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0521661749 - Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought

Michael Cook

Excerpt

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PART I

— • —
INTRODUCTORY

CHAPTER 1

THE GOLDSMITH OF MARW

In the year 131/748f. the rebellion which was to overthrow the Umayyad dynasty had already been launched. The ‘Abbāsīd army was advancing on Iraq, while the architect of the revolution, Abū Muslim (d. 137/755), remained in Marw, effectively ruling Khurāsān. His exercise of his power was nevertheless challenged – if only morally – by a local goldsmith (*ṣā’ighh*), one Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Maymūn.¹ This goldsmith went into the presence of Abū Muslim and addressed him in these words: ‘I see nothing more meritorious I can undertake in God’s behalf than to wage holy war against you. Since I lack the strength to do it with my hand, I will do it with my tongue. But God will see me, and in Him I hate you.’ Abū Muslim killed him.² Centuries later, his tomb was still known and visited in the ‘inner city’ of Marw.³

¹ This incident, and its significance, were first discussed in W. Madelung, ‘The early Murji’a in Khurāsān and Transoxania and the spread of Ḥanafism’, *Der Islam*, 59 (1982), 35f. Madelung based his account on the entry on Ibrāhīm ibn Maymūn in Ibn Abī ‘l-Wafā’ (d. 775/1373), *al-Jawābir al-muḍīyya fī ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyya*, Hyderabad 1332, 1:49.11, citing also Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa’l-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje *et al.*, Leiden 1879–1901, series II, 1919.1. In the addenda to the reprint of his article in his *Religious schools and sects in medieval Islam*, London 1985 (item III, 39a), he added a reference to the entry in Ibn Sa’d (d. 230/845), *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. E. Sachau *et al.*, Leiden 1904–21, 7:2:103.6. In what follows, I have extended this documentation; however, my findings lead me to modify Madelung’s conclusions only on one point (see below, note 19). The goldsmith was first mentioned by Halm, who however stated erroneously that he was *qāḍī* of Marw (H. Halm, *Die Ausbreitung der šāfi’itischen Rechtsschule von den Anfängen bis zum 8./14. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden 1974, 88). More recently van Ess has discussed him in his monumental history of early Islamic theology (J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, Berlin and New York 1991–7, 2:548f.), with some further references of which the more significant will be noted below. See also M. Q. Zaman, *Religion and politics under the early ‘Abbāsids*, Leiden 1997, 71 n. 6, 72 n. 7.

² See Madelung, ‘The early Murji’a’, 35, citing Ibn Abī ‘l-Wafā’, *Jawābir*, 1:50.7.

³ Sam’ānī (d. 562/1166), *Ansāb*, ed. ‘A. al-Mu’allimī al-Yamānī, Hyderabad 1962–82, 8:267.9; for the ‘inner city’ of Marw, see G. Le Strange, *The lands of the eastern caliphate*, Cambridge 1905, 398f. It should be noted that Sam’ānī’s *tarjama* of the goldsmith comes to us in two very different recensions. There is a short form, for which Sam’ānī borrowed the entry in Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965), *Thiqāt*, Hyderabad 1973–83, 6:19.7, adding an

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We do not need to concern ourselves with the origins or historicity of this story.⁴ It suffices that Abū Muslim killed the goldsmith, or had him killed,⁵ and that it was the religio-political stance of the goldsmith that brought this upon him.⁶ Nor need we concern ourselves with Abū Muslim's side of the story, except to note that a certain irritation on his part is understandable – this was, we are told, the third such visit he had

Footnote 3 (cont.)

explanation of the *nisba* and the detail about the grave; this is found in the British Library manuscript of the *Ansāb* published in facsimile by D. S. Margoliouth (Leiden and London 1912, f. 348b.15). Secondly, there is a long form marked by the insertion (very likely by Sam'ānī himself) of much extra material (but without the detail about the grave); this long recension is that of the Istanbul manuscript used by Mu'allimī as the basis of his edition (see his introduction to the first volume of his edition, 33).

⁴ The account given by Ibn Abī 'l-Wafā' appears already in Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981), *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, Istanbul 1335–8, 2:33.18, with a full *isnād* (and cf. *ibid.*, 1:70.22, drawn to my attention by Patricia Crone). The key figure in this *isnād* is one 'Aḥmad ibn 'Aṭīyya al-Kūfī', an alias of Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ṣalt al-Ḥimmānī (d. 308/921) (for his biography, see E. Dickinson, 'Aḥmad b. al-Ṣalt and his biography of Abū Ḥanīfa', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 116 (1996), 409f., and for the alias, *ibid.*, 415). Traditionist circles had a low opinion of his probity as a scholar, particularly in connection with his transmissions on the virtues of Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767f.) (*ibid.*, 412, 414f.). A *faṣl fi manāqib Abū Ḥanīfa* in a Cairo manuscript has been ascribed to him (*ibid.*, 413 n. 34; F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, Leiden 1967–, 1:410, 438 no. 16), but I owe to Adam Sabra the information that it does not contain our anecdote. There is a parallel version from 'Alī ibn Ḥarmala, a Kūfān pupil of Abū Ḥanīfa, in Ibn Ḥamdūn (d. 562/1166), *Tadhkira*, ed. I. and B. 'Abbās, Beirut 1996, 9:279f. no. 529 (I owe this reference to Patricia Crone; for 'Alī ibn Ḥarmala, see al-Khaṭīb al-Baghādādī (d. 463/1071), *Ta'rikh Baghdād*, Cairo 1931, 11:415.6). The story does not seem to have caught the attention of the historians; Ṭabarī mentions the goldsmith only in an earlier, and unrelated, historical context (see above, note 1), and occasionally as a narrator.

⁵ In addition to the works cited above, see particularly Bukhārī (d. 256/870), *al-Ta'rikh al-kabīr*, Hyderabad 1360–78, 1:1:325.6 no. 1016 (whence Mizzi (d. 742/1341), *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, ed. B. 'A. Ma'rūf, Beirut 1985–92, 2:224.6, and Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), *Tahdhīb al-Tabdhīb*, Hyderabad 1325–7, 1:173.3); Fasawī (d. 277/890), *al-Ma'rifa wa'l-ta'rikh*, ed. A. D. al-'Umarī, Baghdad 1974–6, 3:350.8 (noted by van Ess); Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965), *Mashābir 'ulamā' al-amṣār*, ed. M. Fleischhammer, Cairo 1959, 195 no. 1565; Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038), *Dhikr akhbār Iṣbahān*, ed. S. Dederling, Leiden 1931–4, 1:171.24 (noted by van Ess). Ibn Sa'd knows an account similar to that given above (*Tabaqāt*, 7:2:103.12), but gives pride of place to one in which the goldsmith is a friend of Abū Muslim. When Abū Muslim brings the 'Abbāsīd cause out into the open, he sends an agent to ascertain the goldsmith's reaction, which is that Abū Muslim should be killed; Abū Muslim reacts by having the goldsmith killed (*ibid.*, 103.7). According to a report preserved by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023f.), he was beaten to death (*al-Baṣā'ir wa'l-dhakhā'ir*, ed. W. al-Qaḍī, Beirut 1988, 6:213 no. 756).

⁶ Our sources indicate that the goldsmith's dislike of Abū Muslim did not arise from affection for the Umayyads. He indicates that his allegiance to the Umayyad governor Naṣr ibn Sayyār had not been voluntary (Taḳī al-Dīn al-Tamīmī (d. 1010/1601), *al-Ṭabaqāt al-saniyya fi tarājim al-Ḥanafīyya*, ed. 'A. M. al-Ḥulw, Cairo 1970–, 1:285.17); and an account transmitted from Aḥmad ibn Sayyār al-Marwazī (d. 268/881) suggests that he was a disappointed revolutionary who had initially believed in Abū Muslim's promises of just rule (*ibid.*, 286.3). Jaṣṣāṣ states that the goldsmith rebuked Abū Muslim for his oppression (*zulm*) and wrongful bloodshed (*Aḥkām*, 1:70.27; similarly Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965), *Kitāb al-majrūbīn*, ed. M. I. Zāyid, Aleppo 1395–6, 1:157.12, cited in Zaman, *Religion and politics*, 72 n. 7).

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received from the goldsmith. The image of Ibrāhīm ibn Maymūn as he appears in our sources is, however, worth some attention. A man of Marw,⁷ he was, in the first instance, a child of Islam.⁸ When asked his descent, his reply was that his mother had been a client of the tribe of Hamdān, and his father a Persian;⁹ he himself was a client (*mawlā*) of God and His Prophet.¹⁰ He was also that familiar figure of the sociology of religion, a craftsman of uncompromising piety and integrity.¹¹ He would throw his hammer behind him when he heard the call to prayer.¹² While in Iraq he was too scrupulous to eat the food which Abū Ḥanīfā (d. 150/767f.) offered him without first questioning him about it, and even then he was not always satisfied with Abū Ḥanīfā's replies.¹³ His politics were of a piece with this. His temperament was not receptive to counsels of prudence, as his discussions with Abū Ḥanīfā will shortly underline. Indeed, his death was little short of a verbal suicide mission – in one account he appeared before Abū Muslim already dressed and perfumed for his own funeral.¹⁴ The goldsmith was a man of principle, in life as in death, and it is his principles that concern us here.

The principle that informed his last act, in the eyes of posterity and perhaps his own, was the duty of commanding right and forbidding

⁷ A variant tradition has him originally from Iṣbahān (Abū 'l-Shaykh (d. 369/979), *Ṭabaqāt al-muḥaddithīn bi-Iṣbahān*, ed. 'A. 'A. al-Balūshī, Beirut 1987–92, 1:449.2, whence Abū Nu'aym, *Dhikr akhbār Iṣbahān*, 1:171.24, 172.3, whence in turn Mizzi, *Tahdhīb*, 2:224.8). Van Ess, who notes two of these references in a footnote (*Theologie*, 2:549 n. 15), states in the text that the goldsmith came from Kūfa, citing a Kūfan Ibrāhīm ibn Maymūn, a client of the family of the Companion Samura ibn Jundab (d. 59/679), mentioned in an *isnād* quoted by Fasawī (*Ma'rifa*, 3:237.1). This latter is, however, a Kūfan tailor (see, for example, Bukhārī, *Kabīr*, 1:1:325f. no. 1018), and there is no reason to identify him with our Marwazī goldsmith (*ibid.*, no. 1016).

⁸ Cf. his name and *kunya*: Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm. Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt (d. 240/854f.), however, has the *kunya* Abū 'l-Munāzil (*Ṭabaqāt*, ed. S. Zakkār, Beirut 1993, 596 no. 3,120).

⁹ Elsewhere we learn that his father was a slave (Sam'ānī, *Ansāb*, 8:266.13), as the name Maymūn suggests.

¹⁰ Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), *al-'Ilal wa-ma'rifat al-rijāl*, ed. W. M. 'Abbās, Beirut and Riyāḍ 1988, 2:379 no. 2,693. This is why Bukhārī (d. 256/870) describes him as *mawlā 'l-nabī* (*Kabīr*, 1:1:325.4; Bukhārī, *al-Ta'rikh al-ṣaghīr*, ed. M. I. Zāyid, Aleppo and Cairo 1976–7, 2:27.1).

¹¹ Sam'ānī tells us that he modelled his life on that of the Successors he had met (*Ansāb*, 8:266.9).

¹² *Ibid.*, 266.10; cf. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghādī (d. 463/1071), *Muḍīḥ awbām al-jam' wa'l-tafrīḡ*, Hyderabad 1959–60, 1:375.11, and Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, 1:173.5.

¹³ Jaṣṣās, *Aḥkām*, 2:33.8; Ibn Abī 'l-Wafā', *Jawābir*, 1:49.16. Such conduct on the part of a guest was not approved by the Ḥanafī jurists unless there was at least specific reason for doubt (see Shaybānī (d. 189/805), *Āthār*, ed. M. Tēgh Bahādur, Lucknow n.d., 155.4 (*bāb al-dā'wa*), mentioning the concurrence of Abū Ḥanīfā). It is not clear whether the questions related to the provenance of the food itself or to that of the money that paid for it.

¹⁴ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 7:2:103.13 (*ṭabaṇnaṭa . . . wa-takaffāna*). In this account his body is thrown into a well.

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wrong.¹⁵ The goldsmith was known as a devotee of commanding right,¹⁶ and it was one of the topics he had brought up in his discussions with Abū Ḥanīfa.¹⁷ More specifically, we can see him in death as having lived up to a Prophetic tradition which states: ‘The finest form of holy war (*jihād*) is speaking out (*kalimat haqq*) in the presence of an unjust ruler (*sultān jā’ir*), and getting killed for it (*yuqatal ‘alayhā*).’ This tradition is attested in a variety of forms, usually without the final reference to the death of the speaker, in the canonical and other collections.¹⁸ But we also find it trans-

¹⁵ As pointed out by Madelung (‘The early Murji’a’, 35f.). An account of the goldsmith’s death preserved by Tamīmī has him go in to Abū Muslim and ‘command and forbid’ him (*fa-amarahu wa-nahāhu*) (Tamīmī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:285.11, and cf. *ibid.*, 286.3); likewise al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī states that he was killed in performing the duty (*Muḏāḥib*, 1:375.8).

¹⁶ Thus Ibn Ḥibbān describes him as *min al-ammārīn bi’l-ma’rūf* (*Thiqāt*, 6:19:10; see also Ibn Ḥibbān, *Mashāḥir*, 195 no. 1565). Aḥmad ibn Sayyār remarks on his devotion to *al-amr bi’l-ma’rūf* (*apud* Tamīmī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:286.12; and cf. Tamīmī’s own summing-up, *ibid.*, 287.5).

¹⁷ Madelung, ‘The early Murji’a’, 35, citing Ibn Abī ‘l-Wafā’, *Jawābir*, 1:49.17; Jaṣṣās, *Aḥkām*, 2:33.9.

¹⁸ For the classical collections, see Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), *Musnad*, Būlāq 1313, 3:19.16, 61.24, 4:314.28, 315.2, 5:251.8, 256.18; Ibn Māja (d. 273/887), *Sunan*, ed. M. F. ‘Abd al-Bāqī, Cairo 1972, 1329 no. 4,011, 1330 no. 4,012; Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 275/889), *Sunan*, ed. ‘I. ‘U. al-Da‘ās and ‘A. al-Sayyid, Ḥimṣ 1969–74, 4:514 no. 4,344 (whence Jaṣṣās, *Aḥkām*, 2:34.15); Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. ‘I. ‘U. al-Da‘ās, Ḥimṣ 1965–8, 6:338f. no. 2,175; Nasā’ī (d. 303/915), *Sunan*, ed. Ḥ. M. al-Mas‘ūdī, Cairo n.d., 7:161.7. (Neither Bukhārī nor Muslim include the tradition.) For other collections, see Ḥumaydī (d. 219/834f.), *Musnad*, ed. Ḥ. al-‘Azamī, Cairo and Beirut n.d., 331f. no. 752; Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971), *al-Mu’jam al-kabīr*, ed. Ḥ. ‘A. al-Salafī, n.p. c. 1984–6, 8:281f. no. 8,081, and cf. no. 8,080 (I owe these references to Etan Kohlberg); al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1014), *Mustadrak*, Hyderabad 1334–42, 4:506.7; Quḍā’ī (d. 454/1062), *Musnad al-shihāb*, ed. Ḥ. ‘A. al-Salafī, Beirut 1985, 2:247f. nos. 1286–8; Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), *Shu‘ab al-imān*, ed. M. B. Zaghlūl, Beirut 1990, 6:93 nos. 7,581f., and cf. Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, Hyderabad 1344–55, 10:91.3. The tradition is transmitted from several Companions with a variety of Kūfan and Baṣran *isnāds*. For entries on the tradition (without *isnāds*) in post-classical guides to the *ḥadīth* collections, see Majd al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr (d. 606/1210), *Jāmi‘ al-uṣūl*, ed. ‘A. al-Arnā‘ūt, Cairo 1969–73, 1:333 nos. 116f.; Haythamī (d. 807/1405), *Majma‘ al-zawā‘id*, Cairo 1352–3, 7:272.2; Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḡīr*, Cairo 1954, 1:49.20; Suyūṭī, *Jam‘ al-jawāmi‘*, n.p. 1970–, 1:1155–7 nos. 3,724, 3,728f., 3,734; al-Muttaqī al-Hindī (d. 975/1567), *Kanz al-‘ummāl*, ed. Ṣ. al-Saqqā *et al.*, Aleppo 1969–77, 3:66f. nos. 5,510–12, 5,514, 3:80 no. 5,576. In none of these cases does the tradition include the final reference to the death of the speaker (a fact pointed out to me with regard to the classical collections by Keith Lewinstein). However, such a version appears in a Syrian tradition found in the *Musnad* of Bazzār (d. 292/904f.) (*al-Baḥr al-zakākīb al-ma’rūf bi-Musnad al-Bazzār*, ed. M. Zayn Allāh, Medina and Beirut 1988–, 4:110.3 no. 1285); and cf. Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, Beirut n.d., 2:284.25, 284.27. Moreover, the Mu‘tazilite exegete Rummānī (d. 384/994) in his commentary to Q3:21 seems to have adduced a version transmitted by Ḥasan (sc. al-Baṣrī) which included this ending (see Abū Ja‘far al-Tūsī (d. 460/1067), *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, Najaf 1957–63, 2:422.17, and Ṭabrisī, *Majma‘*, 1:423.32 (both to Q3:21)), and the same form of the tradition appears in the Koran commentary of the Mu‘tazilite al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī (d. 494/1101) (see the quotation in ‘A. Zarzūr, *al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī wa-manhajuhū fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, n.p. n.d., 195.3). The *ḥadīth* is not a Shī‘ite one, although there is an Imāmī tradition in which it is quoted to Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765), who seeks to tone

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mitted by our goldsmith – complete with the reference to the speaker’s death – from Abū Ḥanīfa.¹⁹ A variant version likewise transmitted to the goldsmith by Abū Ḥanīfa makes explicit the link between this form of holy war and the principle of forbidding wrong, and one source relates this to his death.²⁰

As mentioned, the goldsmith had discussed this duty with Abū Ḥanīfa.²¹ They had agreed that it was a divinely imposed duty (*farīda min Allāh*). The goldsmith then gave to this theoretical discussion an alarmingly practical twist: he proposed then and there that in pursuance of this duty he should give his allegiance (*bay‘a*) to Abū Ḥanīfa – in other words, that they should embark on a rebellion. The latter, as might be expected, would have nothing to do with this proposal. He did not deny that the goldsmith had called upon him to carry out a duty he owed to God (*ḥaqq min ḥuqūq Allāh*). But he counselled prudence. One man acting on his own would merely get himself killed, and achieve nothing for others; the right leader, with a sufficient following of good men, might be able to achieve something.²² During subsequent visits, the goldsmith kept returning to this question, and Abū Ḥanīfa would repeat his view that this duty (unlike others) was not one that a man could undertake alone. Anyone who did so would be throwing his own blood away and asking to be killed. Indeed, it

down its implications (Kulaynī (d. 329/941), *Kāfi*, ed. ‘A. A. al-Ghaffārī, Tehran 1375–7, 5:60.7 no. 16; Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), *Tabdhīb al-ahkām*, ed. Ḥ. M. al-Kharsān, Najaf 1958–62, 6:178.6 no. 9); cf. also al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī (d. 1104/1693), *Wasā’il al-Shi‘a*, ed. ‘A. al-Rabbānī and M. al-Rāzī, Tehran 1376–89, 6:1:406.8 no. 9. It is, however, known to the Ibādīs (Rabī’ ibn Ḥabīb (d. 170/786f.) (attrib.), *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, n.p. n.d., 2:17 no. 455). The link between the tradition and *al-amr bi’l-ma’rūf* is made explicit by the commentators to Suyūṭī’s *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ* (see Munāwī (d. 1031/1622), *Taysīr*, Bülaq 1286, 1:182.6; ‘Azīzī (d. 1070/1659f.), *al-Sirāj al-munīr*, Cairo 1357, 1:260.20).

¹⁹ Sam‘ānī, *Ansāb*, 8:267.1, with a typically Ḥanafī *isnād* (and cf. Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767f.), *Musnad*, Beirut 1985, 370.6, without *yuqṭal ‘alayhā*). This tradition, Sam‘ānī tells us, is the only one the goldsmith transmitted from Abū Ḥanīfa. If we set this detail alongside his idiosyncratic reservations about Abū Ḥanīfa’s food, and the way in which they argue on equal terms, we cannot confidently classify the goldsmith as a disciple of Abū Ḥanīfa; this in turn means that we have no compelling ground for classifying him as a Murji‘ite (contrast Madelung, ‘The early Murji‘a’, 35, and van Ess, *Theologie*, 2:548f.).

²⁰ Abū Ḥanīfa relates that he had transmitted to the goldsmith the Prophetic tradition: ‘The lord of the martyrs (*sayyid al-shuhadā*) is Ḥamza ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib and a man who stands up to an unjust ruler, commanding and forbidding, and is killed by him’ (Jaṣṣāṣ, *Ahkām*, 2:34.17, and similarly 1:70.24; see also Ibn Abī ‘l-Wafā’, *Jawābir*, 1:193.3, and Tamīmī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:285.13). (This tradition appears also in Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, 3:195.7; Khaṭīb, *Muḏīb*, 1:371.20; Haythamī, *Zawā’id*, 7:266.3, 272.4; and cf. *ibid.*, 272.6.) The Kūfan A‘mash (d. 148/765) states that this tradition motivated the goldsmith’s death (Ibn Ḥibbān, *Majrūhīn*, 1:157.13, cited in Zaman, *Religion and politics*, 72 n. 7). There is even a version of this tradition that makes a veiled reference to the goldsmith (Ibn Ḥamdūn, *Tadhkira*, 9:280 no. 530; I owe this reference to Patricia Crone).

²¹ In what follows I cite the text of Jaṣṣāṣ, for the most part leaving aside that of Ibn Abī ‘l-Wafā’. ²² Jaṣṣāṣ has *l’ yḥwl*. Ibn Abī ‘l-Wafā’ omits the phrase.

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was to be feared that he would become an accomplice in his own death. The effect of his action would be to dishearten others. So one should wait; God is wise, and knows what we do not know.²³ In due course the news of the goldsmith's death reached Abū Ḥanīfā. He was beside himself with grief, but he was not surprised.

Abū Ḥanīfā, to judge from his relations with the goldsmith, was not a political activist. His cautious attitude to the political implications of forbidding wrong finds expression in rather similar terms in an apparently early Ḥanafī text.²⁴ This work begins with a doctrinal statement of which forbidding wrong is the second article.²⁵ Then, at a later point, Abū Ḥanīfā is confronted with the question: 'How do you regard someone who commands right and forbids wrong, acquires a following on this basis, and rebels against the community (*jamā'a*)? Do you approve of this?' He answers that he does not. But why, when God and His Prophet have imposed on us the duty of forbidding wrong? He concedes that this is true enough, but counters that in the event the good such rebels can achieve will be outweighed by the evil they bring about.²⁶ The objection he makes here is more far-reaching than that with which he deflected the dangerous proposal of the goldsmith: it is not just that setting the world to rights is not a one-man job; it is not even to be undertaken by many. The imputation of such quietism to Abū Ḥanīfā may or may not be historically accurate.²⁷ There are also widespread reports that he looked with favour on the

²³ Abū Ḥanīfā cites Q2:30, where the angels protest at God's declared intention of placing a *khalīfa* on earth, on the ground that he will act unjustly, and are silenced with the retort that He knows what they do not know.

²⁴ Abū Ḥanīfā (d. 150/767f.) (attrib.), *al-Fiqh al-absaṭ*, ed. M. Z. al-Kawtharī, in a collection of which the first item is Abū Ḥanīfā (attrib.), *al-'Ālim wa'l-muta'allim*, Cairo 1368, 44.10.

²⁵ Abū Ḥanīfā, *al-Fiqh al-absaṭ*, 40.10; and see Māturīdī (d. c. 333/944) (attrib.), *Sharḥ al-Fiqh al-akbar*, Hyderabad 1321, 4.1, and A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim creed*, Cambridge 1932, 103f., art. 2. For an elegant analysis of the relationship between these three texts, showing Wensinck's 'Fiqh Akbar I' to be something of a ghost, see J. van Ess, 'Kritisches zum Fiqh akbar', *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 54 (1986), especially 331f.; for his commentary on the second article, see *ibid.*, 336f. (For a briefer treatment, see his *Theologie*, 1:207–11.) A possibility van Ess does not quite consider ('Kritisches', 334) is that articles 1–5 may represent an interpolation into the text of *al-Fiqh al-absaṭ*. Abū Ḥanīfā's distinction between *al-fiqh fi'l-dīn* and *al-fiqh fi'l-ahkām*, of which the former is the more excellent (*ibid.*, 40.14, immediately following the passage), looks suspiciously like the answer to the disciple's request to be told about 'the greater fiqh' (*al-fiqh al-akbar*, *ibid.*, 40.8, immediately preceding the passage). The commentary ascribed to Māturīdī mentioned above has now been critically edited by H. Daiber, who argues that its author was Abū 'l-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983) (see below, ch. 12, note 22, and, for our passage, note 24). ²⁶ Abū Ḥanīfā, *al-Fiqh al-absaṭ*, 44.10.

²⁷ In the same text Abū Ḥanīfā states that, if commanding and forbidding are of no avail, we should fight with the *fi'a 'ādila* against the *fi'a bāghiya* (cf. Q49:9), even if the ruler (*imām*) is unjust (*ibid.*, 44.16; see also *ibid.*, 48.2, where the term used is *sulṭān*). Van

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Excerpt

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use of the sword²⁸ and sympathised with ‘Alid rebels,²⁹ and an activist disposition would not be out of line with the Murji’ite background of Ḥanafism.³⁰ But even if Abū Ḥanīfa was not a political activist, what is significant for us in the texts under discussion is not what he in practice denies, but what he in principle concedes: he agrees with both the goldsmith and his questioner in the early Ḥanafī text that forbidding wrong is a divinely imposed obligation, and one whose political implications cannot be categorically denied. The goldsmith, for all that he is mistaken, retains the moral high ground.

What we see here is the presence, within the mainstream of Islamic thought, of a strikingly – not to say inconveniently – radical value: the principle that an executive power of the law of God is vested in each and every Muslim. Under this conception the individual believer as such has not only the right, but also the duty, to issue orders pursuant to God’s law, and to do what he can to see that they are obeyed. What is more, he may be issuing

Ess is inclined to ascribe the relative quietism of this text to Abū Muṭī‘ al-Balkhī (d. 199/814), the disciple who transmits Abū Ḥanīfa’s answers to his questions (‘Kritisches’, 336f.; *Theologie*, 1:210). This may be right, but it should be noted that early Ḥanafism in Balkh, and perhaps north-eastern Iran in general, was marked by a sullen, and sometimes truculent, hostility towards the authorities of the day (see Madelung, ‘The early Murji’ a’, 37f.).

²⁸ ‘Abdallāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 290/903), *Sunna*, ed. M. S. S. al-Qaḥṭānī, Dammām 1986, 181f. no. 233, 182 no. 234, 207 no. 325, 213 no. 348, 218 no. 368, 222 no. 382 (and cf. 217 no. 363); Fasawī, *Ma’rifā*, 2:788.13; Abū Zur’a al-Dimashqī (d. 281/894), *Ta’rīkh*, ed. S. N. al-Qawjānī, Damascus n.d., 506 no. 1331; Jaṣṣās, *Aḥkām*, 1:70.19 (I owe this reference to Patricia Crone); Abū Tammām (*fl.* first half of the fourth/tenth century), *Shajara*, *apud* W. Madelung and P. E. Walker, *An Ismaili heresiography*, Leiden 1998, 85.3 = 82, and cf. 85.19 = 83 on the followers of Abū Ḥanīfa (this material is likely to derive from the heresiography of Abū ‘l-Qāsim al-Balkhī (d. 319/931), see 10–12 of Walker’s introduction; these and other passages of Abū Tammām’s work were drawn to my attention by Patricia Crone); Khaṭīb, *Ta’rīkh Baḡhdād*, 13:384.6, 384.11, 384.17, 384.20, 385.19, 386.1, 386.6. In this last tradition, as in ‘Abdallāh ibn Aḥmad’s second, Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798) dissociates himself from his teacher’s attitude; compare the half-dozen quietist traditions he cites in his treatise on fiscal law (*Kharāj*, Cairo 1352, 9f.), including that which enjoins obedience even to a maimed Abyssinian slave if he is set in authority (*ibid.*, 9.12).

²⁹ See, for example, C. van Arendonk, *Les débuts de l’imamat zaidite au Yémen*, Leiden 1960, 307, 315; van Ess, ‘Kritisches’, 337; K. Athamina, ‘The early Murji’ a: some notes’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 35 (1990), 109 n. 1.

³⁰ See M. Cook, *Early Muslim dogma: a source-critical study*, Cambridge 1981, ch. 6, and cf. my review of the first volume of van Ess’s *Theologie* in *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 50 (1993), col. 271, to 174. For a rather different view of the politics of the early Murji’ a, see Madelung, ‘The early Murji’ a’, 32 (but cf. his position in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, Leiden and London 1960– (hereafter *EI*), art. ‘Murji’ a’, 606a). The question has also been discussed by Athamina with considerable erudition (see his ‘The early Murji’ a’, 115–30); however, he does not take into consideration the testimony of the *Sīrat Sālim ibn Dhakwān*, and his evidence does not seem to support his conclusion that there existed a quietist stream among the early Murji’ites alongside an activist one (*ibid.*, 129f.). See also below, ch. 12, note 5.

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these orders to people who conspicuously outrank him in the prevailing hierarchy of social and political power. Only Abū Ḥanīfa's prudence stood between this value and the goldsmith's proposal for political revolution, and in the absence of prudence, the execution of the duty could easily end, as it did for the goldsmith, in a martyr's death. Small wonder that Abū Ḥanīfa should have squirmed when his interlocutors sought to draw out the implications of the value.

There were others, however, who were less willing to concede a martyr's crown to the likes of the goldsmith. Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256/870) preserves a remarkable account of a confrontation between the caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198–218/813–33) and an unnamed zealot.³¹ The caliph was on one of his campaigns against the infidel, presumably in Anatolia, and was walking alone with one of his generals.³² A man appeared, shrouded and perfumed,³³ and made for al-Ma'mūn. He refused to greet the caliph, charging that he had corrupted the army (*ghuzāt*) in three ways. First, he was allowing the sale of wine in the camp. Second, he was responsible for the visible presence there of slave-girls in litters (*'ammāriyyāt*) with their hair uncovered. Third, he had banned forbidding wrong.³⁴ To this last charge al-Ma'mūn responded immediately that his ban was directed only at those who turned commanding right into wrongdoing; by contrast, he positively encouraged those who knew what they were doing (*alladhī ya'mur bi'l-ma'rūf bi'l-ma'rifa*) to undertake it. In due course al-Ma'mūn went over the other charges levelled at him by the zealot. The alleged wine turned out to be nothing of the kind, prompting the caliph to observe that forbidding the likes of this man to command right was an act of piety.³⁵ The exposure of the slave-girls was intended to prevent the enemy's spies from thinking that the Muslims had anything so precious as their daughters and sisters with them. Thus in attempting to command right, the man had himself committed a wrong.³⁶

The caliph then went onto the attack. What, he asked the man, would he do if he came upon a young couple talking amorously with each other here in this mountain pass?

³¹ Zubayr ibn Bakkār (d. 256/870), *al-Akbbār al-Muwaffaqiyyāt*, ed. S. M. al-Ānī, Baghdad 1972, 51–7. The passage is quoted in full in F. Jad'ān, *al-Miḥna*, Amman 1989, 256–60, whence my knowledge of it. There is a parallel in Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1176), *Ta'riḫ madīnat Dimashq*, ed. 'A. Shīrī, Beirut 1995–8, 33:302–5 (I owe this reference to Michael Cooperson). I shall return to this narrative (see below, ch. 17, 497f.).

³² The presence of 'Ujayf ibn 'Anbasa makes the Anatolian campaign of 215/830 a plausible setting for the story (see Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, series III, 1103.12).

³³ For *mutakhabbiṭ mutakaffin* read *mutaḥanniṭ mutakaffin*, as in Ibn 'Asākir's parallel (and cf. above, note 14). ³⁴ Zubayr, *Akbbār*, 52.15. ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.9.

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THE ZEALOT: I would ask them who they were.

THE CALIPH: You'd ask the man, and he'd tell you she was his wife. And you'd ask the woman, and she'd say he was her husband. So what would you do with them?

THE ZEALOT: I'd separate them and imprison them.

THE CALIPH: Till when?

THE ZEALOT: Till I'd asked about them.

THE CALIPH: And who would you ask?

THE ZEALOT: [First] I'd ask them where they were from.

THE CALIPH: Fine. You've asked the man where he's from, and he says he's from Asfjāb.³⁷ The woman too says she's from Asfjāb – that he's her cousin, they got married and came here. Well, are you going to keep them in prison on the basis of your vile suspicion and false imaginings until your messenger comes back from Asfjāb? Say the messenger dies, or they die before he gets back?

THE ZEALOT: I would ask here in your camp.

THE CALIPH: What if you could only find one or two people from Asfjāb in my camp, and they told you they didn't know them? Is that what you've put on your shroud for?

The caliph concluded that he must have to do with a man who had deluded himself by misinterpreting the tradition according to which the finest form of holy war is to speak out in the presence of an unjust ruler.³⁸ In fact, he observed, it was his antagonist who was guilty of injustice. In a final gesture of contempt, he declined to flog the zealot, and contented himself with having his general rip up his pretentious shroud. The caliph's tone throughout the narrative is one of controlled fury and icy contempt: it is he, and not the would-be martyr, who occupies the moral high ground.

That the political implications of forbidding wrong would give rise to controversy is exactly what we would expect. And yet the strategy adopted by al-Ma'mūn is not to expose the zealot as a subversive. Rather, his charge is that the man has made the duty into a vehicle of ignorance and prejudice. The effect is enhanced when the caliph goes onto the attack. By the answers he gives to the hypothetical questions put to him by al-Ma'mūn, the zealot reveals himself not as a heroic enemy of tyrants, but rather as a blundering intruder into the private affairs of ordinary Muslims. With men like him around, no happily married couple can go for a stroll in a mountain pass without exposing themselves to harassment on the part of boorish zealots.

The contrasting moral fates of the goldsmith of Marw and the nameless zealot can help us mark out the territory within which the doctrine of the

³⁷ Asfjāb was located far away on the frontiers of Transoxania.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.12. For the tradition, see above, note 18.