūr would seem to indicate the caliph's suspicions about him (cf. al-Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 386). In any case, Sufyān is hardly unique in his cynicism towards the `Abbāsid caliphs. Similar, if often less stringent, attitudes are attested for several

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 Baghdād to preach there ("I could endure him in the Ḥijāz, but he has now made his way to the seat of my power and is seeking to subvert my followers!").[55]

It was in the early `Abbāsid period that the `ulamā's religious authority became firmly established in its classical form.[56] In distancing themselves from their more "extremist" partisans, and seeking to build their image as the patrons of the nascent Sunnī orthodoxy, the early `Abbāsids themselves soon started moving towards a recognition of the `ulamā' as the living locus of such authority. But if they came round to recognizing the `ulamā's position in religious matters, the early caliphs were clearly not prepared to let the `ulamā' also become an independent focus of popular allegiance. When al-Ma'mūn alleged, for instance, that in opposing the doctrine of the "created" Qur'ān the traditionalist `ulamā' were in fact seeking to promote their own leadership,[57] he was

other scholars; and the testimony of biographical dictionaries on this account need not be lightly dismissed.

[53] Compare the Late Antique holy man's concern to maintain his independence in society, untramelled by any ties that might compromise such a position: P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity", *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXI (1971), pp. 80-101, passim, especially p. 92: The holy man's "was a free standing position which only the Emperor enjoyed."

[54] 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-Jāḥiz, *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 Parvîz -- 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.

[55] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, 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 `Abdallāh b. `Abd al Azīz al-`Umarī (on hi... cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, V, pp. 302f. [nr. 515]).

clearly scoring a polemical point against the `ulamā'; nonetheless, the allegation also

reflects his awareness that the `ulamā's influence in society had the potential to

undermine caliphal authority.[58] For the `ulamā's part, certain curious reports even depict

one or another prominent scholar of the time as sometimes being characterized with

epithets typically reserved for the caliph:[59] if genuine, these reports would not only be

interpretable as adverse comments on the actual incumbent, but perhaps also as asserting

the autonomy of the scholarly community. That an autonomously exercised influence

should exist at all in society could scarcely have failed to disquiet the early `Abbāsid

caliphs, the more so if the latter also harboured the suspicion that such an influence might

be exercised against them.[60]

III.3. DEFINING THE CALIPH'S ROLE AND FUNCTION

This chapter has been concerned so far with documenting expressions of the `ulamā's

discomfort with, or opposition to, the early `Abbāsids and the latter's suspicions on this

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The recurrent motif of the "holy man" fearlessly admonishing or rebuking the ruler needs to be taken seriously; the tradition of such admonishings had deep roots in Mediterranean society: cf. Brown, "Rise and Function of Holy Man", especially pp. 92f., 95f.

[56] Cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, ch. 5, especially pp. 58, 88ff.

[57] Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 1125.

[58] 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. Note that al-Ma'mūn may have been acquainted with the *Ahd Ardashīr*: cf. the editor's introduction, p. 34, and Steppat, "Persian Element", p. 453. Also cf. *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. `A.-S. Hārūn (Cairo, 1964-65), I, pp. 283ff., where in denouncing the traditionalist rivals of the Mu`tazila, al-Jāḥiẓ notes that some of them had been among the supporters of the deposed caliph al-Amīn, insinuating that they represented a threat not only to sound religion (sc. the religious policies of al-Ma'mūn) but also to the stability of al-Ma'mūn's government: cf. Nagel, *Rechtleitung*, pp. 437f., for a discussion of this passage.

[59] Thus biographical dictionaries report one or another leading scholar as being

account. The most dramatic confrontation between the caliph and the (traditionalist) `ulamā' was to occur in the reign of al-Ma'mūn; this episode in the history of the `Abbāsid-`ulamā' relationship will be taken up later in this chapter. The *opposition* of the `ulamā', however, was not all there was to their relations with the caliphs. While there is no reason to ignore or explain away such opposition, one must not exaggerate its significance. So far as the proto-Sunnī `ulamā' are concerned, it was their *support*, not their opposition to the `Abbāsids, 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-`Abbāsid sentiment. But, as will be argued in chapters IV and V of this dissertation, there is considerable evidence to suggest that, in general, the proto-Sunnī `ulamā' came to be supportive of the `Abbāsids, and that there are good reasons why this should have happened. In what follows, we shall review certain attempts, on an essentially theoretical level, to regulate the relations of the caliphs and the `ulamā'. 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 `ulamā'. We know about these attempts because of three extant texts of fundamental importance, all of which purport to have originated in the early `Abbāsid period.

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addressed or characterized as "*amīr al-mu'minīn*", usually with the qualification, "*fi'l-ḥadīth*", etc. (this also became one of the technical characterizations in the Muslim "science" of *asmā' al-rijāl*: cf. G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* [Cambridge, 1983], index, s.v. *amīr al-mu'minīn fi'l-ḥadīth*); though the title -- as well as the epithet "*imām al-muslimīn*" -- was sometimes used without such further qualification: Cf. *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, IX, p. 158, ll. 15f.: "... *qālū hādhā amīr al-mu'minīn - hādhā Sufyān al-Thawrī...*" For reports about `Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak and al-Awzā`ī being similarly characterized, see the references in M. Bonner, "Some Observations concerning the Early Development of Jihad on the Arab-Byzantine Frontier", *SI*, LXXV, p. 27, n. 92. Note, however, that the caliph Hārūn, for his part, is said to have characterized Ibn al-Mubārak without equivocation as only "*sayyid al-`ulamā'*" (*Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, X, p. 163, l. 5).

60 Observe al-Ma'mūn's prohibiting the activity of *al-amr bi'l ma`rūf*, etc., after his return to Baghdad from Khurāsān. Cf. *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, VII, p. 331; XII, p. 350.

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, a secretarial official of the caliph al-Manṣūr.[61] The other two works come from the ʿulamāʾ. One purports to be a detailed letter from a Basran *qāḍī*, ʿUbaydallāh b. al-Ḥasan al-ʿAnbarī, to the caliph al-Mahdī, and is a document of quite considerable interest.[62] Some of its contents do raise suspicions, as we shall see, though in general the letter appears to be authentic. The other work, of far wider scope and greater interest, is the treatise on taxation which the celebrated chief *qāḍī* Abū Yūsuf is reported to have addressed to the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.[63] The attribution of this treatise to Abū Yūsuf has recently been questioned by Norman Calder, though, as will be briefly argued in due course, 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. That both al-ʿAnbarī and Abū Yūsuf came from circles of pro-ʿAbbāsid ʿulamāʾ might be deduced from the contents of their works, were there no other evidence for that. If anything, however, the authors' sympathies make their work more not less important in the present context.

All three works may briefly be considered in turn, in so far as their contents are relevant to our concerns here.

III.3.i

Among the things Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ[64] suggests to the caliph is that the nascent

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[61]   On Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ and his *Risāla*, see n. 64, below.

[62]   See n. 72, below, for bibliographic references to al-ʿAnbarī and his letter.

[63]   For bibliographic references to Abū Yūsuf, see n. 96, below.

[64]   For references to various studies relating to Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, see the bibliography in G. E. Lampe, Jr., "Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ: political and legal theorist and reformer", unpublished Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins Univ., 1987. On Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ generally, see *EI*(2), s.v., (F. Gabrieli); D. Sourdel, "La biographie d'Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ d'après les

'Abbāsid state should be based on a recognition of the caliph's 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.[65] It is also to be asserted in the caliph's sole prerogative to enact and promulgate legal decisions and doctrines in the form of a uniform, binding code; and it is to be his prerogative rather than that of anyone else to define what normative *sunna* would mean or consist of at any given time.[66]

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'? In so far as his "*ahl al-fiqh wa'l-sunna wa'l-siyar wa'l-naṣīḥa*"[67] 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.[68] More striking perhaps is his suggestion

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sources anciennes", *Arabica*, 1 (1954), pp. 307-23; J. D. 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* 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 his *Studies on Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 149-67.

[65] *Risāla*, para 11, p. 25. 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,) "reglement". Lampe ("Ibn al-Muqaffa'", p. 91) simply renders it as manual. On this term, also cf. S. Shaked, "From Iran to Islam: notes on some themes in transmission", *JSAI*, V (1984), p. 34. That Ibn al-Muqaffa' conceived of this "*amān*" as a document with some religious significance is clear from the context.

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

[67] *Risāla*, paras 55, pp. 61, 63.

[68] *Risāla*, para 49, p. 57. The institution of the *ṣaḥāba* may, however, have come about

that they should act as moral administrators, so to s, eak, of the communities they live in, serving to discipline and reform the people, restrain them from innovations (*bida*) as well as civil strife (*fitan*), supervise their affairs, and report to higher authorities on matters they cannot themselves handle.[69] Here we clearly have an element of surveillance, apart from that of supervision, in what the `ulamā's function is envisaged to be.

Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s suggestions are of considerable interest for articulating the possibilities that may have existed, or been considered, at the outset of the `Abbāsid rule. The fact that this advice comes from a Persian bureaucrat is also significant, and may be interpreted as reflecting a desire both to render the religious establishment more organized and to make it a part of the administrative bureaucracy, somewhat in the ancient Persian tradition. It may be as well, however, that Ibn al-Muqaffa`'s advice is essentially in the nature of a plea to the caliph to reduce 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 `ulamā' into the service of the

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even before Ibn al-Muqaffa` wrote on its importance. The first `Abbāsid caliph, Abu'l-`Abbās al-Saffāh seems already to have had his *sahāba* (cf. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, ed. `A.-`A. al-Dūrī [Wiesbaden and Beirut, 1978], III, p. 160; Mus`ab b. `Abdallāh al-Zubayrī, *Kitāb Nasab Quraysh*, ed. E. Levi-Provencal [Cairo, 1953], p. 218; S. A. al-`Alī, *Baghdād* [Baghdad, 1985], I, p. 53). That the "institution ... is attested only under Mansūr and Mahdī" (P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, [Cambridge, 1980], p. 67) is incorrect not only because the institution is attested for Abu'l-`Abbās but also because it is attested for the successors of al-Mahdī too: several individuals are mentioned in the sources as the *sahāba* of Hārūn al-Rashīd (Mus`ab b. `Abdallāh al-Zubayrī, *Nasab Quraysh*, pp. 79, 242, 273; *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, X, p. 313 [nr. 5461], XII, p. 126 [nr. 6581]), of Muhammad al-Amīn (*Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, X, p. 313 [nr. 5461]), of al-Ma'mūn (Mus`ab b. `Abdallāh al-Zubayrī, *Nasab Quraysh*, p. 400; *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XII, p. 126 [nr. 6581], 264 [nr. 6707]), and of al-Mu`tasim (Wakī`, *Akhbār al-Qudāt*, ed. `A.-`A. M. al-Marāghī [Cairo, 1947-50], I, p. 260). That after al-Mahdī, the term "*khāssa*" replaced the term "*sahāba*" (al-`Alī, *Baghdād*, I, p. 57) does not evidently inspire much confidence either.

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

state can also be construed to have similar implications.

We do not know of al-Manṣūr's reaction to Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's suggestions. There are some reports, however, according to which the caliph intended to promulgate the *Muwaṭṭāʾ* of Mālik b. Anas 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.[70] 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.[71] The doctors of *fiqh* were therefore to be left to work out their legal formulations without the interference of the state.

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 example, that he was considered the most authoritative of the *fuqahāʾ* by the caliph; or that as a paragon of the (later) Sunnī orthodox spirit, he

[70] 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-Taʾrīkh*, ed. J. Aguade (Madrid, 1991), p. 160 (nr. 489); cf. P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 86 n. 184. U. F. Abd Allah, "Mālik's Concept of ʿAmal in the light of Mālikī Theory", unpublished Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1978, I, pp. 100ff., notes that several works similar to Mālik's *Muwaṭṭāʾ* were written at this time; he suggests that the possibility of one of such works being officially promulgated may have played a part in encouraging their composition. Other sources for the exchange between al-Manṣūr and Mālik include: Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Taqdimat al-Maʿrifa li Kitāb al-Jarh waʾl-Taʿdīl* (Haydarabad, 1952), p. 29, cited in G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 62f.; al-Ṭabarī, *al-Muntakhab min kitāb dhayl al-mudhayyal min tārīkh al-ṣaḥāba waʾl-tābiʿīn*, published in his *Taʾrīkh* (III, pp. 2295-2561), pp. 2519f., cited in Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 86, n. 185.

[71] 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 Dr. W. B. Hallaq.)

respected and was prepared to work with the fact of legal diversity, etc. Nevertheless, the reports do seem plausible enough. Nothing appears to preclude al-Manṣūr from the intention which is ascribed to him, nor Mālik from having given the advice he is credited with.

III.3.ii

We turn now to al-ʿAnbarī's letter to al-Mahdī.[72] The central theme of this letter is to draw attention to four administrative matters which, according to the author, require the caliph's concern more than anything else: the frontiers of the state (*thughūr*) whose defences have to be constantly guarded; attention to the laws which are in force, and to the affairs of those who administer them; the collection of *fay'*, the administration of the lands and people liable for its payment, and the proper distribution of the proceeds of *fay'* among those entitled to it; and finally, the levy and administration of the *ṣadaqāt* taxes.

There is, however, more to this short treatise than advice on administrative matters and the use of religious formulae to buttress it. One of the most striking things about the work is the author's consistent reference to the practice of the pious. The identity of these

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[72] On al-ʿAnbarī, see Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍat*, II, pp. 88-123 (the most detailed treatment by far); Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. Akram Diyāʾ al-ʿUmarī (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 Dhahabī, *Ta'rīkh*, X, p. 344, n. 1. For a brief but illuminating study of al-ʿAnbarī, see J. van Ess, "La liberté du juge dans le milieu basrien du VIIIe siècle (IIe siècle de l'hégire)", 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, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II (Berlin and New York, 1992), pp. 155-64.

Wakīʿ, *Akhbār*, II, pp. 97-107, is apparently the only available source for al-ʿAnbarī's letter. For brief references to this letter, cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, pp. 93, 98, 103; I. Blay-Abramski, "From Damascus to Baghdad: the ʿAbbāsid administrative system as a product of the Umayyad heritage (41/661-320/932)", Ph.D. diss., Princeton, 1987, p. 163; idem, "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, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, p. 167; Iḥsān ʿAbbās' introduction to his edition of the *Kitāb al-Kharāj* by Abū Yūsuf (Beirut and London, 1985), pp. 46-48. It should be noted that none of these scholars call into question the authenticity of al-ʿAnbarī's letter.

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-siddīqīn*).[73] 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-`ā'idūn*),....[74] men of knowledge (`*ulamā'*) [and?] deputies [of God?] (*al-khulafā'*),[75] in whom refuge is sought and who are unblemished (*al-mu`tasam bihim wa'l-ma`sūmūn*). They [include] the prophets, the veracious ones (*al-siddīqūn*), the martyrs (*al-shuhadā'*), and the upright people (*al-sālihūn*).... 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.[76]

For all its rhetorical effect, al-`Anbarī'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 of course very prominent. Some of the caliphs are certainly there, though they are left anonymous.[77] The elect need not all

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[73] Wakī`, *Akhbār*, II, p. 97.

[74] 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-`Anbarī uses the term "*imām*" to refer unequivocally to the caliph: Wakī`, *Akhbār*, II, pp. 99 (l. 18), 100 (l. 15), 101 (l. 18), 103 (l. 14), 104 (l. 14), 105 (l. 5).

The sense of "*al-`ā'idūn*" too is rather uncertain. According to the *Lisān al-`Arab*, someone characterized as "*dhū safh wa `ā'ida*" is one who is "kind and compassionate" ("*dhū `afw wa tā`attuf*"). Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-`Arab* (Beirut, 1955-56), III, p. 316. Note too that a "*mu`īd min al-rijāl*" is one "who knows things, one who is not inexperienced" ("*al-`ālim bi'l-umūr alladhī laysa bi-ghumr*"). Ibid., p. 315.

[75] 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.

[76] Wakī`, *Akhbār*, II, p. 98

[77] al-`Anbarī also refers to *al-khulafā' al-rāshidūn*, though the reference does not necessarily mean that he has the patriarchal caliphs 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 `Umar I, and `Umar II. See Wakī`, *Akhbār*, II, p. 103. al-Mansūr is also mentioned in the letter in a certain context (ibid., p. 102), but hardly as a member of the elite group in question.

belong 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 case of the rulers among these pious forbears, piety also entailed worldly success;[78] further, that the ruler's obedience to God's commands increased the subjects' obedience to the ruler as well.[79]

Another interesting though 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).[80] 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).[81]

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[78] Ibid., p. 98.

[79] Ibid., p. 98; also cf. ibid., p. 100, where the same point is made with specific reference to the caliph al-Mahdī himself. A similar idea occurs, in allusive terms, in Ṭāhir Dhuʾl-Yamīnayn's epistle to his son: cf. al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, III, pp. 1048, 1050; on this epistle, see n. 142, below.

[80] 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.

[81] Wakīʿ, Akhbār, II, p. 101. Cf. Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, al-Amwāl, 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 responsa 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

Elsewhere in the letter, the author briefly returns to the same question, but with a rather different emphasis:

> In such matters confronting the people about which the *a'imma*[82] 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.[83]

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. Instances of such initiative being taken by provincial governors are well-attested for our period.[84] 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

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these *fuqahā'* 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. On `Abd al-Malik b. Ṣāliḥ see *EI*(2), s.v. (K. V. Zettersteen); H. Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate* (London, 1981), pp. 74f. and index s.v.

[82] On this term, see n. 74, above.

[83] 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. (Cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 93, where a rather misleading impression would seem to have been given on this account with reference to another passage in al-`Anbarī's letter.) Also cf. Abū Yūsuf's "*wulāt al-amr*" whom Allāh has made "*khulafā' fī ardihi*": *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*".

[84] Cf. Lassner, *The Shaping of `Abbāsid Rule*, pp. 3-90 passim.

law are silent. It is to be observed here that together with calling for a conformity of administrative practice with religious authority, the author of this letter is, implicitly, making the caliph himself a part of that authority. Conversely, the caliph's authority comes into play, in person or by delegation, only when all the other sources of religious authority are silent (and "the scholars are perturbed").

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 on grounds of authenticity.

The reference to a hierarchy of the bases or sources of religious authority, to which the ruler's *aḥkām* should conform, may seem to presume too developed a juristic theory for a *qāḍī* to espouse a generation before al-Shāfiʿī.[85] But al-Shāfiʿī did not invent the four-fold schema comprising the Qur'ān, *sunna*, consensus and *ra'y*. 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 Qur'ān - *sunna* - *qiyas* - *ra'y* to early in the second century A.H."[86] To Wāṣil b. ʿAṭā', 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 truth (*al-ḥaqq*), and he is said to have originated it.[87] al-ʿAnbarī's plea for

85   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-Shāfiʿi the Master Architect of Islamic Jurisprudence", *IJMES*, XXV (1993), pp. 587-605.

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

87   Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *al-Awā'il*, ed. Muḥammad al-Miṣrī and Walīd al-Qaṣṣāb

conformity of the ruler's decisions to the Qur'ān, 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-'Anbarī's point about the caliph's *ijtihād* can also be related to some contemporary concerns of the 'Abbāsid caliphs (vis a vis their governors, for instance, in which case it would have been in line with the centralizing tendencies of the early 'Abbāsid period), as already noted.

To al-'Anbarī is also attributed the view that "every *mujtahid* is correct (in his judgement)" ("*kull mujtahid muṣīb*"), and that the Qur'ān, and *sunna*, allow the validity of opinions which may be mutually contradictory.[88] If this view is indeed al-'Anbarī's, we might ask what implications it has for the bases of religious authority discussed by the aforementioned passages in his letter to the caliph. In asserting the rectitude of every *mujtahid's* judgement, al-'Anbarī is *not* severing judgements from (a basis in) the traditional sources of religious authority but only pointing out that diversity in judgement 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* judgement -- leading to differences among

(Damascus, 1975), II, p. 135, cited in J. van Ess, "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. 213f.; and ibid.:"Le contexte ne laisse pas douter que Wāṣil pense au *hadīth*... L'enumeration correspond au scheme quadripartite des *uṣūl al-fiqh* classiques, la preuve rationelle tenant la place du futur *qiyās*."

[88] Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl mukhtalif al-hadīth* (Cairo, 1326 A.H.), pp. 55-57. Also cf. Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, VII, p. 8. For a pioneering discussion of this dictum, see van Ess, "La liberté", pp. 25-35; idem, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, pp. 155-64. al-Shāfi'ī's justification, in his *Risāla*, 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 Ijmā'", pp. 55-81, especially p. 67. Calder's certitude that this dictum "obviously had not emerged while Shāfi'ī 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, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, p. 164 n. 93: "Calder setzt in seinem habituellen Skeptizismus die Entstehung der Maxime viel zu spät an."

scholars -- does not contradict the authority of the scholars' agreement,[89] which al-`Anbarī's letter upholds. Not only has consensus always coexisted with the doctrine of the *mujtahid's* rectitude,[90] al-Shāfi`ī's arguments, a generation after al-`Anbarī, for the admissibility of *ikhtilāf* may have been intended precisely to undergird the `ulamā's collective authority.[91] A recognition of their mutual differences was, for al-Shāfi`ī, 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 anyone's part.[92]

If a ring of authenticity is to be heard in the overall tone and tenor of al-`Anbarī's letter -- and in its echoing many of the concerns of the time to which it purports to belong --[93] 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-`Anbarī posits conformity 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

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[89] Cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, p. 162.

[90] I owe this point to Dr. W. B. Hallaq.

[91] Calder, "Ikhtilāf and Ijmā`", pp. 55-81, especially 64ff., 71f.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Another feature of al-`Anbarī's letter may also be noted here: 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 *hadīth* is not surprising, and the lack of *isnād* may be taken to argue for the letter's early date. It is also noteworthy that five out 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 *hadīth* here may have something to do with al-Mahdī's image as a messianic figure (also cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 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-Ma'mūn, al-Fadl b. Sahl and `Alī al-Ridā'", in *Studia Arabica et Islamica*, pp. 345f.).

himself. At the same time, al-'Anbarî goes beyond implicitly affirming the 'ulamā's position as the bearers of a sacred tradition to which the caliph has to conform and from which he ultimately derives his legitimacy. He seems also to make the point that in conforming to this sacred tradition, the caliph can have himself recognized as integral to its preservance and vigour.

The caliph and the 'ulamā' do not, furthermore, only depend on each other; they are also visualized as working in close association. In concluding his letter, al-'Anbarî 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 the caliph 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[94] 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."[95] We shall return to the question of the caliph's advisory council in due course. For now, we must turn to Abū Yūsuf, whose position, as expressed in his *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, on the caliph's function and relationship with the 'ulamā' and on the latter's religious authority has some interesting parallels and contrasts with al-'Anbarî's.[96]

III.3.iii

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

[95] Wakî', *Akhbār*, II, p. 107.

[96] On Abū Yūsuf, see *inter alia*: Wakî', *Akhbār*, III, pp. 254-64, and index, s.v.; *Ta'rîkh Baghdād*, XIV, pp. 242-62; al-Dhahabî, *Manāqib al-imām Abî Ḥanîfa wa ṣāḥibayhi Abî Yūsuf wa Muhammad b. al-Ḥasan*, ed. M. Z. al-Kawtharî and Abu'l-Wafā al-Afghānî (Cairo, 1366 A.H.); idem, *Ta'rîkh Islām*, XII, pp. 496-503. For further references to the sources, see the editor's note in ibid., pp. 496f., n. 6; also see F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, I (Leiden, 1967), pp. 419-21. For 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.

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 ʿAbbāsid history. It becomes necessary then to begin by briefly reviewing some of Calder's arguments.

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.[97] 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."[98] 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 had commissioned him to write.[99] 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 the finances; the caliphate faced acute political and economic crises; and there is "evidence of wholesale restructuring of the financial system".[100] The *Kitāb al-Kharāj* seeks to affirm "absolute caliphal authority",[101] especially the caliph's discretionary powers in taxation. Nothing thus was better suited to the needs of those

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[97] N. Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 105-60, especially pp. 145ff.; the quotation is from p. 145.

[98] Ibid., p. 146.

[99] Ibid., p. 147, and n. 22 for Calder's bibliographic references to al-Khaṣṣāf and his *Kitāb al-Kharāj*.

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

[101] Ibid., p. 160 and pp. 105-60, passim.

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. Calder also correctly points out that a *Kitāb al-Kharāj* is attributed to al-Khaṣṣāf; but he fails 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."[102]

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)?[103] In fact, one of the three works on *kharāj* which are extant is attributed to

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[102]   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.

[103]   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 (Leiden, 1958), pp. 3-6.

Yaḥyā b. Ādam (d. 203/818), also a contemporary of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.[104] 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 the bio-bibliographical literature (though it must be conceded that Calder's position on this point is consistent with his overall 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 al-Kharāj*. Qudāma b. Ja`far, for one, apparently quotes *both* Abū Yūsuf and al-Khaṣṣāf in his own *Kitāb al-Kharāj*,[105] 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,[106]

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[104] On Yaḥyā b. Ādam see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 520; Ben Shemesh, *Taxation in Islam*, I: *Yaḥyā b. Ādam's Kitāb al-Kharāj*. 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.

[105] The name al-Khaṣṣāf does not figure in Qudāma's *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, but one "Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Shaybānī" does (once: p. 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], pp. 8, 31), which is how al-Khaṣṣāf's name is recorded in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. R. Tajaddud, 3rd edn. (Beirut, 1988), p. 259. Abū Yūsuf, on the other hand, is quoted several times (see Qudāma b. Ja`far, *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, index, s.v. Ya`qūb b. Ibrāhīm Abū Yūsuf).

[106] Note that the *Kitāb al-Kharāj* of Qudāma b. Ja`far (d. ca. 320/932), (Köprülü Library MS. 1076, published in facsimile by F. Sezgin [Frankfurt, 1986]), 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],p. 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

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 -- too would have liked a similar work produced for himself.[107] In the absence of conclusive evidence to the contrary, therefore, 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 such advice as would help regulate 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 of course complementary: it is evidently assumed that to organize affairs according to the given traditions and opinions is to ensure the justice and efficiency of the system.

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, the *wazīr* (ibid.).

[107] Abū `Ubayd Allāh Mū`āwiyā 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 (330-33/940-43) had a *wazīr*, `Abd al-Rahmān 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, *Kitāb 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-Rahmān b. `Īsā had himself been a *kātib*, as was Qudāma b. Ja`far [see n. 106, above]; for other examples, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, pp. 145, 151.)

While the bulk of the treatise addresses itself to intricate matters of financial administration, Abū Yūsuf's introduction to this work has a much wider scope and significance. The main body of the work is not without interest for our purposes either, as will become apparent in due course.

A salient characteristic of the work under discussion is Abū Yūsuf's exhortation to the caliph, in explicit terms in the introduction and implicitly throughout the treatise, to conform to and revive the *sunna* of *al-qawm al-ṣālihūn*.[108] The *sunna* which the caliph is being referred to is apparently similar to, though far more concretely perceived and known than, what al-ʿAnbarī 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, ʿUmar I, ʿAlī, etc. as regards the caliphal function -- also serve to conjure up the image of a "golden age" in the past.[109]

Furthermore, inasmuch as the *sunna*, which the caliph is called upon to revive and conform to, is a precisely known entity, it is the ʿulamā' who are its living legatees.[110] 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, again, it is the scholars who are the repositories -- may legitimately be taken to argue for the scholars' religious authority.

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[108] *Kharāj*, p. 71; also cf. Abū Yūsuf's reference to those he calls "*al-wulāt al-mahdiyyūn*", though without further identification, ibid., pp. 171, 174.

[109] Cf. *Kharāj*, pp. 84ff.

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

While Abū Yūsuf seeks to inculcate political quietism and affirms `Abbāsid legitimism (as will presently be seen), he is rather reticent when it comes to the question of the *caliph's* authority in religious matters, a question which he does not forthrightly address. The caliphs are God's deputies on earth (*khi:lafā' fī ardihi*), and are endowed with a "light" whereby they clarify and resolve matters which are obscure to their subjects.[111] 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 Shī'ite imām.[112] 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-ṣālihūn*, promote justice, and, of course, explain obscure matters.[113] 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.[114]

The implications of Abū Yūsuf's implied recognition of the sovereign as the caliph *of God* are rather uncertain, though considering that the classical Sunnī juristic theory of the caliphate rejects such a characterization, this recognition is of interest. More interesting, however, is Abū Yūsuf's reference to the caliph's function of clarifying matters obscure to his subjects. Such a function had already been noted by al-`Anbarī, if rather obliquely, and was expressed in explicit terms by the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd himself, as we will see

[111]   *Kharāj*, p. 71.

[112]   On the notion of a divine light and its function and significance for the imāms in Imāmī Shī'ism, see U. Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors in early Shī'a Tradition", *JSAI*, I (1979), pp. 41-65. Early `Abbāsid poets, too, liked to use the imagery of light for the caliphs: for some examples, see Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 82, n. 15.

[113]   *Kharāj*, p. 71.

[114]   Note Abū Yūsuf's invocation of certain eschatological verses of the Qur'ān and of some *hadīth* to state this point forcefully. *Kharāj*, pp. 69, 75ff. Cf. P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 253, n. 536.

in due course. A group of the "'Abbāsid Shī'a", 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.[115] The appearance of this motif in Abū Yūsuf's *Kitāb al-Kharāj* is of some interest, then, in that one might sense here some measure of religious authority being recognized for the caliph. Yet, the caliph's function of clarifying obscure matters, that Abū Yūsuf speaks of, need not be any different from the 'ulamā's obligation to do the same. The caliph may not define, any more than the 'ulamā' can, what the people must believe; but it is his function to clarify, as the 'ulamā' must too, matters which are obscure. We shall return to this striking affinity between some of the functions of the caliph and the 'ulamā' later.

Another feature of the *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, which is of interest here, is a two-fold advocacy of the 'Abbāsid cause: through political quietism and 'Abbāsid 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*. Both may be discussed in turn, if at the cost of some digression.

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.[116] 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, in the work under review here, with obedience to

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[115] Cf. pseudo- al-Nāshi' al-Akbar, *Masā'il al-Imāma*, in J. van Ess, *Frühe mu'tazilitische Häresiographie* (Beirut, 1971), p. 36 (of the Arabic text).

[116] As the Murji'ite-Hanafite treatise *al-Fiqh al-absaṭ*, p. 44, puts it.

God, with reference to a famous *hadīth*, and much else is adduced to the same effect.[117] An unjust imām might be the worst of creatures in the sight of God,[118] but the imām's answerability evidently is to God alone -- not to the people. The political quietism being advocated here is not in itself very remarkable, however. 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 *hadīth* and *āthār* to present quietism virtually as a criterion of orthodoxy shows not just his own diligen.. e, but also that the quietist view had by this time become, or was fast becoming, the standard one among proto-Sunnī religious scholars.[119] That the chief *qāḍī* should be the one to articulate this position also seems eminently appropriate, of course. 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. Some examples may be noted here.

In one of the reports which Abū Yūsuf quotes on *khums*, Ibn ʿAbbās is represented as asserting, in answer to a query about where the share of the *dhawu'l-qurbā'* belongs: "it belongs to us" (*wa huwa lanā*).[120] 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*

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[117] *Kharāj*, p. 80 (tradition nr. 20), and generally, pp. 79ff.

[118] Cf. ibid., p. 78 (tradition nr. 15).

[119] Cf. 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.

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

share having been permanently diverted to some state-expenditures;[121] yet another report has `Alī, after he became caliph, continue the practice of his predecessors in not assigning a share out of *khums* to the *dhawu'l-qurbā'*.[122] These last two reports seem to betray a polemical concern: they are apparently a response to some Shī`ite claims about the injustice of the *dhawu'l-qurbā's* having been denied their shares by `Umar or `Uthmān. It is suggested therefore that `Alī concurred in the earlier caliphs' decisions on this matter, and may himself have been responsible for the discontinuation of these shares. 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, `Alī's respect for and recognition of the authority of his predecessors. Such reports are not the figment of Abū Yūsuf's imagination; they are attested in other sources as well.[123] That they figure here, and elsewhere in proto-Sunnī sources, means however that `Abbāsid legitimism and proto-Sunnī sentiment could converge. Some aspects of such convergence will be analyzed in chapter V.

A somewhat more dramatic expression of `Abbāsid legitimism occurs in the context of Abū Yūsuf's discussion of the *dīwān* instituted by `Umar I.[124] 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 5,000, which was equivalent to that of the companions fighting on Muhammad's side at Badr -- `Alī having been one of them -- and

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[121] *Kharāj*, pp. 103f. (sec. 4, tradition nr. 8).

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

[123] Cf. Abū `Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ed. M. H. al-Fiqī (Cairo, 1353 A.H.), pp. 332 (paras 847-49), 334f. (para 852).

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

to that of his two sons. In other words, no extra-ordinary merit is recognized for `Alī, while that of al-`Abbās, the uncle of the Prophet, is clearly affirmed.[125]

Abū Yūsuf need not have invented the traditions about al-`Abbās being given the *highest* share; nevertheless, a comparison of his traditions with those in some other works is not without interest. Ibn Sa`d and al-Balādhurī (whose account of `Umar's *dīwān* is closely .. .'elled on that of Ibn Sa`d) describe in some detail the shares allocated to different individuals and categories,[126] but 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 -- 12,000 -- and that the share of al-`Abbās, `Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn was 5000 each, equal to the amount allotted to the *ahl al-Badr*. Another view, according to which the share of al-`Abbās was 7000, is noted, but it is immediately followed by the statement of historiographical "consensus" (*wa qāla sā'iruhum*) that "[`Umar] 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".[127] The account of Ibn Sa`d and al-Balādhurī, in so far as it concerns al-`Abbās, 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 al-Badr* (a share he did not deserve) 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 Shī`īte al-Ya`qūbī reports, unsurprisingly, that in instituting the *dīwān*, `Umar began by alloting a share to `Alī, though he does note the variant view that `Umar may have begun with al-`Abbās. In any case, according to al-Ya`qūbī, while some of the Prophet's wives

[125]   *Kharāj*, pp. 142ff.

[126]   Ibn Sa`d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, ed. E. Sachau et al. (Leiden, 1905-40), III, ii, pp. 212-220; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden, 1866), pp. 448ff.

[127]   Ibn Sa`d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, III, ii, p. 213; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, p. 451.

had a share amounting to 12,000 and `Alī's share (together with that of many others) was 5000, that of al-`Abbās was only 3000.[128] Abū `Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, a younger contemporary of Abū Yūsuf, did not, for his part, even mention al-`Abbās or his share while discussing `Umar's *dīwān*.[129] al-Ṭabarī, however, comes closest to the figures of Abū Yūsuf, if only to bypass them: according to his account, `Umar began with al-`Abbās and allotted him twenty-five thousand dirhams (!), or, according to another report, twelve thousand.[130] The confusion of these accounts does not obscure some of the tendencies at work in them, though this is not the occasion to dwell on these tendencies. Suffice it to say that if, with the exception of al-Ṭabarī, Abū Yūsuf goes to such lengths in affirming the unrivalled status of al-`Abbās, that effort is definitely to be regarded as expressing his legitimist agenda.

In concluding our discussion of the *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, the following observations may be made.

While Abū Yūsuf affirms the `ulamā's position as the locus of religious authority, he does not take everything away from the caliph. He is more elusive than al-`Anbarī -- who himself is no model of clarity on the subject of the caliph's religious authority. While al-`Anbarī affirms the caliph's competence in, and function of, *ijtihād* and making legal decisions, Abū Yūsuf is silent on the matter. Yet Abū Yūsuf does recognize, as already noted, the caliph's function of explaining obscure matters, which may be taken as a recognition of the active role the caliph is expected to play in religious life.

Abū Yūsuf's concern to provide for a close relationship of the `ulamā' with the state

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[128]   al-Ya`qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. M. J. Houtsma (Leiden, 1883), II, p. 175.

[129]   *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, pp. 223-27 (paras 547-57).

[130]   al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, pp. 2412f.

also deserves notice. In the *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, he appears to envisage an effective participation of the `ulamā' in the affairs of the state. For instance, when he repeatedly urges that the administrative cadres be staffed by trusted, pious, and God-fearing men, this exhortation to the caliph is interpretable as an advice to recruit more people from the religious circles.[131] Abū Yūsuf may have intended the `ulamā's participation in the administration as a mechanism to reform administrative abuses or one whereby the task of reviving the *sunna* of old might be undertaken. But it may as well be that in calling for their involvement, he wanted the `ulamā' to have a direct stake in the `Abbāsid state, which 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 which the early `Abbāsids dreaded so much.

III.3.iv

The *qāḍī al-quḍāt* Abū Yūsuf was manifestly pro-`Abbāsid, and the Baṣran *qāḍī* `Ubaydallāh al-`Anbarī -- despite his troubles with al-Mahdī -- was also favourably disposed towards the `Abbāsids, as the tenor of his letter shows, apart from other indications to the same effect.[132] The thinking of both may, therefore, be taken at least to represent attitudes in pro-`Abbāsid religious circles. They may be more representative than that, inasmuch as few `ulamā' would have disputed our authors' contention that religious scholars were the bearers of the sacred tradition and the locus of religious authority, or that the caliphs ought to conform to and revive the *sunna* of the pious forbears. On the other hand, many from the religious circles would have taken exception as much to Abū Yūsuf's legitimist agenda as to our authors' pleas for closer association

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[131] Cf. *Kharāj*, pp. 204 (sec. 129), 247 (sec. 188, 189), 252 (sec. 198), 253 (sec. 200), 288 (sec. 220), etc; cf. also the editor's comments on pp. 54f. Perhaps even more specifically, the advice could have referred to the Ḥanafīs! Abū Yūsuf is, after all, known to have patronized the *madhhab* he belonged to, his contribution to its development having scarcely been confined to the purely intellectual sphere.

[132] Cf. van Ess, "La liberté", p. 28; Blay-Abramski, "The Judiciary", p. 66.

between the caliphs and the `ulamā'. In any case, neither al-`Anbarī nor Abū Yūsuf claimed to speak on behalf of all the `ulamā' (!), and the `Abbāsids certainly would have known better even if they did.

So far as the `Abbāsid caliphs prior to al-Ma'mūn are concerned, the lines on which al-`Anbarī and Abū Yūsuf were thinking seem to have suited their interests. As discussed already, caliphal religious policies generally tended towards courting the `ulamā's favour and playing up the caliph's role of defending 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, and one in conspicuously submitting to which he could enhance his religious image.

That both al-`Anbarī and Abū Yūsuf appear, despite their differences, to restrict the scope of caliphal authority in religious matters -- by affirming the primacy of that of the `ulamā' -- may seem rather more problematic from the `Abbāsid viewpoint. But before al-Ma'mūn took the initiative, the caliphs do not seem to have attempted to wrest religious authority from the hands of the `ulamā' -- for all that Ibn al-Muqaffa` thought that it really was the caliph's preprogative to exercise it. They may not have had a choice in this respect,[133] but it is nevertheless noteworthy that, in our sources, they come across as little concerned to lay claim to it, nor are they particularly bothered by the fact that it was being denied to them by the `ulamā'.[134] It is, after all, Mālik whom the caliph is

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[133] As Crone and Hinds argue, *God's Caliph*, pp. 83ff. But cf. V.2.i, below.

[134] That the `ulamā' were unanimous in this respect should not, however, be taken for granted, and the Mu`tazilī `ulamā' collaborating with al-Ma'mūn during the *Miḥna* need not have been the only exception. Abū Ḥassān al-Ziyādī, one of those summoned for interrogation by the governor of Baghdād at the outset of the *Miḥna*, said for example: "... the Commander of the Faithful is our Imām, *and by means of him we have heard the whole sum of knowledge. He has heard what we have not heard, and he knows what we do not know.* God has invested him with the rule over us; he upholds the pilgrimage and the worship for us, we hand over to him the poor tax levied on our wealth, we fight on his side in the holy war and we

supposed to have asked to codify law rather than taking the initiative himself. Further, if Abū Yūsuf is seen to define the caliph's function in terms which do not seem to hold out much of a promise for his religious authority, one would do well to bear in mind that these thoughts came from someone who belonged to the official establishment, was writing under royal patronage, and was not likely to antagonize the caliph by what he was suggesting.

It does seem then that in general terms (and at least for rhetorical purposes), the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs came to accept the ʿulamāʾs vision of both their own and the latter's function and position, a development which seems to have matured by the time of Hārūn. By that time, the ʿAbbāsids had firmly aligned themselves with the emergent proto-Sunnī trends, the contours of which were themselves by now becoming clearer, as Abū Yūsuf for one bears witness. While the caliph's function of upholding the ordinances of God was a motif familiar from earlier on, that of maintaining an orthodox tradition, of which

recognize his imāmate as a true one. So if he commands us, we obey his orders; and if he forbids us from doing something, we desist; and if he calls upon us, we respond to him." (al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III, p. 1123; translation as in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. XXXII, tr. C. E. Bosworth (Albany, 1987), p. 211 (emphasis added).

The first part of this remarkable statement suggests the possibility that some scholars were prepared to give the caliphs more religious authority than would have been acceptable to many within their own ranks, more in fact than caliphs prior to al-Maʾmūn seem themselves to have demanded. It must be remembered, however, that this statement comes from someone under interrogation during the *Miḥna*. al-Maʾmūn after all was engaged precisely in asserting his *religious* authority, and a remark such as the foregoing may simply have been intended to placate the caliph and his governor. Abū Hassān goes on, in fact, and suggests to the governor that while the caliph had to be obeyed, he himself may not have intended to enforce what he personally believed on a matter such as the Qurʾān's createdness. In other words, Abū Hassān was probably trying at once to placate the caliph / his governor, and to insinuate that the *Miḥna* might simply be based on a misunderstanding (of caliphal intent?). It is conceivable, therefore, that this scholar's disquisition on caliphal authority is more a way of somehow circumventing the *Miḥna* than the result of genuine conviction. Conversely, it is certainly possible that Abū Hassān (and some others?) really believed in a unique kind of caliphal religious authority. That it is a scholar who is here recognizing the caliph's religious authority, if that is indeed the case, is of considerable interest: it shows that even if there was a conflict over religious authority between caliphs and the ʿulamāʾ (and apart from

the `ulamā' were clearly acknowledged to be the representatives, appears to be a more recent development. The development was patronized by the caliphs prior to al-Ma'mūn as a necessary corollary -- or rather, manifestation -- of their commitment to the emergent orthodoxy. Abū Yūsuf's statements, analyzed in the foregoing, are to be understood not so much as blazing the trail -- inasmuch as this development is concerned -- as echoing and sanctioning, no less than otherwise contributing to, the process of its crystallization. Some of the statements attributed to Hārūn, if authentic, would confirm in turn that the caliph subscribed to a view of his function which was not dissimilar to what Abū Yūsuf had envisaged for him.

The following passage from Hārūn's letter of appointment to Harthama b. A`yan, appointed governor of Khurāsān, illustrates the caliph's vision:

> 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.... When he is faced with anything doubtful and uncertain, he should pause and consult those with a systematic training and acquaintanceship with God's religion and those knowledgeable about the Book of God, or alternatively, he should refer it to his Imām, so that God, He is magnified and exalted, may make manifest to him His judgement in the matter and so that he may execute it according to his right guidance.[135]

Abū Yūsuf, or any proto-Sunnī scholar for that matter, could have little to disagree with on the advice to consult local religious scholars. But the caliph's point about the

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the *Miḥna* there is no evidence of that), the latter should not simply be ranged all on the same side in such a contest.

On Abū Ḥassān al-Ziyādī (d. 242), who was later to serve as *qāḍī* of the Sharqiyya quarter of Baghdād for al-Mutawakkil, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 123; *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, VII, pp. 356-61 (nr. 3877); Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 316.

[135] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 717; translation as in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXX, tr. Bosworth, p. 274; also cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 89; Blay-Abramski, "The Judiciary", p. 71. Compare the point about the caliph clarifying obscure matters to similar statements by al-`Anbarī and Abū Yūsuf, discussed earlier: see nn. 83 and 111, above. 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, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 664f.) may also be compared with Abū Yūsuf's disquisition on the caliph's role (*Kharāj*, p. 71).

option of referring the problem at hand to the imām, i.e. the caliph, need not have been unpalatable either. Precisely the same point also figures, after all, in Abū Yūsuf's advice to the caliph, as seen earlier. The recognition that the ʿulamā' and the caliph are *both* fit to rule on obscure matters is thus independently attested from both a scholar and a caliph. The caliph's authority to clarify matters seems to be equated to the authority of the ʿulamā' to do so, which may in turn suggest not only a recognition that the latter are the locus of religious authority but also 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 ʿulamā'. Mālik, for instance, recognised the caliph's *ijtihād*[136] as apparently did Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal too;[137] later al-Māwardī was to speak of "the knowledge which conduces to *ijtihād* in problems which occur (*nawāzil*) and in legal decisions (*aḥkām*)" as one of the seven preconditions for *imāma*.[138] That Harthama should have been advised to refer problematic issues to local scholars *or to the caliph* is a reference to two sources of guidance the governor might turn to but does not suggest two different kinds of religious authority.

The following report, which relates to a Baṣran *qāḍī* of Hārūn, should illustrate that the caliph's advice to Harthama can be read in yet another way as well. A woman brought a case to the *qāḍī*, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Makhzūmī, but seems to have grown impatient with the *qāḍī's* slow handling of it.

So [the *qāḍī*] said [to her]: 'Your case is difficult; you will have to wait ... if I am to

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

[137] See the "Qiṭʿa min Muqaddimat al-Shaykh al-Imām Abī Muḥammad b. Tamīm al-Ḥanbalī fī ʿAqīdat al-Imām al-mubajjal Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal..", appended to Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī (Cairo, 1952), II, p. 280.

[138] al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya*, ed. M. Enger (Bonn, 1853), p. 5. On al-Māwardī and the "classical" 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; also cf. N. Calder, "Friday Prayer and the Juristic Theory of Government: Sarakhsī, Shīrāzī, Māwardī", *BSOAS*, XLIX (1986), pp. 35-47.

understand it properly. But if you want me to refer the case to the *amīr*, who can gather the Baṣran *fuqahā'* for you, I will 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.'[139]

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. 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.[140]

Resolving legal problems was thus not only the ʿulamā's business but was a calling which, 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 let the latter alone give their verdict, or chose from their conflicting advice, the decision was in a sense the caliph's.[141] As the anecdote about the Baṣran *qāḍī* illustrates, however, the caliph was

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[139] Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, II, p. 142.

[140] Qudāma b. Ja'far, *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, p. 23.

[141] Cf. al-Kindī, *Quḍāt*, p. 413 (cited in Tyan, *L'Organisation judiciare*, 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*, 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 ʿalā 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-Muʿtamid) choosing between the scholars' conflicting advice, see D. Sourdel, *Le vizirat abbaside de 749 a 936* (Damascus, 1959-60), I, pp. 342f.; idem, "L'Autorité califienne dans le monde sunnite", in G. Makdisi et al., eds., *La notion d'autorité au moyen âge: Islam, Byzance, Occident* (Paris, 1982), p. 110.

expected -- and known -- to consult the *fuqahā'* on such occasions.

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*. The `ulamā', therefore, are the locus of religious authority, a position Abū Yūsuf argued for and one in which Hārūn al-Rashīd seems to have concurred. 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. Ḥusayn, al-Ma'mūn's governor of Khurāsān, is said to have addressed to his son. Written on the latter's appointment as the governor of Diyār Rabī`a ca. 206/822, 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 esablished practices of the faith and of putting them into action...[142]

It is not without irony that Ṭāhir should emphatically have endorsed the `ulamā's position and importance for the ruler during the reign of a caliph who was to make the most massive effort in `Abbāsid history to undo this position. Ṭāhir's views bear testimony to the recognition, by ruling circles, of the `ulamā's position; it was a recognition that the ruler's legitimacy and an orthodox image were both contingent on

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[142] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, 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. On this epistle see also A.-H. O. M. Dawood, "A Comparative Study of Arabic and Persian Mirrors for Princes from the Second to the Sixth Century A.H." Ph.D. diss., Univ. of London, 1965, pp. 132ff.; W. al-Qāḍī, "An Early Fāṭimid Political Document", *SI*, XLVIII (1978), pp. 91ff.

patronizing the ʿulamāʾ, and conforming to their viewpoint. 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, al-Maʾmūn had not yet embarked on his confrontation with the ʿulamāʾ; still, it strains one's credulity to regard the caliph as having approved of the aforementioned aspect of the epistle's contents.[143] As mentioned already, al-Maʾmūn made a bold effort to change the terms on which the relationship of the caliphs and the ʿulamāʾ had come to be based. The caliph's venture failed, however. It was a failure which only reaffirmed the contours of a pattern that had already begun to emerge. Before concluding this chapter, we may briefly examine the significance of al-Maʾmūn's move and its consequences.

III.4. THE MIḤNA AND ITS AFTERMATH

III.4.i.

For all his distinctiveness, al-Maʾmūn was clearly not the first to attempt bringing the ʿulamāʾ under caliphal control. Given their concern to bolster the legitimacy of the dynasty and enhance caliphal prestige on the one hand, and their suspicions regarding the ʿulamāʾ and the latter's autonomous position on the other, the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs had consistently tried to exert some influence over the ʿulamāʾ. For instance, the ʿAbbāsids had assumed a greater measure of direct control over the appointment of judges than had been the case under the previous regime.[144] The office of the qāḍī al-quḍāt, which originated in the time of Hārūn, also illustrates tendencies towards centralizing judicial administration.[145] Further, pace Schacht, the patronage of the Ḥanafī scholars need not

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[143] For what it is worth, we do have a report about al-Maʾmūn's having greatly appreciated the epistle (Bosworth, "Mirror for Princes", pp. 29f.).

[144] Cf. E. Tyan, Histoire de l'organisation judiciare en pays d'Islam (Leiden, 1960), pp. 120ff.; Blay-Abramski, "From Damascus to Baghdad", pp. 152f.; idem, "The Judiciary", pp. 57f.

[145] Tyan, L'organisation judiciare, pp. 124ff.; Blay-Abramski, "From Damascus to Baghdad", pp. 153ff.

have been due only to Abū Yūsuf,[146] but even if it was, it may still indicate the concern of the early caliphs to exert influence over at least some religious circles in a more or less organized manner.[147]

Where his predecessors had sought legitimacy and religious prestige in associating with the 'ulamā', all while trying to exert some influence over them, al-Ma'mūn made efforts not just to bring the traditionalist 'ulamā' firmly under his control but to effectively break their power.[148] That this was the only reason why the Miḥna was instituted, towards the end of his reign, is not being suggested here.[149] Nor was the Miḥna an isolated event: it was preceded by other implicit challenges to the traditionalist, proto-Sunnī 'ulamā', such as the caliph's proclamations that Mu'āwiya was not to be favourably mentioned,[150] that 'Alī was to be ranked above all other companions of the Prophet,[151] and, of course, that the Qur'ān was the "created" word of God.[152] Whatever other commitments and motives the caliph may have had, it is hard to imagine that in having

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[146] J. Schacht, "Modernism and Traditionalism in a History of Islamic Law", *Middle Eastern Studies*, I (1964-65), p. 398; also cf. ibid., p. 390. (For N. J. Coulson's views on early 'Abbāsid patronage of the Hanafī *madhhab* and its significance, which Schacht disputes in this review of Coulson's book, see *A History of Islamic Law* [Edinburgh, 1964], pp. 37f. 87). The influence of Abū Yūsuf would surely have played an important role in promoting appointment of Hanafite judges. It seems nevertheless that the Hanafites were rather more willing than members of other schools to accomodate themselves to officially sponsored viewpoints, which may be no less a reason why they were patronized. (For its part, such willingness might, *inter alia*, have owed something to the increasing pressure on these scholars to conform to the methods of their traditionalist rivals, and the former's concern to preserve and expand their school, if only through royal patronage.) It is noteworthy that during the *Miḥna*, many of the judges conducting the inquisition were Hanafites: cf. *EI*(2), s.v. "al-Miḥna" (M. Hinds). (This example ought not to be taken too far, however: for non-Hanafite judges were also involved in the *Miḥna*, and some prominent Hanafites figured among those who were questioned or persecuted during the inquisition. Cf. ibid.; W. M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* [Edinburgh, 1973], pp. 284f.) On the preponderance of Hanafī judges in the early 'Abbāsid judicial administration see 'Abd al-Razzāq 'Alī al-Anbārī, *Manṣib Qāḍī al-Quḍāt fī'l-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya* (Beirut, 1987), pp. 66ff.

[147] Note, however, that such judicial organization, for instance, as took place in the time of the caliph Hārūn eventually served to strengthen rather than curb the autonomy of the judiciary. Cf. Blay-Abramski, "The Judiciary", pp. 56ff., 71.

the 'ulamā's belief as regards the Qur'ān examined al-Ma'mūn did not intend to humiliate them and to assert his own authority over them.

While the earlier caliphs had seen their interest in seeking legitimacy and an "orthodox" image *from* the 'ulamā', al-Ma'mūn tried to bring in question the 'ulamā's own "orthodoxy". 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".[153] In his communications to the governor of Baghdād, 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[154] - the implication again being that it was from the state that such a recognition was to be had. Conversely, only those who subscribed to it could serve as *qāḍīs*, and they would also have to function as agents of the state in

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[148]   Cf. P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 258, n. 608. To the same effect, al-Ma'mūn savagely attacked the reputation of many of them, attempting to expose such of their actual or alleged failings as he felt would discredit them best: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 1127ff.; cf. J. van Ess, "Ibn Kullāb et la *Miḥna*", *Arabica*, XXXVII (1990), p. 179. (This article was originally published, in German, in *Oriens*, XVIII-XIX, 1965-66.) As van Ess notes (ibid., *loc. cit.*), al-Ma'mūn seems to have kept himself very well-informed about the affairs of the 'ulamā'.

[149]   For the sources and studies on the *Miḥna*, see *EI*(2), s.v. Also cf. ibid., s.v. "al-Ma'mūn" (M. Rekaya).

[150]   al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 1098. This proclamation, which the chief *qāḍī*, Yaḥyā' b. al-Aktham, is said to have dissuaded al-Ma'mūn from enforcing, suggests that the traditionalist 'ulamā's veneration for Mu'āwiya may have been seen by the caliph not just as an anti-Shī'ite gesture but also as a veiled attack on 'Abbāsid legitimism. (On such traditionalist veneration, see C. Pellat, "Le culte de Mu'āwiya au IIIe siècle de l'hégire", *SI*, VI (1956), pp. 53-66.) In attempting to curb the veneration for Mu'āwiya, al-Ma'mūn was not only asserting a more emphatic view of 'Abbāsid legitimism than what many traditionalist 'ulamā' allowed; he was also challenging as aspect of the latter's world-view, and asserting his own prerogative to define it. Also cf. Nagel, *Rechtleitung*, p. 441.

[151]   al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 1099. Traditionalist 'ulamā', for their part, were keen to stress that 'Alī had no special merit vis-à-vis the other companions of the Prophet

imposing and upholding this doctrine.[155]

al-Ma'mūn's effort may be seen therefore as tending towards limiting, if not destroying, the 'ulamā's autonomous position in society, and bringing them under his direction and control. This purpose could hardly be pursued without some claim to religious authority on the caliph's part. There must, of course, have been other reasons too why this caliph, apparently for the first time in the 'Abbāsid political tradition, claimed some religious authority for himself, more or less of a sort Shī'ite imāms were supposed to possess.[156] The point, however, is that if he was to be able to attack the 'ulamā' on the lines on which he chose to, some pretension to religious authority on the caliph's part was a prerequisite. It may be that al-Ma'mūn's conflict with the 'ulamā' was provoked by his assertion of religious authority, to which he naturally saw the 'ulamā' as a threat. Conversely, his claims to religious authority may themselves have been provoked, *inter alia*, by his concern to effectively challenge the authority of the 'ulamā'. Either way, his claim to religious authority was a basic concomitant of his attack on the 'ulamā'.

(cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-sunna*, pp. 187ff., 204f., where traditions making 'Alī himself affirm this viewpoint are quoted at length). Note, too, that it was only later in life that Ibn Ḥanbal came to accept that 'Alī too had been one of the rightly-guided caliphs, if only the fourth in order of merit: *EI(2)*, s.v. "Imāma " (W. Madelung); cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-sunna*, pp. 194-215 passim.

[152] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 1099.

[153] Note that in his communications to the governor of Baghdād, 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, *Ta'rīkh*, III, 1130) -- which is what his traditionalist critics said it was.

[154] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 1120.

[155] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 1116.

[156] Cf. D. Sourdel, "La politique religieuse du calife 'abbāside al-Ma'mūn", *REI*, XXX (1962), pp. 27-48; Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 94.

After the death of al-Ma'mūn, the *Miḥna* continued in operation under his two immediate successors. Rather curiously, though, al-Ma'mūn's claims to religious authority were neglected, and in this sense there already was a reversion to the pre-Ma'mūnid tradition. Why his immediate successors allowed his claims to fall in abeyance is not clear, though it is possible that unlike al-Ma'mūn, they did not consider them crucial to a confrontation with the ʿulamā'. But then they may not have been very convinced of the merits of having a confrontation with the ʿulamā' either. Under al-Muʿtaṣim and al-Wāthiq, the *Miḥna* did not exactly become a dead-letter, but it lost much of its point.[157] It was now not so much the caliph's initiative as that of some ʿulamā' -- most notably the chief *qāḍī*, Ibn Abī Du'ād[158] -- associated with the caliph and with this policy of persecution, which seems to have kept the *Miḥna* alive. The caliph again became only the guardian of this new "orthodoxy", not its authoritative source -- as al-Ma'mūn once strived to be.

But if the ʿulamā' were to run the show anyway, it was certainly better to let those who enjoyed greater support amongst the populace do so; and if the caliph was only to be the guardian and defender of an "orthodoxy", then it was clearly more sensible to enact that role with regard to the increasingly more influential proto-Sunnī Islam, to which the predecessors of al-Ma'mūn had, for a variety of reasons, consistently been drawn.[159] In decreeing an end to the *Miḥna*, and bringing the traditionalist ʿulamā' back into royal favour, al-Mutawakkil could scarcely have been ignorant of this consideration.

III.4.ii

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[157]   van Ess, "Ibn Kullāb et la *Miḥna*", pp. 177f.

[158]   For a sympathetic biography of Ibn Abī Du'ād see van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III, pp. 481-502.

[159]   The question why the early ʿAbbāsids were drawn towards proto-Sunnī trends is addressed in V.2, below.

`ulamā' might still be led to seek the activist alternative.[162] Ahmad b. Nasr's move could not have had much support among the `ulamā', however, as is suggested not only by the unequivocally quietist, and loyalist, credal statements of Ahmad b. Hanbal[163] but also by the latter's explicit opposition to this move.[164] That Ibn Hanbal and his associates should have persevered in a quietist stance vis a vis the caliph -- even though they regarded belief in the "created" Qur'ān upheld by al-Ma'mūn, al-Wāthiq, and al-Mu`tasim as amounting to *kufr* and the one professing it as worthy of being put to death[165] -- shows how important quietism had become as a tenet of orthodoxy.

Despite its significance, the *Mihna* did not alter but only confirmed the trends and tendencies which were emerging before it was instituted. Contrary to what is sometimes suggested,[166] 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. In terminating the *Mihna*, it was precisely this role of being the defender of the faith that al-Mutawakkil was asserting, and Ibn Hanbal is on record as having acknowledged it for the caliph.[167]

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[162] al-Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 1343ff.

[163] Cf. Abū Ya`lā' Ibn al-Farrā', *Tabaqāt al-Hanābila*, I, pp. 26f., quoted in Madelung, *Religious Trends*, p. 25. Also cf. Z. Ahmad, "Some Aspects of the Political Theology of Ahmad b. Hanbal", *Islamic Studies*, XII (1973), p. 55.

[164] al-Khallāl, *al-Musnad min Masā'il Abī `Abdallāh Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Hanbal*, Brit. Lib. MS. Or. 2675, fol. 10 b; Ibn Hanbal was equally opposed to the vigilante movement of Sahl b. Salāma: ibid., fol. 11 b.

[165] Cf. Ibn Hanbal, *Kitāb al-sunna*, pp. 4, 7, 9ff., etc.; al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 185 a.

[166] For example, by Lapidus, "Separation of State and Religion".

[167] Cf. Ahmad, "Political Theology", p. 55. The conception of the caliph's position that was crystallized in the classical Sunnī political thought turns on this same role; and the political weakness that came to afflict the `Abbāsid caliphate from the middle of the ninth century A.D. notwithstanding, there are many instances when the caliphs asserted their guardianship of the faith with considerable force and effectiveness. See IV.3, below.

"According to Ahmad b. Hanbal," Lapidus writes, "it was the duty of the `ulamā' 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 Ahmad's view is to circumscribe the authority of the Caliphs in religious matters and, though Ahmad did not have a language to express it, to recognize a practical distinction between secular and religious authority."[168] Ibn Hanbal certainly did not have to be convinced of the `ulamā'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 Hanbal's views in this regard comes from a later Hanbalī, Abū Muhammad Rizq Allāh b. `Abd al-Wahhāb al-Tamīmī (d. 488):

> [Ibn Hanbal] 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-sultān), 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.[169]

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168 Lapidus, "Separation of State and Religion", p. 383.

169 "Qitʿa min Muqaddimat al-Shaykh al-Imām Abī Muhammad b. Tamīm al-Hanbalī fī `Aqīdat al-Imām al-Mubajjal Ahmad b. Hanbal", published together with Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, Tabaqāt al-Hanābila, II, p. 280. On Abū Muhammad, the source of this

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 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 involved in it, than are the `ulamā'. A difference of function in and by itself does not necessarily signify a *separation* of state and religion; nor are the functions all too rigidly separated: the caliph too exercizes his *ijtihād* after all, and with the `ulamā' establishing the proofs of religion he too dispels the rebels' doubts to bring them back to the commnity's fold. We shall look more closely at various aspects of early `Abbāsid involvement in religious life in the following chapter.

`aqīda, see Ibn Rajab al-Baghdādî, *Kitāb al-Dhayl `alā Tabaqāt al-Hanābila*, ed. H. Laoust and S. Dahan (Damascus, 1951), pp. 96-106. Even if the views attributed to Ibn Hanbal here are not really his, they may still reflect the thinking of Hanbalî circles and be significant for that reason.

Chapter IV

EARLY `ABBASID PATRONAGE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

IV.1

This chapter proposes to discuss some facets of the ʿAbbāsids' involvement in religious life in the first century of their rule. This theme has figured frequently in the previous chapter, where certain initiatives towards defining the relationship of the early ʿAbbāsids and the ʿulamā' were reviewed. That both ʿUbayd Allāh al-ʿAnbarī and Abū Yūsuf sought, in defining the caliph's role, to effectively integrate it into the ʿulamā's world-view and the community's religious life has already been observed. It will now be shown -- in the first part of this chapter -- that the caliphs, for their part, also tried to present themselves in the garb of ʿulamā'. This peculiar initiative had several expressions which will be documented and their possible implications assessed. In playing the ʿālim's part the ʿAbbāsids could, by virtue of the political authority they wielded, also *intervene* in religious life besides otherwise participating in it. It will be argued, in the second part of the following discussion, that, with the major and dramatic exception of the *Miḥna*, early ʿAbbāsid interventions are interpretable as upholding rather than contravening proto-Sunnī viewpoints, and thus are an expression of ʿAbbāsid patronage of the proto-Sunnī ʿulamā'. The third and final section of this chapter will review other prominent expressions of the early ʿAbbāsid patronage of the ʿulamā', and the significance of this patronage for the latter.

IV.2 *ʿAbbāsid Caliphs as ʿUlamā'*

IV.2.i

An anecdote in al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's *Taʾrīkh Baghdād* depicts a scholar named ʿUmar b. Ḥabīb al-ʿAdawī successfully interceding with al-Maʾmūn 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 (*isnād*) which he invoked for this tradition was none other than an ʿAbbāsid family *isnād*: Ibn

`Abbās, who heard it from the Prophet himself, had reported it to his son `Alī, from whom it was successively transmitted through his direct descendants -- Muḥammad b. `Alī, Abū Ja`far 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 more than was expected of it: the man being interceded for was set free, and the scholar himself was appointed a *qāḍī*. al-Ma'mūn then asked the latter: "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."[1]

This anecdote is probably fictitious;[2] yet the general point it makes about the caliph's interest in *ḥadīth* needs -- as will be shown in due course -- to be taken seriously. If the story were, for the sake of 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.

The early `Abbāsid caliphs were much concerned to patronize the `ulamā' and did so

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1 al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādi, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād* (Cairo, 1931), XI, p. 199 (nr. 5903).

2 Interceding through *ḥadīth* may be a literary motif: cf. the anecdote which depicts al-Mubārak b. Fuḍāla (d. 164) successfully interceding with al-Manṣūr for a man's life by quoting a *ḥadīth* (*Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIII, p. 212 [nr. 7183]). The tradition came from Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, of whom, according to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Manṣūr was very fond. Ibn al-Fuḍāla appears to have put this fondness to good account by frequently narrating to the caliph traditions on Ḥasan's authority (ibid., p. 214).

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 ʿ*ālim's* vocation -- the caliphs appear to have been seeking admission into the ranks of the ʿulamāʾ as well.

Typically the *ḥadīth* a caliph is said to have reported would have an ʿAbbāsid 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 ʿAbbās.[3] In some rather infrequent cases, an ʿAbbāsid caliph quotes or narrates a tradition with an *isnād* comprising well-known *ḥadīth* transmitters rather than members of the ʿAbbāsid family.[4] There also are instances, of course, when no *isnāds* 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. ʿUbayd and as Ziyād b. Abī Sufyān);[5] another tradition was quoted in the same caliph's letter to ʿAbd al-Salām al-Yashkurī, a Khārijī rebel;[6] 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 traditions relate to the ideological concerns of the early ʿAbbāsids, which is hardly surprising. From his ancestors al-Manṣūr reported a

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

[4] See *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, X, pp. 237f. (nr. 5363): al-Mahdī - Shuʿba - ʿAlī b. Zayd - Abū Naḍra - Abū Saʿīd - the Prophet.

[5] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-Rusul waʾl-Mulūk*, ed. M. J. De Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879-1901), III, p. 480. The letter was written in A.H. 160. Ziyād, the celebrated governor of Iraq for Muʿāwiya I, was the son of Sumayya, a prostitute from the tribe of Thaqīf. Claiming Abū Sufyān's paternity for him, Muʿāwiya adopted Ziyād as his half brother in 44 A.H. In his letter of A.H. 160, al-Mahdī accused Muʿāwiya, 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 Muʿāwiya's adoption of Ziyād, and such procedures generally, were condemned (and both of which also figure in al-Mahdī's letter).

[6] al-Azdī, *Taʾrīkh Mawṣil*, ed. A. Ḥabība (Cairo, 1967), p. 238. Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Taʾrīkh*, ed. A. Ḍ. al-ʿUmarī (al-Najaf, 1967), II, p. 476. This letter too was written in A.H. 160.

tradition, for instance, which has the Prophet say: "al-`Abbās is my legatee (waṣī) and my inheritor (wārithī)."[7] A tradition narrated by al-Mahdī, and going back to Ibn `Abbās, prophesised the advent of "al-Saffāḥ wa'l-Manṣūr wa'l-Mahdī".[8] In his afore-mentioned letter to the Khārijī rebel, al-Mahdī quoted the Prophet's statement, "He whose mawlā I am, `Alī is his mawlā", to rebuke the former for his hostility to `Alī.[9] al-Manṣūr is supposed to have already reported this tradition, though in another context and with a complete family isnād.[10] That al-Mahdī could still quote this tradition at the beginning of his rule probably means, as suggested earlier,[11] that the `Abbāsids had not yet entirely abandoned the effort to derive their legitimacy through `Alī. The legitimacy of the `Abbāsids 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 `Abbāsid periods.[12] 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."[13]

This ḥadīth makes another interesting appearance, this time with reference to Sulaymān b. `Alī, the uncle of the first two `Abbāsid caliphs and governor of Baṣra in the

7 Ta'rīkh Baghdād, XIII, p. 137 (nr. 7122); cf. J. van Ess, Theologie und Gesellschaft (Berlin and New York, 1991-), III, p. 19.

8 Ta'rīkh Baghdād, X, p. 48 (nr. 5178).

9 al-Azdī, Ta'rīkh Mawṣil, p. 238; Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, Ta'rīkh, II, p. 476.

10 Ta'rīkh Baghdād, XII, p. 344 (nr. 6785).

11 See II.2.iii, above.

12 W. Madelung,"Apocalyptic Prophecies in Ḥimṣ", JSS, XXXI (1986), pp. 148ff.

13 Ta'rīkh Baghdād, XIII, p. 23 (nr. 6985).

caliphate of al-Manṣūr. No less a source than the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal reports from one ʿUbayd Allāh b. ʿAmr 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 Amir, 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. ʿAffan, who heard it from the Prophet]...[14]

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.[15]

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.[16] 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.

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

[15] Cf. Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Kāmil fī Duʿafāʾ al-Rijāl*, 3rd edn. (Beirut, 1988), III, p. 90, for a *ḥadīth* reported by Dāʾūd b. ʿAlī (an uncle of the first two ʿAbbāsid caliphs) 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 *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XII, p. 203 [nr. 6662])

[16] For examples of such traditions, usually transmitted with ʿAbbāsid family *isnāds*, see *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, 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).

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 seek to assess the reliability of the fundamental contention such material makes -- viz. that the early ʿAbbāsids frequently narrated traditions from the Prophet.

IV.2.ii

The early ʿAbbāsid period was an age of frantic interest in *ḥadīth*. This is too well known a fact to require elaboration. Besides the *muḥaddithūn* and increasingly the *fuqahā'*, the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs too showed very considerable interest in *ḥadīth*. As already mentioned, at least two separate occasions when *ḥadīth* was quoted in al-Mahdī's official letters have been recorded. A letter from Hārūn to a Khārijī rebel also makes a fairly obvious allusion to a well-known *ḥadīth* without however quoting it expressly.[17] It was the same caliph who ruled that all official documents were to start with blessings on the Prophet.[18] 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

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

18   Cf. al-Ṣūlī, *Adab al-Kuttāb* ed. M. B. 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 slave (ʿabd) of God, Hārūn, the Imām, Commander of the Faithful, the slave (ʿabd) of Muhammad, the Prophet of God", or "[from] Hārūn, the *mawlā* of Muhammad". The Barmakid Yaḥyā b. Khālid is said to have dissuaded him from such purposes, however (Ibid., p. 40).

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.[19]

If the purport of the stories which make the ʿAbbāsids 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 ʿAbbāsid family in general -- could demonstrate some acquaintance with *ḥadīth*; it is significant precisely for being an ideological claim, however, as will be shown in due course. 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;[20] it is hardly extravagant to assume that a caliph would remember something of

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[19] It were not only the caliphs but other members of the ʿAbbāsid family as well, who are known to have narrated traditions from the Prophet. Cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* (Haydarabad, 1325-27 A.H.), VIII, p. 221 (nr. 411), s.v. ʿĪsā b. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās al-Hāshimī, "who reported *[ḥadīth]* from his father and his brother Muḥammad; and [among those who reported *ḥadīth]* from him were his sons Dāʾūd and Isḥāq, and his nephew Jaʿfar b. Sulaymān b. ʿAlī, and his grand nephew Hārūn al-Rashīd..." More generally see M. Abiad, *Culture et education arabo-islamiques au Šām pendant les trois premiers siècles de l'Islam* (Damascus, 1981), pp. 96ff.

[20] al-Ḥajjāj b. Arṭāt (d. 206), a Kufan *faqīh*, *muftī* and *muḥaddith* known for his haughty demeanour, was placed by al-Manṣūr in the entourage of his son al-Mahdī (*Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, VIII, p. 230 [nr. 4341]). Muḥammad b. Muslim b. Abiʾl-Waḍḍāḥ, a reliable traditionist, was tutor to Mūsā (al-Hādī) before the latter's accession (al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa waʾl-Taʾrīkh*, ed. A. Ḍ. al-ʿUmarī (Baghdad, 1974-76), II, p. 454).

the religious sciences, some of the *hadīth*, which had been taught to him in his youth. 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 *hadīth* to him. A Medinese scholar, Abū Ma'shar Najīh b. `Abd al-Rahmān (d. 170 or 190), was fetched to Baghdād and asked by al-Mahdī to "stay in our company so that those present here may become knowledgeable".[21] Such a statement insinuates that this caliph already was in possession of 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 *hadīth* from a scholar narrating it. al-Mansūr had "written *Hadīth* and acted as a transmitter in mosques" prior to the advent of the `Abbāsids,[22] and "always remained well-known for seeking `*ilm, fiqh*, and *athar*".[23] al-Ma'mūn too is reported to have attended lectures on *hadīth* and written down traditions;[24] on one occasion, he is said to have narrated more than forty traditions to Ismā`īl b. Subayh, who in turn faithfully reported these to the proto-Sunnī scholar Abū Bakr b. Ayyāsh.[25]

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al-Kisā'ī, one of the most distinguished Qur'ān reciters of his day was tutor successively to Hārūn and al-Amīn (*Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, 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 religious education of members of the `Abbāsid family, see Abiad, *Culture et Education*, pp. 96ff.

21 *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIII, p. 428 (nr. 7304): "... *takūn bi-hadratinā fa-tafaqqah man hawlanā*". Abū Ma'shar was a *mawlā* of the Banū Hāshim, his *walā*' having been bought by Umm Mūsā, a daughter of the caliph al-Mansūr: ibid., p. 431.

22 al-Maqdisī, *al-Bad' wa'l-Ta'rīkh* ed. C. Huart (Paris 1899-1919), VI, p. 90, quoted from Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 84.

23 al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, ed. `A.-`A. al-Dūrī (Beirut, 1978), p. 183, quoted (with a slight modification) from Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 84.

24 *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, IX, p. 33 (nr. 4622)

25 See Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, I, p. 306 (nr. 561: s.v. Ismā`īl b. Subayh).

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 *tarjamas* 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, praising everything in it except for the *isnād*, which he characterized as "*ḥashw*".[26] On another occasion apparently, Ibn Jurayj -- seeking monetary assistance from the caliph -- brought him a special collection of traditions narrated exclusively on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, the caliph's ancestor.[27] Such traditions, and others, may have been transmitted further by the caliphs themselves; and in doing so they may well have endowed them with *isnāds* of their own. That *isnāds* 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 ʿAbbāsid caliphs could and did narrate traditions from the Prophet -- seems, then, to be much more

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[26] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, X, p. 404 (nr. 5573).

[27] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, X, p. 400 (nr. 5573).

real than the anecdotal forms in which it is embodied. But uncertainties undoubtedly persist. Biographical dictionaries devoted exclusively to evaluating the credentials of traditionists normally do not mention the caliphs among such traditionists.[28] But if the caliphs were really transmitting traditions, could they have been neglected? The suspicion is that Sunnī traditionists never *recognized* the caliphs as accredited "traditionists"; that they did recognize, however, that the caliphs took an active interest in *hadīth* and dabbled in it is illustrated by numerous incidental indications which the *rijāl* works often preserve.[29] But then al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's *Ta'rīkh Baghdād* -- the principal source not only of diverse and incidental indications of ʿAbbāsid interest in *hadīth* but also of evidence that the caliphs themselves narrated *hadīth* -- is itself also a *rijāl* work.[30] It is remarkable too that in the *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, it is usually only the early ʿAbbāsids, rather than caliphs of the middle ʿAbbāsid period, who are to be seen as transmitters of *hadīth*. Several later caliphs are known to have been deeply interested in the religious sciences, and in *hadīth*; but some of the purposes to which early ʿAbbāsid interest in *hadīth* was put, especially -- as will presently be shown -- through the use of the ʿAbbāsid family *isnād*, may no longer have been pressing concerns for later caliphs. In any case, there seems to be no particular reason why the early caliphs should have been portrayed as transmitting *hadīth* if they were not in fact doing so. If anecdotes to that effect are a formulaic ingredient of any caliph's *tarjama*, one should have expected the same for later

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[28] Some members of the ʿAbbāsid family are certainly mentioned. Dā'ūd b. ʿAlī, the uncle of the first two ʿAbbāsid caliphs: Ibn ʿAdī, *Duʿafā'*, III, p. 90; al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa waʾl-Ta'rīkh*, I, p. 541, II, 479, 700. Muhammad b. Sulaymān b. ʿAlī: al-ʿUqaylī, *Kitāb al-Duafā' al-Kabīr*, ed. ʿA.-M. A. Qalʿajī (Beirut, 1984), IV, p. 73 (nr. 1627).

[29] Cf. al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa waʾl-Ta'rīkh*, II, p. 684: "... qāla Sufyān [b. ʿUyayna]: qāla lī Qays b. al-Rabīʿ: haddatha bi-hādhaʾl-hadīth al-Mahdī."

[30] Also cf. al-Dhahabī's *Ta'rīkh Islam*, ed. A.-S. Tadmurī (Beirut, 1987-), which combines features of a chronicle with with those of a *rijāl* work, X, pp. 435f. (where al-Mahdi's having narrated a tradition with the ʿAbbāsid family *isnad* is dismissively noted: "... hādhā isnād muttasil, lākin mā ʿalimtu ahadan ihtajja biʾl-Mahdī wa lā bi-abīhi fiʾl-ahkām").

caliphs too; such, however, is only rarely the case. In general then, and notwithstanding uncertainties about the authenticity of particular anecdotes, there seems to be sufficient justification for the suggestion made earlier that the early ʿAbbāsids wished to present themselves as accredited transmitters of ḥadīth.

IV.2.iii.1

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: "O Abū ʿAbdallāh, the scholars (lit.: the people - al-nās) have all passed away; none remains except me and you!"[31] It is not ascertainable, of 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 ʿulamāʾ.[32]

Apart from the various expressions of ʿAbbāsid interest in ḥadīth, the evidence for the foregoing suggestion is admittedly rather slim. Some tantalizing indications do claim attention, however. For instance, the early ʿAbbāsid 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 Hijāzī tradition on a point of law.[33] A report intended to bolster al-Manṣūr's legitimist pretensions has

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[31] Abū Zurʿa, Taʾrīkh, ed. Shukr Allāh al-Qūjānī (Damascus, 1980), II, pp. 438f.

[32] Cf. an early anecdote which has al-Manṣūr ask Mālik to compile the Muwaṭṭaʾ and advise him how to do so(!): "'O Abū ʿAbdallāh, avoid the severities (shadāʾid) of Ibn ʿUmar, the concessions (rukhaṣ) of Ibn ʿAbbās and the peculiarities (shawādh) of Ibn Masʿūd; 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 ʿilman wa ʿaqlan).'" ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb, Kitāb al-Taʾrīkh, ed. J. Aguadé (Madrid, 1991), p. 160 (nr. 489).

this caliph once introduce himself as *"min ahl-al-Madīna"*.[34] 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.[35] A rather different expression of the effort to create an *ʿālim* - 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 ʿAbbās with an ʿAbbāsid family *isnād*.[36] In a letter attributed to al-Maʾmūn, a rather similar point is asserted: "The Commander of the faithful, by virtue of his position vis-a-vis the religion of God, the deputyship of the Prophet of God (*khilāfat rasūl Allāh*) and his kinship with him, is the foremost among those who follow his [sc. the Prophet's] *sunna* (*awlā man istanna bi-sunnatihi*).[37]

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 *ʿālim'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 *ʿālim's* vocation; so far as the caliph is concerned, he enjoys primacy in both of these respects. All this is, of course, the

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[33]   Abū Yūsuf, *Ikhtilāf Abī Hanīfa wa Ibn Abī Layla*, ed. A.-W. al-Afghānī (Haydarabad, 1357 A.H.), pp. 37f.

[34]   *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, X, p. 55 (nr. 5179).

[35]   Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Qudāt*, ed. ʿA.-ʿA. M. Marāghī (Cairo, 1947-50), III, p. 260.

[36]   Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Qudāt*, II, p. 130; cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 92.

[37]   al-Balādhurī, *Futūh al-Buldān*, ed. M. ! De Goeje (Leiden, 1866, rep. 1968), p. 32, cited in A. Z. Safwat, *Jamharat Rasā'il al-ʿArab* (Cairo, 1937), p. 509; also cf. Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 92.

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 Mushīr `Abd al-`Alā' b. Mushīr, it is reported that, when he went to the mosque, people used to line up to greet him and kiss his hands."[38] 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.[39] al-Ma'mūn himself is said to have attended the majlis of a scholar named Sulaymān b. Ḥarb al-Baṣrī (d. 224), and written ḥadīth reported by him.[40] In another instance, the caliph al-Mu`taṣim sent someone to determine and report the number of people who were attending a certain scholar's majlis.[41] That an `ālim's influence in society could be viewed as a potential political threat by the caliph has been discussed at some length earlier. If the basis of such influence was, in part at least, in certain religious accomplishments, the caliphs too may have aspired to some part of such influence by cultivating an image akin to that of the `ulamā'. The wish -- attributed to al-Ma'mūn -- 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 prestige and influence in society which the leading `ulamā' did.[42]

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[38] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XI, p. 72 (nr. 5750).

[39] Cf. M. D. Ahmad, *Muslim Education and the Scholars' Social Status*, pp. 56f.; Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, II (Chicago, 1967), pp. 48, 69; G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), 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.

[40] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, IX, p. 33 (nr. 4622).

[41] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XII, p. 248 (nr. 6696).

Religious authority was another issue. It was argued in the previous chapter that, with the striking exception of al-Ma'mūn, the early `Abbāsids do not appear to have been particularly interested in asserting religious authority for themselves. They sought religious prestige, to rest the legitimacy of their regime on a secure basis. To that end, they strove to cultivate good relations with the `ulamā', present themselves as the guardians of the community's religious life, and emphasize their own competence in religious matters; but they did not claim religious authority over and above the `ulamā'. They simply pretended to be `ulamā' themselves, `ulamā' endowed with political authority and close kinship with the Prophet; and when they did exercise a modicum of religious authority -- 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 --[43] it was not particularly different from the way a leading `*ālim* would have acted when advising the caliph himself.

In pretending to act 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.[44] Such an insistence seems to have been necessary not only because the

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

[43] Wakī`, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, III, p. 219f.; and see n. 33, above.

`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 of enabling him to intervene more effectively in religious life. (The caliph's interventions in religious life is the subject of the second part of this chapter.) Conversely, such an image is also interpretable as an effort to integrate the caliph himself, *qua* `*ālim*, in the `ulamā's legitimating function vis-a-vis the political authority. The caliph's image as an `*ālim* constituted one dimension of caliphal religious rhetoric, which was based on the quest for religious prestige and political legitimacy. More will be said on this religious rhetoric in due course.

IV.2.iii.2

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 al-Zakiyya, for instance, was not only the purest of the Quraysh in lineage (*ṣarīḥ Quraysh*),[45] 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."[46] The connection here between religious knowledge and

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[44] Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 532; ibid., III, pp. 587f.

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

[46] al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 253.

worthiness for the caliphate is implicit but noteworthy.[47] 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.[48]

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.[49] The imām

nevertheless appears as *the scholar* par excellence,[50] 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.[51]

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[47] Observe al-Iṣfahānī's characterization of the qualities on the basis of which
      Muhammad 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 fil-dīn, wa shajā`atihi wa jūdihi wa ba`sihi wa kull amr yajmal
      bi-mithlihi, ḥattā lam yashukk aḥad annahu al-mahdī.*" *Maqātil*, p. 233.

[48] al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 294.

[49] On the imām's claims to knowledge, see J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I,
      pp. 278ff.

[50] van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, p. 279. Cf. the instructions which the imām
      Muhammad al-Bāqir is supposed to have given to Muhammad b. Muslim, one of his
      disciples: "... acquire knowledge from its bearers and teach it to your brothers in faith
      just as the `ulamā' have taught it to you." Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* (Tehran, n.d.), I, p. 42 [I,
      p. 35, nr. 2, of the Tehran, 1374 A.H. edn.], quoted in L. N. Takim, "The Rijāl of the
      Shī`ī Imāms as depicted in Imāmī Biographical Literature", Ph.D. diss., Univ. of
      London, 1990, p. 167. Also cf. `A. Fayyāḍ, *Ta'rīkh al-Tarbiyya `inda'l-Imāmiyya*
      (Baghdad, 1972), pp. 122-41 (on the imām's role as the scholar and teacher of the
      religious sciences).

[51] 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 Takim, "The Rijāl of the Shī`ī Imāms", especially ch. 4 ("The
      Contribution of the Rijāl"), pp. 158-214; on their function as *muḥaddithūn*, see ibid.,

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, *inter alia*, a function of membership in the Prophet's household. The ʿAbbāsids, always insistent on asserting their own membership in the Prophet's immediate household, were probably concerned to compete with the ʿAlids in claims to the possession of knowledge as well. For the latter, knowledge (ʿ*ilm*) was the basis on which the imām's claim to religious authority was to be justified. The ʿAbbāsids, who apparently came to power with the pretensions of a Shīʿite imām, may initially have thought the same way. As they began to move away from Shīʿism, the concern to lay claim to some kind of religious knowledge probably became a medium not so much for asserting religious authority as for cultivating relations with the ʿulamāʾ and pretending ultimately to be one of them. If, and to the extent that, there was a claim to religious authority by caliphs before al-Maʾmūn, it was as one of the ʿulamāʾ rather than over against them. But in laying some claim to the possession of religious knowledge, the caliphs were also implicitly asserting 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 ʿ*ilm* 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

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pp. 176-86.

circles.[52] The chains of linear familial transmission in the `Alid household present a striking parallel to the `Abbāsid family isnāds, which accompanied the traditions putatively narrated by the early `Abbāsid 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 `Abbāsids who seem to have followed the `Alids and not the other way round. Some circumstantial evidence can be adduced for this suggestion. First, the number of `Alid traditions with a standard family chain of transmission clearly outweigh the `Abbāsid ones. Second, the early `Abbāsids were certainly more sensitive to an ideological threat from the `Alids than the other way, though the `Alids could scarcely have been oblivious to `Abbāsid propaganda against them. That it was the `Abbāsids who occasionally appropriated a useful, or threatening, idea from the `Alids is consequently rather more likely than the converse. With an `Abbāsid family isnād, the caliphs could present themselves as being in possession, like their `Alid rivals, of a continuously transmitted

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52 For examples of such isnāds, cf. al-Ṭūsī, Ikhtiyār Maʿrifat al-Rijāl, (hereafter Rijāl al-Kashshī), ed. H. Muṣṭafawī (Mashhad, 1348 H.s.), p. 166 (nr. 279): Muḥammad b. `Alī [al-Bāqir] - his father - his grandfather - the Prophet; ibid., p. 303 (nr. 546): Ja`far b. Muhammad [al-Ṣādiq] - his father - his grandfather - the Prophet; ibid., pp. 396f. (nr. 741): Ja`far b. Muḥammad - his father - his grandfather - `Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. For other specimens, cf. al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, ed. `A. A. al-Ghaffārī, II (Tehran, 1382 A.H.), p. 80 (nr. 3): Ja`far b. Muḥammad directly from Alī b. Abī Ṭālib; ibid., pp. 92 (nr. 7) and 96 (nr. 1): same channel; ibid., p. 107 (nr. 5): Ja`far b. Muḥammad from his father; ibid., p. 108 (nr. 6): Muhammad al-Bāqir from his father; ibid., pp. 116 (nr. 3), 117 (nr. 4), 124 (nr. 5), 126 (nr. 6): Ja`far b. Muḥammad directly from the Prophet; ibid., p. 153 (nr. 9): Ja`far b. Muhammad - his father - his grandfather - the Prophet. Also cf. al-Iṣfahānī, Maqātil, pp. 450-52, where al-Manṣūr is represented as asking Ja`far b. Muḥammad to narrate to him a certain tradition "alladhī haddathtanī `an abīka `an ābā'ihi `an `Alī `an rasūl Allāh; Ja`far 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 `Abbāsid 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 statement or tradition would not necessarily be any less authoritative if it is recognized as originating in an imām, say Ja`far b. Muḥammad, rather than going back to the Prophet.

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 `Alids and the `Abbāsids. These *isnāds* represented an implicit effort to validate and stabilize the lines of succession which the `Alids and the `Abbāsids 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 `Abbāsid *isnād* -- comprising Muḥammad b. `Alī, `Abdallāh b. `Abbās, and sometimes `Abbās b. `Abd al-Muṭṭalib -- may be seen as a claim that the `Abbāsids derived their authority and legitimacy from *this* series of individuals, the last two of whom were in intimate contact with the Prophet. This is the same line of transmission, of course, through which the `Abbāsids began to derive their rights to the caliphate in the time of al-Mahdī, if not already in that of al-Manṣūr.[53]

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[53] Observe how the following anecdote -- which may have come into circulation already in the time of al-Mahdī -- bluntly promotes `Abbāsid legitimism as against the `Alids, and affirms, rather more implicitly, the claim that the `Abbāsid title to the caliphate originated with al-`Abbās himself. Muḥammad b. `Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. `Alī b. `Abdallāh b. Ja`far 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,

A rather tendentious tradition, said to have been narrated by the first 'Abbāsid caliph Abu'l-'Abbās 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 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī, the latter from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and 'Alī from the Prophet.[54] The isnād is probably fictitious because, inter alia, Ibrāhīm was rather too young at the time of Abū Hāshim's death to be able to report from him.[55] That this isnād is fictitious does not really matter however, for the other, standard 'Abbāsid family isnād is not very likely to be genuine either. The family isnāds 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 significant, and suggestive, precisely for its divergence from the standard form of an 'Abbāsid chain of transmission. For it evokes the time when, in the days immediately following their advent, the 'Abbāsids traced their title to the caliphate through an alleged transfer of the imāmate from Abū Hāshim 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī to Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās.[56] The latter, 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

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'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, Ta'rīkh, III, pp. 534f., translation as in The History of al-Ṭabarī, XXIX (Albany, 1990), pp. 254f. (with some modifications).

[54] Ta'rīkh Baghdād, X, p. 51 (nr. 5178).

[55] He was only four years old at the time: cf. Akhbār al-'Abbās, ed. 'A.-'A. al-Dūrī and A.-J. al-Muṭṭalibī (Beirut, 1971), p. 185.

[56] Cf. Ibn Sa'd, Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr, ed. E. Sachau et al. (Leiden, 1905-40), V, p. 241, where Abū Hāshim hands over his Shī'a as well as "his books and his traditions" (kutubahu wa riwāyatahu) to Muḥammad b. 'Alī.

"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.iv

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.[57] These observations are, of course, perfectly valid. In the previous chapter it has been seen that the same perception, which dates from the early `Abbāsid period itself, led many a religious scholar to oppose, or be very cynical about, the caliphs and their intentions. However,

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[57] 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'Élaboration de l'Islam* (Paris, 1961), pp. 115-27.

while it may be that pronouncements of religious commitment 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 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 would also 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. Another form of caliphal recognition, this involving certain leading scholars, will be discussed later.

IV.3 `*Abbāsid Interventions in Religious Life*

The persecution of the *zanādiqa* by al-Mahdī and his successors and that of the traditionalist `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 the proto-Sunnīs. 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 dissertation. These were clearly the most dramatic "inquisitions" of the early `Abbāsid period but were hardly 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;[58] 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.[59] 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

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[58] 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 Adharbāyjān and Armenia, later Umayyad caliph) to the caliph Hishām b. `Abd al-Malik on the *qadariyya* in his army: I. `Abbās, `*Abd al-Ḥamīd b. 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.

[59] In 279, al-Mu`tadid, 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-zāhira* (Cairo, 1929-72), III, p. 80.). In 309, 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 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, 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-Muntazam* [Haydarabad, 1357-59 A.H.], VII, p. 287; cf. n. 98, below). 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.

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."[60]

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 ʿAbbāsid history, the question rather is whether any kind of pattern is discernible in the caliphs' interventions, and whether the caliph intervened to protect the religion as defined by himself or as defined by the scholars.[61] 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.[62] They were much less so by the time of al-Mahdī,[63] 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

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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 ʿAbbāsid 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.

60 al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya*, ed. M. Enger (Bonn, 1853), p. 23.

61 I am grateful to Dr. P. Crone for suggesting the latter question to me. She is in no way responsible, however, for the way I have chosen to answer it.

62 Cf. Zimmermann in *IJMES*, XVI (1984), p. 441.

63 Cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, pp. 687ff.

been of the same conviction as they.[64] The incident suggests that al-Mahdî was trying to ceremoniously draw closer to the proto-Sunnîs -- 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 *qadarîs*, 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, `Abd al-`Azîz b. Abî Salama al-Mājishūn, who was then high in the caliph's favour.[65] 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 Shî`a, for the proto-Imāmite imām Mūsā al-Kāzim is reported to have instructed his followers to desist from *Kalām*, so as not to be penalized.[66] We do not know the reaction of proto-Sunnî `ulamā' to this move. They could scarcely have been displeased, however, for the caliph was only harassing a group deviant not just for its Shî`ism but also for its theological speculation.[67]

Hārūn al-Rashîd, very much in keeping with proto-Sunnî sentiment, abhorred "disputes over religious matters (*al-mirā' fî'l-dîn*), saying that it was a profitless exercise, and that, very probably, there was not heavenly reward for it."[68] The threat of the caliph's persecution is said to have forced the theologians Hishām b. al-Hakam[69] and Bishr al-

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[64] al-Ṭabarî, *Ta'rîkh*, III, p. 534. On al-Manṣūr's relations with some *qadarîs* cf. J. van Ess, "Les Qadarites et la Ġailanîya de Yazîd III", *SI*, XXXI (1970), pp. 273, 285.

[65] Cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, pp. 690ff.

[66] *Rijāl al-Kashshî*, pp. 265f. (nr. 479).

[67] Later, when al-Mutawakkil had a Rāfidî flogged, Ibn Hanbal was, for instance, seen to be visibly pleased, quoting to Abū Bakr al-Marwazî 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 Abî `Abdallāh Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Hanbal*, British Library MS. Or. 2675, fol. 4 b.

[68] al-Ṭabarî, *Ta'rîkh*, III, p. 741, trans. as in *The History of al-Ṭabarî*, vol. XXX, tr. C. E. Bosworth, p. 306.

[69] *Rijāl al-Kashshî*, pp. 258-263 (nr. 477) and cf. ibid., pp. 266f. (nr. 480); *EI*(2), s.v. "Hishām b. al-Hakam" (W. Madelung).

Marîsî[70] 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-

Sunnîs: 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),[71] 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-

Mahdî, in the aftermath of the civil war between the forces of al-Amîn and al-Ma'mūn.[72]

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.[73] It is significant that the two men who reportedly took an active part in

the proceedings of this event were the mustamlîs of Sufyān b. 'Uyayna and Yazîd b.

Hārūn respectively, who are both recognizable as very prominent proto-Sunnî scholars.

If these reports have any historical merit at all, they would indicate proto-Sunnî interest

in his persecution. Yazîd b. Hārūn is said even to have encouraged the people of

Baghdād to have Bishr murdered.[74] Conversely, Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdî may have had this

inquisition for no better reason than to ally the proto-Sunnî sentiment with his fragile

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[70] Cf. al-Khallāl, Masā'il, fol. 152 a; Ta'rîkh Baghdād, VII, p. 64 (nr. 3516); and El(2), s.v. "Bishr al-Marîsî" (J. Schacht, et al.) for a note of scepticism about the stories of Bishr's persecution. For further references to Bishr, see Sezgin, GAS, I (Leiden, 1967), pp. 616f.

[71] On Hārūn's relations with the Shî'a see van Ess, Theologie und Gesellschaft, III, pp. 93ff.; also cf. al-Fasawī, al-Ma'rifa wa'l-Ta'rîkh, I, p. 177 (the execution of Hādir and a companion of his, "'alā ra'yihimā fî'l-taraffuḍ").

[72] Wakî', Akhbār al-Quḍāt, III, pp. 269f.; van Ess, Theologie und Gesellschaft, III, pp. 176f.

[73] Cf. van Ess, Theologie und Gesellschaft, III, p. 178 and n. 20.

[74] See al-Khallāl, Masā'il, fol. 150 a; cf. al-Dārimî, Kitāb al-Radd 'ala'l-Ǧahmîya, ed. G. Vitesam (Leiden, 1960), p. 98.

rule.[75] Also noteworthy in this regard is the indication that there was much popular excitement about this public recantation, and that the people were clearly hostile to the victim. Other instances of such popular mood will be encountered later in this chapter.

Unlike his predecessors, al-Ma'mūn was not content only to regulate religious life by occasionally intervening in it; he also laid claims to religious authority. His was an assertion of the prerogative to *define* the doctrinal position of which he would act as the guardian. Thereby he would at once be asserting his position as the guardian and the ultimate arbiter of the community's religious life and challenging the `ulamā's claims to be either. This was the vision al-Ma'mūn tried to realize through the *Mihna*.

At the outset of the *Mihna*, the governor of Baghdād ordered those *faqīhs*, traditionists, and *muftīs* "who would not profess that the Qur'ān was created to refrain from transmitting traditions and from giving judicial decisions, whether in private or in public..."[76] Such restrictions were no innovation of al-Ma'mūn's. Already in the aftermath of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya's revolt, certain individuals had been officially forbidden to narrate *hadīth*. al-`Abbād b. al-`Awwām who, despite his Shī`ite inclinations "resembled the *ashāb al-hadīth*", was one such individual.[77] The prohibition on him was removed by al-Mahdī after he became caliph but, for reasons which are not clear, was momentarily imposed once again during the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd. Later during

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[75] On this event and the "Gegenkalifat" of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī generally, cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, pp. 173ff.

[76] al-Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 1125; translation as in *The History of al-Tabarī*, vol. XXXII, tr. Bosworth, p. 214. Also cf. al-Mu`tasim's letter to the governor of Egypt (preserved in al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāt wa Kitāb al-Qudāt*, ed. R. Guest [London, 1912], pp. 445-47; a similar letter was also written to the *qādī* of Egypt) instructing that anyone not subscribing to the Qur'ān's createdness be disallowed from narrating *hadīth* or giving *fatwās* ("*wa tark al-idhn li ahad minhum fī hadīth aw fatwā illā `alā intihāl hādhihi'l-nihla wa'l-qawl bi-mithl hādhihi'l-maqāla*"): al-Kindī, *al-Qudāt*, p. 446. The letter, dated 218, was written while al-Ma'mūn was still the caliph; cf. *EI(2)*, s.v. "Mihna" (M. Hinds).

[77] Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, V, pp. 99f. (nr. 168).

Hārūn's caliphate, he was once again allowed to transmit *ḥadīth*.[78] But the measure taken by the governor of Baghdād against the *faqīhs*, traditionists, and *muftīs* was different in what motivated it. It was not simply a punishment for views or activities deemed objectionable for whatever reason by the ruling authorities, but an assertion of the caliph's right to *define* the religion of which he was the guardian; the criterion of disqualification from religious life was nonconformity to a doctrine *the caliph* had proclaimed.

While the *Miḥna* was a direct assault on the proto-Sunnī ʿulamā', 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-Muʿtaṣim'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 ʿAlī b. Abī Tālib. 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 ʿAbbāsid and the ʿAlid families also attended the proceedings of this "inquisitorial council". It was suggested by some that Sālim's disrespect to ʿAlī 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]

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[78] See al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 362. Cf. Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, V, p. 99 (nr. 168); and Ibn Hanbal, *Kitāb al-ʿIlal wa Maʿrifat al-Rijāl* (transmitted by ʿAbdallāh b. Ahmad b. Hanbal), ed. Waṣī Allāh b. Muḥammad ʿAbbās (Beirut, 1988), I, p. 533 (nr. 1256). Another prominent Shīʿī who was forbidden to narrate *ḥadīth*, presumably for having participated in the revolt of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, was Mūsā b. ʿAbdallāh b. Ḥasan (a brother of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya). *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XIII, p. 27 (nr. 6986)

[79] Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, III, pp. 191ff. No date for the incident is given, but it seems to have occurred sometime in caliphate of al-Muʿtaṣim. The *qāḍī* presiding over the proceedings was an appointee of al-Muʿtaṣim, though he continued in office until he was removed by al-Mutawakkil, in 235 A.H. (Ibid., III, p. 194). One of the participants in the deliberations, Yaḥyā b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Himmānī, most likely died in 228, a year after al-Muʿtaṣim's death. (See *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XIV, p. 176 [nr. 7483]; on al-Himmānī, 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

Sālim's expression of disrespect for ʿAlī should probably be seen in the context of the notorious *mathālib* genre. Indulging in the *mathālib* of prominent individuals, or of families, tribes, a whole race, was nothing new; and several writers of the early ʿAbbāsid period earned considerable notoriety for their skill in doing just that.[80] Such 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 ʿAbbāsid caliphs were made the object of such attack. Whenever apprised of such insults, the ʿAbbāsids 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. ʿAdī was imprisoned by Hārūn al-Rashīd apparently for too zealous an interest in *mathālib*;[83] and al-Mutawakkil had one Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Jahmī flogged for calumniating al-ʿAbbās besides the ancestors of the families of ʿUmar and ʿUthmān.[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 ʿAlī occasioned, there are several things which deserve notice. It is not surprising that the incident took place in Kufa, where pro-ʿAlid sentiment was strong; nor that it occurred during the *Mihna*: al-Maʾmūn

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caliphal patronage.) The likelihood then is that this incident took place sometime during the caliphate of of al-Muʿtasim, 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).

[81] Cf. al-Isfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, ed. A.-S. A. Farrāj et al. (Beirut, 1955-61), XX, pp. 21f., XXIII, pp. 390f.

[82] al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XIII, p. 23 (nr. 6985).

[83] Cf. S. Leder, *Das Korpus al-Haitam ibn ʿAdī* (Frankfurt, 1991), pp. 304ff.

[84] Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 124.

had, after all, declared that `Alī was the best of men after the Prophet at the same time (A.H. 212) 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.

Also of interest in Sālim's inquisition is the existence of the inquisitorial council, to which the foregoing report attests. The interrogation of the *fuqahā'* -- in the court of the caliph, his governors, or his *qāḍīs* -- on the question of the Qur'ān's createdness, are perhaps also to be regarded as such, and the interrogation and conviction of the *zanādiqa* would seem to conform to the same pattern, especially after al-Mahdī made a special officer in charge of such inquisition.[86] These seem, then, to be the beginnings of the inquisitorial councils, which were later to be prominent in some periods of Muslim history.[87] Finally, it is of some significance that public sentiment is said to have run high on Sālim's disrespect for `Alī, that the people would have liked to have him executed, and

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[85] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 1099.

[86] al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh*, III, pp. 520, 522; cf. E. Tyan, *Institutions du droit public musulman*, I (1954), p. 463.

[87] For such councils in the Mamlūk period, see D. P. Little, "The Historical and Historiographical Significance of the Detention of Ibn Taymiyya", *IJMES*, IV (1973), pp. 311-27.

that the police had to disperse the crowd before the *qāḍī* could leave the mosque where the trial took place. This episode constitutes, therefore, another early instance of popular involvement in religious disputes, a phenomenon which was to characterize the middle `Abbāsid period.[88]

Sālim was a non-entity, though his inquisition is hardly an insignificant affair. Earlier, in the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd, an indiscretion of the noted Kufan traditionist, Wakī῾ b. al-Jarrāḥ, had created a situation which suggests some interesting parallels and contrasts with what Sālim found himself in. Like many a Kufan scholar of his day, Wakī῾ seems to have had mildly Shī῾ite inclinations though the Sunnīs were eventually to claim him as one of their own. A tradition he reported in Mecca in 184 or 185 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.[89]

"When the Prophet of God died", Wakī῾ reported on the authority of one Ismā῾īl 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. `Abdallāh b. Sa῾īd al-῾Uthmānī, who had the traditionist imprisoned and intended, it is said, to have him crucified. Sufyān b. `Uyayna, another leading scholar, was able to intercede, however: "this man", Sufyān argued, "is a scholar (*min ahl al-῾ilm*), and he has kinsfolk (῾*ashīra*). 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

[88] Cf. S. Sabari, *Mouvements populaires à Bagdād à l'époque `abbāside, IXe-XIe siècles* (Paris, 1981).

[89] What follows is primarily based on al-Fasawī, *al-Ma`rifa wa'l-Ta'rīkh*, I, pp. 175f. Other accounts include: Ibn `Adī, *Ḍu`afā'*, V, pp. 344f.; al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rīkh al-Islām*, ed. `Umar `Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut, 1987), XII (sub ann. 191-200), pp. 451-54 (and p. 451 nn. 2 and 4 for further references); idem, *Mīzān al-I`tidāl*, ed. `A. M. al-Bajawī (n.p., 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 A`lām al-Nubalā'*, ed. Shu`ayb Arna'ūṭ and Kāmil al-Kharrāṭ (Beirut, 1986), IX, pp. 159-65.

caliph] would summon you to confront them (*li-munāẓaratihim*)." Sufyān's warning had the desired effect and Wakī` was released. But that was not the end of the matter. For "the people of Mecca wrote to the people of Medina about what Wakī`, [Sufyān] Ibn `Uyayna and [Muḥammad b. `Abdallāh] al-`Uthmānī had done, and said: 'When [Wakī`] reaches Medina, do 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.[90] 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

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[90] 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.

religious scholars were *known to be* influential at the caliphal court.

The tribulation of both Sālim and Wakī' 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 Shī'īs while Wakī' seems to have been pro-Shī'ī -- 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 Wakī' and Sufyān) in deciding *not* to intervene.

That caliphal interventions are interpretable as *favouring* proto-Sunnī viewpoints does not mean, however, that 'ulamā' 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. 'Abdallāh al-Nakh'ī, a Kūfan *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;[91] Wakī' narrowly escaped punishment, as already seen; and Ismā'īl b. 'Ulayya, 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.[92] It should be noted, however, that while these are all fairly respectable 'ulamā', 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;[93] and it was Ibn Ḥanbal too who is reported to have hoped for al-Amīn's forgiveness in the hereafter

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[91]   Ibn 'Adī, *Ḍu'afā'*, IV, pp. 22f.

[92]   *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, VI, p. 238 (nr. 3277).

[93]   al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 9 b.

on the basis of the latter's concern to have Ibn `Ulayya repent.[94] But whatever the demonstration effect the caliphs may have achieved by reprimanding these scholars, it is noteworthy that neither Sharik, nor Ibn `Ulayya nor even Waki` was actually punished.

In one of its aspects, the *Mihna* itself was an instance of the collaboration of the caliph and some of the scholars;[95] it was a collaboration *against* the proto-Sunnis, 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-Sunni scholars themselves that this caliph had it officially disseminated:

> In the year 234, al-Mutawakkil sent for (*ashkhaṣa*) the *fuqahā'* and *muḥaddithūn*, including Muṣ`ab al-Zubayri, Isḥāq b. Abi Isrā'il, Ibrāhim b. `Abdallāh al-Harawi, and `Abdallāh and `Uthmān the Kufites, the sons of Muḥammad b. Abi 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*...[96]

In thus collaborating with the `ulamā', al-Mutawakkil was not initiating any new trend, however. In the pre *Mihna* period the caliphs were already intervening in favour of certain proto-Sunni views, and, as will be observed in due course, were using the services of scholars -- proto-Sunni scholars -- to regulate religious life. In the period before the *Mihna*, 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-Sunni views and are to be understood as expressing `Abbāsid patronage of those claiming to represent such views.

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[94] *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, VI, p. 238.

[95] Cf. H. F. S. Kasassebeh, "The Office of Qāḍi in the early `Abbāsid Caliphate (132-247/750-861)", Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1990, pp. 131f.

[96] *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, X, p. 67 (nr. 5185); cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III, p. 496.

Besides attesting to early `Abbāsid patronage of proto-Sunnī viewpoints and the caliphs' collaboration with the `ulamā', 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 `ulamā' 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 `Abbāsid 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 `ulamā'. 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.[97] It is also significant that this edict castigates the Ḥanbalī rioters in doctrinal terms: on various grounds they are shown to be guilty of *bid`a*, a charge these rioters themselves typically bandied around with deadly effect. Very much in conformity with early `Abbāsid 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.

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[97]   Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, VIII, pp. 307-309. Cf. Sabari, *Mouvements populaires*, p. 106.

But the caliph may not only *defend* viewpoints deemed authoritative; he might also participate in the processess of articulating such viewpoints. An important instance from later `Abbāsid 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 Mu`tazila and numerous reports from the Prophet, p.ace be on him, and the Companions [to similar effect]", was produced by the caliph himself.[98] 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 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.i

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[98] Ibn al-Jawzî, *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 `Aqîl et la résurgence de l'Islam traditionaliste au XIe siècle* (Damascus, 1963), pp. 299ff; *EI(2)*, s.v. "al-Ḳādir bi'llāh" (D. Sourdel).

al-Ṭabarī reports that, in the year 161 A.H., Yaʿqūb b. Dāʾūd, 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 (*raʾīs al-baṣriyyīn waʾl-qāʾim bi-amrihim*) Ismāʿīl b. ʿUlayya al-ʿAsadī and Muḥammad b. Maymūn al-ʿAnbarī. He appointed ʿAbd al-Aʿlā b. Mūsā al-Ḥalabī as chief (*raʾīs*) of the people of Kufa and the people of Syria."[99]

This report is reminiscent of a suggestion Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ had made to al-Manṣūr in his *Risāla fīʾl-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 ʿulamāʾ -- 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

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[99] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III, pp. 486f.; translation as in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. XXIX, tr. H. Kennedy (Albany, 1990), p. 199 (with minor modifications). On Ismāʿīl b. ʿUlayya, see *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, VI, pp. 229-40 (nr. 3277). Ibn al-Nadīm mentions him among the *fuqahāʾ aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, and lists the following as his writings: *Kitāb al-Tafsīr, Kitāb al-Ṭahāra, Kitāb al-Ṣalāt*, and *Kitāb al-Manāsik*: see Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. R. Tajaddud (3rd edn., Beirut, 1988), p. 283. Nothing is known of the other two figures mentioned in al-Ṭabarī's report. It should be noted, however, that five figures with the 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) is a rather remarkable figure: "ʿAbdallāh [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!" (*Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, 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.

prestige of an `ālim`, 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.[100] Having been the caliph's emissary did not apparently stop Mālik from backing -- through a *fatwā* -- 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.[101] The 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 A.H., 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.[102] 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. Anecdotes that al-Manṣūr also proposed to

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[100] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 172f.

[101] Cf. al-Tamīmī, *Kitāb al-Miḥan*, pp. 319ff.

[102] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, 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 Rabāḥ, and, if not he, then `Abdallāh b. Abī Najīḥ." al-Fasawī, *al-Ma`rifa wa'l-Ta'rīkh*, I, p. 702; Ibn `Adī, *Ḍu`afā'*, I, p. 52; cf. M. Muranyi, *Ein altes Fragment medinensischer Jurisprudenz aus Qairawan: aus dem Kitāb al-Ḥaǧǧ des `Abd al-`Azīz b. `Abdallāh b. Abī Salama al-Māǧisūn (st. 164/780-81)* (Stuttgart, 1985), 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 is the case is however very interesting.

give the sanction of law to Mālik's *Muwaṭṭā*[103] underscore very poignantly a manifestation of how official recognition of a scholar's position was supposed to function.

An anecdote has the caliph al-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.[104] 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 ʿAbbāsids. Ibn Abī Dhi'b the ascetic visited al-Mahdī,[105] Ibn Abī Salama, already mentioned above, was closely associated with the same caliph, and Ibn Abī Sabra served as *qāḍī* in Baghdād for some time.[106] It is also important to bear in mind that both Ibn Abī Dhi'b and Ibn Abī Sabra had been involved or implicated in the revolt of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya.[107] The ʿAbbāsids 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. Saʿd (d. 175 A.H.), a leading jurist of his time and certainly the most influential of Egyptian scholars, seems to provide another instance of caliphal recognition. He enjoyed

[103] See chapter IIIn.70, above.

[104] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIV, p. 369 (nr. 7697).

[105] See *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, II, pp. 296, 305.

[106] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIV, pp. 369, 371.

[107] See chapter III nn. 27, 30, above.

the patronage of al-Manṣūr, al-Mahdī and Hārūn al-Rashīd; it was to this patronage that at least some of his fabulous wealth must have been due.[108] 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.[109] He is said to have been "alone in his time to give fatwās in Egypt".[110] An anecdote even has him admonish a holy man for preaching in a mosque in Egypt without his permission.[111] If taken seriously, this would illustrate al-Layth's supervision of religious life in his homeland, which is what scholars who were officially patronized must have been expected to do. It was al-Layth too whom later Sunnī opinion credited with having brought to an end the reviling of ʿUthmān in Egypt.[112]

Like numerous scholars of the day, al-Layth also visited Baghdād, probably on more than one occasion, and narrated ḥadīth there. One muḥaddith remembered having heard a particular tradition from him "ʿalā bāb al-Mahdī".[113] This may be a reference to a place in Baghdād; or it may well refer to a possible custom of narrating traditions at (literally!) the doorstep of the caliphal residence.[114] Be that as it may, al-Mahdī himself endorsed al-

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[108]   Cf. Ta'rīkh Baghdād, XIII, p. 5; R. G. Khoury, "al-Layth b. Saʿd", JNES, XL (1981), pp. 191f.

[109]   Cf. al-Kindī, al-Quḍāt, pp. 372f.; Ta'rīkh Baghdād, XIII, p. 9; Khoury, "al-Layth b. Saʿd", p. 192.

[110]   "... wa kāna qad istaqalla bi'l-fatwā fī zamānihi fī Miṣr." Ibn Saʿd, Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt, VII pt. ii, p. 204.

[111]   "... mā ḥamalaka an takallamta fī baladinā bi-ghayri amrina": Ta'rīkh Baghdād, XIII, pp. 73f. (nr. 7052). The man thus admonished was Manṣūr b. ʿAmmār al-Sulamī. On him see van Ess, Theologie und Gesellschaft, III, pp. 102-04.

[112]   Ibn Ḥajar, Tahdhīb, VIII, pp. 463f. (nr. 832); Khoury, "al-Layth b. Saʿd", p. 202.

[113]   Ta'rīkh Baghdād, XIII, p. 4.

[114]   Note that scholars were frequently to be found at the gates of the caliphal residence: cf. M. D. Ahmad, Muslim Education and Scholars' Social Status, pp. 244ff. Traditions might also be narrated, and discussions held, at the "gate" (bāb) of scholars' residences. Cf. Ta'rīkh Baghdād, XIV p. 171 (nr. 7483), where a scholar's claim to have heard a tradition from Ibn Ḥanbal ʿalā bāb [Ismāʿīl] Ibn ʿUlayya" is

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 Layth] about what he transmits [lit. about what is acquired from him].[115] 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 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.

The proto-Imāmite imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is probably to be taken as yet another example of the phenomenon under consideration here. He was clearly one of the most prominent 'Alids of his time, and appears to have been regarded by his followers -- already in his life-time -- as an imām. Unlike several other 'Alids of his time, he remained politically quiescent, and may have recommended himself to the caliph al-Manṣūr for this if for no other reason.

In Shī'ī literature, Ja'far often appears as a spokesman of the 'Alids before al-Manṣūr, as one trying to mitigate the harshness of this caliph's measures against the 'Alids.[116] Such a role has been exaggerated in Imāmī sources; the stories illustrating it are often less than credible. Nevertheless it must be noted that the caliph needed to have good relations with at least some of the prominent 'Alids no less than the latter were in

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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*).

[115] "*... fa-qad thabata 'inda amīr al-mu'minīn annahu lam yabqa ahad a'lam bi-mā ḥumila minhu*": *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIII, p. 5.

[116] Cf. al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 450-52.

need of maintaining a tolerably good relationship with the rulers. Thus there is nothing improbable in Ja`far being recognized by the caliph as the representative of his family. In al-Manṣūr's letter to Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, the latter is unfavourably contrasted with Ja`far b. Muḥammad to challenge some of Muḥammad's claims about himself.[117] This would seem to be impressive testimony to the caliph's recognition of Ja`far's position, except that the authenticity of some of the letter's contents -- including this comparison between Muḥammad and Ja`far -- is not quite certain. Tilman Nagel's argument that at a time when al-Manṣūr was engaged in a bitter struggle against the `Alids as a whole, he cannot be expected to have recognized the merit of any one of them, is not particularly convincing, however.[118] Not only was the caliph thereby scoring a polemical point against al-Nafs al-Zakiyya; he must have needed to secure the neutrality, if not the goodwill, of at least some of the `Alids as well. The caliph's praise for Ja`far should not therefore occasion surprise or scepticism. But even if this praise for Ja`far -- together with some other features of the letter -- is taken to have originated in the half-century of more following the putative date of the letter,[119] it would still be interpretable as a recognition of sorts, from the `Abbāsids, of an `Alid's preeminence. The other prominent `Alid who was given official recognition was of course `Alī al-Riḍā', whom al-Ma'mūn designated as his successor.[120]

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[117] al-Manṣūr wrote to Muḥammad: "No one among you who was born after the death of the Messenger of God was nobler than `Alī son of Ḥusayn, who was the son of a concubine. He was a better man than your grandfather Ḥasan b. Ḥasan. After him there was none among you like his son, Muḥammad b. `Alī, whose grandmother was a concubine, and he was a better man than your father, nor is there the equal of his son Ja`far, whose grandmother was a concubine, and he is a better man than you are." al-Ṭabarī, Ta'rīkh, III, pp. 212f., translation as in J. A. Williams, The Early `Abbāsī Empire (Cambridge, 1989), I, p. 101.

[118] Cf. Nagel, "Ein früher Bericht über den Aufstand von Muḥammad b. `Abdallāh", Der Islam, XLVI (1970), pp. 255f.

[119] As Nagel suggests, "Ein früher Bericht", p. 255.

[120] For the text of al-Ma'mūn's letter of designation see Ṣafwat, Jamharat Rasā'il al-`Arab, III, pp. 405-409; and Crone and Hinds, God's Caliph, appendix 4 (for an English translation).

In accepting a prominent 'Alid as the foremost representative of his family, the 'Abbāsids apparently sought to appease the 'Alids and to exercise some influence over them through that individual. If, as seems likely, Ja'far b. Muḥammad and 'Alī al-Riḍā were already regarded as imāms in their lifetime, the 'Abbāsid caliphs may also be assumed to have wanted them to keep their followers in check. For their part, the 'Abbāsids would have given them recognition not only as representatives of the 'Alid household (though hardly as imāms, of course) but also *qua* 'ulamā', a capacity in which the 'Abbāsids could pretend to meet the 'Alids on comparable terms.

Other examples can be added to the foregoing. The prominence of Ḥanafī judges in early 'Abbāsid judicial administration may be regarded as a kind of semi-official recognition of that school; at least some of the Ḥanafī judges -- though not the Ḥanafīs alone -- were subsequently to be associated with the *Miḥna*. But Ḥanafī judges, or judges of any persuasion for that matter, were not always acceptable locally, and there were occasions when the leading men of a town came to the caliph to ask for a replacement. These were occasions when the caliph could conveniently bring home several messages: that he was receptive to the wishes of the people concerned; that the administration of affairs was conducted with the advice of religious scholars; and, of course, that he *recognized* the influence and authority of these scholars (and notables) in their town and, therefore, their voice at his court.[121]

One further instance of caliphal support for 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 patronized scholars. A proto-Sunnī traditionist named Isḥāq b. Buhlūl al-Tanūkhī (d. 252) was

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[121] Cf. Wakī', *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, II, pp. 128ff. (certain prominent men of Basra bringing their complaints against the *qāḍī* to the caliph al-Mahdī; note the suggestion here that the governor of Basra, if not the caliph himself, may have been involved in the conspiracy against the *qāḍī*); ibid., II, pp. 151f. (Hārūn depicted as discussing complaints about his Basran *qāḍī* with leading Basran men of religion).

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.[122] 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" *isnāds*, 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 `Alī 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.[123]

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 raises the possibility that at least part of the *social* influence which some scholars enjoyed may have owed to the recognition given them at the caliphal court. This possibility is perhaps no less plausible than its converse, viz. that a scholar's eminence in religious life and society frequently earned him caliphal recognition as well. However such recognition is understood, it seems fairly certain that we are dealing with a phenomenon which not only represents an

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[122] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, VI, p. 368 (nr. 3390).

[123] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, IX, p. 328 (nr. 4803).

aspect of the caliphs' patronage of religious life but also a mechanism whereby they tried to regulate it.

IV.4.ii

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 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:[124] 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: there were stories about that position being declined even in the time of the pious 'Umar I,[125] and the famous tradition that

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[124] 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.

"one who is made a *qāḍī* is slaughtered without a knife"[126] 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 *isnads* of the foregoing tradition, or in those of other traditions which warn of the perils of the *qāḍī's* position, were themselves judges.[127]

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

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125 al-Kindī, *al-Quḍāt*, p. 302; Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, 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.

126 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, *Duʿafā'*, I, p. 222; al-Kindī, *al-Quḍāt*, p. 471; *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, VI, p. 151; and, most elaborately, Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, I, pp. 7-13.

127 For the "*man juʿila qāḍiyan...*" tradition, such individuals include: ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abān (d. 207), *qāḍī* of Wāsiṭ (Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, ʾ, p. 12; on him, see *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, X, pp. 442-47); Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Taymī (d. 250), *qāḍī* of Baṣra (*Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, VI, p. 151; on him, ibid., pp. 150-52); Ismāʿīl b. Isḥāq (d. 282) (Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, p. 9; on him, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, 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 Shurayḥ (d. 87), the legendary *qāḍī* of ʿUmar I (Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, I, pp. 19f.; on Shurayḥ cf. Tyan, *L'Organisation*, I, pp. 101ff.). Sharīk b. ʿAbdallāh (d. 177; on him, *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, IX, pp. 279-95) appears in variants of the tradition which states that two out of every three *qāḍīs* are in hell (Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, I, pp. 13f.; on Sharīk, see ibid.,III, pp. 149-75); and ʿĪsā b. Hilāl al-Salīḥī, 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

institution of the `aṭā' from the Umayyads.[128] Its operation had probably been more

extensive, and its beneficiaries more numerous, under the latter; and not much is, in any

case, heard of institutionalized `aṭā' after the time of Hārūn al-Rashīd.[129] 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, for instance, is reported to have distributed

2000 dirhams each among the (leading?) *qurrā'* of Kufa on one of his visits there.[130] 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.[131] Of those entitled, the Banū Hāshim received the highest stipend; then

followed, respectively, the Quraysh in general, the Ansār, the other Arabs, and finally the

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found, then he is beaten [so hard] with an iron rod that his grave coughs!" (Wakī`, *Akhbār al-Qudāt*, I, pp. 31f.; on this *qāḍī*, see Ibn Hajar, *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.

128 For a study of the `aṭā', and related matters, in the Hijāz in the Rāshidūn, Umayyad and `Abbāsid periods, see Ṣ. A. al-`Alī, *al-Hijāz fī Ṣadr al-Islām: dirāsāt fī ahwālihi al-`umrāniyya wa'l-idāriyya* (Beirut, 1990), pp. 379-434; Kh. `Athāmina, "al-Ab`ād al-ijtimā`iyya wa'l-siyāsiyya lī dīwān al-`aṭā'", *JSAI*, XIV (1991), pp. 1-39.

129 al-`Alī, *al-Hijāz*, p. 416.

130 *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, VIII, p. 352.

131 al-Zubayr b. Bakkār, *Jamharat Nasab Quraysh wa Akhbārihā*, ed. M. M. Shākir (Cairo, 1381 A.H.), p. 111 (nr. 216); *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIII, p. 194 (nr. 7172); al-`Alī, *Hijāz*, p. 412.

mawālī.[132] 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 A.H. 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 `atā's*, one each from the caliph and his two designated successors.[133] A special feature of the caliph's pious munificence on this occasion was the grant of allowances to 500 leading Medinese *mawāli* (*wujūh mawālī al-Madīna*), at least some of whom must have been prominent in religious life.[134]

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 Shu`ba b. al-Hajjāj of Basra to distribute the money there.[135] Mansūr b. al-Mahdī,[136] a son of the caliph al-Mahdī who briefly served as al-Ma'mūn's representative in Baghdād after the civil war, was, for his part, "fond of *hadīth* and of those specializing in it. Yazīd b. Hārūn al-Wāsitī was a companion of his (*sāhibuhu*). He used to send

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132   Zubayr b. Bakkār, *Jamharat Nasab Quraysh*, p. 111 (nr. 216); al-`Alī, *Hijāz*, p. 412.

133   al-Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 762f.; al-Ya`qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma (Leiden, 1883, reprinted 1969), II, p. 501; al-`Alī, *Hijāz*, pp. 414, 419.

134   al-Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 762f. al-Tabarī mentions three of the *mawālī* who received the highest payments (*sharaf al-`atā'*): Yahyā 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 (*kāna yaqra' al-Qur'ān bi'l-Madīna*).

135   *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, IX, p. 256 (nr. 4830).

136   See on him *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, p. 82 (nr. 7055); Ibn `Asākir, *Ta'rīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, MS. Zāhiriyya Library, published in facsimile by Muhammad b. Rizq b. al-Tarhūnī (n.p., n.d.), XVII, pp. 235-38.

amounts of money to ... [Yazīd], who then distributed them among the *muḥaddithūn* and the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*."[137] al-Ma'mūn, on one occasion, sent 50,000 dirhams to one Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh al-Anṣārī (d. 215) to have the amount distributed among the *juqahā'* 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.[138]

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 'Abbāsid period. al-Layth b. Sa'd has already been mentioned as one such scholar. Ibn Abī Dhi'b'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.[139] Abū Bakr b. 'Ayyāsh and Wakī' b. al-Jarrāḥ, two very distinguished Kūfan scholars, were both given much money by Hārūn al-Rashīd.[140] the Murji'ite Ibrāhīm b. Ṭahmān received a regular pension from the state, as 'Affān b. Muslim al-Saffār also did.[141] 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 had written his *Sīra* of the Prophet under the patronage of al-Manṣūr,[142] while al-Wāqidī, no less illustrious a scholar of the Prophet's life and

137 *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIII, p. 82. The designations "*al-muḥaddithūn*" and "*aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*" apparently refer to the same people.

138 *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, V, p. 409 (nr. 2920).

139 Cf. *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, II, pp. 296-305 (nr. 787), especially pp. 298, 305.

140 *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIV, p. 375 (nr. 7698). On Wakī' see n. 89, above. On Abū Bakr b. 'Ayyāsh, see *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIV, pp. 371-85 (nr. 7698), especially p. 375, where Mūsā b. 'Īsā, the governor of Kūfa, once introduces him to a companion as *faqīh al-fuqahā' wa'l-ra's 'inda ahl al-miṣr* [sc. Kūfa]".

141 Ibrāhīm b. Ṭahmān: *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, VI, p. 110 (nr. 3143); 'Affān b. Muslim: ibid., XII, p. 271 (nr. 6715).

142 Yāqūt, *Irshād al-Arīb ilā Ma'rifat al-Adīb*, ed. D. S. Margoliouth (London,

career, was to serve as al-Ma'mūn's *qāḍī* of `Askar al-Mahdī (East Baghdād) and be

patronized by this caliph.[143] Abū Yūsuf, the Hanafī 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 Yaḥyā b. Khālid b. Barmak.[144]

Abū `Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām tutored the sons of Harthama b. A`yan, was later

patronized by `Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir, and is said to have written his *Kitāb Gharīb al-Hadīth*

for al-Ma'mūn.[145] 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 *hadīth* is reported used to receive `*aṭā*'".[146] The

context indicates that Shu`ba had the Umayyad 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. There always were those who would have nothing to

do with the caliphs' gifts. In a rather tendentious account, the traditionists Sufyān b.

`Uyayna and `Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām are shown as having their debts relieved by the

caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, while the ascetic Fuḍayl b. `Iyāḍ stoutly refuses the caliph's

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1923-31), VI, p. 399; cf. *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, I, pp. 220f. (nr. 51); Sezgin, *GAS*, I, pp. 287f.; and 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* and of its furtherance of the `Abbāsid cause. The following comment of Ibn `Adī, *Du`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]..."

[143] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, III, pp. 4, 19 (nr. 939).

[144] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, p. 257.

[145] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XII, pp. 408 (nr. 6868).

[146] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-`Ilal wa Ma`rifat al-Rijāl*, ed. Waṣī Allāh b. Muḥammad `Abbās (Beirut, 1988), I, p. 379 (nr. 732).

largesse despite his need for it.[147] Fuḍayl evidently thought that the caliphs had no right to the money they dispensed. Another anecdote has him say so to Sufyān b. ʿUyayna: "if [the money] were lawful for them it would have been lawful for me [too]".[148] 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. It is also noteworthy in this anecdote that Fuḍayl did go to al-Rashīd and did address to him 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 was good enough.

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 ʿulamāʾ found expression. Not long after its foundation, Baghdād 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 important than the desire to make the acquaintance of fellow scholars.

Among the numerous scholars who visited Baghdād, several are expressly stated to have been invited or summoned by the caliphs, or they are reported to have visited the caliphs while in Baghdād.[149] These were the typical recipients of caliphal patronage. It is hardly far-fetched to imagine that, apart from narrating ḥadīth at the court and in the

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[147] Abū Nuʿaym, Ḥilyat al-Awliyāʾ (Cairo, 1932-38), VIII, pp. 105-08.

[148] al-Masʿūdī, Murūj al-Dhahab, ed. C. Pellat (Beirut, 1965-79), IV, pp. 215f.

[149] For some random examples, see Taʾrīkh Baghdād, 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).

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. Such visits may 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 -- and form -- of royal patronage. Reports that many an *ʿālim* was strongly opposed to such visits need not be a projection of later attitudes, however; it was precisely because the ʿulamāʾs 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. 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 ʿAbbāsid family, leading functionaries of the government, and not least, prominent ʿulamāʾ had their own circles of patronage. The fervour of Baghdād'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.[150]

Precisely because Baghdād 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.

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[150] Cf. the mutual rivalries and jealousies of 2nd century traditionists, though these were hardly limited to Baghdād alone (cf. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, p. 165 and n. 9); nor could such jealousies have been peculiar only to the traditionists.

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.[151] van Ess is also right in observing that, prior to al-Ma'mūn, it was not particular schools but individuals whom the `Abbāsid caliphs were patronizing.[152] To this it must be added, however, that these individuals normally represented some shade of the emergent proto-Sunnism. As seen in the foregoing, it is with religious scholars of this persuasion that the caliphs most often associated, and it is -- in the broadest sense -- *their* viewpoint that the `Abbāsids usually come across as supporting.[153]

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. The Basran Shu`ba b. al-Ḥajjāj was characterized by a contemporary as "the father and mother of the poor".[154] The Egyptian al-Layth b. Sa`d was as famous for assisting the indigent as he was for patronizing fellow-scholars. Among the latter, his beneficiaries included the Khurāsānī mystic Manṣūr b. `Ammār, the Egyptian *qāḍī* `Abdallāh b.

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[151] van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III, pp. 29f. The term "brain-drain" is van Ess'.

[152] van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III, pp. 9f.

[153] Cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III, p.10: "Man hatte die Revolution zum Erfolg geführt, indem man sich von den Ambitionen und Träumen der Šī`iten hatte tragen lassen; konsolidieren konnte man sie nur, indem man die Sunniten gewann."

[154] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, 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 Chruch 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."

Lahīʿa and the Medinese jurist Mālik b. Anas.[155] A Wāsiṭī scholar, Khālid b. ʿAbdallāh al-Ṭahḥān, 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."[156] Of another 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*.[157] Muḥammad b. Sallām b. Faraj (d. 227) claimed to have "spent 40,000 (dirhams?) in seeking knowledge and a similar amount in disseminating it";[158] Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn's father is supposed to have left him a legacy of a million and fifty thousand dirhams "all of which he spent on *ḥadīth*."[159]

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 mean patronizing them; it could also signify paying their fees to induce them to teach or narrate *ḥadīth* to their prospective student(s). Traditionists were often unwilling to share their knowledge without remuneration.[160] This explains the afore-mentioned Shuʿba's

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155   See Khoury, "al-Layth b. Saʿd", p. 193.

156   *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, VIII, p. 294 (nr. 4397); also cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb 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*)": *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, VIII, p. 294.

157   *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XI, p. 20 (nr. 5687).

158   Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, IX, p. 212 (nr. 333)

159   Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, XI, p. 282 (nr. 561).

160   On some of those who charged fees for narrating *ḥadīth* see al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī,

complaint that "he who seeks *hadīth* becomes poor".[161] If, then, the quest for *hadīth*, and the decision to become an `*ālim* or a *muhaddith* could be an expensive one, it was all the more important to patronize those who intended to adopt such a vocation. Many an aspirant to membership in the `ulamā's community would have needed financial assistance to *become* a scholar, and perhaps after that as well: it was from the state or from a more fortunate fellow scholar that such assistance would probably have been expected to come. `Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak, 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 *hadīth* 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 Muhammad. I do not know of anything after prophethood [itself] which is superior to the dissemination of knowledge.[162]

Reports about the affluence of particular scholars sometimes also give clues, perhaps unwittingly, to where the wealth may have come from. 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 he enjoyed from three successive caliphs. Wakī` b. al-Jarrāh

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*al-Kifāya fī `Ilm al-Riwāya*, ed. A. `U. Hāshim, 2nd edn. (Beirut, 1986), pp. 187f.; on the dislike of many others to accept payment for *hadīth* see ibid., pp. 184ff.

161 Ibn `Adī, *Du`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, *Du`afā'*, I, p. 67.); that is, they would be more concerned with the material gain involved in narrating *hadīth* than in the authenticity of their materials.

162 *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, X, p. 160 (nr. 5306); also cf. T. Nagel, *Rechtleitung und Kalifat* (Bonn, 1975), p. 267.

is said to have inherited a hundred thousand (dirhams?) from his mother;[163] his father, it is also reported, had been in charge of the *bayt al-māl* for Hārūn.[164] 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;[165] and 'Abdallāh b. 'Uthmān b. Jabala (d. 221), who is said to have given away 1000,000 dirhams as charity during his lifetime, was the *qāḍī* of Jurjān for 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir.[166] The origins of these scholars' affluence, and particularly 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.

IV.5

The foregoing discussion has sketched early 'Abbāsid participation in the religious lif₃ of the time. It is not clear what, or how much, the various facets of caliphal involvement in the kinds of activities depicted here meant to the religious scholars, or to society at large. That they would have had no effect is highly unlikely; the very persistence of the caliphal involvement is enough to suggest that much. It is tempting to think that, in a milieu where the caliph himself was pretending to be one of the 'ulamā',

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[163] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIII, p. 469.

[164] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIII, pp. 467f.; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, II, pp. 67 (nr. 108: s.v. al-Jarrāḥ b. Malīḥ). Wakī' himself is said, however, to have been unwilling to become a *qāḍī*. Cf. Wakī', *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, III, p. 184.

[165] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, XI, p. 282 (nr. 561).

[166] Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, V, pp. 313f. (nr. 535). He is described as "*imām ahl al-ḥadīth bi baladihi*": ibid., p. 314.

the latter could not have failed to benefit from the prestige and influence which the whole-hearted caliphal recognition of the importance of their vocation gave to them. The caliphs did not have to be motivated by purely religious considerations; they had their own reasons to patronize the `ulamā'. But that is secondary. Of the first importance is the point that the `ulamā' -- primarily the proto-Sunnī `ulamā' -- 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 often less than idyllic. For apart from the interlude of the *Miḥna*, it was not in doubt that `Abbāsid interests could best be served in promoting the proto-Sunnī scholars. It was not a particular school but a broad tendency which the caliphs patronized; and they did so for their own interests. But these interests converged with those of the *ahl al-sunna*. It is in this convergence that the significance of `Abbāsid patronage lies. The next chapter will review some expressions of this convergence.

Chapter V

THE RHETORIC OF RELIGIOUS POLICIES

V.1

This chapter seeks, *inter alia*, to suggest that the proto-Sunnī ʿulamā' of the early ʿAbbāsid period were in general favourably disposed towards the ʿAbbāsid caliphs. Besides the possibility of being influenced by the effects of caliphal patronage (studied in the previous chapter) this attitude may also be partly accounted for in terms of certain proto-Sunnī viewpoints, which, in their implications, favoured ʿAbbāsid interests. Such implications -- explored in the first part of this chapter -- may, in turn, offer some clues on why it was the proto-Sunnī viewpoints that the early ʿAbbāsids found most congenial. Part two will discuss some of the limitations under which ʿAbbāsid religious policies were exercised. The third part is an enquiry into the significance of ʿAbbāsid patronage for the development of proto-Sunnīsm.

V.2. A CONVERGENCE OF INTEREST

V.2.i

It has already been observed that the ʿAbbāsids were in need of establishing their legitimacy on firm grounds, that they sought to distance themselves from Shīʿism, and that they wished to cultivate religious prestige for themselves. Why the pursuit of these purposes should have drawn them to proto-Sunnī scholars is, at least partially, understandable in terms of the various contributing factors which have been encountered earlier: the proto-Sunnī trends called for a position of religious moderation and a broad-based consensus which would have suited the ʿAbbāsid concern to appeal to broad segments of society; the proto-Sunnī ʿulamā' gradually adopted a quietist political standpoint, which obviously suited ʿAbbāsid interests; as both proto-Sunnī and Shīʿite religious trends began to crystallize, they came to assume a greater distance towards each

other, which would possibly have given the `Abbāsids an interest in patronizing the former as a means of countering the ideological challenge of the latter; the caliphs' interest in *ḥadīth* and the religious sciences, an expression of their religious rhetoric, was another reason why they patronized the scholars of *ḥadīth*, and the proto-Sunnī `ulamā' generally.

Finally, it is tempting to suppose that early `Abbāsid patronage of the proto-Sunnīs may also have had something to do with the perception that the latter enjoyed popular support. In his day, the Mu`tazilī al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868-9) had observed that the `Uthmāniyya 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 (*ijmā*) of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*], it would cost him his life."[2] Such evidence, which dates from the middle of the third century, is impressive; but it is necessary not to exaggerate its import. It is not certain whether the `āmma of al-Ma'mūn's age should necessarily be equated with the proto-Sunnīs, nor whether a caliph would have been much concerned to appeal to the `āmma even if they should.[3] That proto-Sunnī scholars wielded increasing influence in society must certainly have been perceptible to the caliphs, not least to al-Ma'mūn. Yet, it is rather unlikely that early `Abbāsid patronage of the proto-Sunnīs owed to nothing more than the perception that the latter were in the ascendant. For, in that case, `Abbāsid patronage would have had to

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[1] al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-`Uthmāniyya*, ed. A.-S. Hārūn (Cairo, 1955), p. 176.

[2] Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo, 1326 A.H.), p. 20.

[3] Note that al-Mutawakkil was as wary of the riotous rabble as al-Ma'mūn may have been: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879-1901), III, p. 1413.

wait till the middle of the third century to be certain of the proto-Sunnī ascendancy.

The mere diversity of the likely reasons which underlay 'Abbāsid patronage already suggests, of course, that we should be wary of identifying any one of them as *the* reason explaining the phenomenon in question. The variety of possible causes should also alert us not to assume too readily, or rigidly, that the early 'Abbāsids *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 'Abbāsid 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 did, it is crucial to view the 'Abbāsid relationship with the *sunna* in the perspective not just of what this concept could have done to 'Abbāsid religious authority but also of the use to which the 'Abbāsids put the Prophet's *sunna* and *hadīth*. But the 'Abbāsids do not seem to have claimed religious authority over and above the 'ulamā', so they are unlikely to have been affected adversely by the crystallization of that concept. If anything, the caliphs were able to cultivate their religious rhetoric much more effectively with the help of their interest in and patronage of *hadīth* than would have otherwise been possible.

The various factors recapitulated above have considerable explanatory value. Yet the picture which 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 probably 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

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[4] P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 80ff.; the quotation is from p. 90.

to safeguard, even promote `Abbāsid interests, and/or indicate a certain convergence with `Abbāsid 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.ii.1

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*. Ibn Ḥanbal was one of those who promoted the rehabilitation of `Alī, and did so for various reasons. Someone once said to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal: " 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? What about the *hajj* 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...?"[5] 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 one of the first 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 `Alī was legitimate also vouched for the legitimacy of all those who succeeded him in the caliphal office. The `Abbāsids 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 `Abbāsid caliphs themselves.

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[5] al-Khallāl, *al-Musnad min Masā'il Abī `Abdallāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 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.

Another of Ibn Hanbal's arguments for the legitimacy of 'Alī's caliphate, and indeed for his inclusion in the privileged company of the patriarchal caliphs, took the form of adducing the alleged statement of the Prophet: "the caliphate after me will last for thirty years". This *hadīth* is one of the most interesting expressions of the *ahl al-sunna's* political attitudes in the second century, in which it appears at some time to have originated. If Ibn Hanbal'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 a brief elucidation in the present context.[6]

The point that this *hadīth* makes, and which apparently is its *raison d'être*, is that the six years of 'Alī's rule are part of the thirty-year life that the caliphate is to have after the death of the Prophet. The *hadīth* does not only assure to 'Alī a share in the righteous caliphate, it also locates a "golden age" in the same period, and 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 'Alī 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 *hadīth*. But this was probably meant only to emphasize the moral distance separating the righteous 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 this tradition originated. To Ibn Hanbal, of course, it was both well-known and of irreproachable authenticity. No doubts at all were

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[6] For this tradition see Nu'aym b. Hammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, MS. British Library, Or. 9449, fol. 23a; al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fols. 65b - 66b; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* (Cairo, 1313 A.H.) V, pp. 220, 221; idem, *Kitāb al-Sunna*, pp. 214ff.; Abū Zur'a, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. Shukr Allāh al-Qūjānī (Damascus, 1980), I, pp. 456 (nr. 1158); Ibn 'Adī, *al-Kāmil fī Du'afā' al-Rijāl*, 3rd edn. (Beirut, 1988), III, p. 401, VII, pp. 248f., 256; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa'l-Nihāya*, ed. Ahmad Abū Mulhim et al. (Beirut, 1987), VI, pp. 204f.

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."[7] He once also had a man removed from his *majlis* for expressing doubts about the reliability of Saʿīd b. Jumhān (d. 136), a transmitter of this *ḥadīth*.[8] Saʿīd b. Jumhān was a Baṣran who is supposed to have heard this tradition from Safīna, a *mawla* of the Prophet.[9] From Saʿīd the tradition was reported by Ḥammād b. Salama (d. 167), a well-known Baṣran traditionist.[10] The *Rijāl* critics were not particularly enthusiastic about the reliability of either Saʿīd or Ḥammād, though for Ibn Ḥanbal both were reliable.[11] If Saʿīd is rather too early to have originated this tradition, and a relatively unknown figure, Ḥammād is not without suspicion as its possible originator.

But this *ḥadīth* does not have only a Baṣran *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 Baṣran Saʿīd b. Jumhān. From al-ʿAwwām, it is in turn transmitted by the Wāsiṭī Hushaym b. Bashīr[12] or, rarely, by the Wāsiṭī al-Ḥajjāj b. Farrūkh.[13] We have already met al-ʿAwwām, first as one of those who are said to have exhorted the Umayyad troops to keep up the struggle against the ʿAbbāsids

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[7] "*Hādha kalām sūʾ radīʾ, yujānabūn hāʾūlāʾ al-qawm wa lā yujālasūn wa yubayyan amruhum liʾl-nās.*" al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 66b.

[8] al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 66b. On Saʿīd b. Jumhān see Ibn ʿAdī, *Duʿafāʾ*, III, pp. 401f.; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* (Haydarabad, 1325-27 A.H.), IV, p. 14 (nr. 15).

[9] On Safīna see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, IV, p. 125 (nr. 212).

[10] On Ḥammād b. Salama see Ibn ʿAdī, *Duʿafāʾ*, II, pp. 253-266; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, III, pp. 11-16 (nr. 14).

[11] Cf. al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fols. 66a, 66b.

[12] Cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Sunna*, p. 215. On Hushaym see Ibn ʿAdī, *Duʿafāʾ*, VII, pp. 134-38; *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XIV, pp. 85-94 (nr. 7436)

[13] Cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Sunna*, p. 215; on al-Ḥajjāj b. Farrūkh -- a very unreliable traditionist -- see Ibn ʿAdī, *Duʿafāʾ*, II, p. 233.

during the siege of Wāsiṭ, and then as a participant in the revolt of the ʿAlid Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbdallāh.[14] 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 it was he who originated this tradition, could he have done so to exclude the ʿAbbāsids from the caliphate? This possibility should not be excluded either in his case or in that of Hushaym b. Bashīr, who is also said to have participated in Ibrāhīm's revolt.[15] It is more likely, however, that the purpose of this tradition -- whatever its precise provenance -- was to rehabilitate ʿAlī[16] rather than to disqualify the ʿAbbāsids, as already noted. For to exclude the ʿAbbāsids from the "true" caliphate was to do the same to the Umayyads, which al-ʿAwwām -- 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, attested by the participation of both al-ʿAwwām and of Hushaym in an ʿAlid revolt and by the latter's transmitting certain pro-ʿAlī traditions, may explain why the thirty-year tradition could have originated in these Wāsiṭī circles.

The speculation on this tradition may be carried a little further with reference to another famous *hadīth*. The Prophet is supposed to have predicted, "After me there will be twelve caliphs" -- a statement which has numerous, often quite significant variants.[17] This tradition seems modelled on a non-Islamic *Vorlage*,[18] though the symbolic

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[14] al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. A. Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1949), p. 377; and cf. ibid., p. 359.

[15] al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, pp. 359, 363, 377.

[16] Cf. T. Nagel, *Rechtleitung und Kalifat* (Bonn, 1975), 232.

[17] For this *hadīth* and its variants, see Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, fols. 20b, 21a, 26b; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Cairo, 1313 A.H.), I, p. 398, V, pp. 86ff.; Abū Dāʾūd, *Sunan*, ed. K. Y. al-Ḥūt (Beirut, 1988), I, p. 508; Ibn ʿAdī, *Duʿafāʾ*, IV, p. 208; Wakīʿ, *Akhbār al-Qudāt*, ed. ʿA.-ʿA. M. Marāghī (Cairo, 1947-50), III, p. 17; Bahshal, *Taʾrīkh Wāsiṭ*, ed. K. ʿAwwād (Baghdad, 1967), p. 108; Ibn Balbān al-Fārisī, *al-Ihsān fī taqrīb Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, ed. Sh. al-Arnaʾūṭ (Beirut, 1991), XV, pp. 35-37, 43, 44, 45.

[18] The Syriac Apocalypse of John the Little, part of the Monophysite *Gospel of the*

significance of the number twelve is also attested in Muslim tradition and history.[19] There was no consensus, among those who took this *ḥadīth* seriously, about who the twelve caliphs were. It could not have been understood to refer to the Umayyad caliphs (who, excluding Mu'āwiya II, happened to be twelve in number) because such a reckoning would exclude all of the first four successors of the Prophet.[20] Certain variants of this *ḥadīth* even take the precaution of actually naming Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān as the first three of these twelve caliphs.[21] Rather, the *ḥadīth* is likely to have been understood as referring to "the good old time" preceding the *fitna* which began with the murder of Walīd II (126 A.H.);[22] and it is in the period immediately following this caliph's death that it may have originated *as a Prophetic ḥadīth*. Excluding Mu'āwiya 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. 'Alī is not one of these, which is hardly surprising: the *ahl al-sunna*, whose *ḥadīth* this is, did not initially regard him as one of the legitimate caliphs.

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 A. Cameron and L. I. Conrad, eds., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, I: *Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, 1992), p. 203. Drijvers makes a plausible case for dating the *Gospel* to "shortly after the end of the seventh century"(ibid., p. 213).

[19] Cf. Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles", p. 204 n. 31; for one historical example of this symbolism, see *Akhbār al-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, ed. 'A.-'A. al-Dūrī and 'A.-J. al-Muṭṭalibī (Beirut, 1971), pp. 214ff. (twelve *nuqabā'* being chosen, in conscious imitation of the "*sunnat rasūl Allāh ... wa sunnat Mūsā wa aṣḥābihi*" (ibid., p. 214), to guide the clandestine movement which was to bring the 'Abbāsids to power.

[20] But note that some variants do specify the twelve rulers as Umayyads: Rushdīn b. Sa'd - Ibn Lahī'a - Khālid b. Abī 'Imrān - Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān: "*After 'Uthman* there will be twelve kings from the Banū Umayya. 'Caliphs', he was asked? [No,] 'kings', he said" (emphasis added). Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, fol. 21a; ibid., fols. 23a, 31b. While this tradition does recognize the Umayyads as the twelve rulers, it can -- at least in its present form -- hardly have originated in pro-Umayyad circles.

`Abbāsid 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 `Abbās 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.[23] In the present form, this rejoinder could not have

originated much before the caliphate of al-Mahdī, though it may have had some earlier

incarnations.

Early `Abbāsid discomfort with the tradition which prophesied twelve caliphs and

this tradition's refusal, apparently, to give recognition to `Alī's caliphate may be taken

then to indicate its relatively early origins -- in relation, that is, to the thirty-year *ḥadīth*.

The discord between the two traditions is difficult to harmonize, as many a Sunnī scholar

would have been aware.[24] Although both traditions found their way in Sunnī collections

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[21] Cf. Ibn `Adī, *Ḍu`afā'*, V, p. 208.

[22] 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*." (To Schacht's references may be added `Abd al-Razzāq al-San`ānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. H.-R. al-A`ẓamī (Beirut, 1972), XI, pp. 252f. (nr. 20730).) 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 *bid`a*", *JSAI*, V (1984), pp. 263-313, esp. 303ff.) that the *fitna* mentioned in a remark attributed to Ibn Sīrīn (see chapter II n. 57, above) -- which Schacht dismisses -- refers to the *fitna* of Ibn al-Zubayr, not to the events following the murder of `Uthmān (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*.

[23] See Nu`aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, fol. 21a; Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb `Uyūn al-Akhbār* (Beirut, 1925-30), I, p. 204; also cf. ibid., fol. 27b; *Akhbār al-Dawla al-`Abbāsiyya*, p. 29. For a variant of this tradition cf. Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, ed. K. Y. al-Ḥūt (Beirut, 1989), VII, p. 513 (nr. 37642).

[24] Some later Sunnī scholars did notice the incongruity and tried to harmonize the two traditions. Cf. Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), *al-Bidāya wa'l-Nihāya*, VI, p. 205. A more

of *ḥadīth*, it is tempting to think that the discord between their claims is not fortuitous, and that the thirty-year *ḥadīth* was *intended* to contradict the other tradition. That the *ahl al-sunna* came to have an interest in recognizing the legitimacy of `Alī's caliphate and did so through the thirty-year *ḥadīth*, which consequently enjoyed a doctrinal importance utterly lacked by the *ḥadīth* about the twelve caliphs, would seem to be the best circumstantial evidence for this suggestion.

It is not difficult to see why the thirty-year *ḥadīth* would have been less offensive to `Abbāsid interests. As a response to the tradition about the twelve caliphs, it removed the Umayyads from "the good old times". The `Abbāsids, 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 `Abbāsid caliphs would probably not have had much to quarrel with such a viewpoint. Nor would it hurt `Abbāsid interests much if the *ḥadīth* also implied that the era of caliphal religious authority had effectively expired with the age of the Rāshidūn; with the exception of al-Ma'mūn, the caliphs were in any case not much concerned to lay claim to religious authority, as observed earlier.

It is not being suggested here that the thirty-year tradition was coined to safeguard `Abbāsid interests or that it necessarily entered `Abbāsid thinking as the caliphs came to patronize the proto-Sunnī `ulamā'. The `Abbāsids would, *inter alia*, have already been in the process of accommodating their vision to that of the proto-Sunnī `ulamā' before this *ḥadīth* became widely accepted among the latter. Yet the case of this *ḥadīth* should indicate that, in subtle ways, some of the developments which were taking place within

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interesting attempt is that of Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) in Ibn Balbān's *al-Iḥsān fī Taqrīb Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, 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).

the proto-Sunnî circles could promote, conform to, or at least avoid violating, `Abbāsid interests. The significance of this observation may be illustrated with some further examples.

V.2.ii.2

Sunnî tradition goes to some length to emphasize that `Alî did not possess or claim any special knowledge, or any hidden "texts", which the Prophet might have bequeathed to him to the exclusion of all others. `Alî is represented as announcing that all he had, or read, was the Qur'ān -- available to all, of course -- and a *ṣaḥîfa*, whose contents, though described in many variants, did not exceed certain clauses in the so-called "Constitution of Medina".[25] Whatever the precise moment when this tradition came into existence, its use for the *ahl al-sunna* is transparent. Shî`ite legitimism is being directly assailed here: the Prophet did not leave any special `*ilm* to `Alî, 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. `Alî had no particular privilege, no special claim, to be the Prophet's immediate successor any more than `Alî's descendants have to his succession.

This forceful tradition, expressing a proto-Sunnî agenda, was not without certain

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[25] 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 `Abdallāh b. Ḥasan b. Ḥasan, from whom Ibn Isḥāq may have acquired it for his *Sîra*; Imāmî tradition, however, depicts Ja`far 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 `Abbāsid 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 `Abbāsids may, therefore, have been calling them to something concrete rather than abstract; and that these documents (= `Alî's *ṣaḥîfa*) may have been at the heart of the *ṣaḥîfa ṣafrā'* legend (on which see below).

implications for `Abbāsid interests too. For their own reasons, the `Abbāsids were concerned to deny that the `Alids had a claim to the Prophet's legacy superior to theirs. Any attack on `Alid legitimism could therefore contribute, without having to be an expression of pro-`Abbāsid sentiment, towards bolstering the `Abbāsid ideological defences.

Initially, the `Abbāsids had tried simply to claim for themselves what they denied for the `Alids: 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", *sahīfa safrā'*, which, in the conventional Shī`ī 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 *sahīfa* itself was supposed to have been lost.[26] 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 Shī`ī imām, and of which the imām's `*ilm* -- of the past and future -- was particularly prominent. al-Manṣūr is, indeed, supposed to have bequeathed to his son and successor a box full of writings (*dafātir*) predicting the future.[27] But this same caliph is also reported already to have disclaimed any clairvoyance,[28] and the wills of subsequent caliphs were

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[26] Cf. M. Sharon, *Black Banners from the East* (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 139f. As Sharon puts it, "The fantasy which invented the *Sahīfa* also provided for its disappearance." (Ibid., p. 140) On the "testament" of Abū Hāshim, see ibid., pp. 121-40.

[27] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 443f. For a study of al-Manṣūr's will see A. Dietrich, "Das politische Testament des zweiten `Abbasidenkalifen al-Manṣūr", *Der Islam*, XXX (1952), pp. 133-65.

[28] al-Manṣūr's letter to `Ubayd Allāh al-`Anbarī, 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." ("...*wa `alā'llāh iṣlāh bāṭinik, lā a`lamu al-ghayb fa lā akhṭī wa lā adda`ī ma`rifat mā lam yu`allimnī rabbī.*") Wakī`, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, II, p. 91. Unless we are over-interpreting this passage, there seems to be a polemical

not, in any case, accompanied by such prophetic texts.[29] The kind of knowledge which

the caliphs generally laid claim to was more akin to that of the `ulamā' than it was to that

of prophets or divinely inspired imāms.[30] As the proto-Sunnī tradition divested `Alī's

ṣaḥīfa of any significant contents, the `Abbāsids 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 `Abbāsids and the proto-Sunnī `ulamā'.[31] 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.ii.3

Messianic expectancy was strong at the time the `Abbāsids came to power, and did

not die out immediately after their advent. Nor did the willingness of the ruling house to

put messianic ideas to use whenever feasible. Thus al-Manṣūr presented his son as the

Mahdī to have him recognized as his immediate successor, and perhaps also to focus

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note here against those (sc. the some of the `Alids) who did claim knowledge of the unseen.

[29] Cf. the instructions of al-Mahdī to his successor, Mūsa al-Hādī, which can, perhaps, be construed as elements of a will: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, pp. 549f., 588; and the more self-consciously made, and better preserved, will of al-Ma'mūn: ibid., III, pp. 1138-40.

[30] See IV.2, above.

[31] The highly charged notion of *waṣiyya*, the means for the transmission of an imām's knowledge and authority in the Shī`ite world-view, seems also to have been purged by the `Abbāsids of some of those connotations which made it so important for the Shī`a. The point was made through a historical anecdote which described how `Alī b. `Abdallāh, an ancestor of the `Abbāsid caliphs, did not make his *waṣiyya* in favour of his son and successor Muḥammad b. `Alī (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. 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 Shī`a gave such fundamental importance -- was not all that important after all, that it was irrelevant to the question of actual succession.

messianic expectations away from the `Alids. As late as the time of al-Ma'mūn, apocalyptic expectations are alleged, by certain curious documents, to have played a part in this caliph's designation of `Alī al-Riḍā as his successor.[32] But while messianic and apocalyptic notions had their uses, they also had their dangers, as noted earlier; and it does not require much imagination to assume that the early `Abbāsids would have had an interest in seeing messianic expectancy diminish.

In distancing themselves from the Shī`ite milieu, the caliphs were probably not only making overtures towards the proto-Sunnīs, but also trying to separate themselves from the messianic expectations which characterized the Shī`ī world-view in both its extreme and moderate forms. Conversely, the `Abbāsids may well have been drawn towards proto-Sunnism for, *inter alia*, its 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-`Abbāsiyya* may be briefly discussed for the light it throws on early `Abbāsid efforts to reduce messianic expectancy. This tradition takes us back to the pre-revolution history of the `Abbāsid family, and to Muḥammad b. `Alī b. `Abdallāh b. `Abbās, at a time when the latter is supposed to have been directing the affairs of his Khurāsānī Shī`a. While certain reports -- of pseudo- al-Nāshi' al-Akbar, for instance -- speak of Muḥammad b. `Alī'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

Nor is it without interest that it is Hārūn al-Rashīd -- a caliph anything but well-disposed towards the Shī`a -- whom the *Akhbār* quotes as the authority for this report.

[32] W. Madelung, "New Documents concerning al-Ma'mūn, al-Faḍl b. Sahl and `Alī al-Riḍā'", in W. al-Qāḍī, ed., *Studia Arabica et Islamica: Festschrift for Iḥsān `Abbās* (Beirut, 1981), pp. 333-46.

mischief;[33] another exhorts the Khurāsānis to obey and follow Bukayr b. Māhān,[34] a

Kūfan Shī`ite whom historical tradition depicts as the architect of the `Abbāsid da`wa

organisation in Khurāsān.[35] The third, and much longer, letter is what concerns us here;[36]

it is probably to be identified with what the `Abbāsid patriarch is said to have written in

the aftermath of the Khidāsh affair by way of defining the institutes of religion for his

Shī`a. What is remarkable about 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 (*awliyā'*), 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 (*rāha min nasab 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] (*haqq*), 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 Muhammad, and the worst error is the error which comes after right guidance.[37]

This emphasis on other-worldly salvation seems to be much more in harmony with the

need to *diminish* messianic expectancy in the early `Abbāsid society than it is with the

aspirations of a messianically expectant revolutionary (or potentially revolutionary)

movement in Khurasān. Much of the rest of the letter is concerned with emphasizing

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33 *Akhbār*, pp. 212f.

34 *Akhbār*, p. 213; cf. Sharon, *Black Banners from the East*, p. 189.

35 On Bukayr see, in particular, *Akhbār*, pp. 191-250, passim; Sharon, *Black Banners*, index, s.v.

36 *Akhbār*, pp. 208-212.

37 *Akhbār*, pp. 209-211.

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 tendencies 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, after all, 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 and chiliastic hopes among Babylonian Jewry.[38] The early `Abbāsids were apparently doing the same.

It could certainly be argued that the contents of this letter are to be interpreted simply as an effort to curtail the impatience of the Shī`a -- prior to the revolution -- for messianic redemption. But it seems rather more likely that the letter expresses the concerns of the *early `Abbāsid times* to de-emphasize messianism and "routinize charisma". Likewise, when the author of the letter calls upon the Shī`a 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 *da`wa*. Yet the strong sense of quietist loyalism which this exhortation conveys is perhaps better understood as referring to the duty of obedience to the rulers of the early `Abbāsid times.[39]

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

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[38] J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, II: *The Early Sasanian Period* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 52ff., 236ff.

[39] *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." ("... *wa lā ta`sū imāman ... wa lā taftahū mughlaqan wa lā taghliqū maftūhan wa lā takhtānū wulāta umūrikum, wa ahsinū mu`āzaratahum wa siyānata amrihim*.")

famous *hadîth*, 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 (*afdal*) guidance (*hady*) is the guidance of Muḥammad, the worst of things are the innovations (*muḥdathāt*), and every innovation (*bid̄ʿa*) is an error (*dalāla*)..."[40] Also reminiscent of this *hadîth*, if rather more faintly, and of the related motifs in the afore-mentioned passage from the *Akhbār*, is the letter of the caliph al-Mahdî regarding the genealogy of Ziyād b. Abîhi.[41] With appropriate Qur'ānic quotations the dichotomy *hudā* / *dalāla* 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-Mahdî to restore the *sunna* contravened by Muʿāwiya. The term *bid̄ʿa* is not mentioned here any more than it is in the letter which al-Mahdî's grandfather, Muḥammad b. ʿAlî, is supposed to have written to the Khurāsānî Shîʿa, though both contexts are strongly suggestive of that term (and notion). More to the point, however, both contexts are strongly suggestive *of each other*. This may be taken as another indication that the letter attributed to Muḥammad b. ʿAlî originated in the early ʿAbbāsid period -- possibly in that of al-Mahdî -- and expresses some of the concerns of that age.

Proto-Sunnî attitudes (or those of any second-century scholars, for that matter) towards messianism, are little known. We do know that some of the Medinese *fuqahā'* who backed the revolt of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya took his claim to be the *mahdî*

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[40] Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, III, p. 310. For similar and thematically related traditions see Muḥammad b. Waddāh al-Qurṭubî, *Kitāb al-Bidaʿ*, ed. M. Isabel Fierro (Madrid, 1988), especially pp. 171ff. For other references in canonical *hadîth* cf. A. J. Wensinck, *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition* (Leiden, 1927, repr. 1960), s.v. "Innovations". For a wide-ranging discussion of *bid̄ʿa* see M. Talbi, "Les Bidaʿ", *SI*, XII (1960), pp. 43-77.

[41] See the text of this letter in al-Ṭabarî, *Ta'rîkh*, III, pp. 479-481.

seriously,[42] 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*.[43] 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.[44]

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."[45]

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[42] 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).

[43] al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, p. 291.

[44] al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil*, 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."

[45] "*...in marra ʿalā bābik fa-lā takun minhu shayʾan ḥattā yajtamiʿ al-nās ʿalayhi*". al-Fasawī, *Kitāb al-Maʿrifa waʾl-Taʾrīkh*, ed. A. D. al-ʿUmarī (Baghdad, 1974-76), I, p. 726; cf. *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, 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 tell you that the Messiah has come, finish planting the sapling and then go forth to receive him."

This remark seems to have two implications. First, the community 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 `Abbāsids notwithstanding,[46] Sufyān al-Thawrī was known for his stringent quietism.[47] 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 ~ed for any extraordinary enthusiasm about the *mahdī*, nor any 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 `Īsā", that is, Jesus is the *only* figure whose "return" is to be awaited near the end of time.[48]

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[46] See chapter III n. 52, above.

[47] *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, IX, p. 22 (nr. 4615).

[48] Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, IX, pp. 143f. (nr. 200: s.v. Muhammad b. Khālid al-Janadī). Among those who transmitted this tradition from Muhammad b. Khālid was al-Shāfi`ī as well; see *EI*(2), s.v. "al-Mahdī" (W. Madelung). Also see Nu`aym b. Hammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, fols. 102b, 103a. The text of the tradition in Ibn Māja, *Sunan* ed. M. F. `Abd 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. `Abd al-A`lā - Muhammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi`ī - Muhammad b. Khālid al-Janadī - Abān b. Sālih - 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 shuhhan wa lā taqūm al-sā`a illā `alā shirār al-nās, wa lā mahdī illā `Īsā.*") Also see Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Musannaf*, VII, p. 513 (nr. 37646): al-Walīd b. `Utba - Zā'ida - Layth - Mujāhid: "*al-Mahdī* `Īsā b. Maryam."

Belief in the *mahdi's* coming did, of course, survive in Sunnism but without a significance and function comparable to that in Shi'ism.[49] Sunnī collections of *hadīth* 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.[50] The classic work of this genre, Nu'aym b. Ḥammād's *Kitāb al-Fitan*, contains apocalyptic and messianic traditions of various tendencies -- pro- and anti-'Alid, pro- and anti-Umayyad, pro- and anti-'Abbāsid, etc. Many of the traditions recorded there describe -- with details which are frequently at odds with each other -- the circumstances of the *mahdi's* advent. While the *mahdi'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".[51]

If the road to the *mahdi's* advent was paved with chaos and bloodshed, it did not make good sense to long for it, as the Shī'a 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 caution against, too fervent an anticipation of the millennium.

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

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[49] For a thoughtful comparison of the two religious traditions on this, and other, scores, see H. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin, 1982), ch. 1.

[50] Cf. the "Kitāb al-Fitan" of Ibn Abī Shaybā'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 Dā'ūd, 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).

[51] Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, fol. 91a.

famous *ḥadīth* had the Prophet predict that things would only go from bad to worse.[52] 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 gone. 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. Such an attitude not only rules out messianism, it also undergirds a certain commitment to the preservation of the present circumstances -- and perhaps 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 ʿUmar, the fault was not his alone: had anyone of his subjects been the recipients of the Prophet's direct and transforming guidance as those whom ʿUmar governed were?[53] Despite falling short of all ideals, however, and for whatever reason, 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 Abu'l-Rabīʿ Muḥammad b. al-Layth is said to have written on behalf of Hārūn al-Rashīd to the Byzantine emperor Constantine VI.[54] The letter is a long disquisition on why the emperor should convert to Islam, or

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[52] See n. 48, above; and see al-Khallāl, *Masāʾil*, fol. 5b; ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Khawlānī, *Taʾrīkh Dārayya* (Damascus, 1950), p. 74; *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, IV, pp. 220f.

[53] Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, *Kitāb Baghdād*, ed. M. Z. al-Kawtharī (n.p., 1949), pp. 44f.

[54] Cf. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. R. Tajaddud, 3rd edn. (Beirut, 1988), p. 134. The text of the letter is preserved in Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, *Ikhtiyār al-Manẓūm waʾl-Manthūr*, Brit. Lib. Add. 18,532, fols. 85a - 97a; published (from a different MS.) in A. Z. Ṣafwat, *Jamharat Rasāʾil al-ʿArab* (Cairo, 1937), III, pp. 252-324 (the text relied on here is that of Ṣafwat's anthology). On the contents and authenticity of this *risāla* and for some information on its author see the brief but important discussion in J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* (Berlin and New York, 1991-), III, pp.

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[55] 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. Though 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.[56] Even if it was not, it 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 letter says.

If the state was the manifestation of the might of Islam, 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."[57] Who the innovators were is not disclosed. It should be noted, however, that one of the things

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24ff.; also see 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.

[55] The expression comes from K. Cragg, *The Pen and the Faith: eight modern Muslim writers and the Qur'ān* (London, 1985), p. 98.

[56] After all, Muhammad b. al-Layth, the author of the letter, was a "*khaṭīb*": Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, p. 134.

[57] "... *fa kallamahu Ḥammād b. Zayd fī tanahhīhi ʿan al-sulṭān wa qāla hādha fī l ahl al-bidʿa*." Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, ed. E. Sachau et al. (Leiden, 1905-40), VI, p. 259.

which sometimes raised suspicions of *zandaqa* was precisely an individual's renunciation of the world; and the "Ṣūfiyyat al-Muʿtazila", who believed in *taḥrīm al-makāsib* -- effectively a boycott of society and a denunciation of its norms -- and held that having a government was detrimental rather than conducive to the interests of religion,[58] would have been innovators equally from the viewpoint of the state, of the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ and of the other Muʿtazila. 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 ʿulamāʾ would again have agreed.

The instances discussed above provide no more than a glimpse of certain evolving proto-Sunnī viewpoints and their implications. That even before al-Maʾmūn'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 ʿulamāʾs faith in the ʿAbbāsid regime; if anything, it made them more conscious of the need for a "good" caliph.

V.2.iii

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.[59] But if Sufyān was not unique in his (passive) opposition to the

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[58] J. van Ess, *Frühe muʿtazilitische Häresiographie* (Beirut, 1971), pp. 49f. (of the Arabic text), paras 82f.

[59] Cf. G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 207ff., where

`Abbāsids, 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 were 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 `Abbāsids did not conduct them too early in the day. Allaying all apprehensions, he is said to have replied: "The `Abbāsids [lit. the children of al-`Abbās] are more steadfast in [conducting] prayer and firmer in their commitment to it than others."[60] This answer is unfortunately not without some ambiguity. It is not clear whom he is comparing the `Abbāsid religious commitment to, and why. If the comparison is with the Umayyads, it should be of some interest that Ibn Ḥanbal rates `Abbāsid religiosity higher than theirs. *Why* such a comparison is being made might be explicable as an assertion of `Abbāsid 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 `Abbāsids were not merely tolerable but better than "others".

Fuḍayl b. `Iyāḍ, a noted ascetic,[61] is known to have prayed for the longevity of

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Sufyān is considered as the prime suspect for having fabricated a well-known anti-`Abbāsid tradition predicting the imminent destruction of Baghdād.

[60] al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 3b. "*Walad al-`Abbās aqwam li'l-ṣalāt wa ashadd mu`āhadan li'l-ṣalāt min ghayrihim.*" Cf. *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIV, p. 375 (nr. 7798), where an explicit comparison between the Umayyads and the `Abbāsids, attributed to the Kūfan scholar Abū Bakr b. Ayyāsh, is made in very similar terms: "They were more beneficial to the people while you are more steadfast in prayer." ("*Hā'ulā' kānū anfa` li'l-nās wa antum aqwam bi'l-ṣalāh*".) Needless to say, Hārūn al-Rashīd -- in whose presence, and on whose query -- this comparison was made richly rewarded the scholar.

[61] On him see Abū Nu`aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, (Cairo, 1932-38), VIII, pp.

Hārūn al-Rashīd's life.[62] This rather unusual act of his is explained with the gloss that "he feared someone worse than [Hārūn] might succeed him".[63] Whether al-Fuḍayl did in fact pray for Hārūn is not quite certain; but the gloss, which purports to come from Ibn Hanbal, seems to forecast the travails of the `ulamā' in al-Ma'mūn's time and is therefore tendentious. Yet the matter does not quite seem to have been settled with such a gloss. In Abū Nu`aym's *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, 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 Muhammad b. Abī `Uthmān -- that al-Fuḍayl feared "the strife (*balā'*) which would follow Hārūn['s death]".[64] 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!

As regards the caliph al-Mutawakkil, one Ibrāhīm b. Muhammad al-Taymī believed that there were only three caliphs (worthy of name?): Abū Bakr (for suppressing the Ridda), `Umar b. `Abd al-`Azīz (for redressing the wrongs of his predecessors), and al-Mutawakkil (for restoring the people to adherence to the *sunna*).[65] For his part, Ibn Hanbal too was unreserved in extolling al-Mutawakkil's services.[66] Such praise for al-

84-139; Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb*, VIII, pp. 294-96; for further references see F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, I (Leiden, 1967), p. 636.

[62] al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 4a.

[63] al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 4a.

[64] Also cf. Abū Nu`aym, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, VIII, pp. 104f.

[65] Wakī`, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, II, p. 180.

[66] al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 176b (ad Ibn Hanbal's letter to al-Mutawakkil); and cf. ibid.,

Mutawakkil illustrates how much the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ 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: it indicates the ʿulamāʾ's perception that caliphal policies had the potential to affect them seriously, and that a "good" caliph was therefore to be whole-heartedly supported.[67] 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.[68]

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 more directly involved in promoting the interests of the ruling family or of particular caliphs. Who these individuals were is usually not known; the traces which their activities have left behind are, however, somewhat better known. These range from pro-ʿAbbāsid traditions -- in the

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fol. 5a.

[67] 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 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal* [Cairo, n.d.], pp. 356-79; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa'l-Nihāya*, 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.ii and nn. 125ff., 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 till the former's death in 241] 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 wa'l-Nihāya*, X, p. 354.) 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?

[68] See Nagel, *Rechtleitung und Kalifat*, pp. 242ff. and passim.

form of *hadīth* 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 a precious example. The purpose here is not to analyze these texts -- that task has often received scholarly attention,[69] 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?"[70] Many a preacher active in propaganda *against* al-Ma'mūn, during the civil war, simply changed sides "to praise [him] the way he praised Jesus and Muḥammad" after al-Ma'mūn turned out to be victorious.[71] It is indicative of the nature of things here that al-Ma'mūn, who is supposed to have made this comment, should have been sufficiently cynical to allow this *volte face* to these preachers. Muqātil b. Sulaymān, the Khurāsānī Qur'ān exegete, is said to have fabricated *hadīth*, 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 *hadīth*.[72] In suggesting that the caliphs' commitment to the Prophet's *hadīth* was too sincere to countenance forgers (and ʿAbbāsid claims were too well-founded to need their services), such reports may already

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[69] Cf. T. Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des Abbasiden Kalifates* (Bonn, 1972); J. Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*; Cl. Gilliot, "Portrait 'mythique' d'Ibn ʿAbbās", *Arabica*, XXXII (1985), pp. 127-84.

[70] al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa wa'l-Ta'rīkh*, II, p. 436.

[71] Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, *Kitāb Baghdād*, p. 15.

[72] Cf. Abū Zurʿa, *Ta'rīkh*, II, p. 550 (nr. 1499).

indicate that the activities of pro-regime intellectuals were not only wide-ranging but also notorious enough to require an apology.

Other examples can be added to this random sample. A Shī'ī, Hishām b. Ibrāhīm, was called "al-'Abbāsī" because he had written a book on "The Proofs of the imamate of al-'Abbās" (*Āyāt Imāmat al-'Abbās*); he is supposed to have done so to save his life, and remained in hiding until the work reached 'Abbāsid authorities and he was pardoned.[73] 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 'Alid household.[74] 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Abān (d. 207), who for some time was *qāḍī* of Wāsiṭ, 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, 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Abān is described as having a *ṣaḥīfa*, on which Ibn Ḥanbal, who examined it, found the words "*kitāb 'atīq asfar*" at the top, and "*kitāb asfar 'atīq*" at the bottom;[75] an effort may well have been under way here to revive the legend of the *Ṣaḥīfa al-Ṣafrā'*, "the yellow scroll"!

In the appointment of *qāḍis* some consideration seems also to have been given to their ability to articulate and disseminate pro-regime ideas.[76] A Medinese notable, Hishām b. 'Abdallāh al-Makhzūmī, so pleased Hārūn al-Rashīd with his words and *wa'z* that the caliph, besides rewarding him handsomely, appointed him as the *qāḍī* of

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[73] al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār Ma'rifat al-Rijāl*, (hereafter *Rijāl al-Kashshī*), ed. H. al-Muṣṭafawī, (Mashshad 1348 H.s), pp. 501f. (nr. 961).

[74] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 560.

[75] Wakī', *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, III, p. 314. On 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Abān see *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, X, pp. 442-447 (nr. 5604); also cf. G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, p. 236.

[76] Note that as late as 204, the functions of *qaḍā'* 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.

Medina.[77] In Hishām's eloquence the caliph may possibly have seen some expression of pro-'Abbāsid (or pro-Hārūn) sentiment, and certainly a potential to promote the regime's interests. An anecdote, noticed in the previous chapter, in which a scholar's quoting a tradition with an 'Abbāsid family *isnād* leads to his appointment as *qāḍī* by al-Ma'mūn makes a similar point. Such individuals could be useful to the dynasty; appointment to the *qaḍā'* was both a recognition of services already rendered and an invitation to their continuance. The same caliph also had a scholar, 'Abdallāh 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 'Abbās and Mu'āwiya.[78] These reports, of which this scholar is said to have been the sole repository, are all tendentious; they seek, *inter alia*, to argue for 'Abbāsid legitimism as against the claims of Mu'āwiya and 'Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr.[79] al-Ma'mūn, evidently pleased, appointed the narrator as the *qāḍī* of Fars, which he remained until his death.[80] 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) 'Abbāsid caliph once sought in a *qāḍī* are unusual but significant nevertheless:

> From among the *fuqahā'*, [he is supposed to have instructed a confidant,] find me someone who has written [down] *hadīth* and has mastered it, and [possesses the ability for] individual judgement (*kataba'l-hadīth wa tafaqqaha bihi ma'a'l-ra'y*). 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 'alā mulkinā*).[81]

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77 Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, V, pp. 312f. That Hishām was a notable belonging to the influential Makhzūm clan of the Quraysh, and that he had a reputation for *al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf* etc. (ibid., V, pp. 312f.), must also have guided the caliph's decision.

78 *Akhbār*, pp. 83f.

79 Cf. ibid., pp. 53ff., 58ff.

80 Ibid., p. 83.

81 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, p. 259.

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 a particular scholar (one Muḥammad b. Shujāʿ, alias Ibn al-Thaljī), in whose honour the whole image would seem to have been conjured.[82] However, the possibly fictitious character of this report does not invalidate its rather incidental testimony that *qāḍīs* may have been required to further the dynasty's ideological interests. Nor is it without significance that *qāḍīs* were often suspected of mendacity in *ḥadīth*.[83] That, however, was scarcely confined to the *qāḍīs* alone.

Of all centers of *ḥadīth* scholarship Baghdād was probably the most notorious.[84] 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 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 Duʾād, the Muʿtazilī chief *qāḍī*, bought the services of ʿAlī b. al-Madīnī (d. 234), 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.[85] 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 Duʾād 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

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[82] Ibid., pp. 259f.

[83] On the mendacity of Baghdādian *qāḍīs* see Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, pp. 89f.

[84] Cf. *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, I, p. 43.

[85] *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, XI, pp. 466f. (nr. 6349).

scholars lost their reputations on account of such visits.[86]

Such instances can be multiplied. Those already noted should suffice however to realize 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 *hadīth* might be recognized for what they were, and their originators squarely discredited by proto-Sunnī scholarly opinion, pro-`Abbāsid motifs in *hadīth* and elsewhere could still freely circulate and end up in quite respectable places. The impact of pro-`Abbasid traditions on classical historiography is a case in point, and one which is too well-known to require elaboration. Only one other example will be given here to illustrate the point.

In the *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 *hadīth* 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 replace the `Alid *dramatis personae* while the tradition remains otherwise unaltered.[87] Other traditions of the pro-`Abbāsid series in the *Masā'il* are less provocative but affirm `Abbāsid legitimism no less. Ibn Ḥanbal should not perhaps be accused of

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[86] Cf. *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, X, p. 229 (nr. 5359), citing `Alī b. al-Madīnī's opinion about a traditionist named `Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abi'l-Zannād: "The traditions he narrated in Medina are [to be deemed] reliable but those he narrated in Baghdād were corrupted by the Baghdadians."

[87] al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 5a; cf. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, ed. `A.-`A. al-Dūrī (Wiesbaden, 1978), p. 4 (for a rather remote variant of this tradition); also cf. J. van Ess, "Les Qadarites et la Gailānīya de Yazīd III", *SI*, XXXI (1970), p. 285 n. 2. For the Shī`ī tradition regarding the *ahl al-kisā'* see *EI*(2), s.vv. "Ahl al-kisā'" (A. S. Tritton), "Ahl al-bayt" (I. Goldziher et al.), "Mubāhala" (W. Schmucker); *EIr*, s.v. "Āl-e `Abā" (H. Algar).

giving credence to such traditions. The *isnāds* with which these traditions are introduced

there do not mention him, which gives rise to the strong suspicion that the compiler of the

Masā'il, 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 *isnad*. In any case, even if the presence of the pro-ʿAbbāsid traditions in the

Masā'il does not reflect Ibn Ḥanbal's approval of them, their presence there is still

significant:[88] the proto-Sunnī -- and not just the Ḥanbalī -- circles, whose world-view the

Masā'il echoes, need not have been opposed to the message these traditions had to

convey.[89]

It is not being suggested here that by Ibn Ḥanbal's time the proto-Sunnī scholars had

all become pro-ʿAbbāsid. That there was a strong current of pro-ʿAbbāsid sentiment in

the proto-Sunnī camp by that time may however be seen to follow from the foregoing

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[88] The following is a paraphrase of these traditions, and an indication of some of the sources (besides the *Masā'il*) they occur in:
(1) To condemn and hurt al-ʿAbbās is to condemn and hurt the Prophet: al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 5a; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, I, p. 300; Wensinck, *Handbook*, s.v. al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, pp. 2, 9.
(2) al-ʿAbbās is the twin-brother (*sinw*) of the Prophet's father: al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 5a; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, I, pp. 207f., II, p. 322; Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, p. 2.
(3) ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb successfully prayed for rain by invoking al-ʿAbbās' close kinship with the Prophet: al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, fol. 5b; Wensinck, *Handbook*, s.v. al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, p. 7.

For other traditions extolling al-ʿAbbās see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, pp. 1-22; for those extolling ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās see ibid., pp. 27-55. al-Balādhurī shares many of the traditions on Ibn ʿAbbās with Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, II, pt. ii, pp. 119-24; for an illuminating semiotic analysis of the forty-four traditions which occur in the latter's *tarjama* of Ibn ʿAbbās see Cl. Gilliot, "Portrait 'mythique' d'Ibn ʿAbbās", pp. 127-84.

[89] If the *isnāds* 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 al-Ashrāf*, III, pp. 1ff.), the following prominent names are frequently encountered in the *isnāds*: Abū Bakr b. ʿAyyāsh (d. 193; on him see *Ta'rīkh Baghdād*, XIV, pp. 371-85 [nr. 7698]); Abū Muʿāwiya Muḥammad b. Khāzim al-Ḍarīr (d. 194; on him see *Ta'rīkh*

evidence.[90] It owed itself not a little to `Abbāsid religious policies as well as to the awareness, on the part of both the `Abbāsids and the `ulamā', 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 `Abbāsid 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..."[91] 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

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Baghdād, V, pp. 242-249 [nr. 2735]); Ismā`īl b. `Ayyāsh (d. 182; on him see *Ta'rīkh Baghdād,* VI, pp. 221-228 [nr. 3276]); Khālid b. `Abdallāh al-Wāsiṭī (d. 182; on him see *Ta'rīkh Baghdād,* VIII, pp. 294f. [nr. 4397]); al-Walīd b. Muslim (d. 195; on him see Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb,* XI, pp. 151-155 [nr. 254]); Wahb b. Baqiyya al-Wāsiṭī (d. 239; on him see *Ta'rīkh Baghdād,* XIII, pp. 457f. [nr. 7324]); Wakī` b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 198; on him see *Ta'rīkh Baghdād,* XIII, pp. 466-481 [nr. 7332]); Yahyā b. Adam (d. 203; on him see Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb,* XI, pp. 175f. [nr. 300]); Yazīd b. Hārūn (d. 206; on him see *Ta'rīkh Baghdād,* XIV, pp. 337ff. [nr. 7661]).

90 The view that "it was in traditions marginal to mainstream Islam that the `Abbāsids found their intellectual resources" (P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses* [Cambridge, 1980], p. 64) is therefore off the mark (though the "traditions" in this statement do not of course simply mean *hadīth* or *akhbār*).

91 M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power,* I (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 169f. (italics in the original).

consider briefly what this sobering note signifies for `Abbāsid religious policies.

We have discussed earlier al-Mahdī's letter to the governor of Baṣra 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 Baṣra] he set out putting it into effect, but then representations were made on ... behalf [of the family of Ziyād, who would be adversely affected by the decree] and he did not proceed. `Abd al-Malik b. Zubyān al-Numayrī had been sent a letter like the one to Muḥammad [b. Sulaymān],[92] but he did not put it into effect because of his relationship to Qays and his dislike of any of his people leaving it for another group."[93]

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.[94] (More will be said on the significance of caliphal rhetoric in the next

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[92] `Abd al-Malik al-Numayrī, a former governor of Baṣra, was in charge of the public 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.

[93] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 482; translation as in Kennedy, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXIX, p. 193. Already Abu'l-`Abbās al-Saffāḥ, the first `Abbāsid caliph, had written to his Baṣran governor, Sulaymān b. `Alī, to confiscate the property of the Banū Ziyād; but the governor's compliance to this directive had been only partial. See Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, III, p. 91.

[94] Cf. Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: historical sociology and political pluralism*, tr. B. Pearce, abridged, with an introduction, by O. Murray (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

section.) Conversely, the foregoing report can also be interpreted as evidence that caliphal decrees could, without much difficulty, be circumvented or ignored in view of local interests. That this could happen somewhere as near the seat of `Abbāsid power as Basra gives a rather grim picture of the effectiveness of `Abbāsid 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.[95]

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 qāḍīs' decisions.[96] The same caliph once had a qāḍī of Mawṣil flogged to death for reasons which have not been recorded.[97] 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 `Abdallāh b. Lahī`a is an instructive if somewhat atypical example. He was appointed by al-Manṣūr -- "`alā ḍu`fī `aqlihi wa sū`i

the edicts of the Chinese emperors or of the papal bulls of the Middle Ages)."

[95] Cf. H. Kennedy, *The Early `Abbāsid 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.

[96] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 435.

[97] al-Azdī, *Ta'rīkh Mawṣil*, ed. A. 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. Wakī`, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, III, p. 304 (Hārūn's qāḍī of al-Madā'in terrorized and forced to flee for non-conformity to the caliph's directives).

madhhabihi" --[98] and continued in office under al-Mahdî. Ibn Lahî`a's waywardness (*sū'*

madhhabihi) is often understood as consisting in his Shî`ite proclivities,[99] though some

doubt has been expressed about that.[100] But Shî`ite inclinations were not unusual for a

qāḍî in early `Abbāsid times. What is rather more remarkable is that Ibn Lahî`a also

figures prominently in *isnāds* of numerous messianic and apocalyptic traditions --

traditions which have all sorts of tendencies, `Alid, `Abbāsid, and perhaps

anti-`Abbāsid.[101] Now if a *qāḍî* such as Sharîk b. `Abdallāh could be harassed by al-

Mahdî for narrating a tradition deemed to have unfavourable implications for the ruling

house,[102] one might have expected something similar for Ibn Lahî`a for transmitting or

authorizing traditions uncomplimentary to the `Abbāsids.[103] That, however, is not the

case. It does not necessarily follow from such traditions that Ibn Lahî`a was

anti-`Abbāsid, however, any more than the pro-`Abbāsid traditions would prove his

having been pro-`Abbāsid.[104] That a *qāḍî* (of all people) *could* lend his authority to

ḥadîth 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.

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[98] al-Kindî, *al-Quḍāt*, p. 369; cf. R. G. Khoury, `*Abd Allāh ibn Lahî`a*, (Wiesbaden, 1986), p. 47.

[99] Cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, p. 717 and note 11 thereto. For some specimens of the Shî`ite traditions transmitted by Ibn Lahî`a, see Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Majrūḥîn*, II (Aleppo, 1975), p. 14; *Ta'rîkh Baghdād*, XI, pp. 112f. (nr. 5805).

[100] Khoury, `*Abd Allāh ibn Lahî`a*, pp. 46ff., dismisses (rather unconvincingly) both the remark and the suspicion that the *qāḍî* was a Shî`î. Madelung, too, thinks that "Ibn Lahî`a was not a Shî`ite...": W. Madelung, "The Sufyānî between Tradition and History", *SI*, LXIII (1986), p. 36.

[101] Cf. Madelung, "The Sufyānî", pp. 30ff.

[102] Ibn `Adî, *Ḍu`afā'*, IV, pp. 22f.

[103] Cf. Madelung, "The Sufyānî", pp. 33, 37.

[104] Cf. Madelung, "The Sufyānî", p. 32: "His primary motivation ... seems to have been to offer duplicate traditions on any subject brought up in *ḥadîth* rather than any particular axe he had to grind or viewpoint he wished to support."

The ʿAbbāsid state probably lacked the infrastructural and intensive power necessary to implement its religious policies effectively.[105] There is little indication, however, that before al-Maʾmūn's institution of the *Miḥna*, the caliphs had ever tried to do so. 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 were no doubt of considerable significance, as will be argued in due course; but of an effort to impose a state religion, so to speak, there is little evidence.[106] The only attempt made in the early ʿAbbāsid period to enforce a doctrine was that of al-Maʾmūn.

What made al-Maʾmūn's association with the doctrine that the Qurʾān was created 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 the ʿulamāʾ pretended. Abū Ḥassān al-Ziyādī, 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 that the commander of the faithful has *ordered* you that I must acquiesce in it, I will say what you ask me to."[107] 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

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[105] 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."

[106] Cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III, p. 9.

[107] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III, p. 1123. Emphasis added.

among themselves, but] they did not force their views on the people."[108] The reasoning of Yaḥyā b. Aktham, al-Ma'mūn's chief *qāḍī* in the pre *Miḥna* period, in dissuading the caliph from his intention to have Mu'āwiya publicly cursed, also bears some similarity to the views just quoted: "The people, especially those of Khurāsān, will not bear this [sc. cursing of Mu'āwiya]; 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."[109]

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. 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. It is not being suggested 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-Ma'mūn took the advice against the cursing of Mu'āwiya, but not against the *Miḥna*, though even that initiative did not succeed for long. The failure of the *Miḥna* can plausibly be viewed as a result of the greatly enhanced power of the 'ulamā' in society, though one can scarcely ignore the fact that most of the 'ulamā', even Ibn Ḥanbal according to some (hostile) accounts,[110] had acquiesced in the caliph's decree. If the *Miḥna* still came to 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.[111]

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[108] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 1123.

[109] Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, *Kitāb Baghdād*, ed. M. Z. al-Kawtharī (n.p., 1949), p. 54.

[110] Cf. *EI(2)*, s.v. "*Miḥna*" (M. Hinds).

[111] The case of al-Ma'mūn's coinage reform of 206/821 is, perhaps, illustrative. It took "a decade for the caliph's command to go around the caliphate and it ... [did] not

The termination of the *Miḥna* was in many ways a return to the more familiar pattern of caliphal patronage of the proto-Sunnîs. However, if al-Mutawakkil seems to have gone beyond his pre-Ma'mūnid predecessors in also trying to *implement* some of the proto-Sunnî 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 NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF `ABBASID PATRONAGE

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-Sunnî trends, specifically -- and the scholars' dependence (to what extent, it is impossible to say) on the caliphs. Nor could it have been without significance that the caliphs acted as the guardians of the faith; in terms of that function they could express support for certain religious trends or groups, combat "heresies" and

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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-Amîn 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.

all kinds of religious and political threats, and provide 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 `Abbāsid 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, as already suggested, to be seen as an instance of religious rhetoric: Not only were occasions of the caliph's 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 an expression of his power, a power which otherwise laboured under many a constraint.[112] `Abbāsid 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 `Abbāsids 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,[113] al-Mahdī's architectural initiatives in Medina and Mecca are another example. In the year 160, al-Mahdī had the

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[112] The significance of military triumphs against external or internal foes for the caliphal rhetoric of early `Abbāsid times will not be studied here. An excellent example of the lines along which an enquiry into this aspect of caliphal rhetoric can, *mutatis mutandis*, 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 `Abbāsid Age* (Leiden, 1991), pt. 2 (pp. 109-235).

[113] Cf. chapter IV nn. 5f., 17f., above.

Prophet's Mosque in Medina enlarged and its *maqsūra* removed.[114] The latter was an "innovation" which the Umayyads had introduced in the architecture of the mosque to separate and guard themselves from the rest of the congregation.[115] 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 Mu'āwiya 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 Mu'āwiya 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."[116] In Mecca, two inscriptions, both of the year 167, recorded respectively al-Mahdī's extension of the gate through which the Prophet passed on his way to Mount Ṣafā', 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..."[117]

Rather than dismiss such religious rhetoric for what it was -- a prop of 'Abbāsid legitimism -- it should perhaps be seen as a contribution, inadvertent perhaps, 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

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[114] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 483. On the *maqsūra* see *EI(2)*, s.v."Masdjid", pt. i (J. Pedersen and R. Hillenbrand).

[115] Cf. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, II, p. 50.

[116] al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, III, p. 483; translation based on H. Kennedy, *The History of al-Tabarī*, XXIX (Albany, 1990), pp. 194f. (with several modifications). Cf. 'Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Ta'rīkh*, ed. J. Aguade (Madrid, 1991), p. 122, for a hostile report on Mu'āwiyā's tampering with the Prophet's *minbar*.

[117] E. Combe et al., *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, I (Cairo, 1931-), p. 40 (nrs. 50 and 51 respectively).

of an "orthodoxy".

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 Khurāsān, 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 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 ʿAbbāsid "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 against which the "orthdoxy" 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 traditionalist victims did in their own terms.[118]

The foregoing observations do not perhaps take us very far in determining the nature and extent of the impact ʿAbbāsid religious policies may have had on proto-Sunnī trends; that problem must remain unanswered, perhaps unanswerable, as already noted.

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[118]   See III.4.i and n. 153, above.

However, these observations do serve to indicate, as does this dissertation as a whole, that the early `Abbāsid caliphs were deeply involved in the religious life of their times, and that the diverse facets of this involvement can be seen to have an overall pattern. Conversely, proto-Sunnī trends did not develop in isolation, but rather in association with the patronage, policies, and politics of the court. The numerous instances of scholars and caliphs coming into contact with each other, for example, are significant as concrete expressions of such association. Whether or not the latter tells us anything about the *impact* of `Abbāsid religious policies, it does tell us much both about the religious policies themselves and about the social and political context of religious life in early `Abbāsid times.

CONCLUSION

This study has sought to document some aspects of early ʿAbbāsid involvement in the religious life of the times. The subject has been little studied so far, which may explain -- but does not justify -- such weaknesses as the present undertaking may be thought to suffer from. The following are among the major conclusions of this study and some further considerations.

By the time of Hārūn al-Rashīd, the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs can be seen to have moved in the direction of proto-Sunnism. They patronized the proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ, occasionally intervened in favour of some of the latter's viewpoints, and, in general, did not view their function very differently from what the ʿulamāʾ thought it to be. With the exception of al-Maʾmūn, the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs did not claim to possess any special religious authority. They did, of course, emphasize their close kinship with the Prophet, which gave them a special status vis-a-vis others; and they do seem to have enjoyed cultivating an ʿulamāʾ-like image for themselves. But there is no evidence that they claimed to be endowed, by virtue of being caliphs, with any unique authority to *define* religion. It is in *collaboration* with the ʿulamāʾ, not in opposition to them, nor even independently of them, that the early ʿAbbāsid caliphs appear generally to have acted; and it was crucial to their religious rhetoric to be *seen* as so acting.

The proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ, for their part, may be considered as generally supportive of the ʿAbbāsid regime. This support must have owed something to ʿAbbāsid patronage, which was expressed through a variety of channels. Prominent scholars were not averse to benefitting from caliphal patronage, which may in fact have made some contribution towards the careers of some of the scholars. Both the caliphs' patronage and the ʿulamāʾ's support must also be explained, however, in terms of a certain concordance of interest

between the two. In fact, certain proto-Sunnî viewpoints, which are conventionally understood to signify the `ulamā's cynicism as regards contemporary rulers, even as a refusal on their part to acknowledge the legitimacy of the existing order, turn out on reflection to be much more innocuous, even favourable -- in some of their implications -- to the `Abbāsids. The caliphs' patronage of the proto-Sunnîs would seem then to be based on something more than the perception that the latter were in the ascendant.

However, while patronizing the proto-Sunnî `ulamā', the caliphs do not appear to have made any effort to systematically impose or implement particular doctrinal viewpoints.[1] The *Mihna* of al-Ma'mūn was uncharacteristic of the period not only in being an *attack* on the proto-Sunnî `ulamā', but also in being 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-Sunnîs. However, such interventions were less in the nature of religious persecutions and more in that of erratic but self-conscious and very public statements of a caliph's support for or opposition to particular viewpoints.

Such interventions need not have been insignificant for being erratic or inefficient: 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 may have given the religious trends represented by such scholars considerable advantage over their rivals.[2] While the precise effect of `Abbāsid patronage on the proto-

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[1] Cf. J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* (Berlin and New York, 1991-), III, p. 9.

[2] Cf. Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (Madison, 1992), p. 136, on the rise of the Christians to a socially dominant position in society: "It was the flesh and bone of access to the imperial power that came to count in the fifth century. A

Sunnī religious trends can hardly be measured, it does not seem extravagant to think that such patronage would have 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.

There is no evidence to suggest, however, that the patronage of the proto-Sunnīs in the early ʿAbbāsid period meant preference for a particular proto-Sunnī viewpoint to the neglect or exclusion of others. 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 Ḥanafītes had Murji'ite 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 *qāḍīs* for the ʿAbbāsids.[3] In general, the caliphs found it politic to respect local sentiment:[4] *qāḍīs* frequently were locally acceptable people,[5] which is to say that they not only came from the region they served in but that they may also have shared

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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."

[3] Early ʿAbbāsid *qāḍīs* from the *ahl al-ḥadīth* include: ʿĀṣim b. Sulaymān al-Aḥwal (d. 142) al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *(Ta'rīkh Baghdād* [Cairo, 1931], XII, pp. 243-47 [nr. 6695]); Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd al-Anṣārī (d. 143; ibid., XIV, pp. 101-106 [nr. 7446]); al-Ḥajjāj b. Arṭāt (d. ca. 144; ibid., VIII, pp. 230-36 [nr. 4341]); Yaḥyā b. Zakariyyā b. Abī Zā'ida (d. 183 or 184; ibid., XIV, pp. 114-119 [nr. 7454]); Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth (d. 194; ibid., VIII, pp. 188-200 [nr. 4313]; Muʿādh b. Muʿādh al-ʿAnbarī (d. 196; ibid., XIII, pp. 131-34 [nr. 7118]); Mūsā b. Dā'ūd al-Khalaqānī (d. 216; ibid., XIII, pp. 33f. [nr. 6990]).

[4] Cf. H. F. I. Kasassebeh, "The Office of Qāḍī in the early ʿAbbāsid Caliphate 132-247/750-861", Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1990, pp. 73ff. for the argument that the early ʿAbbāsids did not patronize any particular *madhhab*.

[5] Cf. H. Kennedy, "Central Government and Provincial Elites in the Early ʿAbbāsid Caliphate", *BSOAS*, XLIV (1981), pp. 29f.

the doctrinal commitments of the people there; there were occasions, however, when neither their regional origins nor their doctrinal commitments were the same.[6]

The early ʿAbbāsids appear then not to have interfered with variation and differences among the proto-Sunnīs, nor to have looked for uniformity where none existed. It is tempting to think, however, that in patronizing different shades of the emergent proto-Sunnī opinion the caliphs may in fact have contributed to bringing them closer. By coming to live in a cosmopolitan Baghdād, 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.[7] Something similar may have happened when ʿulamāʾ of various persuasions found themselves visiting, or serving, or being assisted by, the same patron. Occasions when qāḍīs did belong to a legal school different from that of the people they served need not have pleased the latter much, though such appointments could not have failed to lessen somewhat the insularity of local *madhhabs* and to give the qāḍī's own an opportunity to spread some of its influence.[8] Further, while not preferring any particular proto-Sunnī viewpoint, the caliphs do appear to have patronized *moderate* rather than extremist positions, and to have sought conformity to a certain minimum of acceptable views. Sharīk b. ʿAbdallāh al-Nakhʿī -- the Kūfan qāḍī who successively served al-Manṣūr, al-Mahdī and al-Rashīd -- for example, is said to have recognized the superiority of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar to all others of the Prophet's Companions while not concealing his own

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[6] Cf. the case of Hanafī qāḍīs in non-Hanafī Egypt: al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāt wa Kitāb al-Quḍāt*, ed. R. Guest (London, 1912), pp. 371, 412, 427f., 449; Kennedy, "Central Government", p. 37; more generally, see Kasassebeh, "Qāḍī", pp. 80f.

[7] van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, III, pp. 29f.

[8] Cf., as rather extreme examples, the action taken by a Hanafī qāḍī of Egypt (during the *Mihna*) against the followers of Mālik and al-Shāfiʿī (al-Kindī, *Quḍāt*, p. 451); and the measures of a qāḍī of al-Mutawakkil against the followers of Abū Hanīfa and al-Shāfiʿī (ibid., p. 469).

devotion to `Alī's household.[9] Conversely, al-Ma'mūn was at pains to emphasize that his *tafḍīl* of `Alī did not amount to denouncing the other prominent Companions of the Prophet.[10]

A few observations on different levels of continuities characterizing the period under study here are also in order in concluding this dissertation. The caliphs' patronage of the proto-Sunnī `ulamā' is, perhaps, the most prominent of such continuities. The `Abbāsids had aligned themselves with the latter already before the *Miḥna*, and the pattern of patronage and collaboration thus established was rehabilitated once the *Miḥna* was terminated. The *Miḥna* should thus be seen not as a watershed -- which, in its failure, completely altered the course of `Abbāsid religious history, stripped the caliphs of all religious authority, marked the separation of politics and religion, of state and society, and so forth -- but as an interruption, a reaction against a certain pattern of `ulamā'-state relations the contours of which are already discernible in the pre - *Miḥna* period.

There is no question that al-Ma'mūn tried in certain fundamental respects to chart a course different from that of his predecessors. It is important however not to view him as breaking with everything which went before him. Earlier caliphs too had been suspicious of, and had tried to exercise some control over, the `ulamā'. Most of the *qāḍīs* associated with the *Miḥna* were Ḥanafīs; the latter's induction as judges in `Abbāsid administration was hardly an innovation of al-Ma'mūn's. While the *Miḥna* represented an attempt to curb the `ulamā's influence and authority, many of those acting as inquisitors were `ulamā' too;[11] it is arguable then (though the point should not be exaggerated) that the *Miḥna* only

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[9] Wakī`, *Akhbār al-Quḍāt*, III, pp. 155f., 159f., 161. Such reports may possibly be tendentious, though the point that a Rāfidī would not normally be acceptable in `Abbāsid administration while someone recognized as pro-`Alid or mildly Shī`ite might be is scarcely an exaggeration.

[10] Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, *Kitāb Baghdād*, ed. M. Z. al-Kawtharī (n.p., 1949), pp. 45f.

defined who the acceptable 'ulamā' were, it did not seek to do away with the 'ulamā' --
which in turn bears witness to the position the 'ulamā' had already acquired in society.
Although al-Ma'mūn had 'Alī proclaimed as the best of men after the Prophet
Muḥammad, he comes across -- in his "Epistle to the Army", at least -- as anything but
sceptical of 'Abbāsid legitimism.[12] Finally, though he patronized the Mu'tazila, al-
Ma'mūn himself was no qadarī;[13] and he too had once patronized many an 'ālim the
proto-Sunnīs respected: for instance, Yaḥyā b. Aktham, who had been al-Ma'mūn's chief
qāḍī in the pre Miḥna period,[14] was to be appointed again to that position by al-
Mutawakkil.[15]

Important continuities also existed between the Umayyad and the early 'Abbāsid
periods on the one hand, and between the early 'Abbāsid and later periods on the other.
This dissertation has not been concerned with such continuities, but some may
nevertheless be mentioned here. Many of the religious trends and developments
surveyed earlier in this study are as much late Umayyad as early 'Abbāsid religious
history. The early 'Abbāsids were hardly the first to be in contact with the 'ulamā', to
patronize them, or even to intervene in religious life; and the Umayyads too had scholars

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[11] Cf. Kasassebeh, "Qāḍī", pp. 131f. for the interesting suggestion that the Miḥna might
      be seen as a struggle between two groups of 'ulamā'.

[12] A. Arazi and A. El'ad, "L'Épître a l'armée", pt. i, SI, LXVI (1987), pp. 35ff.

[13] Cf. Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, Kitāb Baghdād, p. 40; cf. J. van Ess, "Ḍirār b. 'Amr und die
      Cahmīya", Der Islam, XLIV (1968), p. 34.

[14] Cf. Ta'rīkh Baghdād, XIV, pp. 197f. (nr. 7489).

[15] al-Tabarī, Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk, ed. M. J. De Goeje et al. (Leiden,
      1879-1901), III, p. 1410; Ta'rīkh Baghdād, XIV, pp. 200f. It was al-Ma'mūn too
      who, while residing in Marw, had appointed Naḍr b. Shumayyal qāḍī of Marw and
      had patronized him. Naḍr is remembered as one of the ahl al-sunna and may have
      been associated with spreading the influence of this madhhab in the area of his
      jurisdiction, though the suggestion that he was the "first" to introduce it in Khurāsān
      is scarcely credible. (Yāqūt, Irshād al-Arīb ilā Ma'rifat al-Adīb, ed. D. S.
      Margoliouth [Cairo, 1923-31], VII, p. 219, and generally pp. 219-22; cf. R. Sellheim,
      "Gelehrte und Gelehrsamkeit im Reiche der Chalifen" in Festschrift für Paul Kirn
      [Berlin, 1962], p. 62.)

who were favourably disposed towards them. 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. On the other hand, there are continuities with the middle ʿAbbāsid and later periods. Already under the early ʿAbbāsids, one can observe the beginnings of the phenomeron of mass involvement in religious controversies, which were to plague later periods of history. Inquisitorial councils begin to emerge under the early ʿAbbāsids, and the pattern of the caliphs' collaboration with the ʿulamāʾ as the guardians of religious life, as evidenced by the early ʿAbbāsid period, was to continue in later times. Later caliphs too, as well as other prominent functionaries of the state, continued to cultivate an ʿulamāʾ like image for themselves.[16] On the other hand, we do not have to wait till later periods of Muslim history to see many a distinguished religious scholar associating with the rulers and supporting their regime. The proto-Sunnī ʿulamāʾ generally favoured, and were favoured by, the ʿAbbāsids. If there ever was a divorce of state and religion in Islam,[17] it did not occur in, nor was it the product of, the early ʿAbbāsid times.

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[16] Cf. the case of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs al-Qādir (see IV. 3 and n. 98, above) and al-Nāsir (see *EI(2)*, s.v. "al-Nāsir li-dīn Allāh [A. Hartmann]); also see R. P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 143f. on the interest in *hadīth* evinced by some of the ruling elite of the Būyid period; and J. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: a social history of Islamic education* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 146ff. on the similar interests of the Mamlūks.

[17] The most articulate case for such a divorce remains that of P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 61-91, especially pp. 85, 88; cf. chapte˙ 1 n. 30, above.

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